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## Hybrid Work Is Here to Stay, but Finding the Right Balance Takes Time

Leaders from McDermott Will & Emery, BDO, CVC Capital Partners and more joined a Law.com Pro webinar to discuss how they're making hybrid work work.

By Jacob Polacheck | March 24, 2022



Credit: elenabsi/Adobe Stock

Now that the pandemic has fueled an expansion of hybrid work arrangements across sectors, law firms and others in the corporate world are embracing the positives and working to overcome the challenges of their newfound flexibility.

In a webinar hosted by Law.com Pro, industry leaders assessed the emergence of remote work over the past two years and its viability for professional services firms. Two years since going virtual, firms are still working to strike the right balance as they develop plans for the future.

Wayne Berson, CEO of accounting firm BDO, said he's watched the portion of his firm's employees working in-person decrease from about 60% to around 18-20%.

"That's a major change for us that's going to affect our strategy going forward," Berson said, noting the firm's flexible approach is dictated by individual circumstances. "What is going to change is the way we look at our office space."

Berson said BDO has made a decision to cut its "probably \$100 million in rent" in half due to the emergence of remote work. And while there are drawbacks to a distributed workforce, he acknowledged there are clear financial benefits as well.

"We don't see us ever getting back to where we were," he said. "I don't like the fact that we're not together, I do like the effect on my income statement."

Similar to BDO, Johnson & Oshan Law managing partner Rachel Johnson said her firm had a philosophy that embraced remote work before the pandemic and has stuck with it throughout.

"Wherever you are most efficient and can work is where we want you," Johnson said, noting that the firm now gives the option to teams to work in a private WeWork office. "Our expectation is that if we are paying for that office, you are going most of the time, most days of the week, and that you're using it. If you're most effective doing that, we will give it to you."

Prior to the pandemic, CVC Capital Partners worked five days a week in the office, but director Sylvia Qiu said it is now working on an official arrangement of three days in the office and two days at home each week.

"There's more flexibility, and some of that trust is there," Qiu said. "While they are working remote, they are working. When you are working from home, again, it's no longer frowned upon. It's clear we've found ways to be productive that way."

Qui also addressed how her team has been able to gain trust in order to take advantage of hybrid opportunities, including being more mindful about individual experiences to foster an environment that supports employees' mental health.

"There's no specific rule for that," Qiu said. "It's just communication."

McDermott Will & Emery chair Ira Coleman said his firm has been operating more in-person than it may have appeared, noting a cultural expectation on behalf of the firm's partners that people will work in-person with their teams and clients.

"We were moving, prior to the pandemic, to a three days a week rather than a four days a week model with our clients, which we think was important from a talent retention standpoint," Coleman said. "One of the big challenges for us is trying to navigate how we think about mentorship and apprenticeship when so much of the work we're doing now is actually being done virtually."

The panelists also discussed the importance of autonomy and trust within the workplace, both of which are important for attorneys and employees to avoid the feeling of being constantly monitored.

“It’s personally putting yourself out there that we don’t want people to lose because they’re constantly on Zoom and at home all the time,” Coleman said. “Being able to put yourself out there is what makes you successful.”

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