

Pros and Cons of Home Office for Meeting Clients

My practice is exclusively Estate Planning, Elder Law, Probate and Conservatorships.

I am considering using the home office I use for day to day operations for meeting with clients. I will keep my two offices as locations to meet in (on a mail plus conference room plan with my Satellite as a small office as I typically spend the entire day there), the plan would be to do most of my client meetings in my home. I will need to do some modifications to create a separate entrance. Estimate of Cost (including some work to my house that needs done anyway but which would not be optional if I did this project) by my calculations \$10,000 to \$30,0000 depending on how much I do on the rest of the house.

My primary reasons for doing this is to reduce my night driving (my eye doctor thinks he may need to restrict my night driving formally in about 3 years), I am not overly concerned with people knowing my home address as it isn't that hard to find now. I use virtual staff right now.

Are there any pros or cons I am not considering.

Check with the state's ADA rules, as well as your county's rules. I can't remember all of them now, but I thought that if you set up an office that was open to the public, it was required to be accessible. It's one of the reasons why I ask all of my potential clients if they can get up stairs. If they can't, I move us to a different location that has wheelchair

access, or at least no stairs, depending on their need.

From a more personal aspect, there is the annoyance factor of the "just dropping in" client or the client who overstays his or her welcome. Some clients may also be turned off by going to a house in a clearly residential neighborhood. If you are in more of a mixed downtown type of location, it's probably not as bad.

Good luck either way!

Corrine Bielejeski, California

I don't work out of my home, but I have a similar practice profile to yours, and my office isn't far from where most of my clients live (5-10 minutes or so).

I get a LOT of drop ins. A ton. Many are not yet clients, but many are. Why call, if you can just stop by on the way to the store? This is part of the reason why we have a full-time receptionist, and some people just don't like to talk on the phone and would rather show up and talk to a real person. Many of our clients are retirees, and I think enjoy having a reason to leave the house. This may not be reflective of your client profile, and may not be reflective of your experience at your office, but consider that it may change, and people may be more apt to just stop by if you are in a residential setting.

Cynthia V. Hall, Florida

I agree. I wouldn't feel comfortable inviting clients to my home. I prefer to have at least SOME privacy. Although, I have told them that I live "in the gated community behind the police station, across the street from the Secret Service agent and next door to SWAT officer." (Which is even better, because it's true.)

David Allen Hiersekorn, California

One time a neighbor asked me to help her sister - she was having problems with her boyfriend. She came to my living room, since she was visiting next door. Later, my neighbor told me that I should probably stay away from my windows for a while because the boyfriend was mad at the advice I gave and he has a gun.

David A. Rubin, Missouri

There can be a happy medium. I use a PO Box and always meet clients at their homes, offices or a coffee shop of their choosing. I do not give out my home address. I don't want people here. I like working from here, though, because I can work when I can and still participate in my family when I choose. When I can't sleep, walk across the hall and knock out a

few things early to make the day easier. I do not do litigation, though.
Just estate planning. Never had a problem yet in all my years.

Elizabeth C.A. Johnson

I wouldn't do it for a few reasons.

1. My clients are "regular people." Sometimes they say things they shouldn't say. Like "Hey, my lawyer lives down that street." That is innocent enough until someone finds out who is a defendant or a soon to be defendant. Now someone knows where I live. I would rather not have that happen.
2. I have kids around. My kids know how to behave when I am working, but I don't want to have to run a background check on all of my clients before I meet with them to make sure they can be around kids.
3. I don't want my clients to see that much into my personal life.
4. It doesn't seem safe. What if the relationship goes south? Now they know where you live. I would pass on that.

Jonathan G. Stein, California

I think Jonathan definitely has some good points about the home meetings.

While an estate planning practice may not result in the kind of security threats that a criminal practice might come with, they are still concerns.

When I first opened my practice I was having meetings at my apartment complex which wasn't so bad as there was a check-in process, but I had a client show up unannounced (I scheduled a phone call, he thought it was in-person) and while there wasn't any great threat or risk, it immediately

turned me off to having my clients show up where I live.

I think one of the bigger deciding factors are the type of clients that you will have meet at your house. I have a feeling that estate planning and elder law clients might be on the more reasonable end of the type of clients that would be acceptable in your house.

Joshua M. Biletsky, California

It's not only clients that you have to worry about.

Many years ago my New York law firm used my home address as our New Jersey office. Never a problem or an issue until I defended a stock broker in a claim brought by a customer who turned out to have serious mental issues. After the customer lost on his claim, and we prevailed on our counterclaims, the customer threatened the judge who was hearing the award confirmation petition, threatened to blow up the New York Stock Exchange, and to come to my office and give me a deadly disease.

These weren't serious threats, the guy was an elderly lawyer, but it was enough to make me wish my address was not on our letterhead.

Today many counties have their property tax rolls on line, and our home addresses are available to anyone who cares to look.

But why make it that easy? Pay Regus or whomever to use an office or a conference room for an hour or two. The \$100 or \$150 is well worth the

peace of mind, IMHO.

Mark Astarita, New York

http://www.denverpost.com/ci_22867350/parolee-indicted-lakewood-attorneys-murder-robbery

That is why I would NEVER bring a client to my home, ever.

It's why I advise attorneys not to meet clients late.

Criminals are criminals are criminals. Estate law may be a different boat.

My vote is not only no, but hell no.

Matthew Buck

Maybe it's just me, but I just want my personal space. My home is my refuge. I might tell clients what town I live in, but I wouldn't ever tell them the address.

Sasha Golden, Massachusetts

I frequently meet clients in my home office, which does not have a separate entrance. They know I have a downtown office too, and usually appreciate my willingness to accommodate their preferred location. They don't need to know it is my preferred location too. It is usually the family law and criminal lawyers that don't do it no matter what.

Shell Bleiweiss, Illinois

That is my system as well. I do appellate litigation and offer to meet at such locations as well at an off-site private conference room. I have a statewide practice so, but the percentages, few actually want to travel to me anyway. Also, appellate law does not require many client meetings, and sometimes none. When I had a brick-and-mortar office I would get people just dropping by (including nights and weekends). I do not want to experience that at home!

Very truly yours,

William M. Driscoll, Massachusetts
