



Workshop #1: Charting Course: Return-to-Office Strategy in Small to Midsize Law Firms



Robert Q. Lee
*Managing Partner,
Orlando, Brennan,
Manna & Diamond*



Brie Leung
*Chief Strategy Officer,
Much Shelist, P.C.*



Peter B. McGlynn
*Partner & Trial
Department Chair,
Bernkopf Goodman LLP
(Lead Facilitator)*



Kevin L. Walsh
*Principal & Co-Chair,
Client Development
Committee,
Groom Law Group*



ARE LAW FIRMS WELCOMING REMOTE WORKERS WITH OPEN ARMS OR SIMPLY RECOGNIZING THAT REMOTE WORK IS INEVITABLE AND UNAVOIDABLE?

Narrative

Abigail is a second year associate at Midlaw LLP. Although it's too early to determine if Abigail is on a partnership track, Midlaw considers her to be a "keeper." After a year and a half of allowing associates to work remotely, Midlaw is now requiring all associates to be in the office a minimum of three days each week. Although there has been some pushback by a few associates, all of the associates have returned to the office at least three days a week – except for Abigail. Abigail likes working remotely, doesn't miss the in-office collegiately and claims she can work more productively from home. There have been no threats by Abigail that she'll resign if required to return to the office, nor has Midlaw threatened termination if she doesn't. However, all of the other associates are watching closely to see how this issue gets resolved.

How do you think this issue should be resolved?

Discussion Points

- Are law firms truly embracing remote work?
- How are law firms' "no in-office" policies working out?
- How are law firms' "work from anywhere" policies working out?
- How do the panelists and audience feel about Abigail's request (more akin to a demand) to work remotely and how should it be handled?

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- Are law firms facing recruiting difficulties because of their pandemic work policies and how are they being handled?
 - Are law firms trending towards a hybrid/work at home/office arrangement rather than adopting a “no in-office” or a “no remote work” policy?
 - For those law firms that have mandated that everyone must return to the office, what have been their experiences?



PRODUCTIVITY AND REMOTE WORK

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Narrative

John is a third year associate in the litigation department of a 30 lawyer boutique firm with 10 other litigation associates. Despite only being in the office one or, on occasion, two days a week, John is one of the most productive associates in the litigation department. However, John has very limited “live” interactions with his fellow associates and partners, and only attends litigation department and firm meetings via Zoom.

What, if anything, can be done to convince John to spend more time in the office? Are there other ways to create an “in-office” experience for remote workers like John?

Discussion Points

- Need to develop clear, remote work policies with limited exceptions.
- Have a candid discussion with John about the importance of one-on-one mentorship and the importance of master/apprentice relationships.
- Despite John's high level of productivity, his compensation and bonus will be based on less tangible factors that are hard to calculate with John working remotely the majority of his time.
- Emphasize to John that “firm life” is vitally important to professional growth. Thus, attending retreats, holiday parties, and practice groups in person is critically important.

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- Establish “always on” breakout rooms with Zoom and Slack channels.
 - Establish regular department virtual conferences.
 - Establish virtual “water coolers.”
 - Establish improved mentoring of associates.
 - Create new ways to incentivize people to come back into the office to work.



REMOTE WORK AND WELLNESS

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Narrative

Nora is a highly skilled senior associate, but much prefers to work remotely. She feels guilty about not being in the office more often, however. To compensate, she routinely begins her workday at her remote office desk around 7:00 a.m., takes a 20 minute lunch break and usually works until 7:00 p.m. or later. She feels exhausted after her work day and experiences periods of loneliness. Nora feels constantly (internally) pressured to be more productive and she devotes less time to her personal wellbeing.

Discussion Points

- What are the difficulties in establishing work/play boundaries for remote workers and how to overcome them?
- How to deal with isolation from the social aspects of the office environment.
- Setting times to turn off notifications, creating a dedicated office space and setting regular business hours.



HAS “QUIET QUITTING” BECOME MORE PERVASIVE DURING THE PANDEMIC AS A RESULT OF REMOTE WORK?

Narrative

The term “quiet quitting” was inspired by a Chinese Tik Tok trend known as #TangPing or “lie flat,” which means to “quietly disengage from one’s job; to perform little more than the bare minimum, work no later than your contracted hours, and, in absolutely no event, go above and beyond what’s required.”

“Quiet quitting” as a concept has been around for a while. In a 1995 episode of The Simpsons, Homer Simpson stated that “if you don’t like your job, just go in every day and do it really half assed.”

Almost two decades later, in 2012, a group of conservative Members of Parliament in the United Kingdom, including the most recent ex-Prime Minister, Liz Truss, wrote that “the British are the worst idlers in the world.”

Discussion Points

- Has “quiet quitting” simply been an undiagnosed phenomenon that existed prior to the pandemic?
- Has the pandemic exacerbated “quiet quitting”?
- Is “quiet quitting” a phenomenon visited more upon Millennials and Generation Zs?



WILL A RECESSION IN 2023 ALTER REMOTE OFFICE WORK POLICIES?

Narrative

Very recently, investment giant Vanguard Group, workplace technology company Paycom Software, Inc., Wall Street banking giant Goldman Sachs Group, Inc. and several other large employers have issued directives to their employees “urging” them to strictly follow existing hybrid schedules or come into the office additional work days in 2023; otherwise, they could face termination and loss of severance payments.

Narrative

As the job market shifts due to the increased prospects of a recession (Amazon very recently announced that 18,000 employees are being laid off), many employers have become more empowered to rigidly enforce existing hybrid work schedules and some are mandating that employees return to the office five days a week.

Discussion Points

- Do you think a recession will alter the current trend towards allowing remote work?
- What concerns are there with respect to employee retention and recruitment if law firms require all personnel to come back to the office full time?

Thank you for attending.



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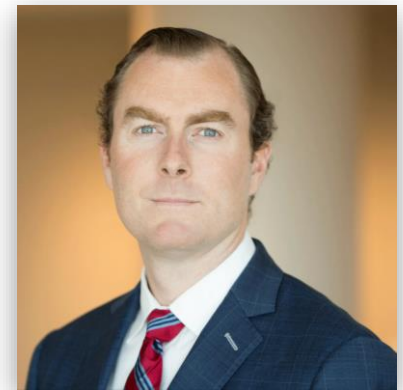
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