

Popular Threads on Solosez

Home Office People – Meeting With Clients

I'm sure this has been addressed before if so, I apologize, but I didn't read the posts because they didn't apply. However, I now recently relocated from my "office-office" to my home-office. Where do you meet with clients? Do you meet with certain ones in your home? Mutually agreed upon location? The client's home? Any comments are appreciated!

Adrienne S. Davis, Lincoln, Nebraska

I have practiced out of my home off and on for about 6 years. I do a combination of all. I do criminal defense as well as civil lit. I almost always meet my criminal clients anywhere but home. I have to know them well to invite them here. But, they usually seem to understand. I often go to their home. But, again, if I am uncomfortable I meet them at a restaurant or at the courthouse in the library. Sometimes you can meet them at their bonding company.

Most new business clients I meet on a lunch date. Once I have established a relationship with them, and they trust my capabilities, I invite them to the home for appts. I always feel a little shy about the domestic/less than professional surroundings. This is a horse farm. But, so far, everyone loves coming out here. It is peaceful and enjoyable. They usually stay and want to look at the horses.

Family law clients I usually meet at either their home or mine. Generally, I have spoken at length on the phone with them and they couldn't care less what my office looks like. They just need someone to help them and talk to them. Many of the times early on we are right in the courtroom on a TRO, Protective Order, temp orders or a writ, and so they are forgiving about my humble office.

Now, keep in mind, I do not have a high powered or urbane clientele. I have a mainly rural practice. If I did, I would create a more professional office space here at my home and have them here.

I have also in the past worked out relationships with attorneys whereas I would use their office space for an occasional conference in exchange for doing some contract work.

Nina S. Willis

Thanks, Nina. I appreciate the comments! My main concerns were (a) I really do not want 99% of my criminal clients to know where I live, let alone coming into my home, and (b) making an unprofessional impression. Especially because I had one of those offices where almost everyone commented about how great the building was, the office, the location, etc. Even opposing counsel who came for depositions for the first time almost



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always commented on how great it was. We (boyfriend and I) just moved and I do think I have a pretty good set-up as far as my office goes. And, it is literally about 3 steps in the front door. Take a right turn, and there it is. They would see the living room and part of the dining room, but that is it. The “office” is roomy, 3 really large windows, etc. Anyway, thanks!

Adrienne S. Davis, Lincoln, Nebraska

I have never practiced out of my home, except for the first month I was in private practice (November, 1976!). I lived right next to a restaurant that was owned by my landlord. He was kind enough to let me use the restaurant to meet with clients, even when it wasn't open (and would make us pizza to munch on during conferences!).

However, I know attorneys who have practiced out of their homes for years. Most of them do not meet with clients at their homes. They either have an arrangement with another firm or executive offices suite to use a conference room for an hourly charge, or meet at the client's business location. In fact, most business clients really like their attorney to make "house calls" and it is good PR because you get to see how the business operates on its home turf.

Since you practice in a city (Lincoln), I would imagine that there are executive suite setups that can rent you an office or conference room on an hourly basis for a client conference. Just build the cost into your fee.

Howard Raab, Fort Lauderdale, Florida

I've had a home office, and I've met with both criminal as well as family law clients in my home. I wouldn't hesitate to do that again. Frankly, the criminal clients were the least of my concern from a security standpoint. One time I had a walk-in, and in the course of conversation, it came up that he'd done time. "Oh, what for?" I asked. Murder.

"Oh, that's nice." He was a pleasant and well-behaved client.

From a safety standpoint, there's an illusion that a regular office setting is safer than your home office. Step back, and think of the San Francisco law firm which was blown away. And the lawyers shot in parking lots and outside of the courthouse. Leaving your office address off of your business cards isn't a guarantee of safety; anyone who's really determined can find out where you live.

Now, I realize that economic considerations come into play, but there are measures that any home officed lawyer should implement:

a. Have staff present during any meeting with a client. b. Establish regular office hours, and don't see clients after hours. c. Control the premises and maintain boundaries.

If I were a client meeting a lawyer, particularly for the first time, at a cafe or other non-office setting, I'd be chary. Here I'm being asked to turn over important papers, money, and, most importantly, my confidence and trust

to someone whose office setting, whether it's Corporate Towers or a home on Mayberry Lane, I've never seen. Heck, you know where I live, but I'm without a clue where to retrieve my file or where to have you served. I might be all too willing to meet with my local drug dealer at Denny's, but I want the privacy of an office setting to meet with my lawyer.

jennifer rose, Mexico

As I understand it, murder is mostly a one time crime, unlikely to be repeated (I'm not talking about serial killers or mass murderers like at Columbine). So the guy that murdered his wife might be an ideal (and LEAST dangerous) client.

Dick O'Connor

Last month I and a few others from my tennis club played tennis at San Quentin. We played with and against several lifers- including some in there for murder and kidnapping (We didn't get to play with Scott Peterson - as he is on death row and is isolated- besides as I recall he was into golf and fishing not tennis)

They seemed like the some of the nicest guys in the world. Several of us commented that they treated us a lot better than we are usually treated at our own courts

However- I still would not want to invite them into my home

Lew Wiener, California

COTE is right on the money. I have had no problems with my home office or having my home address on my marketing materials.

The way to avoid problems is to use your good judgment, not rely on an artificial boundary such as an external office.

Here in Chicago a few years back, a deposition was taking place in a divorce matter. The husband thought he was being taken advantage of in the proceeding, came into the deposition with a gun, and shot both opposing counsel as well as his own attorney.

If you think an external office provides better security than a home office, you are only fooling yourself. Again, assess the person and the type of case (family law cases tend to be much higher stress levels than criminal cases as a generality) before inviting them to your office - regardless of where it is.

Better still, meet them at a very public place, like a coffee shop, where you can have your privacy but others are there to observe in case things go awry.

TJ Thurston, Huntley, Illinois

I have an office (full-time, not executive suite) but I am at home T and Th afternoons and have met clients there. These are clients that I have been referred through friends or clients who I knew prior to them being clients. I have also met clients at outside places, especially to pick up documents. For example, I drive by a particular County hospital 1-2 times a week so when I got a client who worked there, I met her in the cafeteria once to pick up some paperwork and for her to give me a quick update on her situation. We were in a rather loud, crowded place where no one paid us any attention -- odd how sometimes a public place can be almost more private than an office.

I realize that is a little different than what you are asking, but the reason I am writing is that I have been very happily surprised at how little my clients care about my office. Sometimes they have walked in half an hour early and my office looks like an explosion of papers and there is a happy meal from my son still on the chair and I am all stuttering and wearing sheepskin clogs instead of heels -- and they all seem to care less. I am trying to prepare a little earlier for their consultations now! But it was a good lesson for me that while of course it matters to look professional, it does not seem to be the make-or-break point for many clients.

Amy Kleinpeter, Pasadena, California

If you check the archives you will see some extensive discussions of this subject.

Also if you used Gmail- you could save everything on Google's server and thus have your own easily searchable archives.

Lew Wiener, California

I agree that clients are usually less concerned with the office environment than we are, and than we think. Once we have their confidence, they are usually more focused on getting our undivided attention, no matter where that may be. For instance, the grocery store, the parking lot, your best friend's wedding..... remember.....people can be quite irreverent about where you are and what you're doing if they can talk to you. Even the more sophisticated clients. My gynecologist asked me real estate litigation questions during an initial consultation. LOL Nina S. Willis

Grant Griffiths from The Home Office Lawyer blog and I engaged in a little exchange that he turned into [a blog posting on this subject](#):

Might be useful.

Sheryl Schelin, North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina

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