

CHICAGO LAWYER®

INSIDE OUT

This is our official 10th anniversary column. Much has changed over the past decade in the legal profession and in the world. However, none of that compares to the changes since March and the onslaught of the COVID-19 virus. It has upended our lives in almost every way. This column was written in early April, before the virus is expected to peak in Illinois and in the country.

How have the virus and stay-at-home orders affected your work and your lives?

Martini: The coronavirus and the stay-at-home orders have drastically impacted both my work and home life. The great news is my firm was prepared for this scenario, technologically and otherwise. It has been a seamless process to work remotely the past several weeks.

In many ways, it has been business as usual in my day-to-day practice, other than the fact that I don't connect with people in person. Video-conferencing has been a tremendous help in staying connected in a more meaningful way with people than either on the phone or by email. However, amidst what is seemingly normal on the surface, when we stop working and look at what is going on around us day to day, both locally and globally, there has been a profound shift in the world, and this significantly impacts our clients — both as professionals and as people, and our businesses. None of us will be the same once this is over.

On a lighter note, I can safely say the novelty of being home all the time with our two cats has worn off. They are disinterested in us at this point.

Susler: Obviously, working at home is the most tangible change. Given this is completely new territory for all of us, with rapidly changing business and legal landscapes, changing daily and even hourly some days, the intensity and speed of my work and required adaptability has increased exponentially. My work, and likely that of our readers, has always been highly collaborative. This too has increased; given the rapid changes in this new economy, business and legal need to be in even more constant communication to collaboratively navigate these new landscapes.

I am part of our executive team overseeing our COVID-19 preparation and strategy, so my work for the past month has been almost exclusively related to that, with "regular" legal work taking a back seat, often to the consternation of my clients, though they have been understanding.



NOW WE'RE ALL 'IN-HOUSE'

Learning how to work under the stay-at-home order

By CHRISTINA L. MARTINI and DAVID G. SUSLER

How do you separate work and personal life? How do you relax?

Martini: Not very well. Going into this situation, I had these great visions of having more time to exercise, rest, take care of chores around my house and other tasks. What I have found is that I have greater difficulty separating my work from my personal life. I find myself working longer hours than I had been before, not having any down time and not accomplishing any of the goals I had set for myself. Now that I am particularly mindful of this issue, my intent for the next several weeks is to better create separation so that I can get at least a bit more rest and clear my head.

Susler: As someone who was used to working at home only a few days a year, it is difficult. There is no concern with having enough work to do or the motivation to do it; the concern is how to stop working and maintain some semblance of a personal/non-work life. What had been my commute time has now been added to my work time. I am at my dining room table at 6 a.m., working nonstop for the next 12-14 hours.

I started wearing my regular office attire during the day and changing in the evening as if I were coming home from the office. It has made a difference in mindset in terms of delineating between work and personal — and my dry cleaner was quite happy to see me that first Saturday!

Although we are still early in the COVID-19 world, any lessons learned?

Martini: The irony is that in the new normal, where we are all required to exercise social distancing, we have been resourceful in finding ways to not only stay close but to actually grow closer.

I have also learned that little acts of kindness, no matter what they are, go a long way, especially now. Whether it's a quick check-in call, emailing someone to say that you are thinking about them, or having a virtual coffee with a client by video, all of these gestures go a long way.

Susler: Exercise! It's great stress relief and helps me stay alert and feel alive. Also, difficult though it may be, keep a positive attitude. These are quite stressful days, so take time to focus on our blessings. Just keep focusing on the task at hand and recognize that this too shall pass, we will recover and return to a sense of normalcy. CL

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is a partner with McDermott Will & Emery and focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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To submit a question, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com