

PRESENTED AT
Virtual Webcast

June 12, 2020

Articles by
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March 24, 2020

7 MINUTES TO READ · 1500 WORDS

Defining Moments in Uncertain Times: Leverage and Pivot Your Way to Success

Think about the “defining moments” you are experiencing in these times of COVID-19 and start to review, analyze, and plan your way boldly into the future.

By Melanie Bragg

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In this times of crisis, the best we can do is rally our lawyer spirit and be strong, be safe, and never, ever give up.

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This month I ask you to think about the “defining moments” that you are experiencing right now as we navigate our way through the major changes and challenges of today’s world. Two months ago, we saw photos of people dressed in hazmat suits and patients dying in Chinese hospitals. It was all so far away. We were not cognizant that in just a few short weeks we would be experiencing the same thing and that so many aspects of our daily lives would be drastically impacted, literally overnight.

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Now, in this uncertain time, we are told or ordered to stay at home, and we see our way of doing business shifting under our feet as fast as a massive earthquake. Clients may be getting cold feet about starting new lawsuits or completing work that has begun. Courts have slowed down, and some have ground to a halt. Law firms are letting people go, law firm management is dealing with tough decisions concerning how to proceed, and solos such as us are facing the stark realities of maintaining our own survival. In this process we will have many “defining moments.” Let’s explore what those may be and how we can use this time to review, analyze, and plan our way boldly into the future.

Think about Your Defining Moments Just Before COVID-19 Hit Our Shores

I ask you to spend some time pondering where we were just a few weeks ago—all the things we had on our plate, all the plans we had, all the deadlines and commitments we counted on to form the basis of our lives. Where are we now? In just this short time span, a new reality has come into existence. Everything is dramatically different. And our priorities have radically changed overnight. Many solos operate like a high percentage of American workers—monthly cash in/cash out. We don’t all have the recommended six months of savings to cover an outage such as this. We aren’t sure that clients will continue coming in the door as we do not know how many of them will be unemployed and unable to pay for basic legal services. We may need to let some of our employees go or reduce their salary. We may need to find new areas of law to practice. The level of uncertainty in our lives now changes every day when we see the numbers of infected people and forecasts of possible lives lost. It can surely cause stress, panic, and even despair. It’s not easy to work under these conditions. Yet, as lawyers we are trained to be leaders. To be strong. To not show our vulnerability or fear. That is just how we are.

It is a good idea to spend some time thinking about what our defining moments were in the period before COVID-19 and look at what they are now. It’s enlightening when you have a new prism to look through. The things you thought were so important two months ago are not even on the radar now. We are being called to dig deep into our personal reserves of strength and character.

Think about Your Defining Moments Now During the Crisis

How are you reacting to events? Are you willing to pivot quickly to what needs to be done in order to carry on the business? Or, are you just ignoring it and hoping it will go away? Are you thinking that others will be affected, not you? (Believe it or not, I have spoken to some of my colleagues who have professed these things!) Naturally, there are different stages we go through in the process. Phrases such as “this will be over quick,” “it won’t affect me,” or “I can handle it,” can quickly devolve into “oh no, I’m in trouble” to “how will I survive?” to “this is the end of me.”

My advice is to remember that we are all in the same boat together now, and reaching out and talking to one another is a good thing for us to do. Now is not the time to put on a brave front and go it alone. We know that our profession will be needed in a variety of ways, and this time calls for us all to be open-minded, nimble, and ready to change at a moment’s notice. This is a battle, and we will win if we are equipped. A big part of being equipped is really being in touch with yourself and your feelings. I suggest we all journal about what we are going through right now—our defining moments. It will be something precious to hand down to your children or grandchildren. You never know the lessons that you might glean from your own personal notes.

Think about What It Will Be Like after It Has All Settled Down Again

As with any big disruption, we all long for things to go back to the “way they were.” But we all know we will never be the same again. Our priorities will have been revealed during the crisis, and many of us will emerge with new priorities. The funny thing is all the recent emphasis on toilet paper. We never dreamed that such a commodity would be so very important. It’s symbolic if you really dig deep. There is probably a lot of “stuff” we need to get rid of and things we thought we needed in our lives that we don’t. A situation like this surely reveals those things. I have a friend whose daughter works for the company that sells Charmin. They are booming. Think about it: Innovation is born of crisis. There will be many changes. Courts can now do video hearings. We will probably continue to have that as an option. Why not? Mediations are being done online now, too. I just had my first one yesterday. Electronic

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First appeared as part of the conference materials for the
2020 Defining Moments: Insights into the Lawyer's Soul session
"Defining Moments: Insights into the Lawyer's Soul "