

Coping With A Pandemic: Burns & Levinson's Josef Volman

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As society continues to adapt to COVID-19, Law360 is **sharing reactions** from around the business and legal community.

Today's perspective comes from Boston-based **Josef Volman**, co-chair of the business law group at Burns & Levinson LLP.

What challenges has the pandemic created in your specific area of work?

I often act as outside general counsel to privately held businesses, venture capital- and private equity-backed portfolio companies and public companies, and spend a lot of my time on buy-side and sell-side mergers and acquisitions, as well as equity financing transactions for companies and investors.

I spent the first couple months of the pandemic helping companies with crisis management including employee issues, financial issues and navigating the Paycheck Protection Program and Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security, or CARES, Act programs.

The CARES Act was a great attempt by the government to assist small businesses, but the guidelines were changing daily and we had to continuously interpret those guidelines and help clients work through the application and qualification process.

One of the more challenging aspects was advising clients on whether to keep the funds or return them as further guidance was issued. It was an extremely confusing time for many companies and it was gratifying to be able to help them navigate this uncharted new territory. We are now dealing with applications for forgiveness of the PPP loans and will see how that process



Josef Volman

goes.

On the deal side, we've been fortunate to have closed financing and M&A transactions during this crisis. Each of those transactions had challenges related to structure, timing and valuation as a result of the pandemic, but we successfully got through them.

How have you and your firm adapted to reopening in your area, and what are your expectations for the fall?

We have continued to encourage employees to work remotely. We also divided the firm into small units that are assigned certain days of the week for coming into the office to ensure that we are well below the capacity permitted by the state and local regulations. Most of our employees take public transportation so we have offered discounted parking for those who want to come to the office.

As a department head, I have tried to find ways to make sure that my group stays connected, so we have organized Zoom meetings and happy hour and other events so that we can see each other virtually.

Just this week, we did a trivia event hosted by a professional trivia company that was really fun and allowed our summer associates to have a chance to interact with the entire group of partners, associates, paralegals and legal administrative assistants.

We have also been hosting regular training sessions for our junior associates to keep them active and make sure their professional development is supported.

Depending on school openings and other events, we are expecting more of our attorneys to come to the office more regularly in the fall, but we don't anticipate returning to full capacity until the end of the year. Until then, we will continue to work remotely and find ways to support our firm culture and collegial atmosphere.

How are you and your family adapting at home?

It has been an interesting change of pace for me. Before the pandemic, my client work, business development responsibilities, and various industry and charitable activities required frequent travel and being out many nights during the week for events and client dinners. It's been a nice change to be home for dinner every night with my wife and two teenage children.

My son is home from college and my daughter is graduating high school, which inspired us to find creative ways to try to make this final high school semester special for her despite the difficulties around all of us. Our dog is

probably the happiest of all since he gets several family walks per day. He will definitely miss us when we go back into the world and aren't home with him 24/7.

I have definitely used this time at home as an opportunity to reflect on the balance of my home and work life, and how I can approach my job and engage with colleagues and clients in a different way going forward.

What is the most creative or productive response to the crisis you've witnessed so far?

One of the things I love about my job is that I get to work with very innovative entrepreneurs. I have seen them rise to the occasion and find creative ways to maintain their operations despite the challenges posed by the crisis.

One of our clients in the sports apparel industry used its facilities to manufacture personal protective equipment, which has kept its employees working as well as providing much-needed PPE for front-line health care workers who desperately need it. Another client with manufacturing contacts in Asia was able to set up supply arrangements to get PPE for hospitals in the U.S. that were grappling with severe shortages.

We also recently closed a financing for a client that developed a two-way, voice-activated device which is now being deployed in assisted living and other facilities so that doctors, nurses and remote caregivers can communicate with seniors regarding medical and other issues.

All of these stories continue to inspire me during this time and provide hope that our scientists will find a way out of this crisis.

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