

Nevada Lawyer asked its readers to weigh in on balancing life with their careers in the law. Many of you responded to tell us how important it is to find that balance and a few had some tips that might help. One respondent had a rather unique take on the question of whether or not “work” and “life” should even be separated.



WORK/LIFE BALANCE

AMY B. HONODEL, ESQ.

It's easy to balance the demands of being an attorney in a very small practice with being a single parent – if you can stop being serious and act like a kid. I've been known to jump in inflatable bouncers for minutes at a time (I dare not claim I have the stamina of a 7-year-old to go for an hour). I've ridden roller coasters that twist and turn and let you look at the ground in moments of panic. I fly down slides at the park; I pet goats and cows at the petting zoo, and I will turn my tongue red with a Slurpee. When my best friend instructed me to wear pajamas to her wedding, I did not question her sanity. I gladly asked if I could wear my slippers too.

Mind you, I do all of these things in the company of my son, who was diagnosed with mild autism before he was two. Since he was diagnosed, I have spent countless hours reading books, online articles and magazines, and talking to friends, family, physicians and teachers about this diagnosis. Autism forced me to work harder at teaching him skills many take for granted. As a result, I had better perspective



Honodel makes time to play – and to share that skill with her son, who has been diagnosed with a mild form of autism.

on how important some of the “crises” from the office really were.

When my son reached age five, I realized he was ahead of his typical peers in academics, but he didn't know how to play. Since playing was an activity I had participated in regularly at one point in my

life, I felt qualified to teach it. I jumped right in and started playing. He caught on.

We have fun. In turn, he reminded me that laughter and movement and simple pleasures are the best medicine for an overdose of work.

KIMBERLY R. McGHEE, ESQ.



After having my first child this past November, balancing my litigation practice and my home life became a challenge. While my son, Aidan, is one of my greatest accomplishments, I was afraid that because I chose to become a mother my career goals would suffer, or that I couldn't be both a great mom and have a career. With the help of an amazing husband, I have found it is possible for me to be a

great attorney, a great mom and a happy person.

Once I committed to organizing each day completely, I found that I could have a good work/life balance. If I organize my day right, I have time for my baby, my husband, my work, my community activities and myself.

Before I became a mother, I was terrible at saying no. Now that I'm busier than ever, I force myself to ask for help when I need it and try not to over-commit myself. "No" is not always a bad word!

One recommendation I would make for finding a good work/life balance is to make sure you take care of yourself, too. I really enjoy pilates and found a group that has classes for both parents and babies. It's a perfect way to combine emotional and physical well-being because I get to exercise and spend time with my son!

Another necessity in balancing a successful professional and home life is finding the right environment in which to work. My firm is supportive of my working from home when my schedule allows and also my use of a webcam which allows me to video-chat with my little one or just watch him play with his toys or take a nap.

I also find ways to give back to the community that don't conflict with my family time. I volunteer with the Ask-a-Lawyer Program at the Regional Justice Center; I go in a few hours a month and consult with people who need legal advice but can't

afford it. I can use my skills to help people without having to sacrifice large blocks of time.

I also prioritize what matters and how much time I give to things. Things I used to think were important just aren't a priority anymore and new priorities have sprung up in their place. Taking the time to stop and take an honest look at myself and my needs provided me with a roadmap for balancing my work with my family and receiving the rewards from both.

BROOKE M. BORG, ESQ.

I have been an attorney for 10 years and just recently, while pregnant with my second child, opened my own firm during a challenging economic time. And, the great thing is, business is going very well.

I specialize in corporate law, estate planning and real estate law, which – for many – can seem a bit "vanilla." However, I find my motivation in preparing clients for life's many "what ifs." Knowing that I have helped my clients save a lot of money and hassle with some of life's most personal needs is what keeps me going and makes me love what I do for a living.

Just like any new business owner, it is a daily challenge to decide how to balance work life and home life with a burgeoning firm (despite the economy) and a growing family at home.

However, I believe my personal drive, positivity and focus allow me to make family my number one priority and spending time with my husband (Matt) and daughter (Avery), with a son arriving later this year, a must.

Even though running my own firm keeps me busier than ever, it has also afforded me the ability to make my own schedule and, thus, allows for more time with family. For that to work, I've been quite protective of that schedule and make every effort to only commit to meetings and events that are directly in line with my goals.

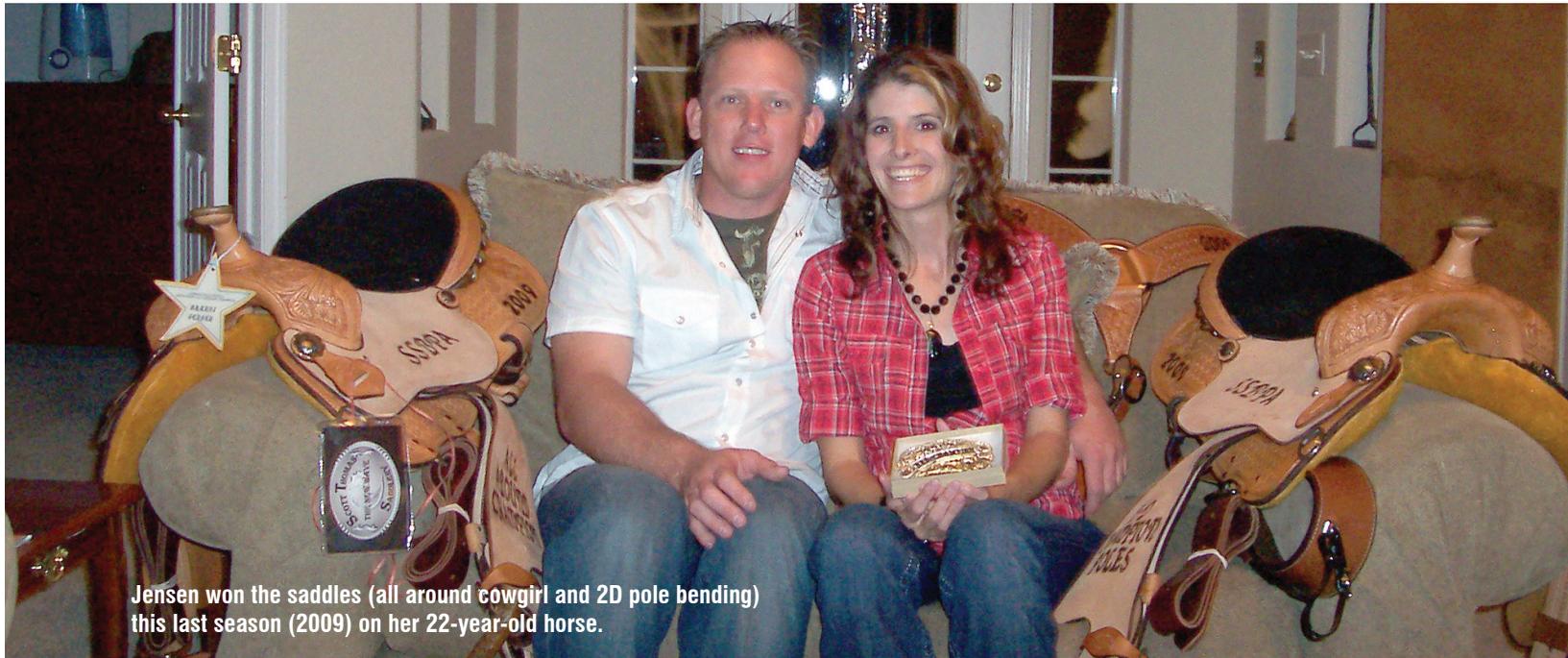
It's certainly not easy saying "no" to the many opportunities that come my way, but doing so when necessary allows me to continue to be the best attorney, business owner, family member and friend I can be, and that's what's most important.



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Work/Life Balance

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Jensen won the saddles (all around cowgirl and 2D pole bending) this last season (2009) on her 22-year-old horse.

BRANDI JENSEN, ESQ.

I often hear, “I don’t know how you do it all.” The funny thing is, I don’t. In all reality, I merely “try” to do it all. I am a wife, a mother, an attorney and a cowgirl. My name is Brandi Jensen. I am the mother of three great children, ages five, three and one; the City Attorney for the City of Fernley; and a horse addict.

I am grateful to work for a modern-thinking entity that understands the needs of today’s society and allows me to work four 10-hour days. I go to work early, when the grogginess is still in my children’s eyes, and when the office is quiet and empty and things can fly to the outbox before the daily chaos begins. Unless stuck in court, I try to return home for lunch, which usually includes a quick PB&J, snuggles and a possible stain on my suit.

With the exception of council and planning meetings, I am able to get home at a decent hour every day. Since I work four 10s, the last day of the week is now “family fun Friday,” which equals kindergarten, the park and usually suckering mom into McDonald’s or a Slurpee.

I play with my kids at night, do homework, try to teach them chores and responsibility and do all the things I believe I am supposed to be doing as a mom. I lie awake at night and wonder if I should be working or staying home and then torture my mother and husband with my ever-changing analysis the next day. My husband and I still go on dates, having gone from Fridays to whatever day we can work it.

Somewhere in it all, I try to keep two quarter-horses legged up and ready to compete for barrel racing. The 2009 barrel racing season was wonderful, thanks to a supportive husband. I’ve won two saddles a buckle, and a breast collar (it is horse equipment, seriously).

This year I put my family first and still took away some great prizes. My 5-year-old daughter competed as did my mom. We make it a true family affair, even when my mom beats me – on a regular basis.

It has been mentioned, at times, that I am competitive in nature but, in truth, the sport is a wonderful release of stress. When I am on horseback, I never worry about legal issues or wonder where the purple sippy-cup disappeared to or whether my co-workers will notice the goldfish in the back seat of the truck.

I never accomplish it all. My desk never clears, my laundry is never put away in a timely fashion and my horses are never given the hours I’d love to train them with. In the end, my goal is to put my family first, work hard for a good reputation and keep my sanity through the magic of a horse. I am merely a wife and mom, who happens to be a lawyer, who will forever be a cowgirl and who is attempting a delicate dance of the balancing of her life.



Jensen's family, Haley (5), Brooke (3), Kade (1), husband Jesse.

LARA A. HOOVER, ESQ.

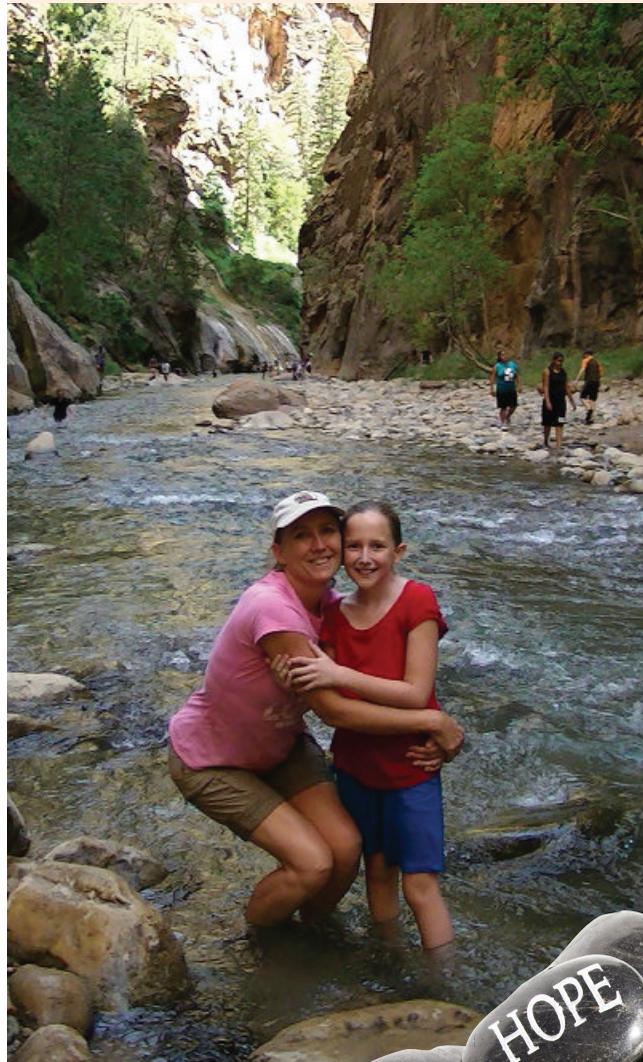
We were asked to write how we balance the demands of a career in law with personal interests and family; I couldn't resist. I am the Las Vegas resident partner at my law firm. When I was promoted to partner, I was told that I would be required to bill the same amount as the associates but would also have the responsibility of handling the administrative work in my office. I eagerly nodded my head that I understood, excited that I had finally made partner.

Fast forward to a few years later – I have a son in high school and a daughter in grade school. (My eldest son lives in California. I fondly refer to him as my man-child.) My husband hit mid-life and left us; I'm now a single mom. That means I handle soccer (seasonally), dance classes, music classes, rehearsals and shows, making school lunches at 5:30 in the morning, homework, orthodontist appointments, church, finances, shopping, cooking, cleaning, yard work, algae in the pool, an accidental litter of five Chispaniel puppies, my daughter's sleepovers and my son's garage band practices (and feeding the boys in the band) every weekend – by myself.

My personal interests involve music and the performing arts and anything outdoors such as running, camping, hiking, biking and swimming. If I don't get to the great outdoors of Utah every few months, I feel incomplete. Balance all of that? What is this word "balance" that you speak of? I get out of bed every morning, thank God for another day, hit the ground running, and don't stop. And I love my life.

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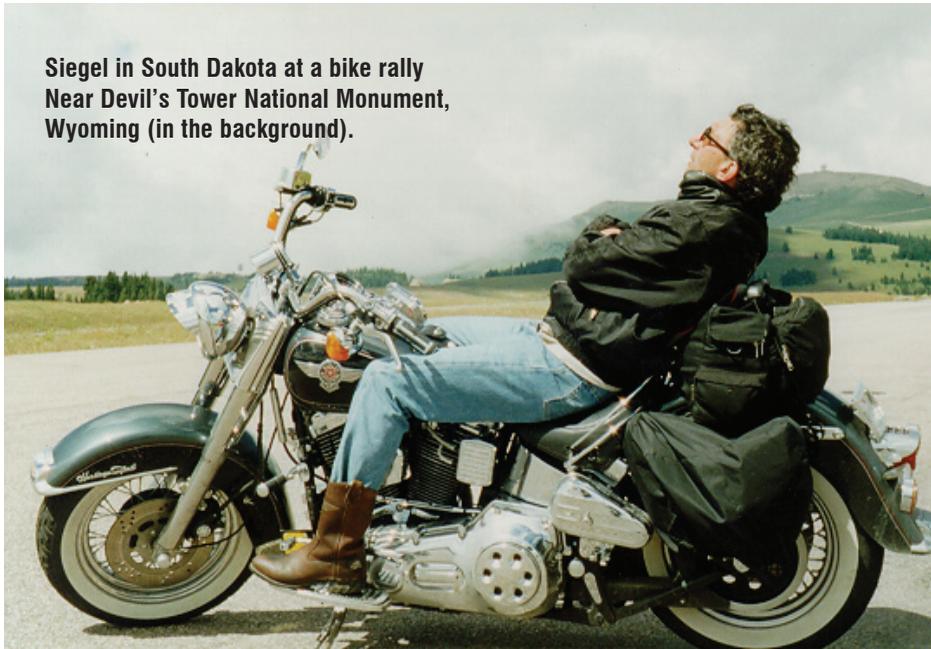


Hoover and her daughter at Zion National Park.





Siegel with LaVonne Roberts at the Mt. Charleston Hotel.



Siegel in South Dakota at a bike rally Near Devil's Tower National Monument, Wyoming (in the background).

HOWARD SIEGEL, ESQ.

Law is, itself, a metaphor for equality and balance; the scales held by Lady Justice personify this core concept. Indeed, it has been suggested that many of us, in pursuing our professional decision to practice law, do so to further a personal instinct for a broader sense of balance. And yet, like the shoemaker's proverbial children, lawyers often fall short of achieving a proper balance in their personal lives.

The considerable demands of our chosen profession clearly play a pivotal role in challenging attorneys to find the time to identify and develop outside interests and to spend a more fairly apportioned amount of time with their families. But these demands do not excuse any of us from failing to achieve balance. All jobs have their inherent requirements,

both in terms of time and focus; but our obligations to others, as well as to ourselves, extend beyond our obligations to our clients and the workplace.

The solution? One key ingredient is to recognize that the opportunity to achieve a healthier mixture of professional and personal time is always right in front of us – right at our fingertips, quite literally. These opportunities are just as accessible as scheduling time for our meetings, phone calls, drafting and research. In other words, it's not really a matter of "finding" the elements of balance; rather, it's a matter of disciplining ourselves to fold our hobbies, family, exercise time, travel and all of our other non-work related interests into our personal schedules with the same level of commitment that we apply to the components of our work schedule. If we can shift our priorities just enough to elevate our personal pursuits to a place approaching parity with our professional obligations, then, almost certainly – indeed, definitionally – a better balance will follow.

Let one of the very next calls we make be to our gym, a nearby park, the local chapter of a favored hobby or community organization or to our family. The client will still be there for the call after that.



SHANE JASMINE YOUNG, ESQ.

I am a sixth-year attorney with a law firm in Las Vegas. Even though the demands of a full-time attorney alone are enough to keep one's stress level on the rise, it is my family that puts it all in perspective and gives me the motivation to keep moving forward.

I am married, with four beautiful daughters (Caira, 10; Shaira, 10; Caylyn, 2; and Camryn 1). As a working mother, my schedule is hectic, to say the least. There just are not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything I set out to do. I often find myself getting frustrated because I can never seem to cross off all of the items on my ever-growing "to-do" list. As each day passes, though, I become better at handling this situation. I have learned to prioritize the items on my list and if I am not able to get to the things at the bottom, then I just have to push them to another day. I remind myself that the world will not crumble if I don't get to the laundry today, or whatever the case may be.

Young's four daughters

While it is extremely difficult to strike the appropriate balance between work and home, I am very fortunate to have the support of both my firm and family in doing so. My firm and its partners recognize and appreciate the struggle their attorneys face in juggling a career with personal interests and family. Fortunately for me, I am able to work fairly flexible hours. With the technology that we now have, I can do my job at home just as I would in the office. This allows me to be home with my children when I need to be, which sometimes requires me to be out of the office during normal “business” hours. Many weekdays, I get back on the computer after my children go to sleep and work later hours. To maximize my time with my family, I also try to avoid coming into the office on weekends; so, if I have to work, I do my best to do any work from home on Saturdays and Sundays.

My family has been a great support system as well. With the help of my husband, parents, aunt and siblings, I am able to work full-time and raise my family. My girls are fortunate to be surrounded by so many loving people. Despite all of our modern advances, the old adage “It takes a village to raise a child” still rings true for us. And I wouldn’t have it any other way.

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MARSHAL WILLICK, ESQ.



In the past two weeks, the ABA Journal has posted articles entitled “Why Lawyers Should Work No More than 40 Hours a Week” and “Does Money Buy Happiness? Only if You Spend it on Leisure, Research Suggests,” the bottom line of which is that work – focused attention on accomplishing something – should occupy only a sliver of one’s life. I disagree with these rationalizations for sloth.

The idea of a “work/life” balance flows from a false premise. As Melody Hobson put it, “I don’t draw lines in the sand between work and life. When I’m working, I am living.” And dedication to a professional calling takes exactly that – dedication. A 2006 interview by the ABA Journal of Benjamin Sells (former lawyer and psychotherapist; author of “The Soul of the Law”) captured the thought well:

Is there psychological fallout? Sure. But that’s part of it. ...You’re supposed to get it right, period. I think it’s a legitimate expectation; a lawyer has a huge responsibility to law. And if you think you need a life, or you think that working in law

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isn't a life, then it isn't for you. You are a lawyer, and lawyering is hard. I really believe that you shouldn't become a lawyer unless it would be a misery to you if you didn't.

Lincoln, on the practice of law, said "Work, work, work, is the main thing." A recent survey indicates that most lawyers take two to three weeks of vacation per year, and some much more, but Shakespeare had it right:

If all the year were playing
holidays,
To sport would be as tedious
as to work;
But when they seldom come,
they wished for come.

So have a little compassion for Paris Hilton.

It makes little sense to spend the first 25 years of one's life trying to become a lawyer and the rest of one's life trying to spend as little time as possible working as one. While you should take such time for rest and relaxation as is necessary to continue to function at your best, productive effort – not the avoiding of it – can and should be a source of happiness. As Tertullian advised, "Where our work is, there let our joy be." And that approach is good for you, as Pablo Casals observed: "The man who works and is never bored is never old. Work and interest in worthwhile things are the best remedy for age."

The bottom line I leave for a poet:

I slept and dreamt that
life was joy.

I awoke and saw that
life was service.

I acted and behold,
service was joy.

– Rabindranath Tagore ■