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Don't Forget to Leave the Office Once You Return: 5 Places to Disconnect

BY ROBERT SING

Special to the Legal

As more and more of us are returning to work full-time in our physical offices, it is as important as ever to remember to physically and mentally take care of ourselves. Just over 70% of respondents to The American Lawyer's 2021 Mental Health and Substance Abuse Survey stated that the COVID-19 pandemic made their mental health worse. Thirty-seven percent of the respondents stated that they were depressed, nearly 71% said they had anxiety, and about 14% said they had another mental health issue; these were all increases over the last survey, which was conducted in 2019. There were multiple different reasons given by respondents as to why their mental health worsened, including isolation, lockdown, working remotely, disruption in routine, fear of job loss, fear of catching the virus, missing family, workspace constraints, catching the virus and reduced access to mental health programs.

To me, it is easy to see that many of the causes of worsening mental health



ROBERT SING is a catastrophic injury attorney with Duffy + Fulginiti in Philadelphia. Learn more about his work at duffyfirm.com.

given by respondents to the survey are not going to go away just because we are returning to our offices. In fact, I believe some of these sources of depression, anxiety and mental health issues are here to stay. For example, almost 14% of respondents said that working remotely caused their mental health to suffer. For many of us, the pandemic forced us to either upgrade or completely implement remote working capabilities. As a result, the line between work-life and personal-life was blurred during the pandemic. Now that we are returning to our offices, I am sure that many of us will still have the capability to work remotely. After all, time and money was spent on upgrading or implementing the ability to work remotely; it is not like those investments are going to be put to waste. A potential issue I see with this is that the line between

work-life and personal-life will continue to be blurred. Even when we leave our physical offices, we never truly can leave work now that our remote working capabilities are as advanced as they are. That is unless we remember to take time for ourselves and disconnect from our devices.

Many times, there are going to be late nights and weekends where it is necessary to log on and work remotely; that just comes with the territory of our work. But we do have to remember to take time to physically and mentally take care of ourselves. I think an easy way to do that is to go somewhere to disconnect from technology. It is easy to say that you will not look at your phone for a couple of hours. In reality, it can be very hard to put your phone or laptop down because of the fear of missing out, whether it be fear of missing an email, a text, a court filing, or social media post. Here are five of my favorite places to go to when I need to disconnect:

- **Bethany Beach.** I have been going to Bethany Beach since I was a baby and it is my favorite place to go to when I need a break. Although it is a

farther trip than the Jersey Shore, the extra travel time is worth it. Bethany is a small beach just south of Rehoboth Beach and Dewey Beach, and just north of Ocean City, Maryland. It is much more calm and quiet in Bethany than any of the Jersey Shore beaches I have been to, perfect to get away to for some peace and quiet. There are plenty of great restaurants with great views, small “mom-and-pop” shops, and delicious beach snacks throughout Bethany. Every time I take a trip to Bethany, I return to work feeling relaxed and recharged.

- **Bushkill Falls.** Referred to as “The Niagara of Pennsylvania,” Bushkill Falls has multiple scenic hiking trails of varying difficulty that lead you around the beautiful waterfalls. The sound of all that water flowing through the woods is calming; instead of listening to meditative background noises on your phone, why not take the trip to Bushkill and listen to the real thing?

- **Hersheypark.** Not only is Hersheypark full of iconic attractions, it also should force you to lock your phone away for the day. Based on personal experience, I cannot stress enough that nothing should be in your pockets when you ride on roller coasters. The keys to my then week-old car came flying out of my pocket on Skyrush and were lost in the water below. You may think that your phone is safe in a zippered pocket, but so did I. Another time, even with zippered pockets, the screen protector on my phone was cracked from the g-force pushing it against the seat on Storm Runner. Just lock your phone away in your car or rent a locker and go enjoy a phone-free day.

- **Newport, Rhode Island.** Newport is the most picturesque beach town I have ever been to. It is equal parts West Egg from “The Great Gatsby” (Leonardo DiCaprio version), Stars Hollow from “Gilmore Girls,” and Amity Island from “Jaws.” While taking a trek down a walking trail known as Cliff Walk, you have a beautiful ocean view on one side and gigantic, historic mansions on the other. Drive

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down Ocean Avenue and there are beaches of varying sizes just begging to be explored. After a day of exploring all of the natural beauty that Newport has to offer, there are a ton of high-quality restaurants to indulge in the evening. If you are a big fan of seafood, Newport is a must-visit.

- **The movie theatre.** The last time I went to a movie theatre pre-COVID was January 2020. One year and six months later, I finally saw a movie in theatres again. Theatres are all around us and are an easy way to escape everything for a few hours. But let me tell you, some people need to be reminded of proper movie theatre etiquette. Like Hersheypark, this is another place where you should feel compelled to have your phone off and away. And not just put on vibrate, I mean completely silent. Everyone around you can still hear the vibration of your phone and it always seems to

go off during the quietest part of the movie. Even a quick glance at your phone can be extremely annoying to your fellow moviegoers, especially now that phone screens have gotten to be so big and bright.

As we are returning to our physical offices full-time, we cannot forget to leave them. The mental health of lawyers does not have a great track record and the COVID pandemic has only made it worse. Being a lawyer can be a very stressful and demanding job. To do the best job we can for our clients, it is necessary to make sure that we are physically and mentally taking care of ourselves. I am no mental health expert, but I hope that this article reminds everyone to take care of themselves and gives some inspiration for your next trip. For anyone that would like additional mental health help, there are many confidential resources, such as Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers, that are available to you. •