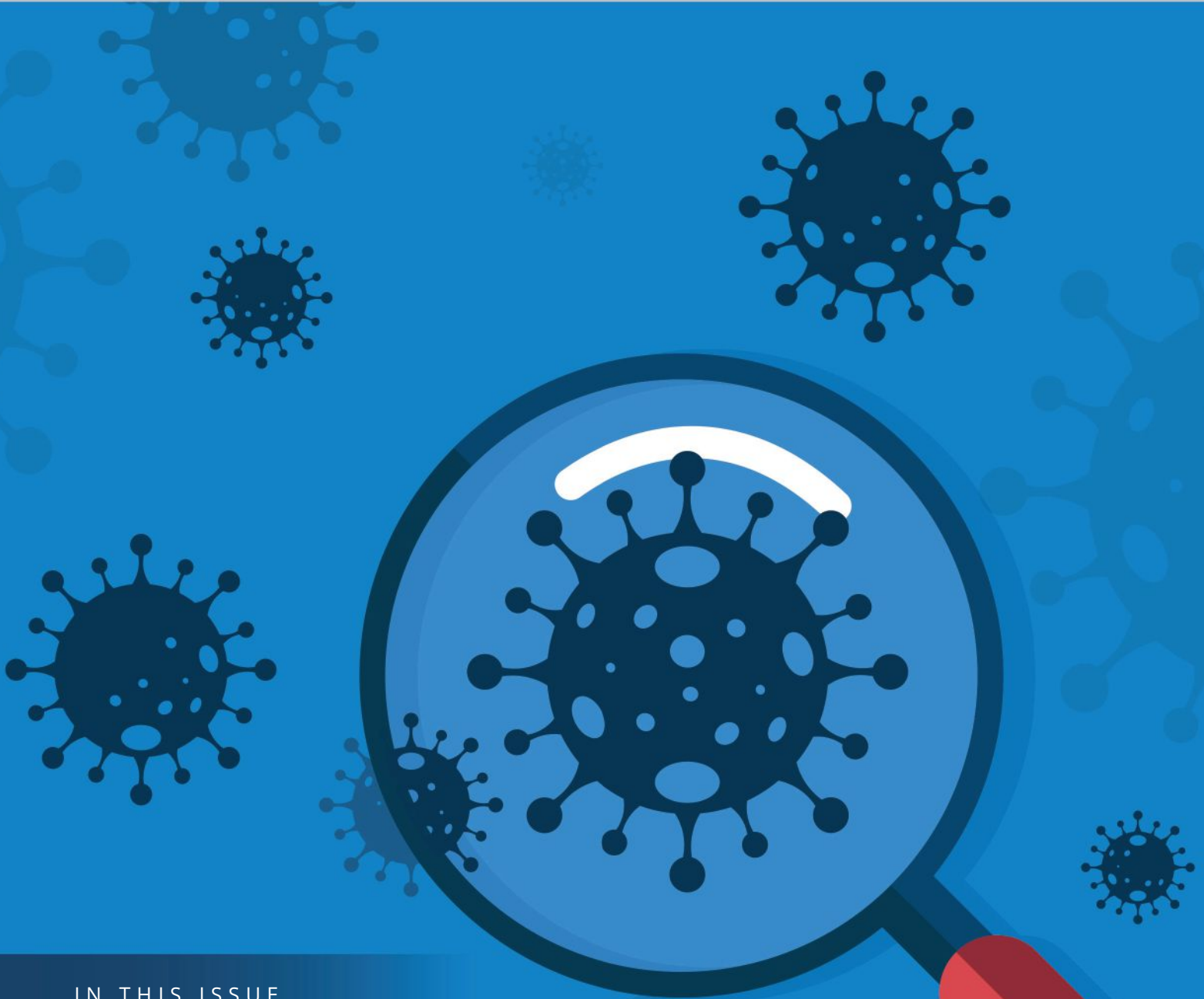


KENTUCKY BAR ASSOCIATION

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IN THIS ISSUE

**Pivot: The Ever-Changing  
Response to COVID-19**

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# Connectedness

Lawyering is not a solitary pursuit—which is not say to that it can't be lonely.

Law firms are dedicated to the notion that there is strength in numbers. Public sector attorneys see their efforts reflected each day in a whirl of both new and familiar faces. Solo practitioners may sometimes wish they had more “alone time” in which to gather their thoughts, but they seek out clients, brush elbows with professional friends and foes alike, and play to the gallery just like everyone else. When any of us make arguments, there's always someone to listen.

Have all the good arguments already been made? Are there any truly novel ways to make a case anymore? We're all familiar with the assertion that a limitless supply of monkeys, banging away at an infinite number of computer keyboards, would eventually reproduce all the works of Shakespeare. But good luck billing the client for that many hours, or obtaining that many continuances from the judge. Various estimates put the number of words in the

English language at somewhere between 150,000 and 200,000. No one person can credibly claim to know them all—even patent attorneys.

Randomness alone won't get the job done. Lawyers come up with fresh perspectives on an all-too-familiar fact pattern the same way that popular musicians come up with fresh melodies when confined to only 12 standard notes in an octave. They bounce ideas off one another. They see what resonates. They look for the raised eyebrow, the relaxed exhalation, the knowing smile. The goal of each exercise is the same. Finally, we think we've got something familiar enough to be accepted, but different enough to impress. Now is anyone going to buy it?

However brilliant lawyers may be as individuals, they profit most from connectedness. Call it collective consciousness, shared intelligence, the hive mind. When everything you do is ultimately designed to

convince someone to share your point of view, while other groups of bright people are getting paid big money to point out that you just don't get it, you learn to value collegial input very quickly. It also doesn't hurt that everyone gets to remember who you are when it comes time to refer a case, hire out-of-firm co-counsel, or share a useful tip that might just change the outcome of your next solo venture.

It would do a disservice to the very spirit of lawyer mental health and wellness to restrict such analyses to what happens in the workplace. If that's where we get all of our connectedness, it's going to catch up with us eventually. Getting money in exchange for work doesn't just allow us to pay our mortgages, meet our payrolls, and—for better or for worse—dress like a lawyer. It also reminds us that the time we sink into legal practice is time for which we can be, should be, and need to be compensated, because we all have other things

to do, other places to go, and in particular other people to see.

This is not a segue, as one might anticipate, into several additional paragraphs that extoll the joys of romance. We can save that column for some time in the spring. Instead, let's take a look at connectedness of a more prosaic nature.

Returning to an earlier analogy, when popular musicians come off the road after a lengthy series of engagements, the last thing they really feel like chasing down—at least for a good while—is the company of others. The same can be said of lawyers after a week or two of trial. Win, lose, or draw, both groups leave it all on the stage if they have any realistic hopes of being invited back. Monosyllabic greetings and thousand-mile stares are fairly reliable symptoms that friends and significant others may find fairly difficult to understand at first. Those who kept the home fires burning may fleetingly wonder if next time they should just torch all of our possessions out on the front lawn.

This grumpy, asocial behavior typically doesn't last for long. Pretty soon we remember what really matters. This is helped along by the realization that although they listen politely, no one really cares which clever courtroom tactics actually turned the tide, as long as telling the story seems to make us happy. Someone actually likes us. Who knows why? Does that matter? There are other voices in our lives again. Connectedness is a reward in and of itself, not just a way to prosper professionally or gain entrée to the material advantages of a sizeable social network.

One way to gauge the value of connectedness is to consider the effects of a lack of interaction with others. Decades ago, behavioral scientists began the practice of dragooning first-year undergraduates—a suspect class if there ever was one—into

submerged isolation chambers in order to determine the effects of prolonged isolation. Electrodes were attached, dials spun, and gauges rose and fell. Claustrophobes were weeded out in advance, and safety measures were carefully tested and applied. The scientists settled in for a long wait.

They didn't have to wait long. When the students came up for air, it wasn't due to a sense of panic or fear; instead, they assumed that rather than just minutes they'd been out of touch for hours. Time had slowed virtually to a standstill, and instead of blissful slumber or nostalgic reverie, what research subjects often reported were outright delusions and hallucinations. Despite the ready willingness of students of that era to pay good money to experience such phenomena in the relative comfort of their own dormitories, no one showed any real passion for being lowered once more beneath the waves. The human brain just isn't built for isolation.

Study after study paints an eminently convincing picture of increased personal satisfaction, more robust health, and greater longevity as a result of connectedness. We need look no further than what occurred during the recent pandemic for evidence of the value of connectedness in our own lives. How good it was to see friends and colleagues together once again after a lengthy absence, if only on a flickering screen.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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