



What Is Our New Normal?

By: Sheryl Loesch, Clerk of Court

Here we are, nearly 18 months since experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are still talking about it. I doubt any of us could have imagined this happening in our lifetime, especially in this age of medical advances. The pandemic has touched every aspect of our lives, and it is likely each of us has a story to tell.

Fortunately, progress has been made in protecting us all from this virus, and we now find ourselves trying to return to normal. But, as we do so, most people are wondering: just what is the new normal? Although the pandemic has impacted each of us in numerous ways—physically, mentally, and financially—I am choosing to look forward and consider the positives that have come out of this otherwise dire situation. I'm choosing to make lemonade from the lemons.

We are very fortunate to work in a court system in the United States. Many of you know that I am the current President of the International Association for Court Administration, otherwise known as IACA. I work with a Board of Directors made up of judges and court administrators in judiciaries around the globe. So I am familiar with how foreign judiciaries have functioned throughout the pandemic.

While all courts were caught off guard by this pandemic, many did not have the capacity to function and meet the needs of the public they serve. Things we take for granted—a stable internet provider, state-of-the-art technological equipment, personal protective equipment—were not readily available in many countries. In order to have justice served, some judges actually held court in metal storage containers that were strategically placed throughout the areas they served. In many countries, even though internet service was available, it was not robust enough to support the demand and was therefore rendered unstable and unreliable, making both remote court proceedings and remote work nearly impossible.

One thing that every court had in common, though, regardless of the court's respective circumstances, was the commitment to dispense justice. Judges and court

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staff went to great lengths to see that justice continued to be dispensed—and they were adamant about doing everything in their power to keep court operations going in whatever capacity they could. This is a true testament to the commitment and passion judges and court staff have for the work they do. They realize the importance. They realize that what they do impacts people’s lives. At the end of this message, I am including some pictures from the Supreme Court in the Philippines that show the dedication of court staff.

In our Court, we learned how to further expand the use of technology to continue functioning. We already knew the importance of teamwork. The strong sense of “team” that our Court is known for helped keep things running smoothly even though we were apart from one another. We had a renewed appreciation for our families and our pets (yes, we are a Court of true pet lovers!). For me, when my home internet wasn’t the fastest at the moment I needed it, or when my Zoom screen would lag, instead of getting annoyed, I tried to appreciate what we have available to us here in the United States.

I was thankful that I was not facing what court administrators had to face in other countries. My hope is that the appreciation I felt will continue for all of us as we move into whatever will be our “new normal.”

I, for one, am looking forward to everyone returning to work so we can all be together again. There definitely is light at the end of the tunnel.

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