



The Pros and Cons of Practicing Law at a Coworking Space

As coworking spaces have increased in popularity and number over the past few years, more and more attorneys have decided to house their offices in communal office spaces. Coworking spaces provide several unique benefits to attorneys, but also present a few challenges for practicing law that attorneys should consider.

Is a coworking space a good option for your legal practice? Let's examine some of the pros and cons so you can make that determination for yourself.

PRO: WAY LESS ADMINISTRATIVE COSTS AND HEADACHES

Until recently, opening a law office required a significant up-front investment and a long-term lease. There was rent to pay, furnishings and office supplies to purchase, along with utilities and other extra costs to worry about. And often, commercial leases lacked the flexibility required by attorneys with growing (or shrinking) law firms.

Coworking spaces have put an end to these administrative headaches. Sure, there are still contracts to sign, but these contracts are for desks and small private offices—not for thousands of square feet. Coworking spaces are already furnished (some very nicely so) and most are stocked with basic office supplies. And any infrastructure costs—the kitchen appliances, the coffee/water/snacks, the wireless internet—are included in the monthly rent charge. Just bring your own computer and you're all set.

CON: WAY MORE CONCERN ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY AND ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE

Within the offices of most traditional law firms, attorneys and staff take for granted the minimal effort required to protect confidential client information and to preserve attorney-client privilege. And why wouldn't they? Everyone in the office is a partner, employee or contractor of the firm.

But practicing law in a coworking space presents situations that require attorneys to be more vigilant about protecting client information than they likely have ever been before. They will need to be sure to take calls from clients in enclosed rooms to prevent others from overhearing the contents of those calls. They will need to lock their computers whenever they leave their desks to prevent prying eyes from seeing what's on their screens. (They might want to even install privacy filters on their screens to prevent other people from seeing what they are seeing.) They will need to make sure they are in front of printers when documents are printed and should be careful to delete from the printer's memory any print jobs that have been transmitted but did not actually print.

It will be an adjustment, but once attorneys working at coworking spaces get into the habit of being vigilant about protecting client information, such efforts should become second nature.

PRO: INSTANT NETWORKING

Working at a coworking space provides organic networking opportunities for that space's members each and every day. But the magic really happens when an attorney works in a coworking space whose members tend to be the kinds of people and companies that would hire that attorney. Attorneys with practices focusing on advising startups, for example, often find networking at coworking spaces to be particularly fruitful. That shouldn't be a surprise, given the tendency of tech companies and startups to be members of coworking spaces.

Networking at coworking spaces isn't just for solos and small firm attorneys, either. Linklaters, a large global law firm, [entered into a partnership with a UK tech financing company](#) thanks in part to one of Linklaters' practice development people building a relationship with a company representative while the Linklaters employee worked out of a [WeWork](#). Linklaters rented space there explicitly to—wait for it—find and build relationships with tech startups.



CON: LACK OF AN IN-PERSON SUPPORT SYSTEM

One of the benefits of working with other attorneys—whether in a single firm or as part of an office shared by various attorneys—is the real-time, in-person support system created by those other attorneys. Questions about various aspects of the substance or the business of the law can be easily answered by someone an office or two away.

This support system ceases to exist when an attorney practices law in a coworking space by him or herself, or with only one or two colleagues. The questions that might have otherwise been answered within a few minutes by a trusted colleague now must be answered in other ways, such as via a LinkedIn® group or by searching online.

AN EASY DECISION FOR SOME ATTORNEYS. NOT SUCH AN EASY ONE FOR OTHERS.

Each attorney will have a unique set of circumstances through which the question of joining a coworking space must be viewed. But make no mistake. With the ever-increasing popularity (and ubiquity) of coworking spaces, more and more attorneys will likely be weighing these pros and cons in the years ahead.

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