



WORKING AT HOME WORKS

I began working at home about ten years ago to accommodate the sleep schedule of my two infant children. Although my children are now school age, I continue to work partly at home because it provides me substantial business, professional, and personal benefits. This article reviews my experiences and my approach to balancing family and career.

EFFICIENT USE OF TIME

I live in Beaverton, have a downtown office, and have a tri-county family law practice. Generally, I meet my clients face to face for introductory appointments, major appointments to form strategy, and depositions, but much of my communication is by mail, e-mail, fax, and telephone. In most cases, my assistant meets with the clients to receive discovery from them and to work with them to create documents such as uniform support affidavits. I can perform most of my daily work outside of the office so long as my assistant plays "traffic cop" at the office and so long as I can be in instant communication with clients and counsel by telephone and fax. This generally is easy for my staff, since our phones have a feature that allows us to easily transfer a call to a number outside the office. I can bill hours, give advice, and practice law without being chained to my office. This allows me to spend fewer actual clock hours to do my work and simultaneously allows me to meet my non-practice needs with ease.

I typically begin my work day at 7:30 a.m. On days that I have ex parte in Washington or Clackamas County, I start my workday at home by billing an hour of time before departing for court. This permits me to begin and end my workdays earlier. This also works at the end of the day: if I finish court in Hillsboro or Oregon City in the early afternoon, I go straight home to complete my workday and to save nonbillable commuting time to downtown and a return commute home. On days preceding inclement weather, I bring home a box of files and

save an agonizing snow commute. If there is a traffic stoppage, I simply work at home for an hour until the traffic clears. My system works equally well for sick child and medical appointment days: I can work efficiently at home from 7:30 to 9:30 and then take my child to the doctor. It also gives me the flexibility to help out at a 3:30 p.m. after-school club meeting and then complete my quota of billable hours at home. In the occasional case involving clients in different time zones, I can talk to my East Coast clients without major inconvenience. During multiple-day trials, I can efficiently prepare cross-examination and closing arguments at home without going to the office.

COMPUTERIZE

Over the last ten years advances in computer and information technology have enhanced the ease of working at home. The obvious first step is to establish a computer work station. I found that my needs for a home office were relatively simple: a suitable computer and work station; a few office supplies; a \$30 battery-operated dictation machine; software for word processing, child support, and spousal support; a copy of Judge LaMar's family law code; and copies of my office checklists. Not being a computer guru, I relied heavily on my legal assistant and an outside computer consultant for technical expertise. Originally, I had my legal assistant load all of my family law forms on discs so that I could use them at home. This system was inefficient, however, because I needed to transfer word processing back and forth by disc and because I could not access my office computer files from home. A later and better solution was to connect my home office to my law office. I now am able to retrieve computerized files and to create documents with the same efficiency as I would at my office. With advances in scanning technology, incoming correspondence can be scanned, saved in the client directory, and viewed by me at home.

My system worked in full form recently when my daughter unexpectedly missed several days of

school during the week prior to a major trial and during a major workweek for my wife. I traveled to the office in the evening to obtain necessary paper files. I worked efficiently at home fielding calls from clients and counsel, writing correspondence, creating documents, and preparing for trial. By remote access, I created documents which were then printed by my assistant at the office, signed by my partner, and mailed or filed by staff. Incoming correspondence was faxed to my home computer on my PC. I missed no billable hours, met all my deadlines, and was able to care for my sick daughter. In another instance, I had a sudden inspiration at bedtime the evening prior to a major trial. I was able to rework my trial memorandum in the morning and then carry the revised work product to trial the next day.

EMPLOYEES NEED FLEXIBILITY TOO

Working partly at home has allowed me to effectively combine family and career while also maximizing the number of hours I bill. I encourage my attorney and non-attorney staff to do the same. My legal assistant also has a computer at home that is networked to the office. Now, if she has a medical appointment, sick child, is snowed in, or has a contagious virus and also has a case deadline to meet, she can meet all of her responsibilities by partly working at home, in the same manner as me. It is far less stressful for both of us.

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