

DAY IN THE LIFE

CURATED BY PATRICIA D. CAFFERATA, ESQ.

Estate Planning Attorney Finds Pandemic Emphasized Importance of His Practice

By Taylor Morris, Esq.

On Friday, March 13, 2020, I met with some clients at my office to execute their estate planning documents. The following Monday, everything changed. Instead of being at the office, I found myself taking telephone conferences in my closet at home, trying to escape the clutches of my young children.

The effects of COVID-19 have abruptly changed the way we practice law, at least for the foreseeable future. I never could have imagined how quickly my ability to meet with clients could be jeopardized. As an estate planning and probate attorney, meeting with clients in person is a vital part of my law practice, or so I thought. Now, months later, I realize that although my practice has started to normalize, some aspects may never be the same.

Welcomed or not, COVID-19 has created new opportunities for our law practice. Our use of telephone and video conferencing has increased drastically. Whereas we used to meet in person with almost every client initially, we now perform most initial consultations virtually. We have an electronic notary and implemented procedures so clients can execute documents remotely in real time, which we did not have in place before. This service has allowed us to accommodate clients who need to execute documents but are unable to come to the office due to health risks or inability to travel. We also implemented more efficient systems to work remotely, both in the way we access client files



and our office telephone system. I have even had clients execute documents through the glass doors of their living facilities and in their vehicles.

In addition to our estate planning practice, our probate practice also looks much different. With the closure of the probate court, we have been and currently attend court hearings virtually. The way we file probate petitions, submit orders, and file and obtain certified documents has shifted almost entirely to an electronic system. Sometimes it takes several weeks to obtain certified documents, which used to take only a matter of days. Wills can now be filed electronically initially to expedite the opening of an estate, instead of having to file the original will and wait for a time before the estate could proceed. During the quarantine, we would receive new administrative orders frequently that addressed various probate procedures.

Like many others, we had to quickly adapt and figure out how to do some things differently than before.

One of the sobering experiences I have had as an attorney during this pandemic is handling the probate for an estate of a person who died because of COVID-19. The surviving children were all diagnosed as well and shared with me their experiences in seeing their mother suffer and die, as well as the pain and lingering effects they have had to deal with personally and are still going through. This experience has re-emphasized to me the importance of taking precautions and ensuring that our law office is compliant in following protocols so that our staff and clients are safe and protected. It also serves as a reminder of the importance of having an estate plan in effect.

I have noticed that during the past few months how COVID-19 has been a catalyst for some people to get their estate planning in order. People who neglected or gave little thought to do their estate planning in the past are now taking action after seeing the impacts of this new disease. Perhaps this has been one of the silver linings of the pandemic – it has prompted some people to effectuate an estate plan before it is too late.

TAYLOR MORRIS is an attorney at Morris Estate Planning Attorneys, practicing in the areas of estate planning, probate, asset protection planning and business succession planning. He holds the AV Preeminent Rating from Martindale-Hubbell and is recognized as one of the Legal Elite and Best Up & Coming Attorneys from *Nevada Business Magazine*. He is a native of and a third-generation practicing attorney in southern Nevada.