



Young Lawyers Report

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Litigating During COVID-19: Steps You Can Take to Effectively Work from Home in Today's Environment

There is no doubt we are living—and litigating—in unprecedented times. The coronavirus pandemic gripping the globe has affected our families, our businesses, and our way of life. Luckily, as attorneys, many of our roles and business initiatives lend themselves to remote working. Minor inconveniences aside, the majority of our work can be completed, or rescheduled, from the comfort of our couches, and for that we should be truly grateful. Many Americans are not as fortunate.

But change can be hard. And, like any change, working from home, especially for an extended period of time, can take some getting used to. So how can we, as young attorneys, remain disciplined in our daily routines without the structure of an office setting? Here are five tips to help you stay efficient and productive until we return to some semblance of normalcy.

- 1. Stick to a Routine.** As convenient as it is to not have to catch a train, bus, or otherwise beat the crowds to make it into the office, the lack of structure can easily let the day get away from you. To avoid this, make sure you set boundaries for your workday. Make a schedule, set an alarm, and stick to it. When you first sit down to work, make a list of your “must accomplish” tasks and goals for the day, and refer back to it anytime you feel your day going off-track. Make sure you build breaks into your schedule to give yourself a goal to work toward. Have a designated office area to keep your “home” life separate from your “work” life. And while one of the biggest perks of working from home is being able to wear what you want, staying in your pajamas or “comfy” clothes all day can impact your productivity. Even changing into a t-shirt and jeans will help you separate work from relaxation.
- 2. Deep Clean Your Cases.** With many courthouses closed and depositions cancelled, it is only natural to wonder how to generate enough work to meet billable hour requirements. Rather than panic, now is the perfect time to catch up on your reporting. That huge construction case with 20,000 documents? Take a closer look at the more relevant documents to see if you have missed anything. That motion for summary judgment due in two months? Now is the time to get a head start. Prepare for depositions that will most certainly have to be rescheduled with strict deadlines. Strategize about that trial that is still six months out. This is a great time for litigators to hone their crafts and do their best legal work. Take advantage. And if you still feel short on work, talk to a partner or director at your firm. He or she will be better equipped to allocate work if you need more.
- 3. Stay Connected.** It is easy to start feeling lonely or disconnected when working from home. Part of what makes being an attorney fun (or, tolerable) is the camaraderie of our peers. To stay motivated, stay connected. Start a chat



group, create a group messaging thread, or just check in with your colleagues and other professional contacts regularly.

4. **Be Proactive.** Although many courthouses throughout Illinois have been closed and cases continued, you know which deadlines are on the horizon, even if you no longer have firm dates in place. Hopefully, some sense of normalcy will return, even if the quarantine measures remain in place for an extended period of time. To help make that happen and to minimize the disruption to your cases, it is important to be proactive with your litigation strategy. Provide updates to your clients who may be in other parts of the country about the current situation in your neck of the woods. Make sure that video and teleconferencing is available for any upcoming depositions. If you are scheduled to present insureds or witnesses in the upcoming weeks, even telephonically, reach out to them to make sure they are comfortable attending. Although there are limits to what we can do to progress cases while working from home, being proactive now will help the transition back to in-office working more seamless.
5. **Have Some Perspective.** Finally, and perhaps most importantly, stay positive and have some perspective. The COVID-19 pandemic that has gripped the world has resulted, and will unfortunately continue to result, in worldwide sickness and deaths. Many people will be out of work temporarily as a result of this pandemic, some permanently. If the worst thing that happens to you during this crisis is social distancing and having to work from home, consider yourself extremely lucky. Take all necessary precautions to keep yourself and your family safe and healthy. This includes your mental health. In whatever form suits you, pray, meditate, practice yoga, or develop your own wellness habits to maintain your mental health. This, too, shall pass.

About the Author

Justyna M. Kruk represents individual and corporate insureds in a variety of matters, including wrongful death, product liability, premises liability and construction cases. Her practice also includes professional liability and property damage matters, as well as general tort defense. She has handled all aspects of the litigation process, including resolution through mediation and trial. Before joining *Tribler Orpett & Meyer, P.C.*, Ms. Kruk honed her advocacy skills while working in-house with a major insurance company. Ms. Kruk earned her J.D. in 2014 from The John Marshall Law School and her B.A. in 2011 from The University of Chicago.

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