

PRACTICES IN FLUX

Attorneys balance COVID-inspired remote work with demands of the profession.

Valley law firms are positioned for growth as the pandemic fades and their profession struggles to define the new normal. For attorneys, that struggle includes the balance of remote work and the demands of a client-driven business.

A report on the legal sector found that law firms showed “surprising agility” during the pandemic in transitioning to remote work, and now face the next transition.

“The legal industry emerging from the pandemic is not the same one that entered it,” said **James Jones**, lead author of “2022 Report on the State of the Legal Market” from the **Center on Ethics and the Legal Profession at Georgetown Law and Thomson Reuters Institute**. “Much of that change is now happening inside the firms themselves as lawyers re-evaluate their careers and life priorities.”

Several of the attorneys profiled on the following pages mention remote work as a response to the pandemic, and one – **Richard Rosenberg of Ballard Rosenberg Golper & Savitt** in Encino – has plans for three days per week in the office. “There seems to be some emerging consensus that most firms will probably require about three days a week in the office for most lawyers,” the Thomson-Georgetown report states. “Firms will have to determine how to manage key areas including equitable assignment of work, mentoring, evaluations, career advancement, and maintaining firm culture in hybrid work environments.”

The Business Journal’s annual list of Law Firms follows the profiles and starts on page 13.



Legal Advice: ‘Disclose Everything Upfront’

Defense attorney sees clients who hide information about their case.

Antwoin Wall is a senior associate specializing in labor and employment law and litigation at **Pearlman Brown & Wax’s** Encino office. In addition to a law degree, he has an MBA from Pepperdine University.

What has the pandemic changed at your firm?

How we interact and maintain (as well as build) rapport with clients. The former model of building rapport through in-person lunch, dinner or seminars has not been an option for two years, so we have learned to be creative to keep our clients not only satisfied with the service they receive but engaged with the attorneys handling their matters. For example, our attorneys regularly host virtual breakfast and lunch. They send food to the client in advance and then meet via Zoom to simply touch base or cover a particular topic or issue.

How has it affected your clients?

All our clients’ bottom-lines have been affected by the pandemic, which in turn, has impacted billing for the client, as well as the firm. Additionally, from a management standpoint, our clients had to learn how to oversee remote and hybrid employees.

What’s your favorite part of being an attorney?

Seeing my clients satisfied from the hard work

and effort I put in to resolving their legal issue. A happy client means that I have done my job effectively.

What will change in the post-pandemic market for legal services?

I believe that most clients and firms have adapted to working during the pandemic. However, from a post-pandemic perspective, I would say that the nature of the legal services requested will change. That is, the type of claim, injury, and damages associated with lawsuits will be unique, without precedent, leaving counsel to navigate and litigate cases, and courts to reach decisions of first impression, at a frequency not seen in recent years.

What qualities in your personality make you a good lawyer?

My listening skills make me a good lawyer. I listen first, speak second. My clients appreciate my ability to understand their circumstance fully by listening to and understanding their legal issue before providing advice and/or defense strategy.

What is a memorable experience from your law career?

Perhaps not unusual, but certainly a very memorable experience was when I represented a client (owner of the company) being sued for sexual harassment (among other claims) by a subordinate. The case is memorable because everything about the relationship at issue was consensual. From text messages to posts on social media, there was no question that the



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YEARS AS ATTORNEY: 9

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HOBBIES/PASTIMES: Spending quality time with friends and family, traveling, physical fitness, watching football with kids.

parties were in a mutual relationship. Yet, given the nature of the employment relationship (i.e., owner-subordinate), and assuming the case went to trial, the exposure for the employer was substantial, and as a result, the case still settled for an undesired, significant amount.

What are your favorite out-of-office

activities?

Travel with friends and family. And while I complain about how it consumes my week-ends, I truly enjoy watching my children play competitive sports, especially soccer.

If you could change one legal rule or practice, what would it be?

Without question, I recognize and appreciate the importance of written discovery. That said, it is often the most arduous and contentious part of my practice. Thus, my one change would be to revamp how written discovery is handled, particularly the meet and confer process.

What’s the one thing you wish your clients would do more often?

Disclose everything upfront. One of the most challenging aspects of being a defense attorney is being blindsided with information that the client was aware of, but chose not to share out of concern that the information would negatively impact the case.

What advice would you give to someone considering a career in law?

Find a mentor before going to law school. Besides the challenge of the coursework and high cost involved, three years is a significant amount of time to spend preparing for a career that may not be a match. A mentor can provide practical advice, share the “pros and cons” of the industry, and explain the skill set required to be successful.

– Antonio Pequeño IV