

Tips, Lessons, and Silver Linings from the New Work-Life Reality Under COVID-19

Kristin Cilento Carter,
Baker Donelson

C COVID-19 has undoubtedly impacted all aspects of life for most Americans, particularly our frontline workers who have been working around the clock to make sure health care, food, and other critical services are available in our country. In this particularly trying time, we have all been working to adjust to new realities regarding social distancing, remote or altered work schedules, school and camp closures, and caring for the health and well-being of ourselves and others. While these changes have certainly led to additional stress in some aspects of life, they have also presented opportunities to evaluate priorities, explore new interests, and establish or reinforce connections with clients, colleagues, and friends.

In this issue of *Health Law Connections*, AHLA's Women's Leadership Council (WLC) is sharing some tips, lessons learned, and silver linings we have gained as attorneys and individuals as we adjust to this altered landscape.

Working Remotely

With social distancing measures in place across the country, attorneys are working from home in greater numbers. This change brings about a host of adjustments, including ensuring appropriate access to necessary client documents and communications, finding a quiet spot to establish a home office, and balancing additional home duties such as caring for loved ones or children. The following are some tips that members have shared with the WLC:

► *Follow a schedule, but recognize the need for flexibility:* If possible, evaluate your day in advance and establish a schedule that will allow you to attend necessary work meetings and calls, while also carving out time for other priorities, such as homeschooling, exercising, or necessary down time. While there is a need to be flexible for last-minute client emergencies

and evaluation of new legal developments, setting a schedule in advance will help ensure that you can be present for the priorities you set for the day.

► *Consider an "alternative" commute:* Many of our cars have collected dust during the pandemic, which has created less separation between home life and the office. Instead of giving up time that was previously spent commuting, consider using that time for "self-care," such as enjoying a cup of coffee in the morning, exercising, reading, or watching a TV show. Use this time to ramp up in the morning or decompress in the evening.

► *Know when to "log off":* Being an attorney can be a 24/7 job, particularly as we assist clients through uncharted territory. While we always want to meet and exceed the expectations of our clients, there are also times when we need to set boundaries and log off from work for downtime.

Workplace Communication and Policies

With workplaces adapting to remote and alternative work schedules, there are several practices and policies that workplaces have adopted either formally or informally to address the changing work environment. The WLC shares some of the following helpful practices:

► *Communication:* As many workplaces have had to quickly adapt to new government mandates and rollout new initiatives to help employees through the pandemic, regular and frequent communication has proven to be key. Some workplaces have adopted internal COVID-19 newsletters, or daily touchpoint calls, which allow attorneys to collaborate, discuss COVID-19 and other legal updates, and seek input on client needs and projects.

► *Flexibility:* In addition to open communication, there also has been a significant recognition of the need for flexibility in the workplace. Many firms

Do you have any tips or "silver linings" to share? Please join the discussion in the Women's Network Community at americanhealthlaw.org/communities.

and other workplaces have increasingly recognized formally or informally that a daily work schedule may require attorneys to work outside of a “9-to-5” schedule to address the needs of children, caring for other family members, and attending to non-work related appointments during the day. During the pandemic, workplaces and colleagues are increasingly allowing greater flexibility, while also ensuring that the needs of clients are met through proactive communication and collaboration.

Balancing Working Remotely and Assisting with Childcare/Homeschooling

During the pandemic, many attorneys with children have found themselves taking on the additional role of assisting their children with distance learning, while balancing work. While the WLC does not have any perfect solutions for tackling this new role of fulltime teacher, some suggestions include:

- ▶ Schedule work calls when possible during times when your children might otherwise be occupied with schoolwork or other activities that do not involve heavy parent involvement.
- ▶ Consider implementing a “daily morning huddle” where the family can discuss priorities and needs for the day and proactively anticipate challenges that may arise.
- ▶ Enjoy lunch and recess together as a family. If schedules permit, take a break together to enjoy some outside time or check in with each other throughout the day.

▶ Each family has its own needs and circumstances, so give yourself some grace and embrace the chaos that may inevitably arise in an imperfect work environment.

Silver Linings

With every challenge comes opportunities for growth and an ability to establish a fresh perspective. The WLC shares some of the following silver linings resulting from the changes surrounding these new work realities:

- ▶ There have been opportunities for more time with family and appreciation of simple things, such as skipping rocks in a pond; going for hikes, walks, and bike rides; cooking healthy dinners; and having random picnic lunches.
- ▶ It has been a great time to check in with clients, colleagues, family, and friends to see how they are doing, share latest developments, and demonstrate support for one another. It has been a great opportunity to virtually see people for Zoom meetings, happy hours, and other virtual activities.
- ▶ One of our members, Cori Loomis, adopted a practice of Sunday afternoon surprises. Cori and her husband started delivering small gifts or surprises, such as a bottle of wine or donation to a local charity on their behalf, to friends’ doorsteps on Sunday afternoons to let them know they were thinking of them.

The author would like to thank Cori Turner, Jennifer Nelson Carney, Tamala Choma, Cori Loomis, Elisabeth Pimentel, and Heather Alleva for their input on this article.

Women’s Network



Kristin Carter is a shareholder in the Health Law Practice Group of Baker Donelson and is a resident in the Baltimore Office. Kristin represents a broad spectrum of health care providers, including hospitals, clinical laboratories, physicians, and other health care providers. Kristin has had the honor of serving on AHLA’s Women’s Leadership Council since 2017, and she looks forward to assuming a new role as the Vice Chair of Educational Programming in the Fraud and Abuse Practice Group in July 2020.

