

# PUBLICATION

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## Common Ground: Embracing Remote Work for Better or for Worse

Third Quarter 2020

**"I cannot believe this is happening." If this thought has crossed your mind over the past few months, it likely can be attributed to the global pandemic that has forced changes in your personal and professional life. It is also certain that regardless of whether you are a "traditionalist," "Boomer," "Gen-X," or "Millennial," you have made adjustments in order to maintain a sense of self, normalcy, and productivity. In many ways, the pandemic has stretched even the brightest legal minds to find ways to better connect with clients and colleagues.**

Victoria Young, a first year associate in Baker Donelson's New Litigator's Group, puts Buck Wellford, chair of Baker Donelson's Advocacy Department, in the "hot seat" for our first "Common Ground" column, which details his triumphs and discoveries while working remotely. Common Ground seeks to bridge the gaps between attorneys from all walks of life as we grapple with complex issues through authentic dialogue. More importantly, it aims to show how even our differences can positively shape our workplace and culture when we simply sit down to share. You will be surprised just how much more alike than different we may be. Not convinced? Just keep reading!

**Victoria:** What has been the greatest benefit from working remotely?

**Buck:** I learned that I am capable, with the proper set-up, of working from home effectively. I did not think I was suited to do that. I thought I would get too distracted. I also learned how to use WebEx more effectively, though I still bungle my way through the "Share Screen" feature.

**Victoria:** Without the pandemic accelerating innovations such as virtual hearings, depositions, different filing options, etc., do you think our industry would have implemented many of these changes any time soon?

**Buck:** I think there was already a move toward more remote practice, including depositions and court hearings, but the pandemic certainly accelerated it. I don't see the trend reversing itself any time soon for depositions. Remote court hearings are likely to become more commonplace as well going forward, although anything requiring courts to evaluate the credibility of witnesses and certainly trials will go back to being in person.

**Victoria:** What has working remotely revealed about you professionally?

**Buck:** I can be more flexible and self-reliant in terms of technology than I gave myself credit for being.

**Victoria:** What best practices have you adopted during this period of remote work?

**Buck:** I make a list of "to do" items every Sunday, putting them on a big "sticky note" sheet on the wall of my home "office" (my dining room), divided into separate categories. I have to see it every time I walk in and out of the room. I get great satisfaction at checking off the items. If I am working at the office, I do the same thing with a big whiteboard I have at one end of the office.

**Victoria:** In what ways do you believe Baker Donelson had already positioned itself to make the necessary adjustments to succeed during this time?

**Buck:** Baker Donelson anticipated the huge increase in internet capacity we needed, expanding that capacity several weeks before we went remote. We doubled and tripled down on educating our lawyers and staff on all the resources necessary to work remotely, efficiently. Our practice group leaders and office managing shareholders really stepped up in having regular, usually weekly, WebEx meeting with their groups. We have now demonstrated the ability to pivot quickly from working at the office to home, and back again. We have also done a better job than most large firms, to my knowledge, regularly checking on our lawyers who are having greater pressure than usual trying to balance home and work life.

**Victoria:** Fill in the blank. "Working during Covid-19 has taught me....."

**Buck:** Resilience and patience.

**Victoria:** Now, Buck...on to the Lightning Round. You get to pick "this or that" style. Here we go... Business casual OR loungewear while working from home?

**Buck:** Business casual.

**Victoria:** I eat healthier working from home OR I snack a little too much?

**Buck:** Healthier at home, because I don't leave the office when at work.

**Victoria:** I rise earlier working from home OR I just work later?

**Buck:** If working from home, I tend to take a break around 5:30 but get in a couple of hours later in the evening. If I am at the office, I tend to work later, until 6:30 or 7 and don't do anything other than monitor emails later in the evening. The hours tend to even out whether I am working from home or coming to the office.

**Victoria:** I prefer the office OR I prefer home OR I am going with a hybrid?

**Buck:** At this point I prefer the office. Plenty of room and access to everything I need.