

THE UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGE OF COVID-19

**FINDINGS FROM THE 2020
MAJOR, LINDSEY & AFRICA/ABOVE THE LAW
LAW FIRM ASSOCIATE SURVEY**



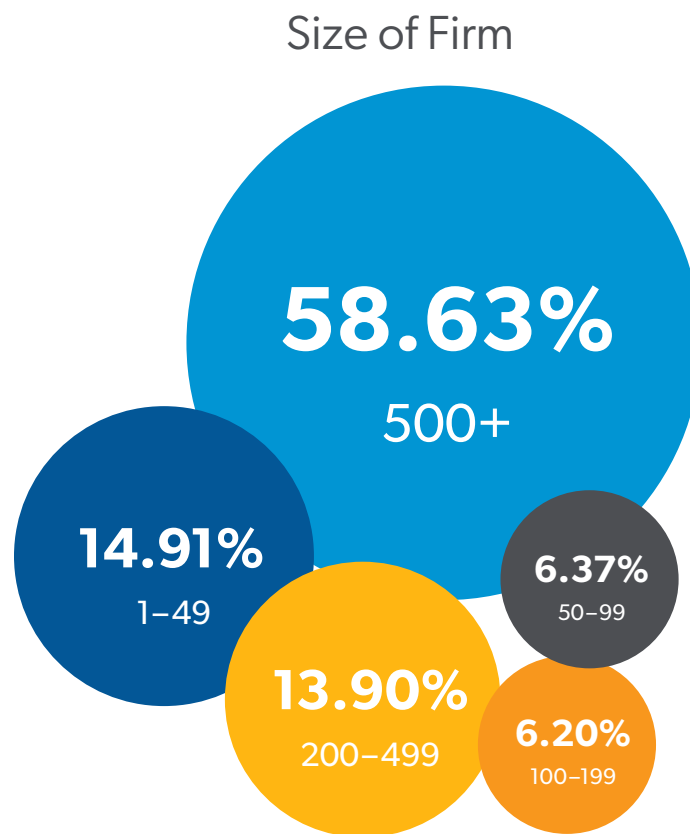
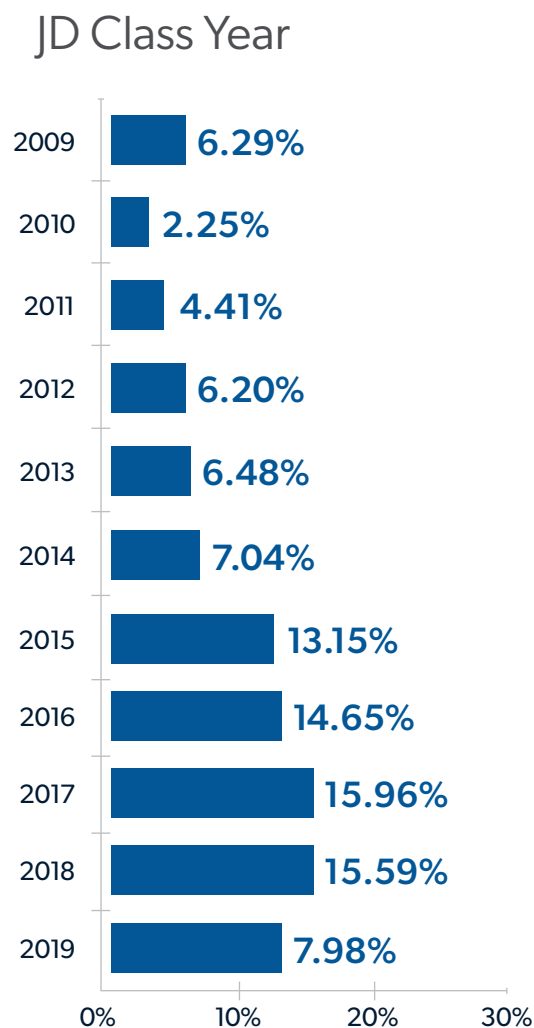
In facing the COVID-19 global pandemic, law firms are being forced to adapt at an unprecedented pace. To gain a sense of how firms are reprioritizing and reconfiguring their processes and operations—and how associates are being affected—Major, Lindsey & Africa and Above the Law fielded a survey of law firm associates in April 2020. The survey received more than 1,300 responses, all sharing insight into topics such as communication transparency,

technological resources, firm culture, and potential long-term effects on the profession.

This new report, *The Unprecedented Challenge of COVID-19: Findings from the 2020 MLA/ATL Law Firm Associate Survey*, offers the most detailed picture available of how law firms and individual associates are coping *right now* with both the ongoing disruption and the prospect of lasting change.



DEMOGRAPHICS

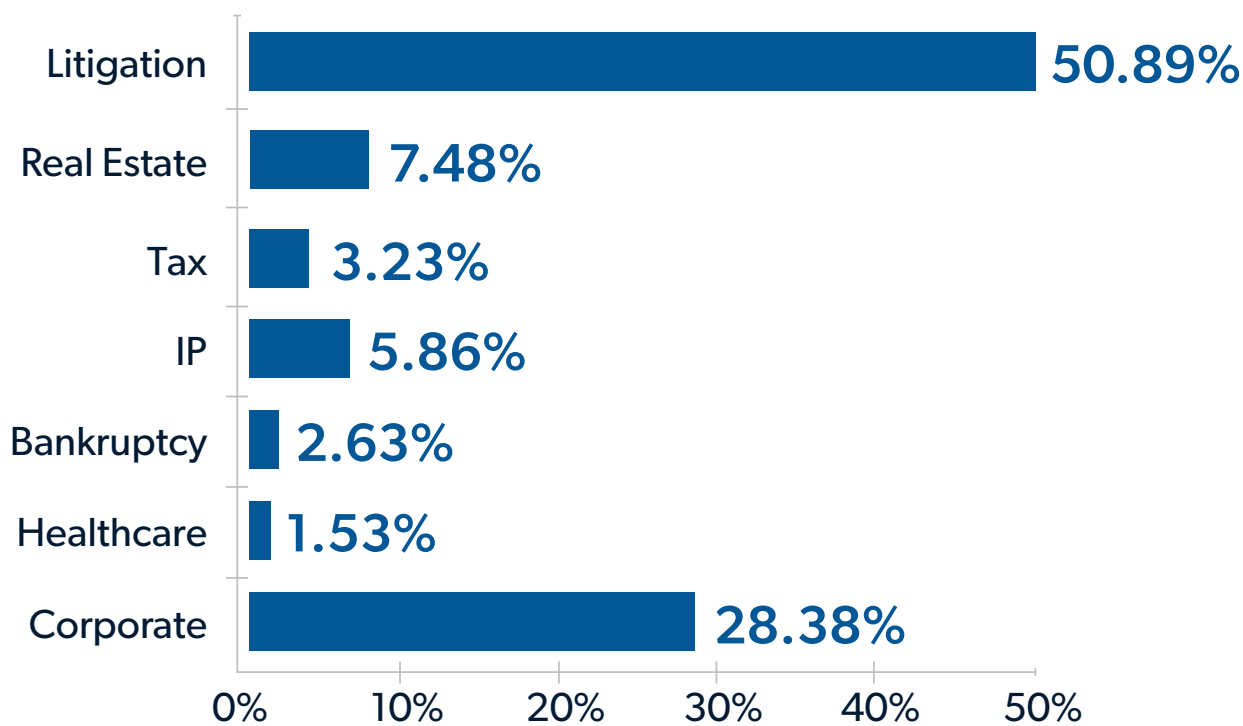


Geographic Location



DEMOGRAPHICS

Practice Area



Specific Corporate Area

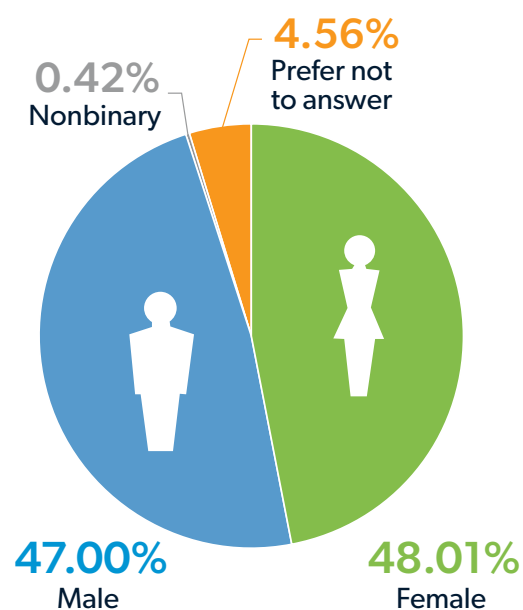
52.22% M&A

9.85% Funds

14.29% Securities/
Capital Markets

23.65% Banking/Finance

Gender





KEY FINDINGS

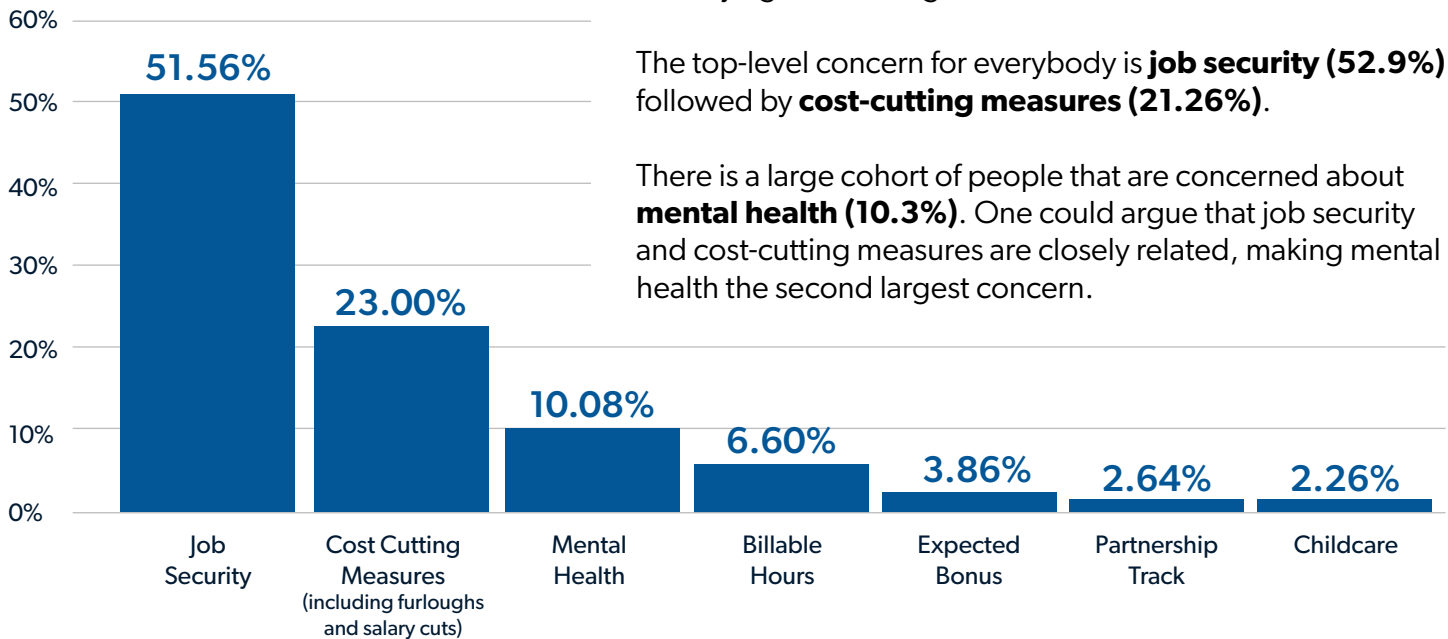
- > **The top-level concern for everyone is job security (52.9%) followed by cost-cutting measures (21.26%)**
- > There are gender discrepancies with respect to partnership track, childcare and billable hours
- > Consistent with the findings from our 2019 survey of Millennial attorneys, **transparency is still valued**
- > The vast majority (**77%**) say **communication within their firm has increased**
- > An overwhelming majority of respondents (**93.54%**) reported that their **target billable hours had not changed**, despite the fact that many firms have instituted salary cuts and there has been a reduction in work available for certain practice groups
- > **Child or family care responsibilities impact whether or not lawyers find it difficult to work from home**
 - **61% of associates who are caring for a child or family member** are finding it difficult to work from home compared with only **34% who don't have those responsibilities**
 - **48% of women** find it very or somewhat difficult to work from home vs **39% of men**
- > **85% of respondents reported that they are sufficiently equipped to work from home**, though many indicated they had to provide those resources for themselves, and even suggested that firms could provide a stipend to compensate them for that. This does not represent a departure from pre-COVID days. Associates are working more from home but they were just as well equipped to do so before the crisis
- > Firms have recognized that **mental health and wellness are a priority** for associates and have recognized their role in promoting wellness
- > The majority of respondents believe **this crisis will result in permanent changes to the legal industry**. Respondents felt changes would be made to **remote working policies (94.94%)**, **technological resources (82.49%)** and **physical office space (56.75%)**

CONCERNS

Percentages listed here indicate proportion of respondents identifying item as “highest concern”

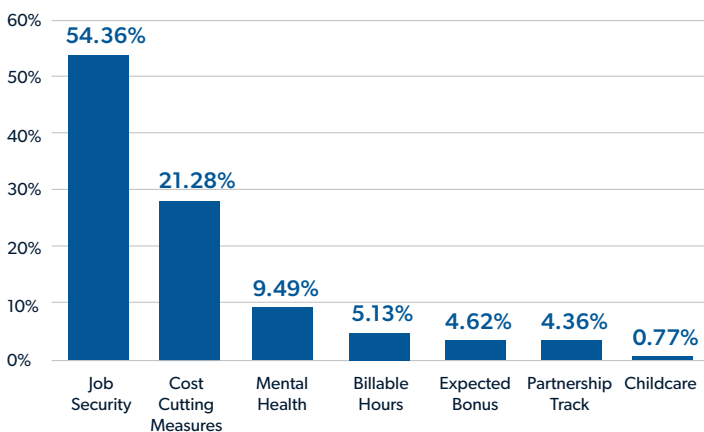
The top-level concern for everybody is **job security (52.9%)** followed by **cost-cutting measures (21.26%)**.

There is a large cohort of people that are concerned about **mental health (10.3%)**. One could argue that job security and cost-cutting measures are closely related, making mental health the second largest concern.

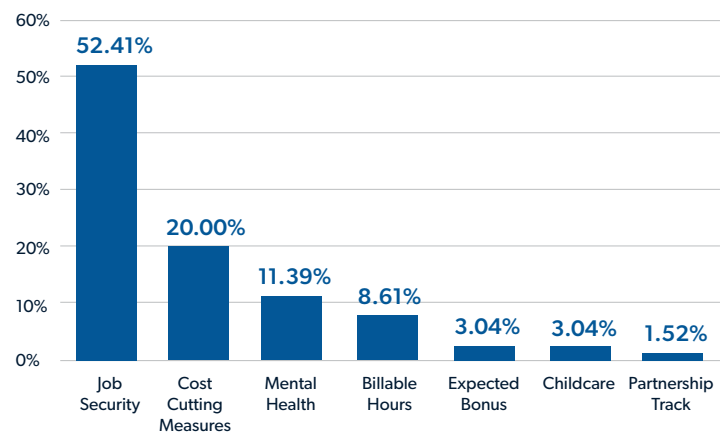


By Gender

Male



Female



Job security was the primary concern for both male and female respondents, followed by cost-cutting measures.

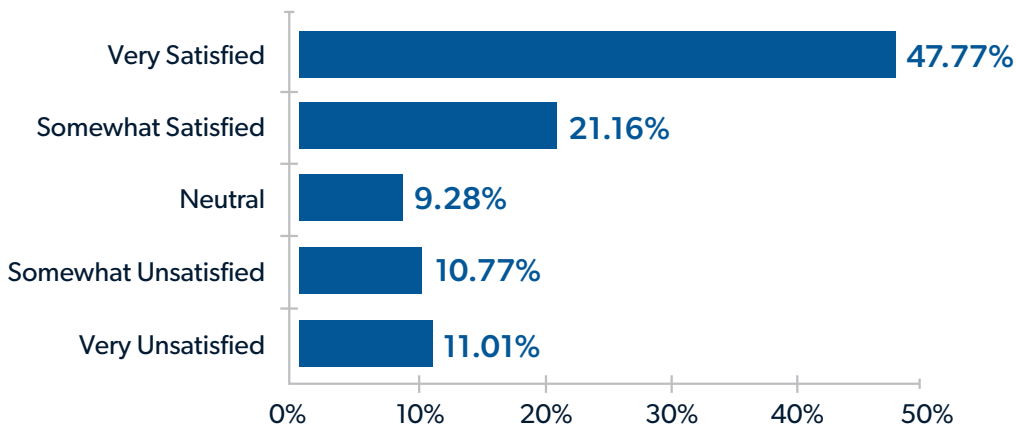
There are, however, gender discrepancies with respect to partnership track, childcare and billable hours.

- **4x as many male associates** are concerned about **partnership**
- **3x as many female associates** are concerned about **child care**
- Almost **double the number of female associates** reported concern about **billable hours**

COMMUNICATION

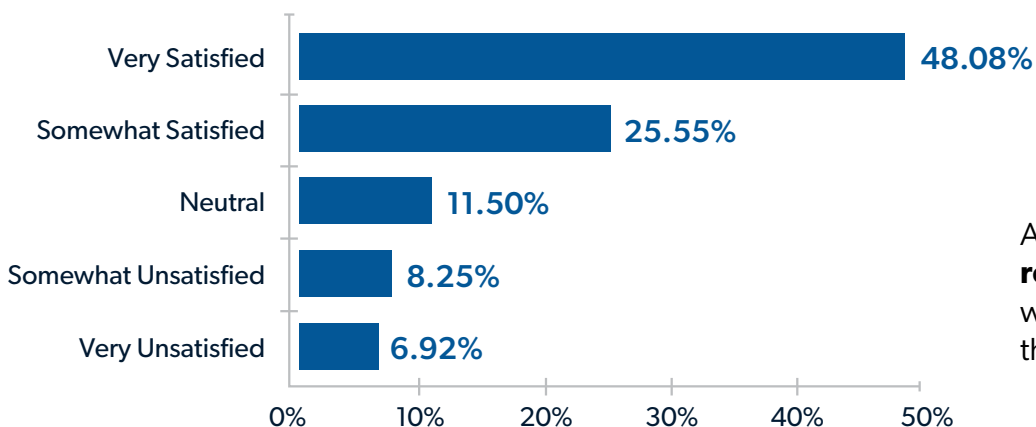
How satisfied are you with your firm management's level of communication on the following topics?

Firm wide cost-cutting measures (layoffs, salary reductions, furloughs)



The largest cohort of respondents **(47.77%) reported being very satisfied** with the level of communication regarding firm cost-cutting measures overall.

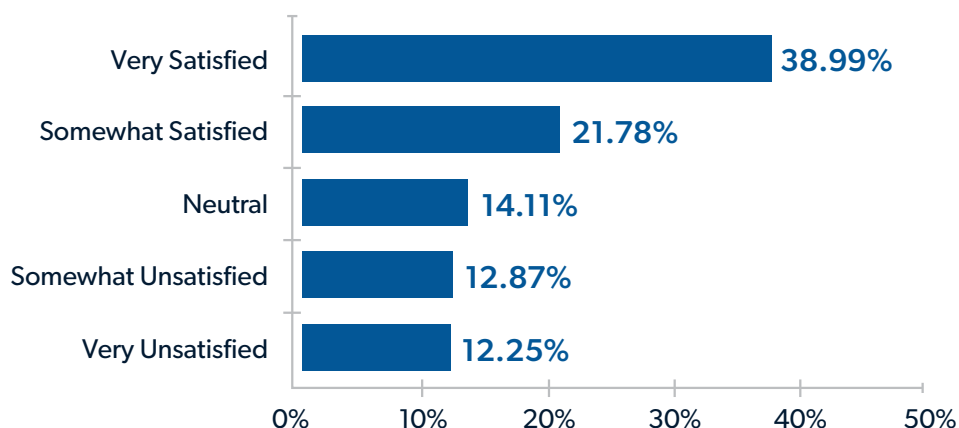
Your firm's financial health:



Almost **half of all respondents reported being very satisfied** with the communication about their firm's financial health.

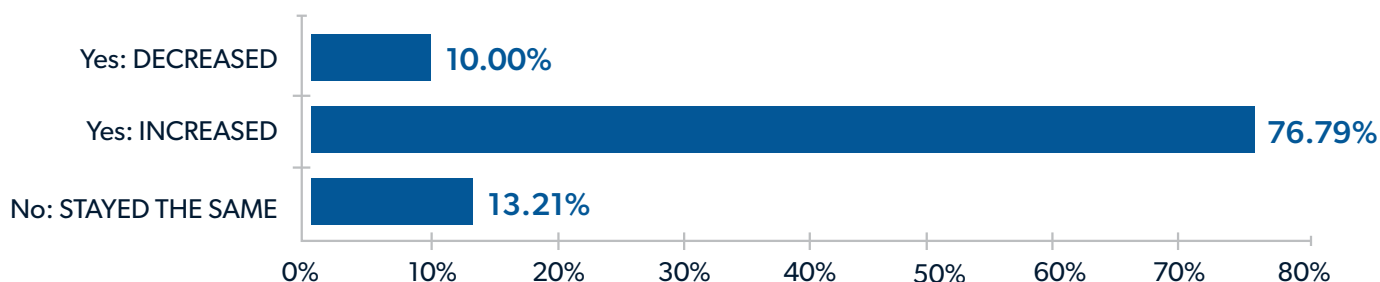
COMMUNICATION

Whether associates are going to be impacted by cost-cutting measures:



The largest cohort of respondents **(38.99%) reported being very satisfied** with communications regarding whether associates are going to be impacted by cost-cutting measures.

Has communication within your firm changed due to COVID-19?

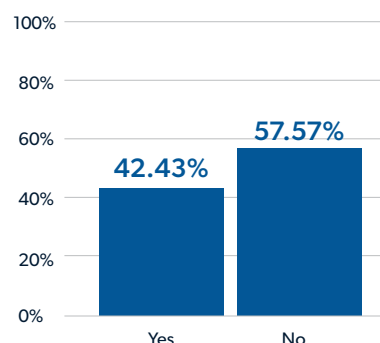


The majority of respondents **(76.79%) reported that communication within their firm has increased.**

COMMUNICATION

Since the shutdown, are partners at your firm requiring recurring video chat check-ins?

The majority of respondents, **almost 60%**, reported that partners at their firm **are not requiring** recurring video chat check-ins.

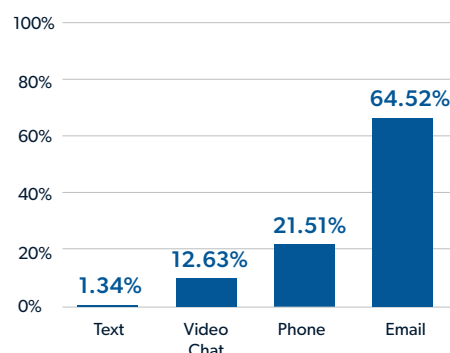


What currently are the preferred methods of communication with others in your firm? Rank in order of importance.

Overall mean (average)

2.80 Video Chat	1.47 Email
2.07 Phone	3.65 Text

Percentages were ranked as the most preferred (1) by respondents

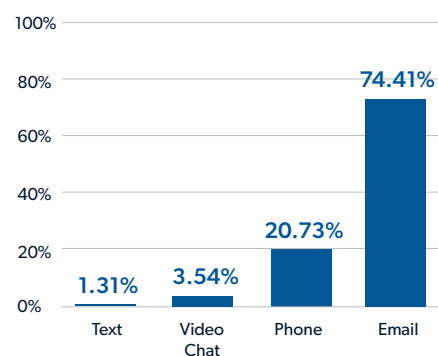


What currently are the preferred methods of communication with others outside your firm (i.e., clients, courts, opposing counsel)? Rank in order of importance.

Overall mean

3.01 Video Chat	1.33 Email
1.88 Phone	3.77 Text

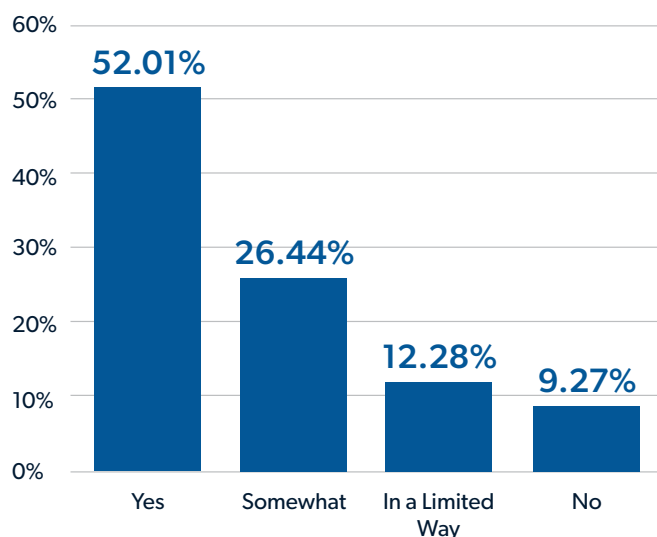
Percentages were ranked as the most preferred (1) by respondents



CULTURE

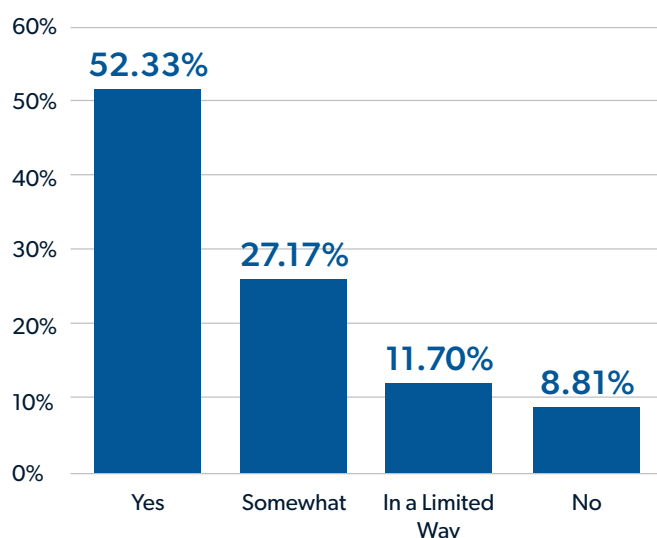
Do you feel sufficiently connected with the partners for whom you work?

The majority of respondents **(52.01%)** reported **that they do feel sufficiently connected** with the partners for whom they work.



Do you feel sufficiently connected with the other associates in your group?

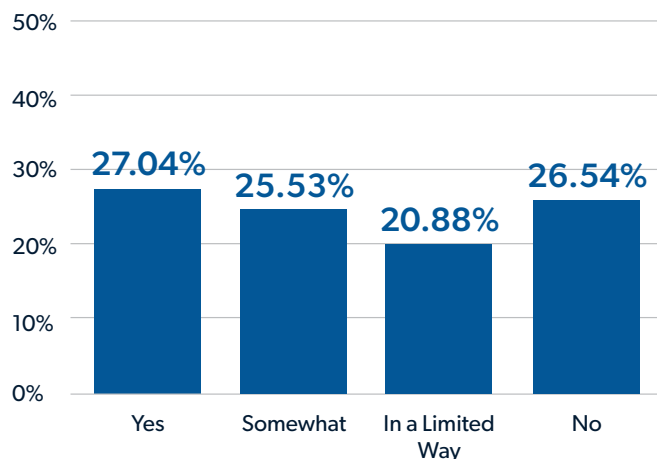
The majority of respondents **(52.33%)** reported **that they do feel sufficiently connected** with the other associates in their group.



Do you feel sufficiently connected with the other associates in other groups at your firm?

The largest cohort of respondents **(27.04%)** reported **that they do feel sufficiently connected** with the other associates in other groups at their firm.

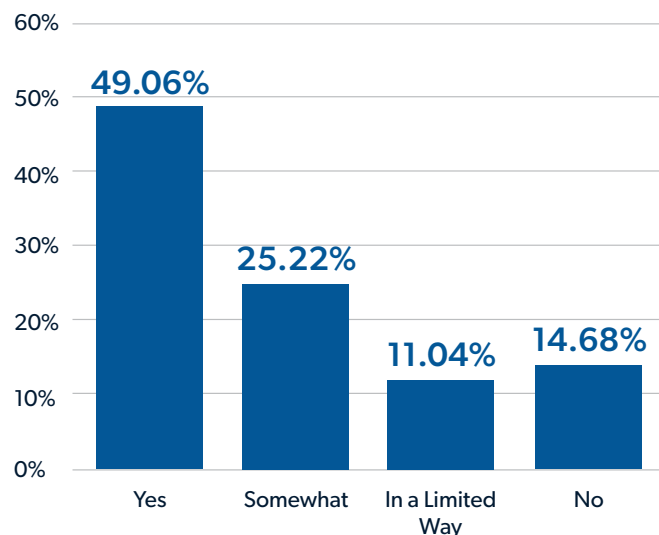
However, this majority was only a small margin, as **26.54% of respondents reported that they do not feel sufficiently connected** with the other associates in other groups at their firm.



CULTURE

Are you satisfied with the efforts your firm is taking to foster camaraderie?

Almost half of all respondents reported that they **were satisfied with the efforts** their firm is taking to foster camaraderie. **74% reported being either very or somewhat satisfied with these efforts.**



What more would you like your firm to do?

Most common responses included increased **transparency regarding job cuts, salary cuts, bonuses and firm health, relaxed billing hour requirements, and increased and better communications.**

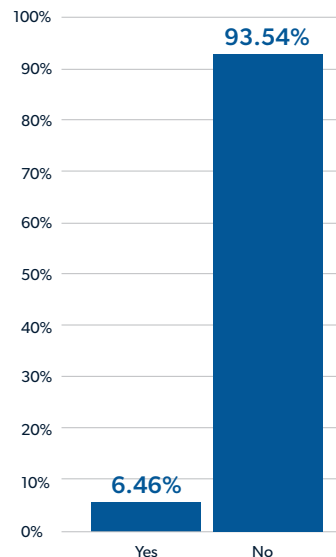


WORKLOAD

Has your target billable changed?

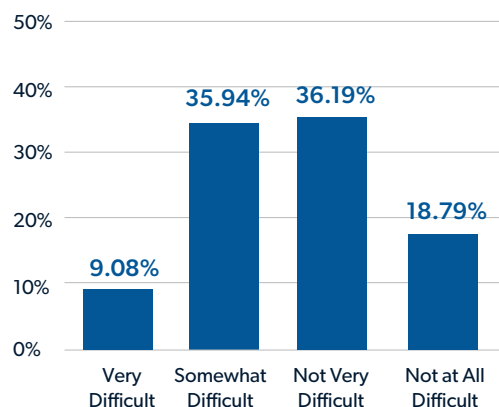
An overwhelming majority of respondents (**93.54%**) **reported that their target billable had not changed**, despite the fact that many firms have instituted salary cuts and there has been a reduction in work available for certain practice groups.

There is a strong desire however for associates to see the billable hour target changed in light of this pandemic. It was also the #1 suggestion for the future, as can be seen later in this report.

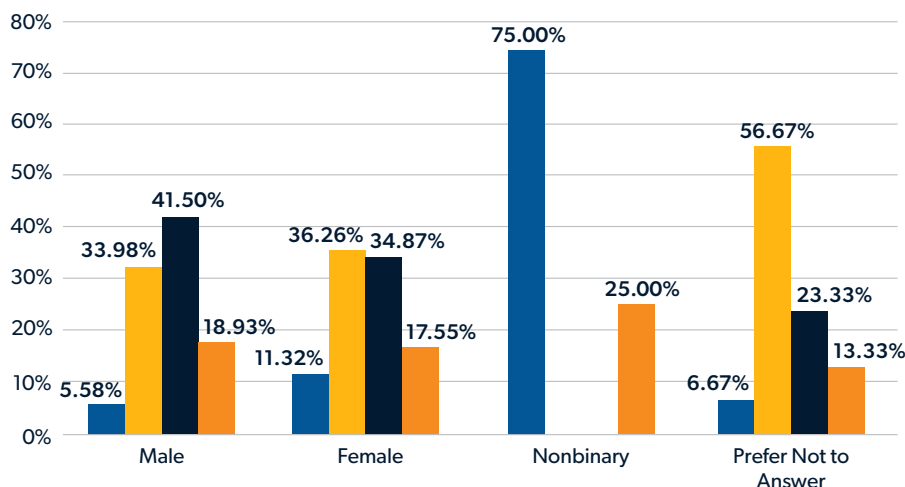


How difficult are you finding it to complete your work from home?

36.19% of respondents reported they found completing their work from home **not very difficult**, representing the largest group by a very narrow margin. **35.94%** of respondents, however, reported they were finding completing their work from home **somewhat difficult**.



By Gender



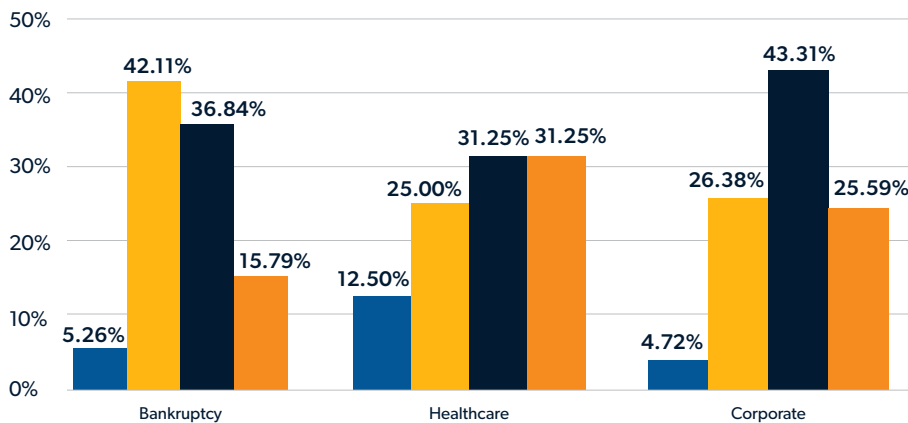
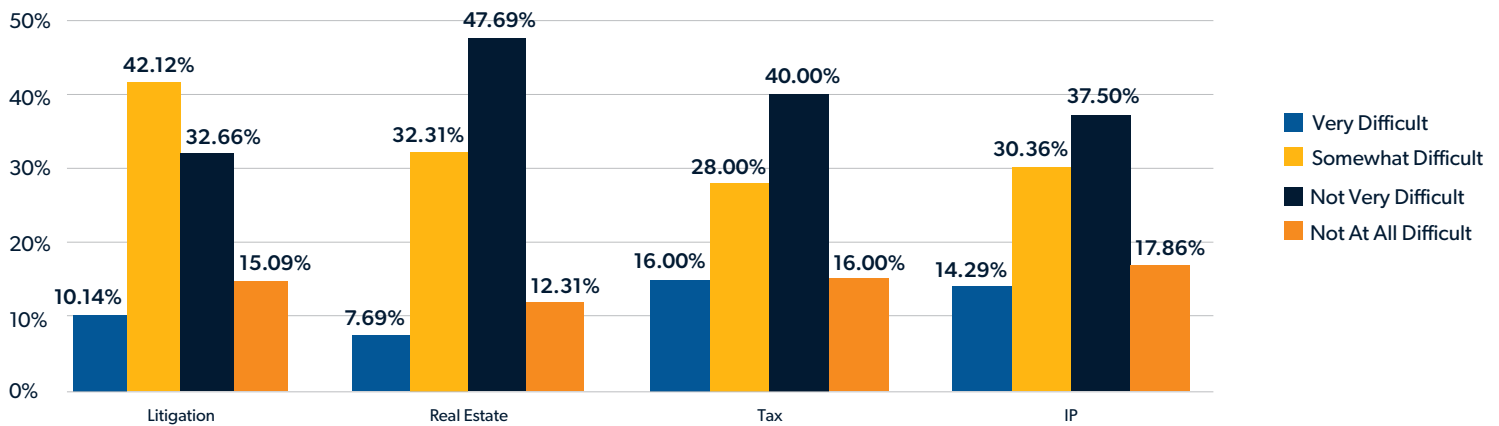
48% of women find it very or somewhat difficult to work from home vs 40% of men.

Among associates who find working from home not at all difficult there is little difference between genders.



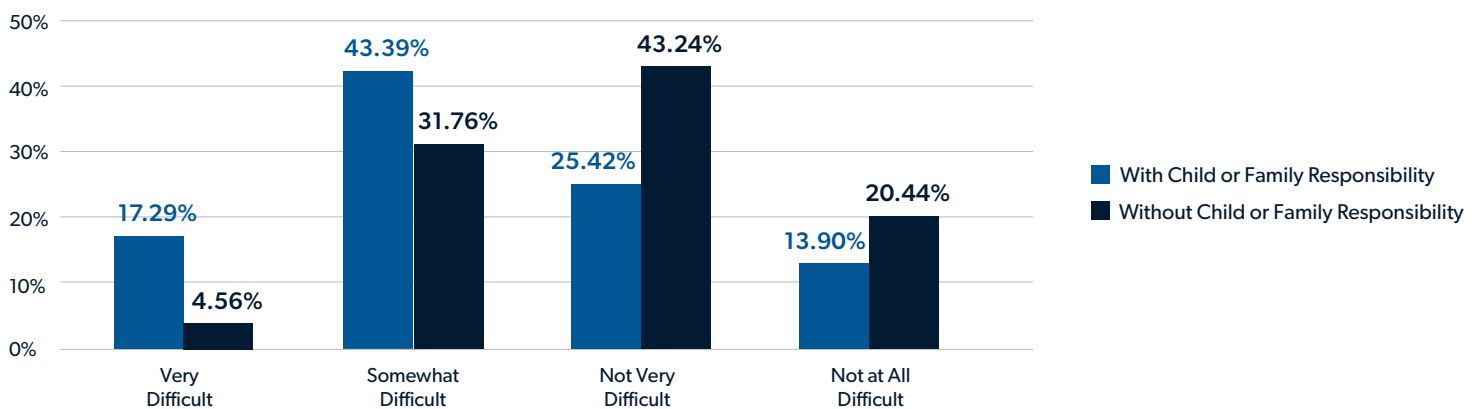
WORKLOAD

By Practice Area



Those in Litigation and Bankruptcy practices — about 50% — are finding it difficult to work from home; those having the easiest time working at home are those in Real Estate, Corporate, and Tax.

Child or Family Responsibility

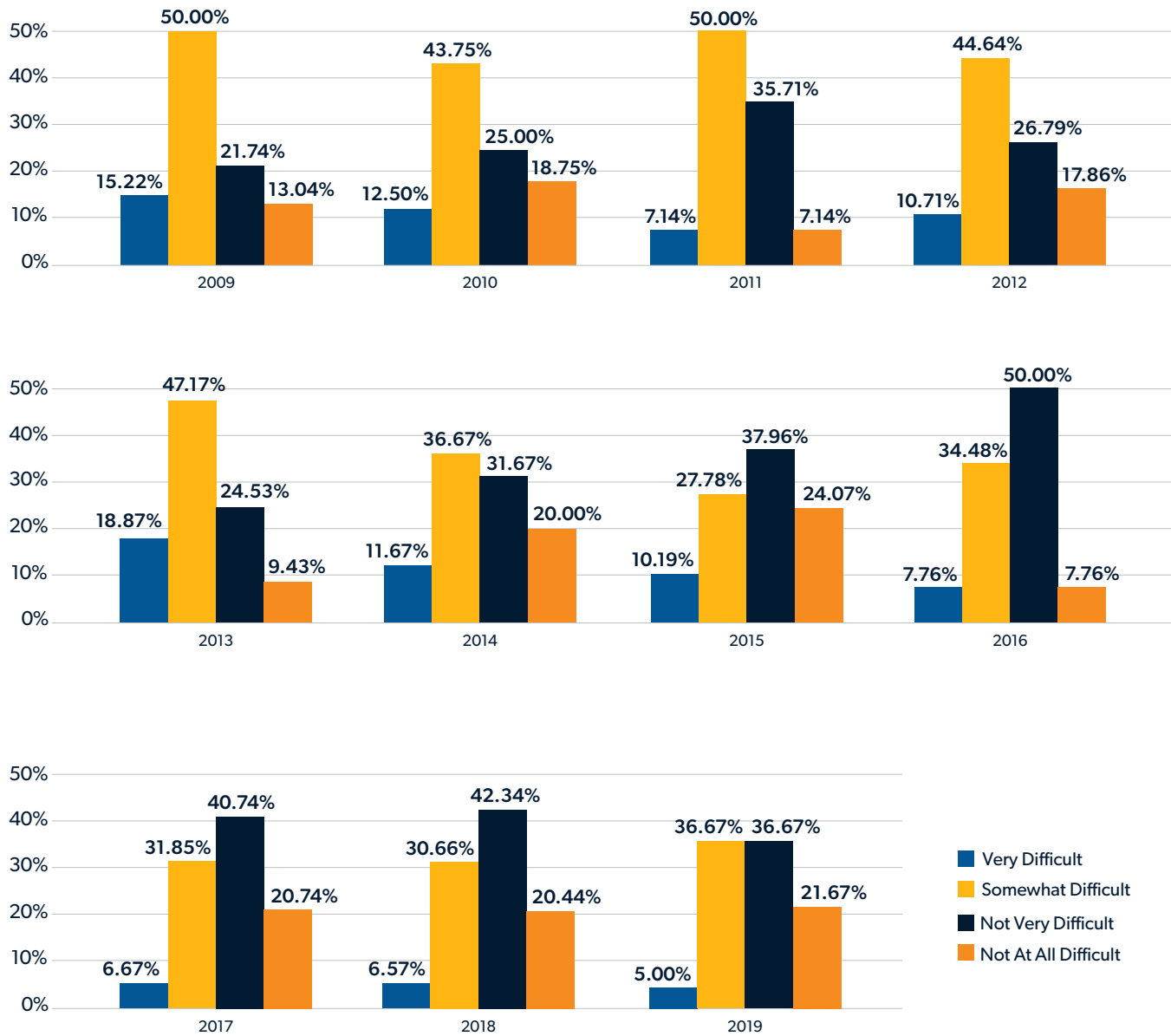


Among associates who are caring for a child or family member, 61% find it very difficult or somewhat difficult to work from home. Only 14% find it not at all difficult.

Only 4.6% of associates who aren't caring for a child or family member find it very difficult to work from home.

WORKLOAD

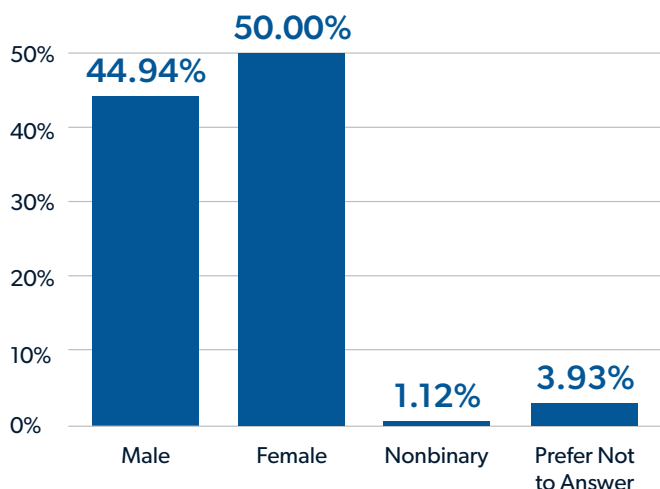
By Class Year



Senior associates tend to have a more difficult time working from home than more recent grads. This is not surprising since senior associates are likely to have more responsibility, such as work load, childcare, etc.

WORKLOAD

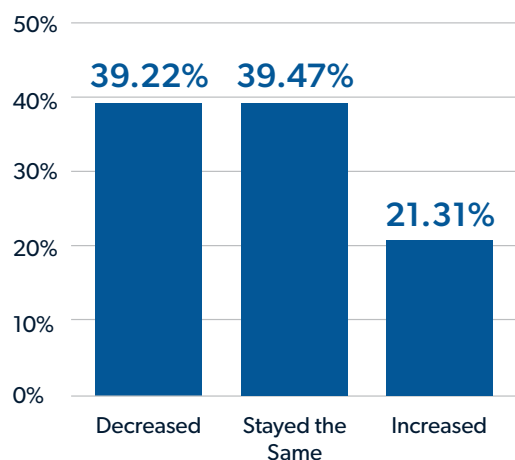
Gender Breakdown



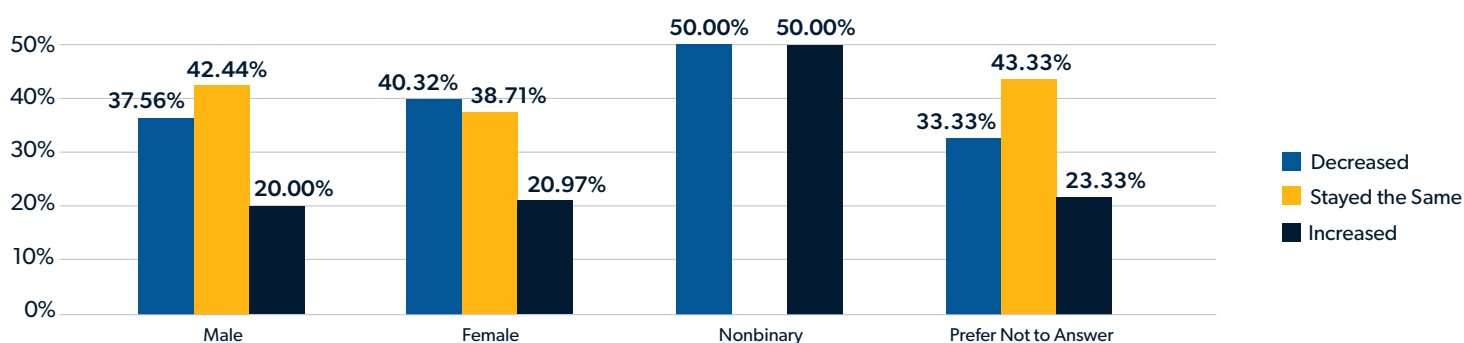
Those who find it difficult to work from home with family or child responsibilities

Since working from home, has your workload increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Reports that workload has stayed the same or decreased were on par. **39.22%** of respondents stating **workload has decreased** and **39.47%** reporting it has **stayed the same**.

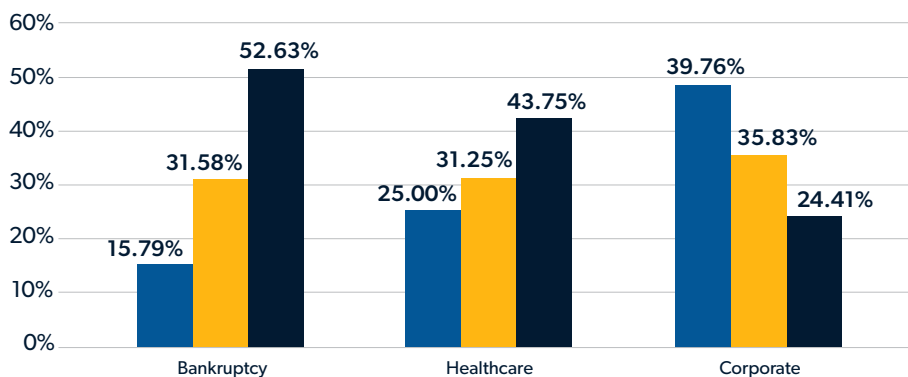
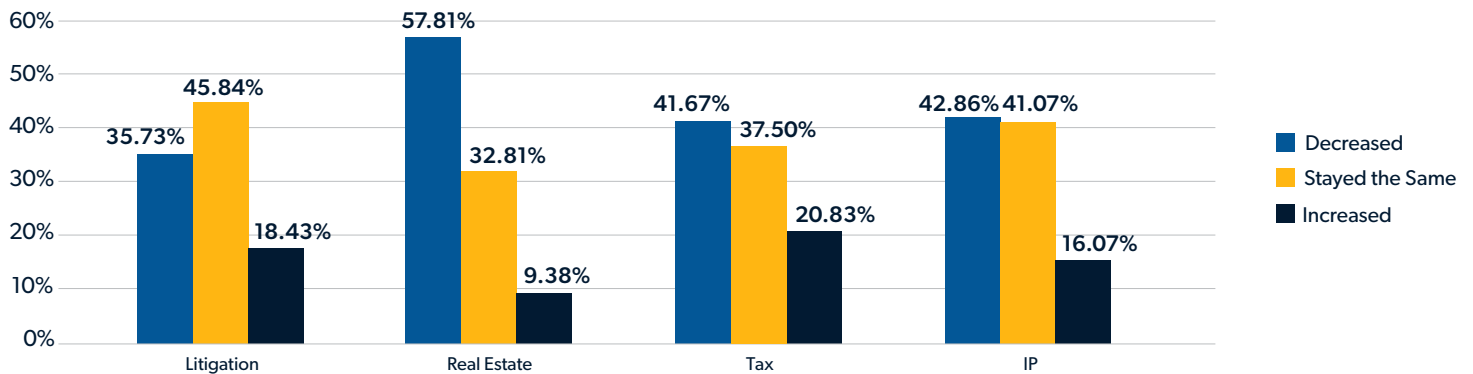


By Gender



WORKLOAD

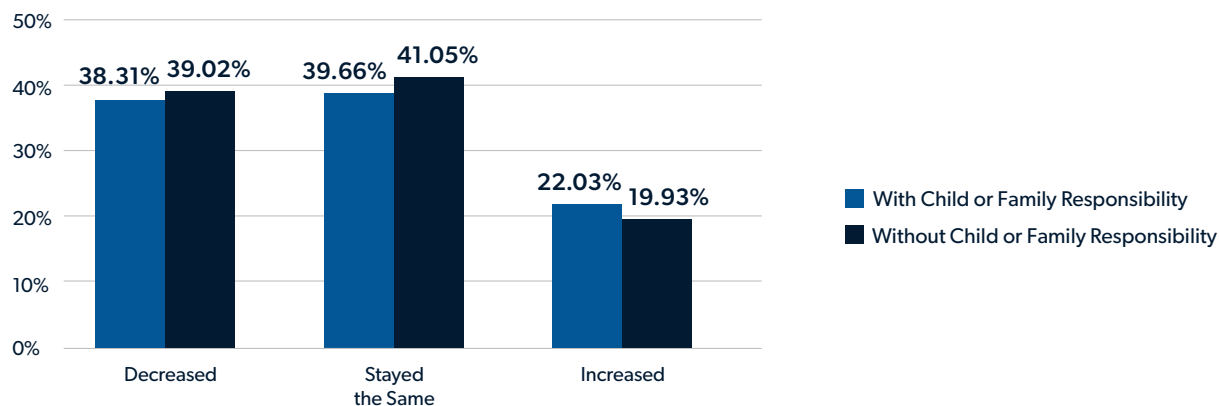
By Practice Area



Bankruptcy (53%) and Healthcare (44%) associates reported an increased workload. The largest decrease in workload was reported by **Real Estate associates (58%)**; **Corporate, Tax and IP associates all show reduced workloads of about 40%.** **35% of Litigation associates report a decrease in workload.**

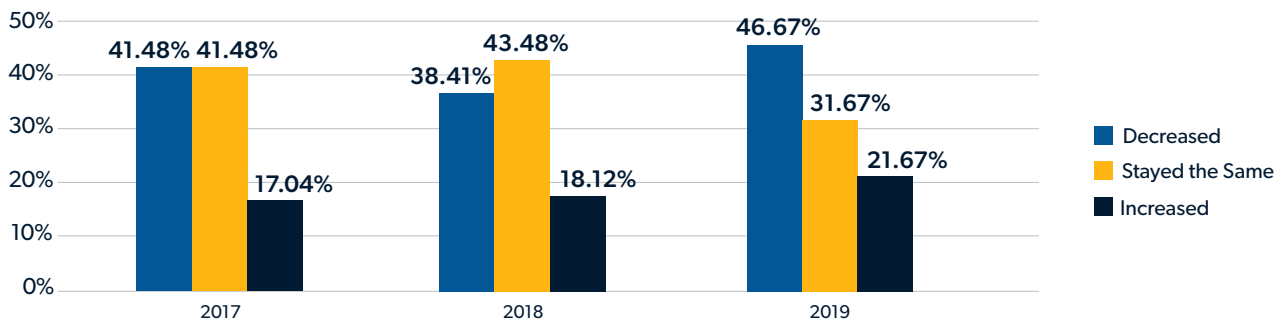
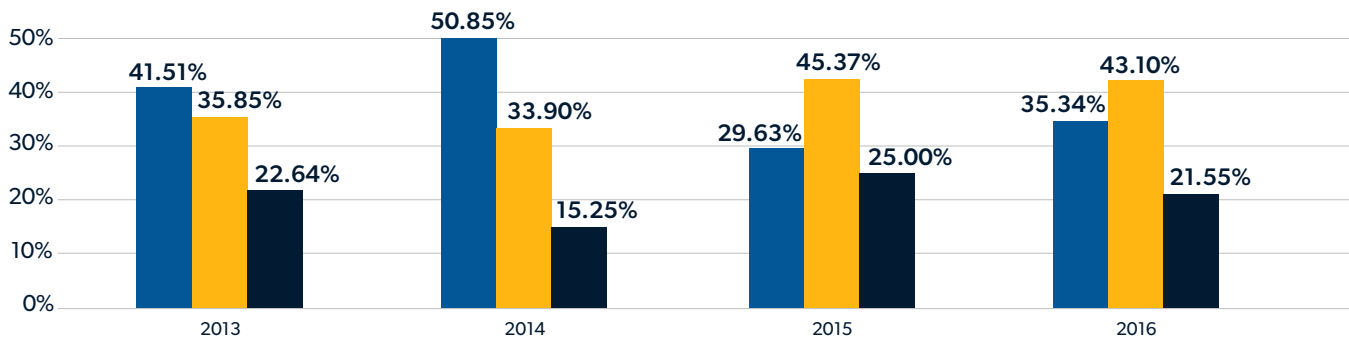
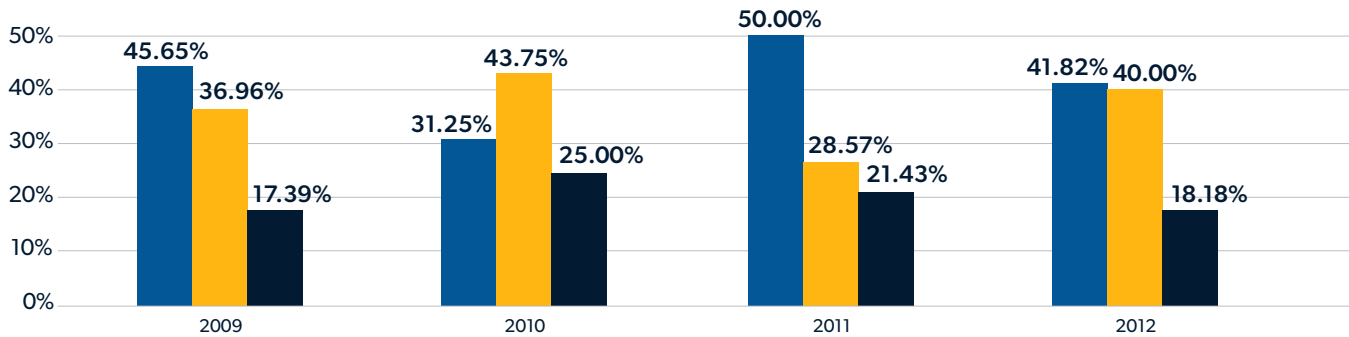
Whether litigators reported an increase or decrease in their workload did not correlate with their reported level of difficulty in working from home.

Child or Family Responsibility



WORKLOAD

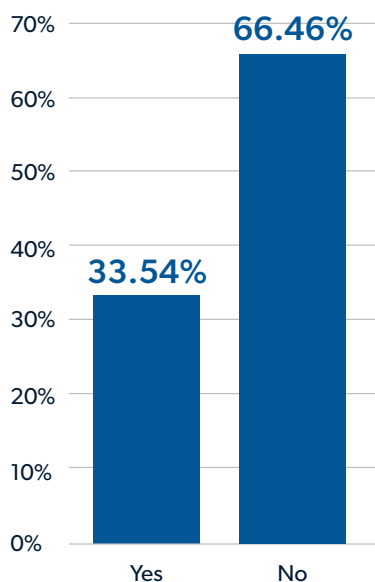
By Class Year



■ Decreased
■ Stayed the Same
■ Increased

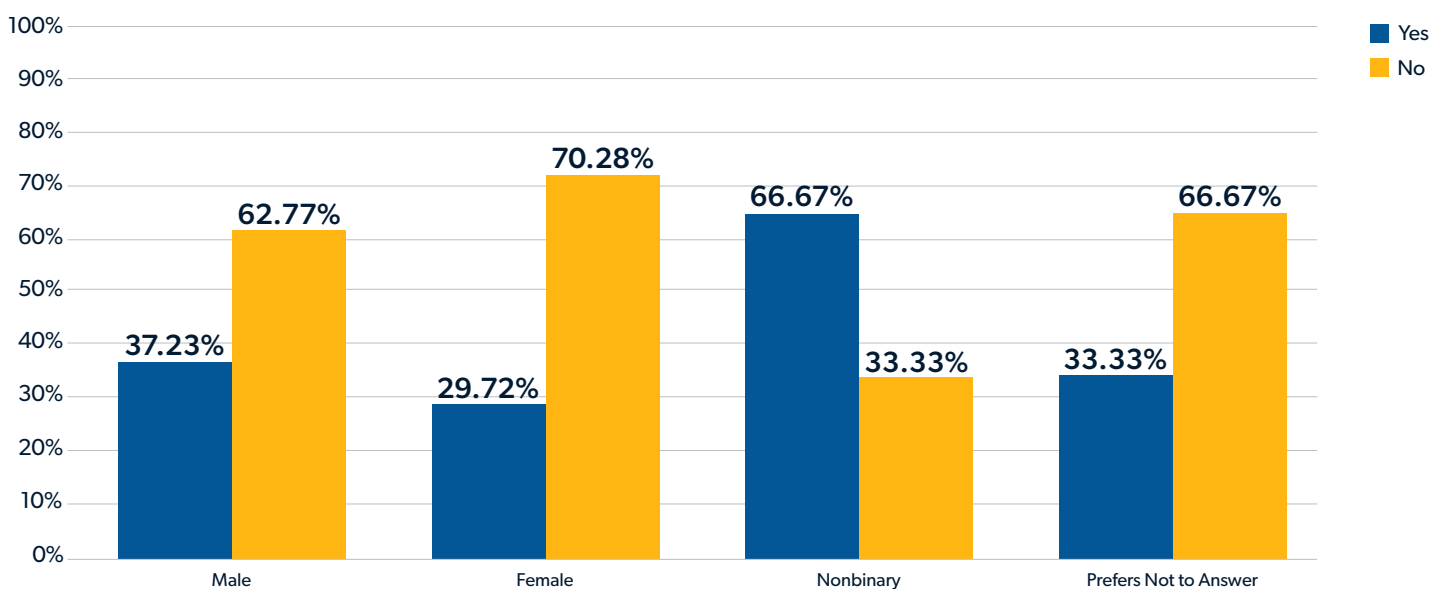
WORKLOAD

Do you have children or other family members that you are caring for?



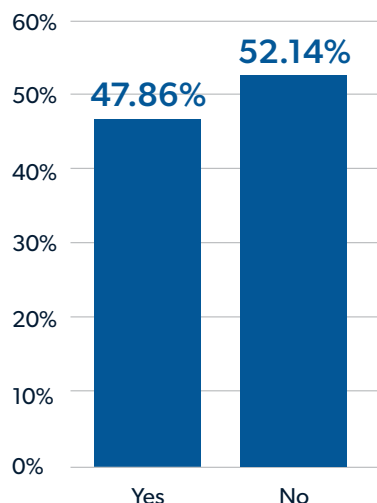
The majority of respondents (**almost 70%**) reported that they **do not have children or other family members that they care for**.

By Gender



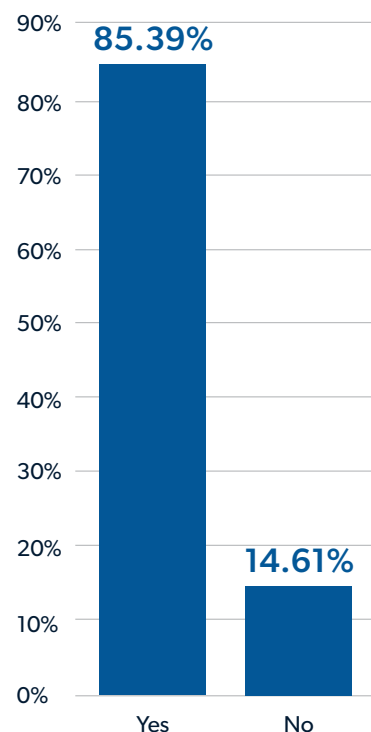
TECHNOLOGY

Has your firm given you additional technology resources since you started working from home?



The majority of respondents (**52.14%**) reported that their firm has **not given them additional technology resources** since they started working from home.

Do you have all the resources that you need in order to complete your work?



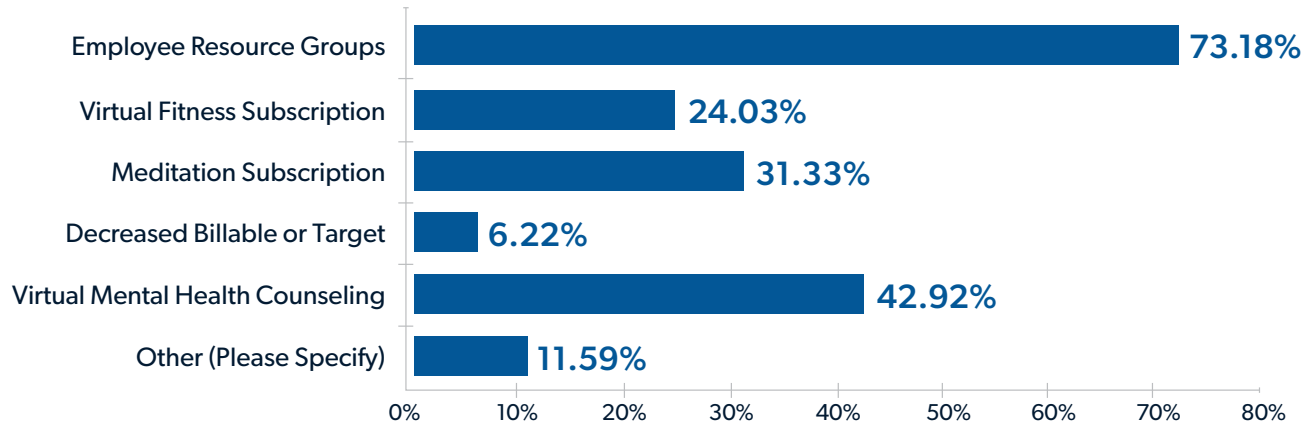
85.39% of respondents reported that they **do have all the resources they need** in order to complete their work.

What additional resources can your firm provide?

The most common responses received were **monitors, printers, scanners** and **tech stipends**.

WELLNESS

Has your firm added any of the following wellness resources post COVID-19? (select all that apply)

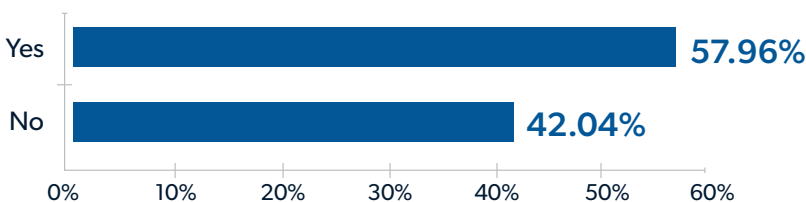


Employee resource groups (73.18%), virtual mental health counseling (42.92%), and meditation subscriptions (31.33%) were identified as the top three categories of wellness resources added by firms since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other responses included:

- Billable flexibility/no billable requirement
- Weekly emails with wellness focus
- Parenting resources
- Online resources/links to free fitness and mental health resources, etc.

Are you satisfied with those resources?



The majority of respondents (**57.96%**) reported **they were satisfied with the resources provided by their firms** post COVID-19. Dissatisfaction seems to be attributed to an unequal offering of resources among different firms.

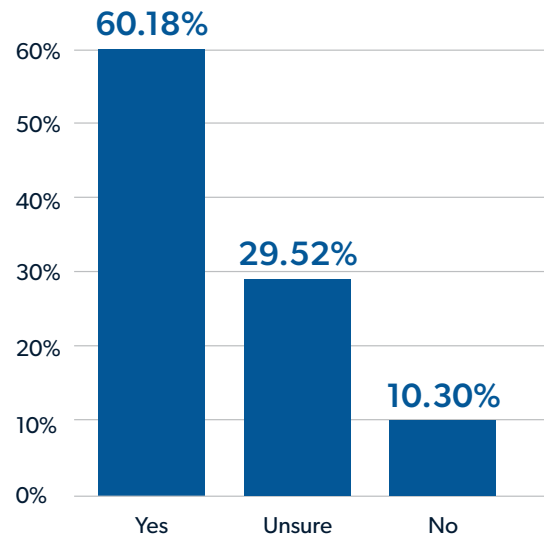
What more can your firm add?

Most common responses - **Decreased billable requirement, virtual fitness, mental health support**, or any of the resources listed in the previous question

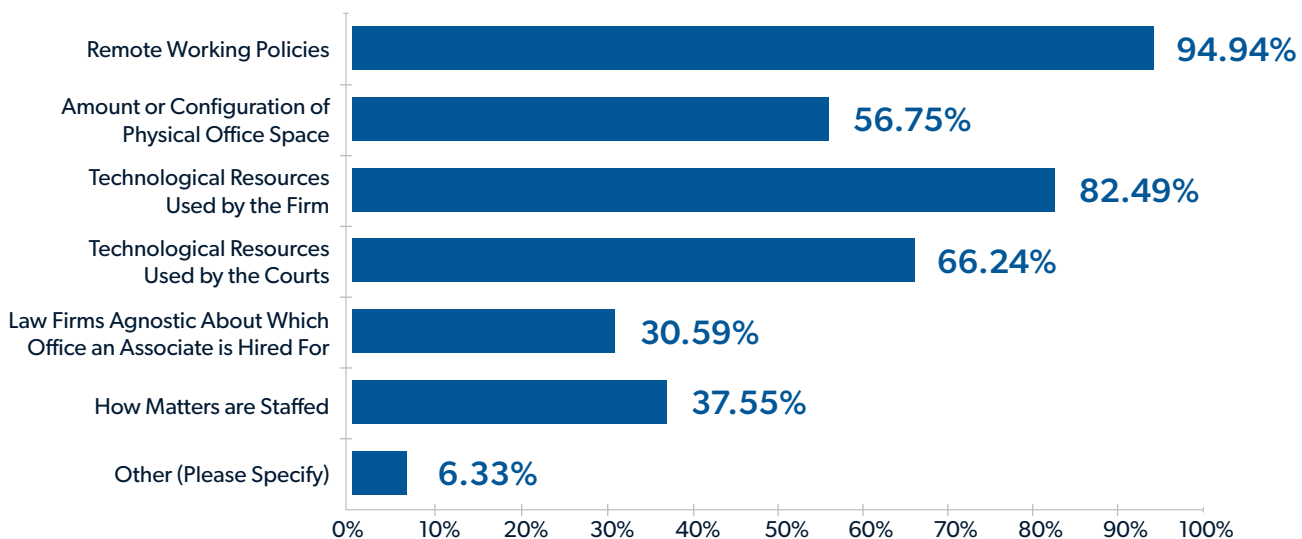
WELLNESS

Do you think this crisis will result in permanent changes to the legal industry?

60.18% of respondents reported that they **do believe this crisis will result in permanent changes** to the legal industry.



Which do you think will change? (select all that apply)



Remote working policies (94.94%), technological resources used by the firm (82.49%), and technological resources used by the courts (66.24%) were identified as the top three areas respondents believe will change.

OTHER CHANGES:

- > Communication; overseeing/micromanaging associate's work
- > Even fewer female partners over the next decade as female associates are pushed out of the practice of law
- > Pandemic and business interruption coverage
- > Compensation
- > A severe economic downturn will hamper litigation
- > Salaries will decrease
- > Starting salaries and bonuses
- > Increased satisfaction among firms; more clear delineation of top tier firms and wannabes
- > Billable rates
- > Fewer jobs
- > Permanent cost-cutting measures
- > Firms will trim the fat when this is over (unnecessary expenses, unproductive employees)
- > Increased requirement for technology skills on hiring
- > Number of support and ancillary staff needed for a firm. Law student recruiting.
- > Support staff size
- > Paperless priority, leave policy, increased wellness support
- > Firm travel
- > Partners will require fewer meetings, and be content to do more by email. As a consequence, billable hours spent in internal meetings to discuss client matters will decrease substantially
- > Litigation associates will train in Bankruptcy
- > Overall firm management; firm practice group diversification; client diversification; unforeseeable changes (this is big)
- > Shift of associates away from firms
- > Discretionary spending will be gone moving forward. No more parties

CONCLUSION

There is no “silver lining” in the tragedy of this pandemic. Yet there are some encouraging themes in our findings. Most associates give their firms high marks for communication transparency during these uncertain times. Firms have recognized that supporting the mental health and wellness of associates is an imperative. While the future shape and direction of the legal industry are obviously uncertain, there is a near-consensus that lasting change is inevitable. What remains to be seen are the depth and duration of this change. The consistency of our high-level findings across the board, regardless of geographic location, practice area, gender, firm size, or experience level, suggests that law firm associate experiences during these extraordinary times have more in common than not. While there were some differences between men and women with respect to concerns about partnership track, childcare, and billable hours in this COVID-19 world, associates appear to be weathering the changes as their employers adapt to widespread disruption.

ABOUT MAJOR, LINDSEY & AFRICA

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RU BHATT, a Partner in our New York Associate Practice Group, works closely with lawyers at all stages of their careers to help them achieve their goals. He prides himself on being more than just a recruiter; he's a career counselor and advocate, coaching his candidates through every step of the recruiting process including integration at their new firms. He takes a holistic approach to getting to know his candidates, including their career goals and ambitions, and then shares his knowledge of the legal landscape to help them make informed decisions.



STEPHANIE BIDERMAN is a Managing Director in our New York office. She specializes in placing attorneys of all levels into top-tier national, international, regional and boutique law firms as well as into prominent in-house positions. One of her strengths is her ability to work closely with candidates to help them identify opportunities that are consistent with their individual career goals.



MICHELLE FIVEL is a Partner working both in the Los Angeles and New York offices. Michelle has a successful 10-year track record of placing associates and partners in top-tier international, national, regional and boutique law firms as well as prominent corporations. She is regularly called upon by law firms to provide advice regarding the lateral market, and she counsels attorneys to assist them in achieving their career goals.