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Greatest Lesson in 2021: Being in the Office Together, as One Group, Is Crucial to Office Culture

Commentary by
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The world is clearly more efficient and digitally connected than ever before.



Hersh

We all bent and adapted to survive the pandemic. Social circles got smaller and we kept our dearest close. We dealt with the rest of the world through a computer screen. In business, we changed, tightened up our systems

and, as trial attorneys, learned to handle hearings, depositions, mediations and client meetings from afar, while we waited for jury trials to resume. But we undoubtedly all still craved human connection.

COVID proved flexibility was essential to overcoming this global crisis, and any crisis for that matter. 2021 however demonstrated the need of valuable people on your team to allow you to in fact thrive during a crisis. Our firm shared the same challenges as most businesses did when returning to in-person this year. Employees came to enjoy working remotely and some were skeptical about the safety of the workplace. Again we adapted and created policies and procedures to open and engage safely.

Almost immediately, though, it became clear that we needed the human connection and interaction that our office culture provided. We missed shared meals, and round table meetings and most importantly we missed that supportive spirit required for us to succeed and win for our clients. Litigation requires incredible stamina. The energy

needed for success is hard to maintain when connected virtually. There are traditions and rituals that keep us going when pressing ahead becomes most daunting and winning seems impossible, and which allow us to celebrate our triumphs and grieve our losses, together. When everyone returned to our office earlier this year, we had to work to ensure the same, powerful culture and traditions we had before the pandemic, also returned with us.

We continue to work toward that goal today, but being in the office, together, as one group, has highlighted the crucialness of our office culture. This uniquely human experience cannot be achieved over Zoom and is the greatest lesson for 2021. And, having the systems in place to find and keep those valuable people is essential for moving forward.

The question now is whether everything will go back to normal. Equally important, however, is whether it should? Some of the ideas and innovations born out of the pandemic offer efficiencies never seen in litigation and offer a great opportunity for firm growth and client success. Out-of-state witnesses are now a Zoom away and the five-minute motion calendar now truly takes only five minutes, in the absence of drive time and waiting. These innovations, among others, shouldn't be scrapped just because we can meet in person. They forced us to face the glacial moving legal machine that had become the status quo. Let's put in the time now to ensure we take the best of what we changed and adapt for the future.

So, what does the future look like in 2022? Our country is more polarized than ever. Will that, in addition to everyone's pandemic experiences, affect litigation? How will jurors be impacted and how will those impacts affect trial outcomes? Jurors went through the pandemic, and if they're sitting on a jury, they made it through to the other side. But, some will have had dips and valleys in their journey. They might have experienced loss, or trauma, in their personal lives, or at work. Or, perhaps they have been impacted by the unfortunate politicalization of the current crisis. All of this may, and probably will, affect juror decision-making.

While we explore these potential jury impacts, we are also experiencing, and will continue to experience, increasingly rapid movement in our cases. The Florida Supreme Court, earlier this year, ordered the circuit courts to clear backlogs and push through proceedings in a timely manner. Judges and attorneys are feeling the pinch. Some firms are now experiencing an unprecedented and, in some instances, unmanageable turnaround time. There is concern that the pace will affect the quality of work. Judges are more often refusing to grant continuances and the manpower to handle it all is scarce.

Having the right people working behind you is key. Finding the right people is now the challenge. The skillset is out there, but not everyone is a good fit. Having the right processes in place to match people to your firm dynamic and culture makes all the difference. Don't

just fill that seat because of someone's credentials, think about who you want on your team. With the right people, you can gain the confidence to take risks and pursue paths not seen before COVID. And we as attorneys owe it to ourselves and, more importantly, our clients to make sure we have the right teams, and once again adapt, to be able to handle faster workflows. What the Florida Supreme Court has demanded benefits our clients, who deserve having their cases handled efficiently and quickly. If the days of cases languishing for years on end are behind us, our legal system will have improved. We must adapt to ensure the quality of our work remains and that our clients experience the benefits of faster case turnaround and quicker case resolution.

The changes we're experiencing in litigation also offer an opportunity for firms brave enough to embrace the change and grow. For a regional firm, the access and exposure that Zoom offers was not imagined in 2020. Geography no longer limits expansion and the opportunity for state or national growth is possible. With COVID fresh in our minds many are filled with uncertainty. Some are waiting for the next wave and the world to shut down again. If we learned anything, we learned that change is inevitable. We should now have the confidence to face any obstacle, adapt, and even thrive. What will get us there are the people around us.

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