

Leading Successful Practices Through COVID-19 – Learn from Your Peers and Pay It Forward

By [Susan Raridon Lambreth](#) on April 15, 2020

Recently, LawVision hosted a webinar for the members of its Practice Group Professionals Roundtable. This is one of our longest running roundtables, started in 2001. The members are the business directors, chiefs of staff, legal ops leaders for law firm department and practice group leaders – essentially the business people who help the lawyer-leader run the department or groups. Just before the webinar, members had reached out to us with questions about issues like:

- Business continuity best practices
- Cash conservation activities (including draw and pay cuts, bonus payouts, furloughs/layoffs, increased use of retainers, deferral of projects, etc.)
- Engagement of professionals while working from home
- Continuity of PG meetings while working remote
- Impact on lateral hiring
- Other work from home issues PG Professionals are dealing with or seeing

So, we organized a webinar of the members to share their best practices and insights and how they and their group members were coping. Firm members were sharing their success stories and challenges in hopes of helping other firms benefit as well.

As covered in another recent blog, this is a time when it is critical to “over-communicate” live voice and to keep up, if not increase, the social connections of your firm members.

Here are some of the highlights – and I know there will continue to be interesting and creative ways firms are responding:

- More frequent partner calls at firm, department or practice group level – where firm management can share the latest updates about changing firm policies, structures and approaches to adapt to new client needs, working from home (WFH) and more – in some firms, this has been weekly just to insure that there is no vacuum that can be filled with untruths or misinformation that could alarm people or otherwise hurt morale.
- Weekly calls of the entire practice group so that the members can stay connected, support each other and share ideas ([see my recent blog posts on running effective PG meetings virtually...](#))
- Requiring everyone on the practice group calls to activate their camera so fully engaged on the Skype, Zoom or other conferencing they are using.
- Partners reaching out to associates individually to make sure they feel connected, to answer any questions they have about what the firm is doing and how things are changing, to be assured about their importance to the firm and more. This can be done through assigning partners in your PG to reach out to specific associates or through your already assigned mentoring relationships (just don't let any associate fall through the cracks if a partner doesn't do his or her calls).

- Bringing levity to the calls or meetings of departments, practices, matter teams or even entire firms (if small enough to work) by hosting virtual “happy hours”, sharing photos of dogs in their WFH space or of something baked at home (when was last time most lawyers had time at home to actually bake something that wasn’t pre-made?).

Some of the interesting themes that arose include:

- Where for some firms, practice group meetings in the past might have “dragged” or struggled to keep the members’ interest (even if live), there now is plenty to talk about and no shortage of sharing. For many, they feel their practice group meetings are now more substantive than ever and members are actively engaged on the video calls.
- The presence of a common “threat” or “enemy” in COVID-19 and the economic impact of it has created a new sense of urgency for groups to meet, share ideas and execute on plans together.
- Having more regular (weekly or bi-weekly) but shorter (30 mins max) meetings has created a higher level of energy in the groups (this is consistent with the research in the outstanding book on how to move plans from ideas to execution, [The 4 Disciplines of Execution](#)).
- One of the biggest struggles in the first week or two of WFH has been for parents of young children, especially if both parents worked outside the home before. It is definitely affecting productivity as one parent has to manage the kids (from feeding to setting up living room forts and more) and they take turns trying to do their work. For others without young kids but perhaps other distractions like less than ideal work at home space or being home all alone and isolated, there are very different issues. The PG Professionals and others in the firm are part of the leadership helping the firm figure out how to support the professionals to effectively serve clients from their home “offices”, while also doing “self care” to keep their own morale up.
- Be careful if you are a “planner” as you can find yourself trying to cope with the current crisis by planning and as one of our speakers for the webinar said, “you can’t plan your way out of this.” You can do your best to be prepared but don’t create a false sense of confidence that you have a plan that will stand. Like one of my favorite quotes says, “Life is what happens when you made other plans.”

Dr. Larry Richard also spoke at the end of the webinar to offer suggestions to our members about the 3 basic human needs that are being affected dramatically by all these changes and uncertainty. He detailed this and strategies for addressing them in an article he published this week [“The Psychology of Crisis Leadership.”](#)

We hope that you will reach out to share how your firm or practice is developing new approaches to communicate, engage with colleagues or clients, support each other and create new ways of working and serving others. That way we can pass those ideas on to help others and continue to pay it forward by sharing like these firms did.