



## **How Our Family Survives and Thrives in a Pandemic**

### **Skills and Professional Development**



We are two general counsel who have been practicing law for nearly 20 years — and married for 14. Since the start of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#), we have largely worked from home in Washington, DC. Our two sons, 13 and 11 years old, attend school virtually.

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ACC asked us to share our perspective as a married couple of general counsel on how we have survived and thrived in a pandemic. Our daily life isn't perfect, as you can see from our ["Day in the Life" profile](#). But here is what we are learning together, starting with the simple and ending with the profound.

## Work environment

- As lawyers, we are on conference calls all the time. Good wireless headphones or earbuds are better than laptop speakers and will not broadcast your conversations in your home.
- We give our family members advance notice of important calls and put a do not disturb sign on our doors. This helps minimize interruptions and accommodate household schedules.
- Invest in a faster internet connection and wifi extenders to accommodate a family always using internet on multiple devices. Slow or dropped connections are frustrating.
- Buy a laptop stand to minimize neck strain from looking down at your screen all the time. This also brings your camera up to eye level for a more natural conversation. Pair your laptop with a Bluetooth keyboard and mouse.
- Consider buying an extra monitor. We use portable monitors that connect into our laptops with a USB port.
- Footrests make sitting far more comfortable. Andrew uses a plush cushion and Carrie uses an angled wooden stool.
- Our older son uses a standing desk. A quality foot mat helps him stand all day without strain.

## Physical health

- Strengthening your physical health and immune system are always important, and even more important now with the risk of catching COVID-19.
- Exercise every day. We go to the gym early in the morning or late at night, when there are fewer people around. (Remember to wipe down the equipment before and after using!) We do bodyweight exercises when we take work breaks during the day.
- Take phone calls while taking a walk outside. Put your phone in your pocket and use wireless headphones or earbuds to stay hands-free.
- Put a water bottle on your desk to remind yourself to hydrate regularly during the day.
- You are what you eat, and you eat what you buy. Choose wisely in the grocery store.
- Breathing, meditation, and mindfulness have real and positive impacts. We joined support groups to reinforce these healthy behaviors.
- A good night's sleep makes or breaks the next day. We hold each other accountable for set bedtimes, and turn the lights off on each other when it's time to sleep.
- Naps are not just for little kids.

## Talking about work

- Let's be honest: Being a lawyer is hard enough in good times — and horrible in hard times. But take a deep breath and keep perspective. We may be expected to be our organization's doctor, but no one is going to die through our legal work. We're not medical doctors or nurses.
- Many problems are people problems. A "general counsel" should often be a "general counselor." Especially now, you really have to understand your clients and their anxiety about themselves and their business. Compassionately engage the legal and emotional causes of

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their worries.

- Find a friend who will listen to your work problems. Explaining what's going on clears your mind. And an objective counselor helps reframe problems. We are so grateful to our ACC friends and mentors for guiding us over the years.
- When talking about work, ask first if it's a good time. We care about supporting each other, but sometimes we want to forget that we are lawyers or just chill out. Respect the listener's headspace.

## A counselor's feelings

- Lawyers shudder in worlds of abstract anxiety. Ground yourself in physical activities. Garden. Cook. Roughhouse with pets. Preferably with family or friends who have also been social distancing.
- Cultivate gratitude. Our family is grateful that we are together. In this pandemic, we don't leave for the office, the airport, or school. We enjoy each other a lot more now.
- Always ask: "Who counsels the counselor?" It's harder to help others if you need to help yourself.
- Lawyers have to be aggressive advocates sometimes. But being mean to other people can drain your emotional health. Be fair and firm, but never nasty.
- Doing what is legal and doing what feels right can be different. For your heart, strive to minimize the differences.

## The big picture

This pandemic reminds us that life is more than the law, more than a career, more than a title, more than making money. Life is about more than selfish interests; it's about taking positive actions for others. For us, our church helps affirm this big picture. Whatever you believe, a spiritual community can help you ponder and honor the greater pattern of our lives.

Be gentle and realistic with yourself and your expectations. You probably can't save the world — or your company — even if you work really hard. But you can aim to help others as a lawyer, counselor, family member, and friend. That is enough.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg said it best:

*"To make life a little better for people less fortunate than you, that's what I think a meaningful life is. One lives not just for oneself but for one's community."*

For more guidance on the coronavirus pandemic, visit the [ACC COVID-19 Resource Center](#).

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