



Reflecting

on the
First Year

By Christy L. Cahall

While most students packed their own essentials as they headed off to law school, I also had to pack for my seven-year-old son. As a single mom, I had no choice but to take my son to the law school library and juggle my studies with his homework. Needless to say, my educational path was unconventional. So why would practicing law be any different?

My hopes and dreams of being an attorney were dashed when I attempted the bar exam and was unsuccessful. I was devastated, but I had to move forward and raise my son. After a very lengthy break, I decided to try again. Why not? Aside from possibly bruising my ego, what did I have to lose?

True to form, my atypical journey continued with the world shutting down due to COVID-19. I had already settled into working from home and expected to take the bar exam under unique testing conditions. However, when the first day of the exam arrived, the reality that I was taking it during a pandemic hit me like a ton of bricks, which increased my anxiety. Taking an exam that would determine the trajectory of my life with the threat of death lingering in the air was less than ideal. Trying to issue spot, apply the law, and write a legible response is difficult enough. How do you remain calm when you add wearing a mask, a plastic partition on the desk, and instructions to socially distance to the equation? It was challenging, but all of us survived. When the exam was finished, I was more than happy that it was over. But I was particularly relieved that I walked away from the exam without contracting COVID-19.



Months later my life changed in the blink of an eye. Results were released, and I passed the bar exam. I could finally practice law. I would be sworn in, virtually, of course. There, I was being sworn in from the comfort of my home office. Along with all of the other excited new attorneys, I logged into the ceremony from a home computer. Naturally, I decorated my background for the occasion. I did not want the excitement of the event to be diminished because it was being conducted virtually. The Nevada Supreme Court Justices were present and on my computer screen, and all were wearing masks pursuant to CDC guidelines. My family, including my dog, were in the living room watching it all on my television. It was all very surreal but worked out well.

Now, I was off to the races and confident I could work from home because I had been doing it for more than one year. I quickly realized, however, that the support a newly licensed attorney traditionally receives in an office setting was no longer present. The ability to quickly meet in a senior attorney's office if I needed advice on a matter was not an option. Building relationships and rapport over lunches or in the break room was no longer on the table. If I was going to succeed, I knew I had to find the support I needed in other, less traditional ways. I also knew I had to be intentional with my interactions with my general counsel, as well as with my clients. I had to embrace a virtual world and was determined to do so, even with my dog barking at delivery drivers or neighbors in the background.



I could not rely on email alone. I utilized virtual meeting and instant messaging software and started placing phone calls again because seeing someone or being able to converse in real time added a human element that made me feel connected to others. I frequently reached out to my general counsel using virtual meeting rooms. I scheduled more standing meetings and calls with my clients than I likely would have if I were in a physical office. I also reached out to attorneys who I did not work with on a day-to-day basis in order to obtain different viewpoints and build rapport. The days of quick questions by the water cooler were gone, so I learned to maneuver differently.

Once I was comfortable entering the physical world again, I arranged lunches with small groups of colleagues so that I could build relationships, stay connected, and learn from seasoned attorneys. I also took full advantage of the Transitioning into Practice Mentorship program by scheduling regular meetings with my mentor and asking as many questions as I could. In fact, I am still in contact with my mentor today.



Being new to the gaming industry, I wanted to attend Nevada Gaming Control Board meetings to learn more about the application of gaming regulations and familiarize myself with the licensure process. As COVID-19 refused to leave us, the hearings were made available online. Initially, I was not convinced I would be able to learn from watching virtual hearings. Much to my surprise, the virtual format proved to be greatly beneficial. I could research the relevant gaming regulations on one monitor while watching hearings on the other, which made it easier to understand the issues. I also saved time by not having to drive anywhere and could easily turn to my other matters after hearings concluded.

As a transactional lawyer, the one aspect of my career that I thought would be fairly easy to handle virtually was negotiating contacts. Despite technological hurdles, which seemed to occur at the worst times, it turns out I



was correct. I did not need a traditional conference room or office to advocate for and represent my client. Virtual meeting rooms worked just fine, and they were germ free.

As I reflect upon my first year of practice, I realize I gained valuable experience and knowledge. I think one of the most important lessons was learning not to be afraid of challenges. I now welcome challenges and view them as an opportunity to learn and grow professionally and personally. With that in mind, I look forward to my journey ahead.



Christy L. Cahall is in-house counsel for Aristocrat Technologies, Inc. focusing on commercial transactions with respect to Class III gaming. Christy also serves as Chair of the legal department's Diversity & Inclusion Committee at Aristocrat. Christy is a graduate of the University of Miami School of Law and University of Nevada, Las Vegas. In her spare time, she enjoys cuddling with her dog, Nala, and eating delicious food with family and friends.