Reopening the Law Office in the Coronavirus World

What Is the New ‘Business as Usual’?

Information Sources

This information comes from a variety of sources including the presenters’ experience.

Others significant contributors include:

- CDC
- Cushman & Wakefield COVID-19 Guidance
- Michelle Friends, Executive Director, Fairfield and Woods P.C.
- Legal Marketing Association Northeast Region COVID-19 Focus Group
- WHO

*See list of all resources at the end of this presentation*
Reopening the Law Office in the Coronavirus World
Webinar For Women Owned Law & Mothers Esquire

What Happened?

Feb 29 – Washington State declares state of emergency
Mar 11 – WHO declares a pandemic
Mar 16 – Federal government issues stay at home guidelines
Mar 19 – California issues first statewide stay at home order
Businesses & law firms close, WFH commences
Skeleton crews on site
Technology adjustments and deployment
Management begins re-prioritizing, conserving cash

What’s Next?

Apr 16 – White House Taskforce announces Opening Up America Guidelines
Apr 30 – Federal stay at home guidelines end, unless extended
Late Apr/early May – State stay at home orders end, unless extended
Eventually – Stay at home becomes “Safer at home”
Businesses and law firms re-open
Opportunities

• Lead with confidence
• Define your reopening plan
• Test technologies and teams, update as necessary
• Educate your internal and external audiences
• Communicate frequently
• Learn from others

Short Term Challenges

• When to open
• Who returns
• On what schedule
• Accommodations to be made – financial, logistical, physical, mental
• How do we keep everyone safe
  o In the office and en route
• How do we prepare for inevitable setbacks
Planning Considerations

- Supplies
- Social Distancing & Safety Protocols
- Staffing Model & Scheduling Modifications
- Medical Screenings & Privacy
- Information Technology & Security
- Building & Office
- Travel & Travel Restrictions
- Childcare & Options
- Well-being & Mental Health
- Other Considerations
- Longer Term Issues

Supplies

- Thermometers (forehead)
- Gloves
- Masks
- Hand Sanitizer
- Sanitizer Wipes (antimicrobial)
- Toilet Paper
- Soap
- Disposable products for kitchen and other shared areas
- Air filters

Order Now!

Address supply chain management and training for proper protocols and usage
Social Distancing & Safety Protocols

- Physical spaces (see checklist [https://tinyurl.com/COVID19WorkplaceChecklist](https://tinyurl.com/COVID19WorkplaceChecklist))
- Workplace modifications (physical layout, plexiglass dividers, one-way halls)
- Schedule modifications (arrival, departure, staggered breaks, flex-time, shorter in-office shifts, pooling, WFH options, etc.)
- Visitor limitations
- Delivery of supplies, copies & mail
- Initial deep clean and ongoing cleaning/sanitizing & maintenance
  - Common areas (ex: kitchen disposables)
  - Update signage of CDC recommendations, office policies

Staffing Model & Schedule Modifications

Who must return, who returns upon request, who needs permission to return

Teams and rotations
- Know your state/city policies, some may conflict
- Rotating staff, limit those working in close proximity
- Pooling
- Default WFH, don’t rush everyone back to the office

Establish how to request/authorize changes to schedule, location, etc.
- Partners aren’t allowed to overrule policies. Must escalate to COVID-19 task force/management
**Medical Screenings & Privacy**

- Medical Screening
  - Temp checks upon arrival (some are hiring nursing students for assistance)
  - Symptoms questionnaires (fever, dry cough, shortness of breath)
  - Exposure and social activity questionnaires
- Go Home Orders (how and when to send employees home)
- Privacy Considerations
- Communicating exposures and positive cases

Read: [https://tinyurl.com/tempchecksforcovid](https://tinyurl.com/tempchecksforcovid)

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**Information Technology & Security**

Updated security and BYOD policies

Reminders about phishing, spoofing, scams
  - Banks and vendors likely have relevant webinars/training available

Equipment pool inventory and access
  - If limited inventory, may need to rotate/check in & out laptops, etc.

Technical support protocols

Training for new tools: Citrix, VPN, DMS, Time entry, Zoom, Teams
Building & Office Considerations

Office Services
- Limit access to mailroom, supply room, shared printer
- Conference room protocol
  - Bring your own supplies, remove chairs to ensure social distancing
  - Access to storage for personal belongings
- Consider pausing shared newspaper/periodical subscriptions
- Light switch steward – one person to turn on/off lights each day
- Coffee and meal guidelines

Building & Office Considerations

- Will your building be fully operational?
- Adjustments to building security
- Elevator access & protocol
- Cleaning crew options
- Lights and air back on
- Parking
- Delivery & messenger access
- Visitor policy
Travel & Travel Restrictions

• Define travel restrictions and essential travel
• Address risk tolerance
• Provide travel guidelines for essential travel
• Plan for 14 days of isolation upon return

Tips for essential travel include:
• Wear a cloth face covering
• Limit exposure and avoid close contact with others
• Practice good hand hygiene
• Get all recommended vaccinations
• Wipe down communal surfaces with disposable antimicrobial wipes
• Carry and use disposable tissues and discard in trash
• Plan for 14 days of isolation upon return

Childcare

Update or establish policy, availability, space, costs, alternatives, exemptions

• Be careful to not operate like a daycare, unless that’s your intention
• Programs to Monitor
  o YMCA Summer sports
  o Summer camps
  o School Districts in Fall

Well-being & Mental Health

- Make the return fun and comfortable
- Consider welcome back bags (sanitizer, wipes, masks, lotion, etc.)
- Communicate security and health protocols, e.g., office cleaning
- Casual accommodations
- Focus on resilience (listen to https://tinyurl.com/resiliencereneebranson)
- Remind employees of EAP benefits through health plans
- Consult American Psychiatric Assoc. & Center for Workplace Mental Health https://tinyurl.com/covid19workingremotely

Other Considerations

- ADA Accommodations
- Bringing back furloughed or laid off employees
- Building access policy
- FFRCA
- FMLA, State Medical Leave Acts, PTO usage for COVID
- Insurance coverage
- Reemployment of furloughed or laid-off employees
- Training (office protocols for hygiene, respiratory etiquette, interaction etiquette)
- Wage and hour issues
Longer Term Issues

How do we accommodate flexibility in our workforce?
How do we manage a distributed workforce?
How should our business model adapt?
How should our client mix or practice mix shift?
How has our definition of an ideal lawyer or business professional employee shifted?
How has our definition of an effective leader or manager shifted?
How has our definition of an ideal client shifted?
What training, technology and communication investments do we need to make?
When are we updating our crisis communications plan to include what we have learned from this pandemic?

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Resources

PreventEpidemics.Org – When and How to Reopen After COVID-19
- https://preventepidemics.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/COV020_WhenHowLoosenFaucet_v4.pdf?fbclid=IwAR34NqMlkifiA11Ai-xDiOHRg4onb9z9xZXFn8Z4x-bjYXaI03rROGWancs0

Getting Back to Work – Furia Rubel Communications, Inc.

EEOC What You Should Know About COVID-19 and ADA, Rehabilitation Act & EEO Laws
- https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/newsroom/wysk/wysk_ada_rehabilitation_act_coronavirus.cfm?fbclid=IwAR1p8DM0qSiPzozOB5UZ0Ik63VM02qq3TIITTy99j04UKvBy0FPAtkY

Resources

Association of Legal Administrators COVID-19 Response
- https://www.alanet.org/about/media-center/coronavirus-response

Legal Marketing Association Well-Being Resource Center
- https://www.legalmarketing.org/page/well-being

Cushman & Wakefield – Recovery Readiness Guide (including office reconfiguration)

American Bar Association COVID-19 Mental Health Resources
- https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/resources/covid-19-mental-health-resources/

International Legal Technology Association COVID-19 Resources
- https://www.iltanet.org/resources/areas-of-knowledge/covid-19
Resources

RB Consulting – Resilience in the Midst of the COVID-19 Crisis
  • http://www.reneebranson.blog

The Tilt Institute – When Crisis Calls: How Leaders Are Responding to COVID-19

Corcoran Consulting Group – Executive Committee guidance for profitable adaptation
  • http://www.bringintim.com

COVID-19 Recovery Playbook
  • https://lawvision.com/client-resources/covid-19-recovery-playbook/

Resources

CDC Guidelines for Businesses & Employers to Plan & Respond to COVID-19

Australasian Legal Practice Management Association COVID-19 Toolkit

Supplies
  • Intivity.com – masks, gloves, disinfectants
  • GetGarveys.com – masks, gloves, disinfectants
  • Premier Supplies – masks, gloves, disinfectants
  • Joolamedical.com – face masks
  • Geosyntec.com – air quality consultants, HVAC, filters, etc.