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SOUTH FLORIDA'S MOST IMPORTANT AUDIENCE

# Battle in corporate arena pivots on family-career issues

By Marilyn Bowden

Women may have come a long way in the battle for equality in the corporate arena — but the juggling act between career and family remains one of their toughest hurdles, top executives around the county say.

"The opportunities for leadership roles in business are certainly greater now," says **Pat Dahne**, Arvida Realty Services' regional vice president for Miami-Dade County.

That may stem in part from the fact that women now have so many more role models in business positions, she says — such as Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina.

"The challenge that comes with that," Ms. Dahne says, "is maintaining a balance in your life — especially if you're a family person, because that role is much more demanding than a job you can leave at 5 o'clock. It's all part of the package. Women need to be aware of that and make a conscious effort to balance their lives."

As a single parent, she says, she put certain career plans on hold until her younger child left for college.

"I figured I could go after those opportunities later," she says, "but I couldn't go back and spend time with my children."

"I turned down opportunities that involved a lot of traveling. In fact, one of my original motivations for going into real estate was the flexi-



**Patricia Thompson**

bility it allows."

**Patricia Thompson**, a shareholder at Carlton Fields whose specialty is commercial litigation, says she's noticed that as corporations downsize or streamline operations, their employees are expected to take on more responsibilities.

"That may not sound gender-related," she says, "but if women are trying to juggle personal lives with work lives, I suggest that it is."

"It's a strain on men too, but for working mothers it's becoming intolerable to try to carry that extra burden and still take care of your family. Women have to make a choice where they may have to say, 'I've got to be treated differently.'"

In the legal profession, Ms. Thompson says, the myth that women could have it all is long gone.



**Pat Dahne**

"The interesting thing," she says, "is that some firms are beginning to acknowledge this."

For example, she says, Carlton Fields has a policy that allows women to work at all levels at less-than-full-time status while raising a family.

"It's no longer looked upon as something that implies you're not dedicated to your career," she says. "It says you have the common sense to know you need to cut back on other responsibilities to take care of home responsibilities. Many women need that chance to keep insurance and bar dues up."

On the plus side, Ms. Thompson says, women are succeeding in more fields, in greater numbers, than ever before.

"Certainly within the legal field whatever barriers there were to the



**Faith Xenos**

practice of law, if they're not gone they are being trampled into oblivion," she says. "Instead the issue is what skills do you as a lawyer bring to bear."

Opportunities for leadership within law firms is growing, she says, "as a result of enough women around now with sufficient gray hair and a strong client base."

For **Faith Xenos**, principal of Singer Xenos Investment Management, the greatest challenge is "trying to keep informed."

"To make competent decisions for portfolio management, we need to be very well-informed. With the overload of information and technology we have today, that's one of the more difficult areas."

On the other hand, she says, technology is making business genderless — particularly as regards

research and the way we communicate.

It's also making it difficult for anyone to open a business on their own. "For people entering the profession today," she says, "the cost of a lot of the research and information you require is prohibitive. That would be a big barrier for forming your own company. Where 10 or 15 years ago we had the luxury of being independent, most people today have to align themselves with a larger firm just because of the cost issue."

As a trip to Wall Street makes clear, Ms. Xenos says, investment is still very much a male-dominated field.

"In earlier years I did face some opposition," she says. "But people have become a lot more equitable in who they will take advice from and how they will receive it."

She attributes that in part to the emergence of positive female role models such as Janet Reno and Hillary Clinton.

Lack of competent mentoring is another hurdle, she says — one that seems prevalent in many professional fields.

"Competitiveness in the work environment might be an issue there," she says.

The issue of expanding a business while raising a family is "one I have struggled a lot with," Ms. Xenos says. "Even though we've reached 2000, women still tend to be the ones going to Publix."