

PUBLICATION

Common Ground (Interview with Joe Delgado)

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Many people were excited to say goodbye to 2020 for obvious reasons. However, as the old saying goes, Rome was not built in one day. The recovery from COVID-19 will not happen overnight. We are already one quarter through 2021, and I have the great opportunity to interview my sponsor, Joe Delgado, shareholder in Baker Donelson's Atlanta office, about how he is maneuvering through 2021, how this year is different from last year, what he's learned the past year, and what he anticipates going forward.

Mikhal: With such a tumultuous 2020, has 2021 been any different for you so far? How so?

Joe: 2020 was tumultuous in that there was so much uncertainty around everything. It ended up being a strong year financially for the Firm and for me, as well, which is great because it was somewhat unexpected because of all that uncertainty. All through that, there was still this feeling of uncertainty even though you're busy as hell. You're wondering, "When is this going to stop? This can't be right. There has to be something happening here that's going to make this all grind to a halt." Even though we were so busy, I still felt that way throughout 2020. I will say now that we are quarter of a way through 2021, I don't necessarily feel that way anymore. I feel a lot more positive about things continuing on their current trajectory.

Mikhal: I do as well. With vaccines rolling out, people in law firms and other businesses and in general are feeling much more optimistic about the future as opposed to last year.

Have remote work/working from home changed at all for you yet? What are your thoughts about the pros and cons of remote work in the macro sense and as it relates to you?

Joe: I have gone back into the office, but only intermittently, you know, to grab something, take my bills in, check the mail - that kind of thing. I have not spent any sort of significant time there. I have an office above my garage, and this is where I spend all my time and it is where I work. It has been good in that I have found a groove and I feel very comfortable here. It's nice – I'm obviously trying to minimize exposure to COVID. Now that I'm vaccinated, I may change that a bit and start to go into the office with a little more frequency because I'm missing interaction with people.

It is nice that I get my work done here and I am comfortable and can call anyone I want or need on the phone, but it feels a little more scheduled and harder to get a hold of people than when you can just walk down the hall to talk to someone. I miss doing that, I miss going to lunch with folks. I've eaten so many ham and turkey sandwiches, I can't tell you. I probably can continue to eat those the rest of my life, I'm not quite sick of them, but man, it's just nice to be able to get out and interact with folks a little bit. That's definitely a con because I miss it. The pro is that it is really efficient and easy for me to just wake up, do what I do in the morning, take my dog for a walk...and I walk up right to my garage office. There's no commute, I can just get right to work. Sometimes that's good and sometimes that's bad. I think partially the reason why the Firm ended up having such a good year last year was number one, there was work to do, and number two, people didn't have anything to other than work. You might as well work, you're at home. The line between working and being at home gets

so blurred. There is no natural stop. It always kind of feels like you're on so, maybe that's good, maybe that's bad, I don't really know.

Mikhal: I agree – I can see it going both ways. Not having to commute and waking up and getting right to work I see as pros. The cons are like what everyone else says, lack of communication. I personally came into work because I was new and wanted to show myself and did not want people not knowing what I looked like.

Joe: There was a lot of vibrancy around our office before. There were people around, you could chat with people, find someone to go to lunch with. It is going to take some time to get back there.

Mikhal: Do you plan on getting vaccinated and will that affect your experiences personally and at work?

Joe: I have been fully vaccinated. Once the vaccine reaches maximum effectiveness, I feel that I will be a little bit more comfortable interacting in the world. For example, I am a season ticket holder for the local MLS Soccer Team (Atlanta United). The United asked me if I wanted to defer going to games until they were at maximum capacity and all the restrictions had been relaxed or whether I willing to go ahead and start going when my seats were available. I told them I would start going to the games. I've read up on these vaccines. I might get COVID, but I'm not going to die. As long as that's the case, I feel it's a risk I can live with just like I might have gotten the flu before or a cold or done other things. I feel like I have to go ahead and be willing to start living my life. I'm going to wear a mask and socially distance. I'm going to do things that will make other people feel comfortable. If I am around a bunch of vaccinated people, I'm not going to worry about it. I'm going to start doing some things, but I also want to respect other people's concerns, as well.

Mikhal: I agree. My parents feel way more comfortable now, too. My mom did not go anywhere for a whole year. Now that she's vaccinated, she goes out while taking precautions. I think that's how a lot of people are – if most people take precautions and get vaccinated, things will get better.

Joe: I agree. We're eventually going to get to where this is all a memory and it's going to be weird.

Mikhal: I hope so. Things already feel much different than a year ago. It was something nobody had experienced before.

Joe: We were wiping down groceries! It was scary.

Mikhal: It's been over a year since the world shut down. What are you most grateful about today?

Joe: The health of my family, first and foremost. I just didn't know how terrible it was going to be. I am thankful that we all got through it, and we are all healthy. It doesn't feel as bad as maybe we were worried about. I'm also thankful for the health of the law firm. A year ago, I didn't know I would be working – well, I knew I would be working because I have to put food on the table. I just didn't know what the heck was going to be happening or whether things were really going to shut down. When you start hearing things like "all of a sudden pollution cleared up in the world because all of these factories shut down" and there are no planes in the air – you just don't know. It was really, really terrifying. I knew that we, as a society, have to consume things, but with this virus you don't know what's going to happen. Physical health and economic health are really what I am most thankful for.

Mikhal: Yes, I am definitely in the same boat as you. No one in my family died from COVID-19, so I'm grateful for that. My condolences to all those who passed. I was personally worried about COVID-19 due to my past respiratory issues as a kid. I've been able to go to work and go places safely without contracting COVID-19

and was able to start a new job at Baker Donelson during the pandemic. So, like you, I'm grateful for economic and physical health.

What do you think will be the state of coronavirus/COVID-19 in this country on this date next year?

Joe: I think that it's going to be almost an afterthought. I think there will be some isolated pockets of it. The idea of social distancing will be a thing of the past. The percentage of people who really won't get the shot is small. There are a lot of people who talk that way, but that is more out of fear and waiting for other people to get it. They are going to follow the herd and/or will find themselves in situations where the lack of immunization will become very inconvenient for them.

Mikhal: I agree. I think some people will still be wearing masks a year from now, but most people will not. I think there may be some lingering effects and I'm interested in seeing what they are.

Joe: Agreed.

Interviewed by Mikhal Wright.