

CHICAGO LAWYER®

INSIDE OUT

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WHAT ARE SOME PROS AND CONS ABOUT RETURNING TO THE OFFICE?

Martini: In many ways it is important to see and interact with friends and colleagues at work. Although videoconferencing took us a long way while remote, there is still something that can get lost by not being together. This “interpersonal glue” helps ensure that the workplace culture remains healthy and is a driving force in attracting and retaining a workforce.

There are often efficiencies with respect to resources and technology that one has better access to in the workplace they may not have in remotely.

The downside of returning to the office is there remains a lot of fear about the possibility that one may be risking their health by being outside their COVID bubble. Also, it inevitably triggers discussions, sometimes heated, about vaccination requirements that can segue into difficult political and religious discussions.

Susler: Being in the office with your colleagues makes work more fun and it helps alleviate the monotony of being at home.

But, then there is the commute. I can work an extra two hours at home and still start and end my days at the same time. There’s also the bonus that when I’m done working, I am home. I learned to enjoy working at home during COVID. I am productive, even more so than in the office, because there are fewer distractions.

ADVICE FOR YOUNGER ATTORNEYS RETURNING TO THE OFFICE?

Martini: I recommend they make a concerted effort to stretch outside of their comfort zone and to return to the office in a meaningful way. When I look back on my career as an associate, there were so many mentoring opportunities I got by virtue of being in my office when a partner walked by with a project they needed help on.

There were countless opportunities to develop both professional and personal relationships with my colleagues by virtue of being in the office together, whether by grabbing lunch, coffee or a drink. This would happen spontaneously rather than being scheduled. I don’t think I would be where I am today as an attorney and professional if I didn’t have these chances.

Susler: Even if you go back just a few days a week, go to the office. You can successfully research and write memoranda and contracts in the



DON'T FEAR COMING BACK IN

There are worries, but in-office benefits are so important

By CHRISTINA L. MARTINI and DAVID G. SUSLER

solitude of your home, but there is more to being a successful attorney than that. Watching other lawyers in action, being in meetings, negotiations, court, in person, is how you learn.

You get to see how more experienced lawyers practice. You can see how they conduct themselves in various situations. You can’t get the body language or nuance that underlies the words being spoken through a computer screen. Being live and in person with others is how you learn to be a lawyer, not merely a fungible commodity.

WHAT ABOUT THE EMOTIONS OF RETURNING?

Martini: Speaking from personal experience, it has been a combination of joy, anticipation, apprehension and sadness. Anticipation and joy to see people that I care deeply about and have not seen in a long time. Apprehension because like everyone else, I am concerned about getting COVID, and about the possibility of giving it to someone else.

Sadness because so much time has passed since we were all last together and things were more normal. Also, because so much has changed for all of us. We all know people who have gotten sick or passed away because of COVID. Some of them were people with whom we worked closely and will never see again.

The sense that nothing will ever be the same again is sobering but is counterbalanced by us being together again.

Susler: At first, returning to the office after so many months away can be quite scary. It is fatiguing and can be disorienting. However, you will move past that fairly quickly as you get used to going back and being around other people.

Yes, many of us have developed a fondness for being at home, but don’t underestimate the negative impacts of loneliness that you may not be aware of when you are only at home. Also remember to consciously practice patience and kindness with everyone, not only your colleagues, but also people who work in the shops and restaurants you will once again start going to. They too may have had a rough time and a little kindness goes a long way. CL

Christina L. Martini is a practicing attorney, author and columnist. She is a partner with McDermott Will & Emery and focuses her practice on domestic and international trademark, copyright, domain name, internet, advertising and unfair competition law.

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To submit a question, e-mail questions.insideout@gmail.com