

My spouse is an intensive care nurse in NYC (142)

By Kenneth Jones on March 23, 2020



So I've been asking myself, "How can I be helpful?"

On Legal Evolution, I usually write about business and legal technology. But since my wife is a charge nurse in an intensive care unit in New York City, the seriousness of what we are living through is inescapably close to home.

I am not going to write about the situation and conditions in her unit because whatever I write is sure to change by publication time. But I thought some readers might appreciate some of the exceptionally unusual challenges for our home and work lives and how these experiences have rapidly changed my perspective, all for the better. I hope others in the legal sector — which, it turns out, is not as essential as healthcare — will find these thoughts helpful.

Prioritization

Everyone who knows me, and I mean everyone, knows how seriously I take work. I'm a Type A+ personality to a fault.

That work focus, however, changed overnight. If my wife needs personal protective equipment for her unit, that means I spend whatever number of hours on eBay it takes to evaluate the ratings, locations and availability of masks, medical screens or gowns for them. That's Job #1. Or, if my wife asks me to find her something like a Zinc Supplement or Vitamin C packets to boost her immune system, again, that's top priority. I might not have the medical skills to directly help humanity, but I can certainly help her and her co-workers in the ICU.

But that doesn't mean office work gets pushed under the carpet. That's important too. Economics are a huge element of this crisis, and our law firm's ability to continue to service our clients impacts each and every employee of the firm. As a matter of pure morality, I can't just blow that off. At this moment, legal tech professionals absolutely need to pivot to focus on blocking and tackling. Keeping people working, patching, backups, training on collaboration technologies are the vocational order of the day.

During times like these, striking a balance between home, work and society — remembering no one will ever say on their death bed they wished they worked more — is more important than ever.

Get a grip

My health history isn't the worst, but it's not the greatest either. Like millions of others, I find the pandemic both troubling and frightening. To be perfectly honest, there's nothing I would like more than to ask my wife to just stay home. But that would be socially irresponsible. I can't do that, and I would not even think about doing that. The whole situation is just a circumstance I need to deal with — like immediately — and get over right now.

I think we can apply that methodology to work as well. Whether you prefer to listen to White House coronavirus briefings or punch up news on your Internet browser, spending a few minutes doing either makes it really easy to get caught up in “what will happen next month, next quarter, etc.” That's tempting, and we do need to be informed, but we can't let that sort of thinking consume us.

It's easier said than done, but it's time for us to focus on what we can control and ignore what we can't. I know I can help my wife's unit by getting folks a bit more of the equipment and supplies they need. Or just by listening when she wants to talk about work (and understanding when she does not). Or cleaning the house and keeping up the spirits of my son. Every little bit helps.

Think about what you can do, not what you can't

There is so much we can't do. In my state, New Jersey, we can't go out except for essential activities, and there's no sports or activities of many other types to occupy our time.

But one can go to the backyard, build a fire and make popcorn using the white hot embers and connect in new ways (e.g., talking not texting) with our kids. Or one can sit down with their child and do some [LinkedIn Learning](#) or just watch a show on TV. [Editor's note: on Saturday, I split wood for a friend, assembled a firepit, built a fire, and sat next to it for three hours. Suffice to say, this was far from my usual routine. wdh]



At work, part of my general workload is keeping the tech lights on at a law firm, while another part is deploying new software solutions for clients. Yet,

Basic firepit that works on a driveway, patio, or patch of grass or dirt. Available for under <\$65.

while the former is still very important, the latter is likely to be put off for quite some time. But it's pointless to sulk about that. Rather, the thing to do is embrace the new world and do your best to help your teammates in whatever ways add the most value.

This is most important: think about others

In this crisis, it's so easy to get wrapped up with our own personal problems. But if there ever is a time to think about others, this is it.

At work, remember the small things you used to do in the office. For example, in my office, there are certain people I talk with during the day about things like making the office coffee, Seton Hall Basketball, sports and other things. After a few of my friends called me last week — which I greatly appreciated — I figured it might be a nice idea to reach out to some of my internal work groups just to say hi. I am not sure if everyone found it useful, but I wanted to communicate that I was thinking about them. Going forward, I am hoping that all of us can be open to sharing a bit more of our personal side — and to listen to others — to help us all make it through the next few months.

Another thing to do at work now is just be helpful *to everyone*. We all have people we like more than others at work. Same with certain vendors and clients. That's human nature. But, at least in my mind, that's a non-issue right now. You call me to ask for help, you get it. You need something explained, I do so. Sure, it might be true I've done or explained whatever you are asking for fourteen-thousand times prior in my life, but that's immaterial. Now's the time to pull together and be there for one another.

A task that someone like me — a legal technologist — can do is lead by example when it comes to collaboration tools. Whenever I can, rather than write endless emails back and forth to others, I now try to spin up a quick Zoom meeting so folks can talk through issues. Part of that is to be efficient (like when we are together in the office), another part is simply to maintain connectivity. My thought is — the more I do this, the more others might. Which helps us all maintain contact.

This overriding commitment to helpfulness can and should be extended to other parts of our world. For example, if anyone out there has skills or supplies which might help the fight against COVID-19, I would ask that you consider contributing them to those on the front line, whether it be to a hospital, local drive-through testing center, the fire department, or your local medical clinic. I know that's a lot to ask, but I do so noting these are desperate times and healthcare workers are at the forefront of our society trying to beat back this terrible virus. And, in return, although my skills pale in comparison, if there is anything I can do with my tech skills to help others, please [contact me](#). I'm 100% happy to help anyone out there.

Finally, let's not miss the opportunity to pass along a sincere thank you to *all* who are pitching in. Of course, this includes my wonderful, talented wife and other dedicated healthcare workers, including first responders. But it also includes those working in the "essential services" sector, which is supplying us with food, water, energy, transportation and communications infrastructure. All your efforts are greatly appreciated.

The Future

Those of us in the New York/New Jersey region fully understand this is an incredibly serious situation. To everyone both here and around the country, please practice social distancing and follow all other [CDC guidelines](#) to try to #flattenthecurve. I understand, it's an incredible sacrifice which could end up being the new normal for a good 45-60 days. But it is absolutely essential we do so.

God Bless all of you and best wishes to make it through these days healthy and well.

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