



Young Lawyers and Modern Sensibilities

A Hybrid, Adaptable Approach to Work

By Jonathan Amira and Robert J. Garcia

In 2020, the New Jersey State Bar Association Young Lawyers Division's periodical, *Dictum*, published an article on how young lawyers were coping with the drastic changes in how business was conducted in the legal industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over a series of interviews, we learned how people were handling the shift in areas like caseload management, virtual court appearances, and overall work-life balance as work from home became a necessity. The changes were generally characterized as arduous, but some found an opportunity for rediscovery—a moment of pause to reflect on the fundamentals of humanity and lawyering.

In 2025, *New Jersey Lawyer* decides to return to this topic, from a retrospective angle. The world may have gone back to normal, but we have done so with the cognizance and foresight of how to operate in a post-modern world with the technology built before us. The post-pandemic world of lawyering is one that has accepted the merger of technological conveniences with everyday routine. We spoke with four young lawyers, including one returning participant, and a current law student, to gain a perspective of the changes over the last four years.

Where were you in March 2020?

Khiana Gaulrapp—employment and labor lawyer: I was working full time as a law clerk at University Hospital and was a 2L at Rutgers-Newark Law School, in their part-time program.

Reana Garcia—criminal and immigration lawyer: I was an Assistant Prosecutor in New Jersey.

Cory Rothbort—civil trial lawyer: I was at my current firm.

Kate Isidro—3L, Class of 2025 at Rutgers Law School—Camden: I was in my sophomore year of my undergraduate degree program at Rutgers University, Camden.

Chloé Nelson—legal counsel specializing in privacy and advertising law: I was in the spring semester of my 2L year at Seton Hall Law School.

What changes did you observe in the immediate aftermath of the March lockdown?

Gaulrapp: Both my school and my job went immediately remote. But because I worked in health care, I went back to work in-person by the Fall of 2020.

Garcia: I benefitted from having a state job. I did not have the pressure of [worrying about] client retention. The Superior Courts were quick to switch to virtual proceedings and began conducting status conferences. At first, we could not try cases (aggravating our pre-existing backlog). Once things began to reopen/return to normal, it was difficult to try cases because we could not get a jury to sit. At the same time there were additional pressures caused by the social movements regarding police brutality and transparency.

Nelson: It was a super stressful time during the COVID-19 pandemic and in law school. Law school was already stressful. Job prospects were a concern. It was difficult because so many companies and firms were shutting down and [switching to remote work].

What opportunities do feel that you missed out on due to changes after March 2020?

Rothbort: It was very difficult to do any sort of professional networking during the pandemic.

Gaulrapp: Pre-COVID, on a motion Friday you would show up to court and watch oral arguments all day until your motion was called. I feel like I didn't have the same opportunity to [observe] the practice of law in person.

Nelson: I was interning at a personal injury firm that was in-person then fully remote and trying to do litigation which all came to a halt. I was expecting a job offer from that firm, but the pandemic reduced the workload for the office. I was happy it was not because of me, but it was still sad.

Garcia: I was transferred to a new unit within the Prosecutor's Office during COVID and it was a challenge to be trained in that environment; there was lots of learning through trial and error. I did not get a chance to interact with new prosecutors and I'm sure it was difficult for them.



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Isidro: I wanted to do the 3+3 Undergraduate/J.D. program, but it took me four years to complete my undergraduate degree [during COVID]. Going to school and studying for the LSAT was definitely nerve-wracking.

What are your opinions on remote work today?

Rothbort: I have the flexibility to work remotely, but I prefer being in the office. Being a good attorney depends on collaboration and it's much easier to collaborate in person.

Gaulrapp: I enjoy being in person but appreciate a remote option. It makes it easier to have work-life balance. Something as simple as scheduling a doctor's appointment is easier to do with a remote work option, which is valuable. Also, saving on commute time gives me extra time to get more work done. I think collaboration is much easier in the office, and interacting with your colleagues in person provides a valuable sense of camaraderie all workplaces should strive to achieve.

Garcia: Since 2023, I have been a solo-practitioner with a small staff. I have a completely hybrid practice (three days in, two days out). I think it works very well, and I see a better-quality work product overall. Schedules are required to be on our in-office system a week prior so that I can keep track of who is in the office and when. Any meetings between my staff and my clients are always in person. I understand that people have families, and I believe in a work-life balance, so I am flexible so long as the work gets done. My staff appreciates it because they have come from firms that don't appreciate that balance.

Nelson: I have only worked at firms with a hybrid model and a remote model. I like both. When I worked on a hybrid model, I liked having the option to work from home, but it was nice to go into the office. I wanted to be in the office when my partners were there so I could ask them questions and I structured my

schedule, planning days in the office around their schedules. Now, I work in a fully remote position. I like that I have time for hobbies and a personal life, but sometimes I need to get out of my apartment. My current employer has office space throughout the country and will send me out there specifically to meet my co-workers in person.

Isidro: I am absolutely fine with in-person interaction, with attorneys. I enjoy in-person interaction, but I believe that remote options are very useful, there have been times when I have to come back to school and there have been times when I asked for remote days on an individual basis. I know my next job will have the option to work remotely a certain number of days.

How do you use technology in your office and how has that changed in recent years?

Rothbort: The majority of depositions are conducted remotely. Before 2020, it was very rare to have a remote deposition, and you had to get special permission. Now, it's almost the opposite. There are still some situations when I want to have a witness appear in person for a deposition, but in general [depositions] are remote. I find that people are more prompt for remote depositions. I like that I have access to the entire case file. I can search the internet for information as it's being discussed. During a break, if I have a question, I can step out and ask my colleagues who are in the office.

Nelson: My work is very collaborative and, depending on the project I am working on, I will sometimes have daily videoconferences with my colleagues.

Garcia: We use a computer program that's a system for immigration-specific docket review. Everything gets entered into that system. It allows for case management. It allows for client communications directly through the system and those communications are saved in the

system. I can keep track of what is outstanding and keep things "in-house."

Gaulrapp: Everything is changing really quickly. On the popular legal research sites, they have their own versions of artificial intelligence that I have experimented with. I think it's a great starting point, but I don't anticipate it replacing attorneys any time soon.

What challenges do you find using technology in your practice?

Gaulrapp: I've had jobs where I was not fully equipped to replicate our in-office experience at home. Now, I have opportunities to set up my own home office and an IT department that is very accommodating and assists me.

Rothbort: Sometimes [when serving documents by email] other offices have security that blocks delivery, and those attorneys will insist on physical service or [being sent] a flash drive.

Garcia: The greatest difficulty is making sure that clients can use [virtual] programs. Some of my clients have phones, some don't have phones or maybe borrow someone else's phone. They are not as knowledgeable with technology. That is why I prefer to have clients in person even when the appearance is remote, to ensure that the client can get on the videoconference.

What predictions do you have for the future of the practice of law?

Rothbort: I wouldn't be surprised if remote depositions become the norm by court rule. Also email service is now accepted and I think that will continue. Before 2020, it was much less common to have service accepted by email, now it is much more the norm.

Gaulrapp: I think with advancements in technology we will see tools making some aspects of legal practice a bit less time consuming. I think the administrative portion of being an attorney will be more efficient with the use of technology. Right now, I spend time organizing

email communications between colleagues, filing it in a way that I can quickly access it if needed. In the future, I could see this process being more efficient with improvements of sorting rules and search capabilities.

Garcia: I predict we will be seeing more and more artificial intelligence used. For me, AI raises privacy concerns, and I don't feel fully comfortable adapting it into my practice right now as I don't fully understand it. But a lot of attorneys—especially solo practitioners—can use AI to help with efficiency which ideally could be a game changer for leads and retention.

Nelson: I can't predict how that will change the practice, but I think artificial intelligence is going to be just as involved and disruptive in law as it is in every other industry. It's not just generative artificial intelligence, it's going to be

used in document review and enhance our jobs to make things easier.

Isidro: I think using social media will be increasingly common. Sharing professional achievements on LinkedIn and Instagram is expected. Employers have told me that they looked at my profiles on social media to learn more about me. In [job] interviews, I've been asked specific questions about professional achievements that I've shared on social media.

Conclusion

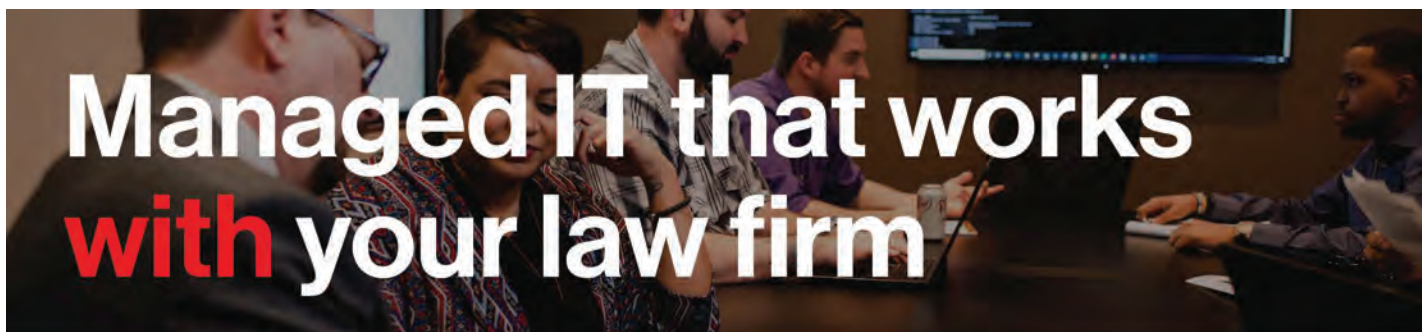
Young lawyers still crave collaboration. Although in-person interaction is still fundamental to the practice of law, new modes of online communication can facilitate this even when working out-of-office. Everyone interviewed seems to appreciate the option to work remotely and views acceptance of this practice as a boon to their work-life balance.

What remains to be seen is just how disruptive advances in remote appearances, organizational tools and artificial intelligence will be on the way lawyers practice law. Thankfully, our profession has proven time and time again that it can adapt to changing times, so:

Let us not struggle to match an imperfect legal system to an evolving world that we understand poorly. Let us instead do what is essential to permit the participants in this evolving world to make their own decisions.' ■

Endnote

1. Frank H. Easterbrook, "Cyberspace and the Law of the Horse," 1996 University of Chicago Legal Forum 207 (1996).



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