

Living Proof Home Office Lawyering Works

BY CHARLES "CHUCK" NEWTON

"I'll tell ya' the truth," as they say in East Texas, this economic downturn has got lawyers as jumpy as spit on a hot skillet.

I am getting calls and emails and inquiries from lawyers from law firms, big and small, asking if establishing a home law office or practice would be right for them. After all, I have practiced from my home for a long time, and these lawyers are hoping that I can provide a crystal ball outcome for them before they decide to undertake the journey. They have a feeling they need to make the change, but they are uncertain. They are concerned. Needless to say, there is no crystal ball.

These lawyers have a lot of perceived problems, or this is to say they still have a lot of mental resistance to moving their law practices home. "I just do not have the space at home." "I have children in the house." "I need to be around people." "My dog barks all of the time." "I have no place to meet with clients." The one I heard quite some time ago (but still like) is, "My wife took me for better or worse, but just not for lunch."

Obviously, I could talk a gate off its hinges about moving your practice home. I have practiced exclusively from home since 1999. Each of the points above is a good one. But, if you are thinking of moving your law office to your home, none of these arguments represent an actual hindrance. They represent nothing more than a friction between what you have and what you want. Too often, we are happier with the devil we know than the devil we don't. This is what keeps us from making the move home.

There is a funny story Texans love to tell. A man named Zachariah falls off a cliff in West Texas. During his fall, he manages to grab a branch sticking out of the side of the cliff. As he dangles above the rocky death below, he begins calling for help. Finally a booming voice says, "I will save you!" Zachariah asks, "Who are you?" The voice says, "I am God." Zachariah yells, "Save me, Lord!" God says, "I will, Zachariah. But you must have faith." With that, God says, "Zachariah, let go of the branch, and I will save you." Zachariah looks at his strained fingers holding on to the branch and then down to the rocky terrain way below. He finally tilts his head back up and asks, "Is there anybody else up there who can help me?"

I doubt that moving your practice home requires this much faith, but it requires faith. Maybe you can call it acceptance, belief, conviction, or hope that everything will work itself out. Regardless, I, too, often get this same response when I tell other lawyers to let everyone go, shut down their outside offices, burn their law books, and move their law practices home.

I do not think that you have to completely buy into the virtual orthodoxy in order to believe that a move home is best for you and your family. There is a community of believers out there of which I am one. But you do not have to participate in the communion, or believe the gospel, or accept the dogma that the traditional practice of law is dying and you do not

want to die with it. In other words, you do not have to drink the Kool-Aid. You can be as agnostic as you want and yet know that this choice is what is best for you and your well-being. You can have these questions and you can be skeptical. You can be doubtful and still, in the long run, understand that how you currently practice simply does not work for you.

My point is that you cannot solve all of the problems you have conjured up *before* you make the move and, even if you could, dilemmas and issues would surface that you did not and could not contemplate. You cannot do anything in this world that is new and untried for you that does not have a degree of ambiguity, unpredictability, vagueness, bewilderment, wonder, or mystification. You can question it and it is fine to have a degree of anxiety about the change. But, you need not meet it with ambivalence, conjecture, distrust, oscillation, or indecision.

I didn't plan to move my law practice home, get rid of staff, rely on cheap tech, and do it on my own. No. In fact, for more than a decade, I went the other direction of building volume, building offices, employing staff, and putting out one fire after another not of my own doing. For more than a decade, I thought there had to be a better way. I would cogitate on it often and noodle it around in my head, but I could never get the full picture enough to make the decision. But, sooner or later, like me, you decide you have to quit burning daylight on things that you know in your heart are not working. When it gets right down to the lick law, you have to take a chance. You have to let go of that branch.

If moving your law practice to your home is an option you are considering, maybe the most I can offer you is that this is an achievable goal. I am a living and working example of effectively and profitably running my law practice from home. Now, I do not think that the sun comes up just to hear me crow, but I have made it work for me. And I do not pretend that I am riding a gravy train with biscuit wheels. Life, in any respect, is more difficult than that. What I am saying is that I have been able to move my law office home, cut my overhead to the bone, and live a happier and more fulfilling life. You can as well. And, although you might not be able to chart the course from where you are right now, I can tell you that the journey has been well worth it for me.

They say you can only go as far as you can see, but once you get there, you can always see farther. The truth of the matter, however, is that if you do not undertake the first journey, you will never see the path waiting for you ahead. So, have a little faith. The main objective is just to make the decision and start. The first step is the hardest. It is not nearly as precarious as it was for Zachariah for you to let go of the branch. But know this: At the end, I, as all other home office lawyers, will be waiting there for you with a standing round of applause. ☺