

Popular Threads on Solosez

Home Office Lawyer Blues

I've been home lawyering for about 18 months, after spending 15-plus years with BigFirms. While I truly love working out of a home office, there's something I haven't figured out yet. How do I deal with the loneliness? I miss the daily interaction over a real water cooler (rather than the virtual one we have here). I miss going out to lunch with colleagues and complaining about the firm's management, or opposing counsel. I miss a Friday night happy hour at the local watering hole.

Though I try to get out for lunch as often as possible, it's usually by myself. Getting out helps, though, because at least there's human interaction.

The "double-whammy," if that's the right phrase, is that I'm not married and don't have kids. So, there's nobody coming home late in the day. It's a pretty solitary existence...

Any thoughts on how to beat the Home Office Lawyer Blues would be greatly appreciated.

ANONYMOUS LAWYER

You gotta sign up for marketing and networking events to get out and create your own water cooler. Chamber events have luncheons and evening mixers. Local bar associations have things. You can volunteer to take on a post. Or what about getting a dog? You can have mine, Sabrina. I've been trying to find her a good home in Sunny SoCal.

Jennifer N. Sawday

If you live in or near a big city, join the bar association and go to lunches, dinners, etc. If you live in a small town or rural area, make contact with other lawyers in the area. Offer to take them to lunch if they won't go voluntarily. Talk up the idea of getting together regularly with the other lawyers in the area. Then plan a monthly lunch or dinner. That will at least get you out once a month plus the individual visits with other lawyers. Add to it the fact that you get to market a bit with these other lawyers and let them know what you do, as well as finding out what they do.

Remember, you cannot just wait for social opportunities to drop in your lap, you have to go out and make them happen.

Good luck,

Frank J. Kautz, II

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I've been working out of my house for a little over a month now, and I hate it. I have kids that are home in the afternoon, and all this week, and when they are sick, and I am starting to feel sympathy for the mama hamster who probably devoured her offspring because they were making so much damn noise.

You are right about the water cooler/lunch thing, which is why I am starting to look at office space.

I've tried the asking lawyers to lunch thing and no one around here is at all interested. Most people are too busy.

Carolyn D'Agostino

Ask vendors for lunch. Payroll reps, accountants, etc. other good sources of referrals for whatever your practice area is... Chiropractors, etc.

Jennifer N. Sawday

Most of the lawyers that I know, and would be pleased to have lunch with, eat a sandwich at their desk unless they are in a meeting.

You'd probably be surprised at the number of solos that would be delighted to go to lunch--but who are afraid to ask people--after all, lawyers are supposed to be totally devoted to the law and work 24 hours a day.

Dick O'Connor

I hired a very part-time paralegal (2 mornings a week) and not only does he more than pay for himself by working on cases, it is SO GOOD to have someone to complain about opposing counsel and/or to exclaim together about how good our cases are. Yes, maybe we are a bit biased, but that was what I missed about working in a firm also.

I have found a few people to lunch with occasionally -- a friend who went solo a few months after me and another on maternity leave.

Also, I have joined the Young Alumni Board at my law school and have signed up for a few mentor-mentee things with law students as well.

Finally, I dropped membership to ABA and ABI and joined local groups instead. Even though I sometimes talk to one person for 3 minutes at a meeting, I just feel somehow grounded after being in a place with other similar lawyers.

-- Amy Kleinpeter

I'm in Chicago and except for the occasional chat while en route to the photocopier, I have as much contact with colleagues as when I was in a regular office. The reason is that I am active in bar associations and often

chat with other attorneys re joint cases or joint worries. I also am attorney for a number of not-for-profits. I never had lunch that often with others and do now as much as I did then. I suppose that it depends on what your local municipality has to offer.

Lynne R. Ostfeld

Local Bar Associations!!! Join one, Join more than one! I belong to a bunch of them. I get as much or as little collegial contact as I want. There's always some event going on just about every week, if not most days.

Los Angeles County Bar Association has an annual fee that allows you to go to numerous CLE events for free throughout the year. I go to those whenever I can. Most people at the events are friendly and eager to make a new acquaintance. I've always enjoyed myself at the events and leave them feeling reinvigorated, often filled with new ideas suggested by colleagues at the events.

It will cost you a pretty penny to join the bar associations, but the return on investment is more than monetary.

Cheers,

Gene Lee

That's my experience as well. Also, if one's home office is in the 'burbs, it's can be difficult to trek to business centers where many lawyers have their "real" offices.

Scott I. Barer

Meet people. Take them to lunch or dinner or for a cup of coffee.
Network.

Join a gym. Join the Kiwanis. Join Toastmasters. Join the Lion's club.
Volunteer as a big brother or big sister. Go to church.

Take a Carnegie course. Take a community education course. Exercise more vigorously.

Pick and choose from the above.

Darrell G. Stewart

I would try real hard to lunch, coffee break, afternoon break at the local watering hole, coffee shop, or whatever - maybe just the local gas station soda fountain. I have gotten thousands of dollars of work from the owner of the local coffee shop - and I don't drink coffee! I go by and get a decaf once in awhile, take my kids for a hot chocolate, etc.

Randy Birch

Darrell Stewart has a good point. Made all the more clear in the now old book "Bowling alone"

Local organizations abound, and most are looking for approachable lawyers. Service clubs that meet at appropriate times could include Rotary, Kiwanis, Optimists, Lions, Seratoma, Oddfellows, and others.

Local sororities Psi Iota Psi, Kappa Kappa Kappa (seems to be Indiana based), or a local "young womens" club are possibles.

Athletic stuff, bowling leagues, basketball or volleyball leagues, will get you away from the house afternoons or evenings, and put you in contact with real people.

Join the Elks, Moose, Eagles or other "stuffed animal" lodge.

Darrell mentioned church - there are hundreds of choices there. If you are a person of faith, find one.

Do not oversell yourself in these social settings. You are there for the humanity it provides, and the good you might be able to do others. Avoid "legal talk" and you will create relationships. Once you have relationships, you can get to the point of having the WC dicussion "darn that OC" conversation, because there are other lawyers there.

Ted A. Waggoner

I operated for a year out of my home and found it very hard to get motivated to finish things. I would sit at my home desk and then get up an go watch a movie thinking that I can work anytime I want, even 2:AM--it made me procrastinate more. I was so bored during the day being all by myself at home with the cats that I felt watching TV got me a little more connected with others. And then, when my wife came home after her job, I wasn't alone anymore and felt that I could work on my law stuff--only to find I was ignoring my wife. Near the end of the year I started feeling very depressed.

The solution--get out of the home office. Get an inexpensive office somewhere---like downtown. Go to it. You'll still be a little alone, but you'll have professionals nearby who you can harass during their cigarette breaks (especially if you do not smoke yourself hehehehe). Plus, you'll probably be more productive because you want to make use of the space you are leasing. I still have my home office--but I only use it for emergencies or for when I really, really want to work at home (which is rare). Its nice to have options though.

Anthony Wright

Good advice. When my law office was near the center of downtown I would (most days) go to the same bistro/coffee shop at some time before lunch (just before the lunch crowd hit en masse. After a while I had met most of the other people who did the same thing--and they introduced me

to more people, and so on ad inifinitum. I'm not saying that I got rich off of a lot of new business, but it helped--AND it enlivened my life, considerably.

Dick O'Connor

I have a little bit different take on all this. Even though I have an office, I work at home quite a bit of the time. My practice (mostly appellate) and my schoolwork (I'm a part-time grad student) tend to require big blocks of time where I hate to be interrupted. It's easy to run the practice from home anyway - legal assistant and I call/email/fax back and forth as necessary. In short, I like the solitude.

Some of the answers you are getting to how to conquer loneliness are much like answers to how to get business. I suggest to you that the two activities dovetail to a large extent. The answer to both is not to do mechanically what everyone says but to find out what has meaning to you. For example, while many people might want to go to lunch or happy hour, I'm just not social that way and can't really seem to make the time anyhow. But SWMBO and I enjoyed meeting some very nice people when we volunteered to work on a ballot initiative last year. Either activity mixes you in with people and can get you business.

Here's my suggestion: Reflect on what you want to do and pursue that. It might be getting involved in religious activities (not necessarily just attending church etc.), politics (change the world!), sports (a number of sezzers play some sport or referee), humanitarian relief, and on and on.

All this sounds like heavy stuff, but at least for me, working together with other people on a project or toward a goal fosters human contact and relationships much more than simply meeting for the purpose of meeting. Have you ever heard someone say that the journey's the thing, not the destination? It's the same sort of thought.

Jimmy Verner

I know this solution isn't for everyone, but...

Have you considered religious involvement?

I attend church every Sunday and it offers a lot of service projects and opportunities to interface with the community. Best of all, it's free (unless you count charitable contributions).

Just a suggestion.

Seth D. Rogers

Join a gym and go often, usually at the same time each day. Over time, you'll end up meeting the people who are there on the same schedule as you. Plus, you'll be in better shape and you'll be tired enough to sit at a desk and concentrate on work.

Scott Hodes

Home offices are not for everyone. If you are just not enjoying it, rent an inexpensive office in an office suite with other professionals.

Nina Kallen

Right--but a lot depends on the layout of the office, relative to the rest of the house. My office is at the end of an "L" shaped house, with access through the family room via double French doors.--a person has to INTEND to come into my office--you can't mjust wander through it. If I don't want to be disturbed, I simply close the French doors. I think that barring the house being on fire, that nobody would ever (or at least seldom) think about coming in.

Dick O'Connor

I second Jimmy's post. I am also the loaner type, hate socializing, and have always had trouble making friends. I lived in a small town (4-5000 people) for 9 years and hardly knew anyone, until I joined a citizen's group that was fighting city hall. Through that one activity I met all sorts of great people. I also had so much fun I ended up going off to law school, but that's another story.

Find a group doing something that interests you and get involved. Getting a dog is good advice too, you can talk to it all you want.

Abby Fuller

"Loaner"? Glad to hear it. Would you kindly lend me \$20,000? And don't expect me to feel like we're friends when you do.

Dick O'Connor

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