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SEPTEMBER 2020



## NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

### BEHIND THE GAVEL A CELEBRATION OF BROWARD HISPANIC JUDGES

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 The Honorable Carlos A. Rodriguez	 General Magistrate Lucy Ramos Miller	 General Magistrate Rudolph Morel	<p>Special Remarks</p>  The Honorable Rodolfo Ruiz		<p>Trailblazer Recognition</p>  The Honorable Marina Garcia-Wood	

Thursday, September 10, 2020

### THE FLORIDA JURIST: RECOGNIZING HISPANIC EXCELLENCE



 The Honorable Justice John D. Couriel	 The Honorable Tatiana Salvador <i>4th Circuit Court of Florida</i>	 The Honorable Myriam Irizarry <i>6th Circuit Court of Florida</i>	 Chief Judge Bertila Soto <i>11th Circuit Court of Florida</i>
	 The Honorable Luis Delgado <i>15th Circuit Court of Florida</i>	 The Honorable Robert Diaz <i>17th Circuit Court of Florida</i>	

Thursday, September 17, 2020



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**ON THE COVER**

National Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated from September 15th through October 15th. This year we will have two events celebrating Broward Hispanic Judges and Florida's Hispanic Judges. More information about Hispanic Heritage month and events can be found on page 10.

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*Robert C.L. Vaughan, Esq.*

This month, we recognize and celebrate the rich culture and vibrant heritage of our friends, neighbors and family of Hispanic heritage. Let us all take some time to dig deeper into our Country's diverse Hispanic and Latino roots and learn something new about Broward County's fastest growing demographic. I also want to recognize the tremendous work that our Broward County Bar members are doing in the face of this pandemic that has temporarily up-ended life and the practice of law as we know it. In the midst of this pandemic, our lawyers have continued to service their client's needs while serving this community through myriad community and charitable efforts. Our Judges and our court staff have not only weathered the storm of COVID-19 but, under the leadership of our Chief Judge, Jack Tuter and his entire Administrative team, our

circuit has emerged as a national leader in innovative and effective alternatives to in-person courtroom appearances and we have kept the wheels of the judicial branch turning.

I confess, however, that I had some difficulty getting this message out. My difficulty arose because while there is much to celebrate, it is all colored by the human tragedy unfolding almost daily before our eyes. Yes, it has happened again, another unarmed Black Man was shot—seven times—by a Law Enforcement Officer, in an encounter that should never have ended in gunfire.

I know that Police have a dangerous job. I know that when they leave for work every day, they all want to get home alive and get back to their families. Me too! We all want to rest assured, knowing that short of some accident or act of God, we will get home safely to our families at the end of the day. I am guessing that so too did Brown, Garner, Brooks, Floyd, Rice, Arbery, Blake, Castile and so many others.

As these deaths continue, so too must the difficult and essential conversations about fighting systemic and institutional racism and stopping other acts of violence against black and brown people. As lawyers and citizens, it is full time that we confront the questions of how, when and why a decision is made that someone is such a "threat" to law enforcement that they must die in a Police encounter? As lawyers, we should be discussing at what point does a Police Officer move from law enforcement officer to Judge, Jury and executioner—if ever?

The ugly truth is that the "crime" allegedly committed in most of these encounters was not the dispositive factor in the encounter, but rather, the dispositive factor was the identity of the person allegedly guilty of committing the crime and the perception of the person representing law enforcement in the encounter.

I have no doubt that this is a hard pill to swallow for anyone in law enforcement who is the target of this observation, because it says something about them that no one of good will or good character would ever wish to learn about themselves. The realization that any of us could have a bias or a prejudice against another human being—subconscious or otherwise—that could result in such deadly consequences by our own hands, must be difficult if not impossible to reconcile with how we choose to see ourselves.

On July 24, 2020 we had our first installment of our Enlightenment Through Engagement series. During the discussion we explored the role of lawyers in facilitating and amplifying our social discourse as members of the third branch of government. Our next discussion is scheduled for September 25, 2020 where we will discuss Law Enforcement and Community Policing Reform. As lawyers, we must do our part and call for institutional accountability and reform in law enforcement and community policing. The price of patience is too high when the currency is human life. How many more must die before we say enough?



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*Omar A. Giraldo, Esq.*

If you are a Young Lawyer, now is a great time to get involved! The year is well under way, and the Young Lawyers Section of the Broward County Bar Association (“YLS”) has many events lined up to help make our attorneys even better. YLS provides a unique opportunity to provide our members the tools to organize an event that they are passionate about and have the support and infrastructure to pull it off.

We will shortly be hosting our third annual Veterans Stand Down

Court. A member saw a need in our community to host a Veteran’s Stand Down Court to assist our Veteran Population in Broward. Chief Judge Tuter recognized the tremendous benefit this would provide to our community and fully supported it. We have assisted several Veterans, and this year we are putting on Virtual Veteran’s stand down court on September 14 and October 12, with more dates to follow. The Stand Down Court will assist in resolving outstanding Driver’s License suspensions, clear outstanding warrants for non-violent offenses, assist in eviction defense, advise on VA and Social Security benefits, and much more. The member that created the Broward Stand Down court is now our President Elect James Heaton and because of his initiative, his event will have a long lasting impact on our community and hopefully will continue long after he has aged off YLS.

We are working with Broward County Public Schools to continue supporting them through our Lawyers for Literacy Program. This year has proven trying for teachers, students, and families and YLS stands ready to support them in any way we can.

Finally, our Golf Tournament Committee remains hard at work to continue our longstanding tradition of hosting our annual Golf Tournament. Unfortunately, due to this year’s social distancing restrictions we will be unable to have the tournament in person. However, our Golf Tournament Committee Chair and YLS Secretary Maria Fischer thought of a fun compromise that will allow us to have a virtual golf tournament to keep the tradition alive. There will be great prizes as well, so stay tuned for more details once everything is finalized.

We greatly appreciate your commitment to our Young Lawyers. Lastly, please mark your calendars for upcoming events, details of which can be found on our online calendar: [www.browardbar.org/calendar/](http://www.browardbar.org/calendar/). If you are interested in joining YLS, partnering with YLS on an event, or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at VG Law Group at (954) 500-2422 or [ogiraldo@vg.law](mailto:ogiraldo@vg.law).



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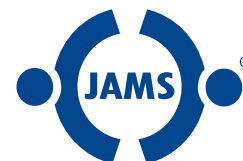
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# HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

by Karina Rodrigues and Elisabeth Rodriguez

## Celebrating Culture and Leadership

Each year, National Hispanic Heritage Month is observed from September 15 to October 15. The commemoration provides us with an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the rich histories, diverse cultures and various contributions of the American Latino community. This wonderful tradition began in 1968 as a weeklong event and was extended to a month in 1988.

There are many reasons to celebrate Hispanic Heritage. As a cultural group, Latinos are a diverse community. The group comes from every race, religion and political affiliation, and the shared history has roots in Native, European and African heritage. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population makes up the nation's largest ethnic or racial minority. More specifically, Hispanics make up approximately 17 percent of America's total population, and currently, one in four children is Hispanic.

Hispanics or Latinos have contributed to American life for hundreds of years. For instance, they have fought in every war since the American Revolution. Moreover, their achievements are countless when it comes to innovations, politics, business, public service, sports and the arts.

It is because of our vibrant history that communities look forward to celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month each year. The celebration has been recognized nationwide with a wide array of events, such as festivals, community gatherings, art shows and conferences. This year, the Broward County Bar Association's Hispanic Lawyers Committee (BCBA) and the Broward County Hispanic Bar Association (BCHBA) will be partnering up once again to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.

While this year our organizations have had to find creative alternatives to traditional celebrations, everyone is excited to continue to highlight collective accomplishments of Hispanics and Latinos. Several surprises are planned throughout the month. However, one of the most significant events will be the follow-up to last year's inaugural "Behind the Gavel" event, the celebration of Broward County's Hispanic judges and magistrates.

In planning this year's "Behind the Gavel" event, several things about Broward County's Hispanic Judiciary became clear. Most notable was the judges' commitment to the community and their desire to invest in the future of the legal profession.

From speaking to high school and college students, to mentoring law students getting ready to take the Bar exam, the judges are all eager to help what they view as the next generation of Hispanic and Latino lawyers, judges and leaders.

Further, whether appointed or elected, Broward's judges of Hispanic descent have an impressive array of personal and professional experiences that should be recognized and celebrated.

Hispanic Heritage Month will provide the community a wonderful opportunity for learning more about Hispanic culture and local leaders, especially our dedicated judiciary. The BCBA and BCHBA hope everyone enjoys what is in store this year and wish everyone a happy celebration.



CELEBRATING  
Hispanic Heritage

*Elisabeth Rodriguez is the chairperson of the Hispanic Lawyers Committee of the Broward County Bar Association, a director of the Broward County Hispanic Bar Association, and a board member of the Broward County Women's Lawyers Association. She works for the Florida Attorney General as an Assistant Statewide Prosecutor.*

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# VIRTUAL NETWORKING

by Jeni Meunier

## Utilizing Virtual Meeting Platforms for Networking in a New Normal.

Welcome to 2020, when one of the most common forms of getting together has been supplanted with something most of us have never done before. No more do we gather with people and share an experience that all in attendance have an interest in. When history looks back at these virus plagued days, the one trend that will forever stand out as ubiquitous given these times of social distancing, the surely necessary, but ultimately annoying, a drive-by birthday party. Oh, how I long for the old days of gathering in a friend's kitchen with other friends, while the guest of honor sprays a fine mist of germs all over a candle laden, buttercream covered cake and nobody cared. Not only that, but we all also cheered. Post celebration, some of us would head home, break out our work laptops, sip wine, furiously hit the keys, and prepare for a work meeting the next day in an actual meeting room! Sigh.

In the last few years, as the legal industry has been brought up to technological speed with virtual data hosting sites, eDiscovery services, and remote data mining, one activity that has always been constant was the person to person networking. Today, with workplaces transitioning to work at home, we are moving from the boardroom to the living room. Virtual meeting platforms with names like Zoom, GoTo Meeting, Microsoft Teams, and Webex are at the top of many CTOs' approved virtual platforms. As more and more in the industry work from home, these platforms bring us screen to screen with the people we need to perform our jobs expeditiously that most closely resembles our lives pre-face masks. While it seems like the transition should not be that fraught with obstacles, let us look at some of the issues that this new way of remotely conducting business presents to companies and firms.

Virtual meetings cannot be structured the same as in-person meetings. Guidelines should be established via memos before a meeting takes place, laying out the structure and what is required for participation. We went from "Please put your devices away" to "Please sign on to your device on time." Interactions have shifted also. Traditionally, little cues and nuances like leaning forward, or certain eye contact signaled a desire to speak.

In the virtual room, staff should be advised to raise their hands or enter their questions and or comments in the chat box when they have input and expect to be called upon for answers. The days of sitting in a room, where distractions were minimal, have been replaced with a sitting at a screen where the distractions are everywhere. Open web browsers, email clients, and even messaging apps should be closed. They pull our attention from the speaker and the engagement suffers. Whichever staff is running the virtual meeting, needs to facilitate the meeting with prompts and direct communication with each member when their voice is needed. Simple requirements such as muting microphones when not speaking, keeping their video on, and an agreed amount of time in-between subjects giving participants a chance to speak up before moving on, can bring efficiency and productivity to an otherwise stoic production. The not so common gestures like eating or picking your nose should be at top of mind. We see a lot of participants slipping while on camera which causes distraction and not-so-professional actions. Participants must be aware of their actions and conduct themselves the same as they would in court or a board room with colleagues and clients.

If history has taught us anything, it is that we will adapt and find a way to get our lives back to as close to normal as possible. Virtual meetings need to be conducted differently than traditional ones. In this "New Normal," we will all come to recognize the requirements we each need to bring to the virtual table, even if it means we do not have to bring our pants.



*Jeni Meunier is a Director at Trustpoint. One. Trustpoint. One provides end-to-end eDiscovery capabilities, in forensic consulting, processing, hosting, review/staffing, production and court reporting and translation services. Jeni can be contacted at Jeni.Meunier@Trustpoint. One*



# ZOOMING FORWARD

by Marc Marra

## A Salute to the Broward County Bar Association

Attorneys are slow to change. The tools used in practice today are in large part the same used at the founding of our Country over 244 Years ago. It comes as no surprise then that when COVID19 hit, we were dubious about utilizing “Zoom” and other video conferencing platforms to conduct hearings and complete CLEs.

William Arthur Ward once said “[t]he pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.” Broward County Bar Association Executive Director Braulio Rosa, a Navy Veteran, has adjusted the sails and righted our course through the uncharted waters of COVID19 by looking to our friends behind the Broward Bench and Broward County Section Chairs.

Every sitting Judge in Broward County is a member of the Broward County Bar Association (“BCBA”). With that bond, the BCBA and Broward Judiciary are working together harder than ever to support our Broward Attorneys. The BCBA conveys important information to our Broward Lawyers such as Court closures or new administrative orders. In turn, our Broward Judges participate in BCBA webinars aimed to inform and educate our Broward Attorneys.

Since the pandemic began, with the support of our Judicial allies, and BCBA Section Chairs, the BCBA has emerged as a leader throughout the State in virtual legal education. Within the last 5 months, the BCBA has

hosted more than 50 webinars (including 15 Judicial panels) for over 7,000 attendees.

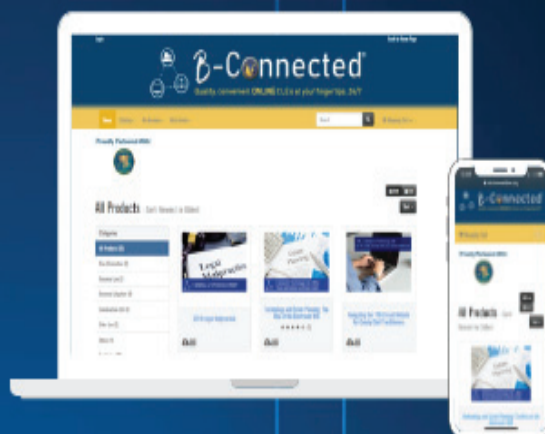
When asked how the BCBA produces such strong seminars, Braulio Rosa was quick to credit his BCBA team: Lauren Riegler Capote, Debbie Rivero, Lyssette Bedon, Patricia Hernandez, and Andrea Salazar (the “Dream Team”).

As a Broward Attorney, I am grateful to have Chief Judge Jack Tuter, our Broward Judges, Braulio Rosa, and the Dream Team in my corner. To learn about future BCBA webinars, you can visit their website at [www.browardbar.org](http://www.browardbar.org) or follow “Broward County Bar Association” on Facebook and Instagram.

*Marc Marra is a Partner with Kelley Kronenberg in Fort Lauderdale, and serves as Director of the Broward County Bar Association, and Director of the Broward County Hispanic Bar Association.*



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# VIRTUAL MEDIATION & ARBITRATIONS

by Arthur Garcia, Jr.

## Six Months of Remote Mediation. What we Have learned Tips and Tricks from the field

It has been six months since we started remote mediations. We have come a long way. Each session presents its own challenge and learning opportunities. Below is a list of tips & tricks for mediators and participants using the Zoom platform.

1. **Mediators and participants:** Test before mediation time. You can log on after you receive your invite even if the host has not started the session. Test your connection, audio and video. Test with the device you will be using during mediation.

2. **Mediators and Participants:** Best connection, Wi-Fi or ethernet? Ethernet will provide the most stable connection, but most people do not have an ethernet connection and must use Wi-Fi.

a. Limit the devices using your Wi-Fi to maintain a stable connection. If you receive an “unstable connection” message, disconnect Wi-Fi on your nearby phone, tablet and other devices.

b. If Wi-Fi goes out, use a “Hotspot” connection. Most internet plans have this. Turn it on and connect your device and you are back in business. Verify with your service provider whether additional charges apply.

3. **Mediators:** Ensure updated version for security purposes and tell your participants so they have confidence in the session security.

4. **Mediators:** At the beginning of the session give participants your cell number and get theirs. Connections fail as does technology. This keeps the session going. If participants do not want to openly share their cell number, once you give your cell number ask the participant to send you a text and you now have the contact you need.

5. **Mediators:** The waiting room. Set up a waiting room and place a logo or name and message so participants know they are in the right place for the right case.

6. **Participants:** On admission and during joint session presentations mute your audio and turn your video on. Muting limits distracting noise or having others hear what was not meant for them. Video keeps other participants from becoming uncomfortable when their video is on and yours is off.

7. **Participants and mediators:** lighting. Avoid bright light behind you like a window and above like a lighted ceiling fan. Have your camera at eye level even if you must raise up your laptop on books. Best view is mid chest up and with your head near the upper 1/3 of the screen.

8. **Mediators:** – Set up breakout rooms before you start. Make a list of all participants and ensure you know where they should be assigned.

9. **Mediators:** – Change participants names from “Joe’s iPhone” or 305-123-4567 to names so moving people and assigning to breakout rooms is easier and you can more easily refer to participants by name.

10. **Mediators:** – Explain breakout room Security – no one can enter, see or hear inside.

11. **Mediators:** – Tell participants the virtual opening of the door is the “ask for help” button. Its location will be different depending on the device being used, be ready to help them find it.

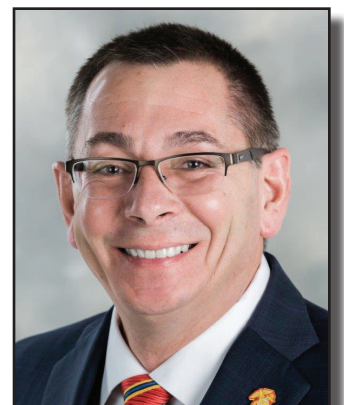
12. **Mediators:** - Give clients post mediation time before shutting down the session. Wait until everyone is logged off.

13. **Mediators and participants:** Screen share. Have the item open on your desktop. Mediators ensure the setting is set to allow participants to screen share

14. **Participants/mediators:** – when speaking look into the camera and speak slowly.

15. **Mediators-Participants:** When using interpreters and claimant is in a different location, have the interpreter call the claimant. Interpreter mutes as does claimant. This allows the mediator to see the interpreter while not speaking over each other.

*Art Garcia is a South Florida-based Mediator and Arbitrator with Upchurch Watson White & Max Mediation Group. Mr. Garcia was a civil litigator for 25 years, a Registered Nurse, EMT and is a Marine Corps Veteran, Honorably Discharged. He is currently a full-time Certified Civil Circuit, County and Appellate mediator and Supreme Court Qualified arbitrator. For more information, visit [www-adr.com](http://www-adr.com) or call 305-266-1224.*



# PREPARING FOR VIRTUAL INTERVIEWS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

by Shari Scalone

Job hunting can be intimidating even without the added pressures of a global pandemic. Employers and employees alike will have to adjust to new expectations, especially with the use of technology. Newer “virtual” technologies and video conferencing have become the new normal and will likely substitute face-to-face meetings for the foreseeable future.

During my own interviewing process using Zoom, I was able to learn and incorporate a few tips which led to a successful interview. Whether the interview takes place on Zoom, GoToMeeting, Microsoft Teams, or other program, the key goal is to exude confidence and be prepared just as you would during a regular interview.

Let us get started:

## 1) Remove distractions

It is important to ensure that you are in a quiet place without any extraneous noise. You may want to remind other household members when you are having the interview and even place a note on the door. Silence your cell phone. Try to coordinate other activities not to coincide with the interview, i.e. lawn care, so that you do not have unnecessary noise. Place pets temporarily in another part of the home to reduce sounds as well.

## 2) Prepare your background

Whether you are interviewing with a virtual background or in a home office setup, make sure it is neat and tidy. Having a work-appropriate background speaks to who you are as a candidate. Employers will want to know that you have the resources and space to work effectively, especially if the position is remote. Treat the background like an accessory. Having some framed artwork or diplomas on the wall will add a touch of character and professionalism.

## 3) Keep your screen clear

In the event that you need to use the screen share option, it is a good idea to close out of everything on your computer before your interview. Closing other programs will help you stay focused and can prevent unintended video or audio from suddenly playing in the background. Closing out of all websites may also help your video load more efficiently.

## 4) Consider lighting

Try to orient yourself with good lighting to project a clear and detailed image. Natural lighting is best if you can sit in front of a window. Avoid backlighting or placing the light source behind you as that will create shadows or a silhouette.

## 5) Wear headphones

Use headphones to control the audio. There may be a lag or an echo without the use of headphones. Headphones also improve sound quality and can assist with blocking out distracting noises.

## 6) Be on time

This tip is distinct from your regular face-to-face interview. Normally, being 15 minutes early is a good indicator of your promptness. However, employers may be conducting back-to-back video interviews using the same link. You do not want to interrupt another interview. Also, appearing early in front of a blank screen may cause you to get distracted on the internet and lose focus.

## 7) Read gestures and use appropriate body language

It is much easier to read cues or facial gestures in person. Nevertheless, make sure to let the employer or hiring manager finish his or her sentence before answering. This tip can be especially useful when there are panel interviews and questions are stemming from multiple people. Avoid fidgeting or tapping your hands or feet. Sit up tall during the interview and place your hands on your

lap or in a natural position.

## 8) Look into the camera while speaking

Maintaining eye contact with your interviewer is a sign of confidence and respect. During the video interview, look into the camera when you are speaking to create the illusion that you are maintaining eye contact with the employer so that you come across as focused and engaged in the conversation. Avoid looking at yourself in the corner of the screen. Actively listen by affirming what they say with non-verbals such as nodding or smiling. To assist, set the video screen to full screen so that the interviewer is the only thing you see.

## 9) Wear professional attire (including pants!)

Wear professional attire from top to bottom. There is a psychological impact of wearing a full outfit during the interview. Wearing a suit or other professional attire will give you confidence and is a reminder of what is at stake.

## 10) Test your technology

All technology is subject to mishaps. Employers tend to be forgiving if there are mishaps and are willing to accommodate. However, it is still pertinent to be prepared. Try to do a test run with a friend. Make sure you have updated your computer or installed the most recent version of software. It is preferable to use a desktop or laptop computer as opposed to a cellphone. Have a full charge on your device or keep the computer plugged in during the entirety of the interview. Also, ensure that the microphone and webcam are configured correctly and that you are situated where you have a strong internet connection.

## 11) Ask questions

Prepare a list of questions prior to the interview. Questions could center on the firm’s culture, the responsibilities of the position, or what a typical day looks like. During the interview, take a mental note of topics that were discussed and have follow-up questions. At the end of the interview, make sure you take time to ask the employer any questions.

## 12) Send a thank you e-mail

After the interview, make sure to send a thank you e-mail to stand out from other candidates. The email should be within 24 hours of the interview. If you had a panel interview, make sure to send a separate thank-you to each of your interviewers. This will give you an opportunity to highlight your skills and reiterate your interest in the position.

Overall, similar principles apply to a video interview as it would to a face-to-face interview. You need to provide clear, tailored answers and show eagerness about your candidacy. The main tip is to become comfortable with the technology so that the interview can go seamlessly. Good luck!



*Shari Scalone, Esq. is an Associate Attorney at Kim Vaughan Lerner LLP and focuses her current practice on commercial litigation as well as insurance defense matters involving property damage and premises liability.*

# OUR VIRTUAL REALITY

by Thomas Citera

There are always pros and cons, but navigating through this new normal, in what is becoming a virtual reality, can be a welcoming challenge.

## A Good Time to learn new skill sets:

Technology- Even though you are relying on your experience, this is a good time to learn a new skill set that will be beneficial in your industry. As you know, technology is at the forefront now with virtual meetings, court hearings and mediations, interviews, and marketing. This is the time to get up to speed yourself, and to practice. Take affordable online courses for certifications in the area. Since the economic recession in 2008, technology has come to the forefront, but still there are many law firms that underutilize or simply have not updated their technology tools. If you are at a firm that lags behind in this area, this may be an opportunity for you to take the lead and add value to your firm by showing what's new in the world of technology, and how new technology can be useful to make the firm more efficient and profitable. Having said that, many firms are stepping it up and have already begun to do video phone chats and invest in new software to enhance productivity.

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## Preparing for Virtual Interviews:

On page 15, Shari Scalone shares her personal experience of preparing for virtual interviews during the Covid-19 pandemic. She incorporates a few tips that led to a successful interview and landed her a position. She brings up several exceptionally good points, one of which being that newer “virtual” technologies and video conferencing have become the new normal and will likely substitute face-to face meetings for the foreseeable future. Her experience showed her that she needed to exude confidence and be prepared, just as she would with a regular interview. Her article is valuable, and it reinforces the idea that it's important to get comfortable with the technology.

## Working remotely

Now you have landed a new position remotely. My experience has been placing some incredibly talented attorneys who were thrilled to be given the opportunity to work remotely, some of whom worked out very well, some who were unfortunately let go. Discipline is key to your success. You are part of the team, and handling cases with the same accountability. Do not naturally assume that working remotely is easy. Expect glitches and obstacles. Toward that end, it is important you know ahead of time what your support system is. Who do you turn to when obstacles present themselves? Does the firm have a dedicated IT Dept? Do they want you working on a specific computer? Do they have online training available? It is understandable that as a new hire you want to show that you can operate autonomously, but you do not want to isolate yourself. You must keep the lines of communication open and always feel comfortable when reaching out to ask questions. I worked with a law firm that prided itself on providing all the necessary support for their remote workers, and none of the attorneys took advantage of it. The attorneys wanted to appear self-sufficient, but this backfired. Utilize the firm's resources. Finally, when working

remotely, operate as if you are going to the office: get up early, shower, dress as though you are going to the office, and clear your workspace. Be sure that your family members know your schedule and, as challenging as it may be, avoid distractions. If you are back in an office, appreciate the time that the firm is taking while onboarding you, get to know the hierarchy with brief introductions, and set the stage for your success.

## Firms hiring attorneys:

Even though this may be a challenging time, you still want to position your firm as the premier firm in your area and attract the best talent. You will have set yourself up for success and you will retain this talent in the long run. Many firms are conducting virtual interviews and doing their best to have a potential employee meet the team. You do not want to present your firm as lacking in the technology that is critical during this time. Now is the time to update your technology to be fully equipped to support staff working remotely. Take stock of the attorneys you have on your staff who may be more tech savvy and utilize their talent while rewarding them, and as you continue to move forward, invest in new talent for the future, now and not later. Many firms are continuing to thrive and are growing despite the pandemic.

## Separating the Pro's from the Cons

As we navigate through these trying times, recognize that there will be a distinction between those that step up to the plate and work harder and those that unintentionally use the current state of affairs as an excuse to sit tight and wait for things to get better. Many quality and reputable law firms are putting searches on hold, posting positions, or utilizing recruiters to see what talent may surface, but are not hiring and pulling the trigger. Several attorneys are putting their job search on hold even though they may have been laid off and are taking a break. This is not the time to put things on hold, as the attorneys that move forward and surpass their billable requirements, communicate effectively with their clients, and cover their cases, will be rewarded in the long run. Again, there are many law firms and attorneys that are continuing to thrive as they are shifting to a virtual reality and getting up to speed with what looks like the foreseeable future. The pandemic will be over, but firms and attorneys will discover that working remotely will be the new normal.

*Thomas Citera has been a recruiter since 1996; he joined the Legal Search Solutions team in January 2018. Previously, Thomas was a Managing Director for a multi-discipline executive search firm in New York City.*

*Thomas' primary focus is permanent placement of attorneys. He oversees all researching, screening, interviewing, and qualifying of attorney candidates for permanent placement; he is also equally involved with developing and preserving relationships with area law firms and has established a large referral network in South Florida. He has an innate ability to truly partner with both his clients and candidates and this has resulted in numerous successful placements.*





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# ENLIGHTENMENT THROUGH ENGAGEMENT

by L. Christopher Saunders

2020 has been a year of upheaval. For many of us, Covid-19 has presented circumstances for which none of us has a frame of reference. For some, it has forced us to re-align our perspectives on what truly matters. The economic upheaval caused by a global pandemic, magnified by ongoing social unrest reignited by the highly publicized deaths of African Americans Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, have forced us to re-examine our role as citizens, leaders and as human beings. Each incident sparked a national discussion about systemic racism and the impact of the American legal system on all its citizens. That national debate is not new. These competing phenomena compel us to look at ourselves and challenge our individual and collective values. Those values, particularly those we hold as lawyers, were at the heart of President Robert Vaughan's first panel discussion in his Enlightenment Through Engagement Series.

On July 24, 2020, more than 70 attorneys from across the county Zoomed in to participate in a discussion moderated by President Vaughan and featuring Julio Gonzalez, the Director of Professional Standards at the Broward Sheriff's Office, and 17th Judicial Circuit Chief Judge Jack Tuter. It centered around the role of the lawyer in society, and how they can foster and amplify necessary social discourse in this pivotal moment in history.

Both Chief Judge Tuter and Mr. Gonzalez reaffirmed our responsibility to uphold the Oath we take as attorneys in representing our clients and as members of the third branch of government. Mr. Gonzalez discussed our obligation to explain the law to our fellow citizens while Chief Judge Tuter stressed our responsibility to respect that oath both in and out of the courtroom. "I was appalled to hear that two attorneys in another state got arrested for throwing Molotov cocktails into a police car", said Chief Judge Tuter, contrasting that conduct with the lawyers who led the charge to dismantle institutionalized segregation.

The panelists discussed the role of lawyers in balancing social evolution and advancement with the respect for precedent. While Chief Judge Tuter spoke of how legal precedents preserve the country's

faith in our judicial system, Gonzalez noted the significance of mentorship in passing down the history and significance of precedents as practicing attorneys, reflecting on his own experience—" [A]s the son of immigrants and a first generation college student, I find myself thanking those that went out of their way to explain things to me."

Toward the end, President Vaughan asked how our profession can meaningfully contribute to social discourse, despite our country's tendency to succumb to vitriolic partisanship: "How do lawyers participate in dialogue, conversations of the day, when certain conversations seem to come pre-tagged with a political conclusion or agenda attached? Is there a way for lawyers to facilitate and further that discussion, without the baggage?" Mr. Gonzalez put it simply, "We are seen as being charged with helping people in our community to understand what's going on in today's world. When it comes to the law, you must be as honest and balanced as you can."

The message was clear. While we are all enduring this collective disruption and confronting issues that both unite and divide us, lawyers are built for this moment. We are advocates with the obligation to seek balance in circumstances where our oath may sometimes require us to respect positions with which we might disagree. We are entrusted with the responsibility to protect our democracy and its bedrock principles—life, liberty and equality for all. We simply cannot stand by. Our profession, our history, and our humanity demand otherwise.

*L. Christopher Saunders, Esq. is the Assistant General Counsel at Miami Dade College. He advises the College on how to navigate through legal issues that get in our way as we serve our students. He is a Past President of the TJ Reddick Bar Association and current BCBA Voluntary Bar Liaison Chair.*



## Wellness during COVID-19: Finding Balance in Chaos

Earlier this year, our world changed. COVID-19 crept into our communities. It became a pandemic, society shut down, and normal communication eviscerated. In-person meetings have not resumed and most attorneys in Broward County continue to work from home. How are attorneys staying balanced during a time when conventional stress-alleviating outlets are unavailable? This article looks at the challenges and explores some ways of coping.

There is no universal “wellness” definition. *Merriam Webster* defines it as a “state of being in good health.” The American Bar Association has defined it as a “continuous process” of thriving emotionally, professionally, intellectually, spiritually, physically, and socially. <sup>1</sup>Having a balanced lifestyle can lead to greater productivity.

Mental health issues and burnout are real concerns in our profession, which is why wellness has become front and center in recent years. Attorneys are at increased risk of losing balance during this pandemic, and as a professional community, we must be proactive in finding balance even in chaos.

### Staying Connected

A part of wellness is staying connected with others. COVID-19 has temporarily created a culture of isolation for adults and children alike. Attorneys need outlets to escape from the stress that comes with the profession. Socializing is one such outlet, and it has been greatly impacted by this pandemic.

Fortunately, we live in an age of technological advancement. Video conferencing can now be more common than physical interaction. Attorneys and their children are increasingly using platforms like Zoom to replicate face-to-face interaction.

Some attorneys will experience greater social isolation depending on risk tolerance. If a person will not leave the house, it can be a struggle. However, it may be a worthwhile sacrifice to protect vulnerable family members.

For those of us willing to take a calculated risk, socializing in person has resumed, albeit to a lesser degree. Many attorneys are still finding ways to socialize with reasonable precautions. Here are some things that attorneys are doing in our community:

- Small breakfasts, lunches, or dinners;
- “Parking lot happy hours” – people stand by their cars and catch up from a reasonable distance;
- Short weekend getaways

There is also a divide between older and younger

people in how they are adapting. Younger attorneys (“technology natives”) tend to embrace video chats. Older attorneys generally dislike it as they miss the personal connection from meeting in person.

### Working Parents

Many attorneys working from home have young children. Based on the anecdotal evidence of speaking to attorneys with children, the common thread for adapting is having structure at home and flexibility with employers.

Structure is key because an attorney needs to focus intensely to perform their job well. As a starting point, an attorney must have a dedicated, separate working space at home. When children are screaming in the background, focus is affected. Parents are dealing with this in different ways, such as (depending on age level):

- Video games, which children are using to communicate and play with their friends;
- Having children help out around the house;
- “PODs” –parents form groups, and rotate days between parents for watching children. Parents can then completely focus on work during certain days;
- Relying on family to care for their children;
- Shifting responsibilities between both parents

Another consideration for working parents is having a flexible employer. Law firms should be flexible with working parents during this time, such as allowing alternate work schedules and reduced billable hours.

The goal of this article is to share ideas for how to cope. There is no one right way. Attorneys need to consider their unique circumstances in deciding how to adapt; but adapt we must.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wisbar.org/NewsPublications/WisconsinLawyer/Pages/Article.aspx?Volume=90&Issue=10&ArticleID=25977>

*Ryan A. Abrams, Esq. is the founder and managing shareholder at Abrams Law Firm, P.A., which focuses its practice on land use and zoning law and local government law. He can be reached at [rabrams@abrams-law.com](mailto:rabrams@abrams-law.com).*





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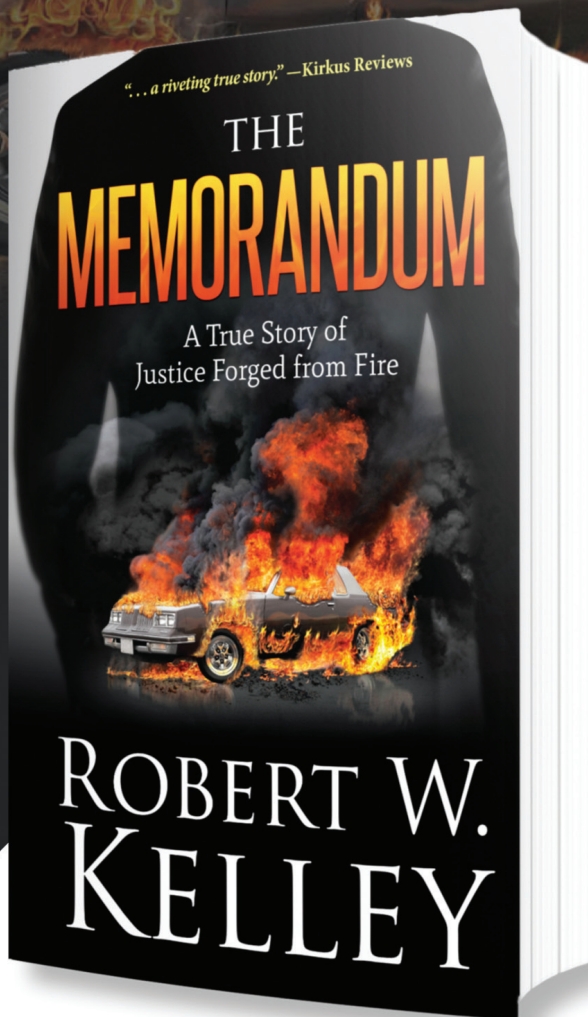
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