

# Managing Legal Work Remotely During COVID-19



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By Julia Medine  
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During the COVID-19 pandemic, legal teams throughout the United States are working remotely for the first time. We compiled advice from attorneys in Priori's community, many of whom have spent years of their career working remotely, on best practices for remote working in the legal profession.

The main takeaways? Across the board, responsiveness, flexibility, forgiveness, and a focused workspace are key.

## **Clear communication about work schedules**

As you navigate an unprecedented work situation, check in daily and work with your clients to make sure you understand each other's schedule and priorities for the upcoming day, particularly given that many people will not be able to work "normal" hours.

*"I have a policy of daily connection with clients." - Tamar Cerafici, Owner, The Cerafici Law Firm, former Of Counsel at Ballard Spahr LLP, who has been working remotely for 16 years*

## **A new kind of workday**

Given the new normal, you may not be able to work the same hours or same volume of hours that you did in the office. However, you might be able to use limited time more productively than before. Delimit time reading the news so that you can carve out dedicated work hours.

*"Time matters less — it's about creating leverage to do good work." - Chris Jones, Attorney, Barbera Corporate Law, former associate at Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP*

*"Generally, I can achieve in one morning at home often what would take me at least one full day in the office because I'm uninterrupted at home and have a higher degree of control over my time." - Seema Agarwal, Founder, "Seema Aggarwal, Barrister & Solicitor," former General Counsel at Kia Canada*

## **Use whatever technology your clients prefer**

During designated available hours, be reachable via multiple communication channels, as clients may have different preferences. Channels include but are not limited to: email, telephone, video (like Zoom or Google Hangouts), messaging (like Slack or Microsoft teams), and workflow automation software. When implementing a new tool, make sure you are familiar with it and its functionality before you need to use it.

*“Each client has their own preference, whether it’s email, texts, calls, or video conferences. It’s about finding what each client prefers and using that.” - Denis Shmidt, Founding Partner of Orsus Gate LLP. Denis’s office has been set up for years to operate anywhere where there’s an internet connection*

*“Clients do not want . . . a learning curve . . . to utilize new or proprietary software.” - John Van Geffen, Partner at Avialex Law Group, LLP*

## **Don’t just rely on email**

It may be more productive to discuss matters live than to do so over email, now that face-to-face communication is off the table. During this challenging time, that personal catch-up and empathy can be particularly crucial to a productive working relationship.

*“[I]t’s easier to catch up on a personal level over the phone.” - Seema Aggarwal*

## **Ask to be over-involved**

While it’s inevitable that you won’t be included in all business conversations, request that clients keep you copied on as many communications as possible so that your work product is in sync with departmental priorities.

*“It’s vital to be cc’d on all communications. [When clients forget to do that,] . . . I need to play catch up when an actual legal matter arises.” - Jason Brooks, IP/Entertainment, New Media and Business at AltView Law Group LLP. Jason has operated a virtual office with his two partners for four years, where they act as outside General Counsel for many companies*

## **Be as responsive as possible**

Respond as quickly as possible to inbound communication, even if solely to confirm receipt. As normal workflow management channels are disrupted, it is particularly important to update clients on your progress and provide a timeline for deliverables, whether by phone call or a digital check-in.

*“You need to maximize the ability for someone to reach you instantly.” - Jason Brooks*

*“Respond quickly to let the client know you have received communication.” - Lori Ross, VP Legal Affairs, FanDragon Technologies and solo practitioner. Lori specializes in technology, new media, data privacy, data security and corporate and commercial contracts for blue chip corporate technology clients. Lori has worked remotely for a large portion of her consultancy legal career. She has never met many of her clients and attorney contacts or opposing counsel*

## Technology and security

In an ideal world, remote lawyers would have access to the same technologies as they do in an office space. These include but are not limited to: video conferencing and screen sharing software, mailing materials, document and file transfer services, secure communication portals, dual screens, and online collaborative document review software.

Security is another important component of remote work, and there are myriad approaches to maintaining secure communications. Many remote attorneys use cloud-based software. Others use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to maintain secure web browsing. File and data encryption are useful security measures to protect physical access to laptops and connected devices.

Much of this technology is difficult to set up on short notice, but you can use online software tools to approximate. Communicate with team members about what tools you have and don't have at home. As with any other element of remote work, you'll need to talk with your clients about standards and best practices.

## Setting up a home office

Prioritize creating a separate workspace. Implement stricter time management strategies than you normally do. Set schedules and timetables for your work.

Of course, all of this may be impossible to accomplish in today's world. Many of us are currently sharing a working space with spouses, kids, roommates and/or pets. American companies are struggling to adjust to internal and external changes, and the rise in global uncertainty will make teams less productive. If you can only prioritize one thing, experts agree that it should be creating an environment in which you can focus, even if for a short period of time.

*"Kids and dogs and spouses at home are a distraction. Best technique is to follow a work routine and let everyone know you are at work . . . Focus and drown out outside distractions." - Lori Ross*

*"[Find] space that is independent of distraction." - Roia Shefayee, formerly the General Counsel at St. Francis Medical Management and formerly an associate at Baker & McKenzie and White & Case LLP. Roia is now a Managing Partner at Wellspring Advisers, PC where she focuses on corporate transactions and business & civil litigation. Roia has worked remotely for years*

The good news is, most legal work is well-suited to remote execution, including contract review and negotiation, real estate, regulatory compliance, and litigation (aside from court appearances and depositions). Many lawyers say they're even more productive when they work from home. While that might not be possible in the short term, implementing some of these best practices should help ease the transition.

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*In the coming weeks Priori will be publishing information on matters relevant to the law and COVID-19. Sign up [here](#) to receive email updates directly to your inbox.*

*If you have other COVID-related inquiries you'd like us to pose to our network of attorneys, please email them to [julia@priorilegal.com](mailto:julia@priorilegal.com).*

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