



## Success in the Modern Age

# Pregnancy or Partner—Why Not Both?

By Elizabeth Huntley

A few months ago, I had dinner with a group of young female attorneys to provide guidance and answer their questions regarding the appropriate steps toward advancing their careers. This group of young women was outstanding. They all worked for top tier firms in each of their legal markets. They all had successful law school careers and several had clerked for federal judges. They are clearly headed for success. They asked questions about complex case management, dealing with law firm partners, and business development. Eventually, one young lady exposed the “elephant in the room” and asked “*what about family?*” During the progression of this discussion, it dawned on me that the young female attorneys were not as concerned about balancing work with family as they were about the potential setbacks to their careers if they became pregnant. They were concerned about their physical limitations during pregnancy and how they would be treated by their law firm partners while pregnant.

As a mother of two, I have never been concerned about how an attorney may be perceived or treated because she was pregnant. I am sure that I feel that way because of the culture at my firm of over six years. I have watched two fifth-year female associates have their first child and maintain continued success on the partnership track. Two years later, they were both pregnant with their second child and both were named equity partners during that same year. One actually gave birth on the same day that she became an equity partner. I really smiled when I saw the dual congratulatory e-mail that included a picture of her newborn.

I watched a senior female equity partner at my firm complete two advanced-aged pregnancies (one with several complications) while maintaining her status as an equity partner. I watched another younger female equity partner experience debilitating illness during her pregnancy only to come back from maternity leave stronger than ever in her career. I watched another female partner and wonderful mother of four at my firm balance family

with a legal career so successfully that she now serves as a United States district court judge. I realized that every female partner at our firm and most of the female associates have children. We could open a child care facility!

The baby boom among the female attorneys at my firm has not put a damper on their success as attorneys. These women have great cases, some are great rain-makers, and most importantly they all provide a great service to our clients. I spoke with some of the women whose stories I shared above to ask how they were able to balance pregnancy and law firm practice. They unanimously attributed their “non-career ending” transition into motherhood to the culture of our firm.

For example, the female attorneys that have taken maternity leave report that our 12-week paid maternity leave policy is a “true” maternity leave. They are not required to work their cases, and none of them were concerned that their cases would be suffering upon their return. Their budgeted billable hours for the year are adjusted accordingly. The equity partner who experienced complications that created a need to adjust her schedule beyond her maternity leave period was able to work out an adjustment to her point system that allowed her the flexibility that she needed. Additionally, some have had flexible firm hours allowing them to work some hours from home, depending on their situation. They have each successfully worked with the firm to establish solutions to their individual circumstances. Who was the big winner in all of this? Our firm. Because of our culture, we are able to retain these outstanding women who bring great value to our team.

I shared these successes with the young women in my dinner party. Unfortunately, they were not sure that such an environment existed at their respective firms. It saddened me that the choice to start a family for a female attorney comes with challenges that her male counterparts do not have to consider. Depending on the firm culture, deciding to start a family can be a tough decision for a female attorney.

As I reflected on this dilemma, I considered the ABA Commission on Women in the Profession July 2014 report titled *A Current Glance at Women in the Law*. A.B.A. Comm'n on Women in the Prof., *A Current Glance at Women in the Law* (July 2014), available at [http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/marketing/women/current\\_glance\\_statistics\\_july2014.authcheckdam.pdf](http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/marketing/women/current_glance_statistics_july2014.authcheckdam.pdf). The report shows the high percentage of young women ascending up the

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■ Elizabeth “Liz” Huntley is a committed child advocate and a passionate litigation attorney. She practices law at Lightfoot Franklin & White LLC in Birmingham, Alabama, in the areas of banking and financial services litigation, employment law, Business litigation, personal injury, and product liability. Ms. Huntley is a leader in both professional and community organizations and regularly serves as a motivational speaker for groups and organizations throughout the Southeast. She is a member of the DRI Diversity Committee. To her surprise, Liz learned that she was three months pregnant just a week after submitting this article.