

SHOP TALK

Q&A

More people thinking about the end

Since the coronavirus pandemic began spreading in the United States, estate planning attorney Linda Cammuso has seen a noticeable increase in clients seeking out her services for themselves and their businesses.

How was the firm doing prior to the pandemic?

Our firm specializes in estate planning and related areas: wills, trusts, powers of attorney, elder law, Medicare applications, business succession planning.

Prior to the pandemic, we have been in a growth mode for our entire existence. Since 2009, we've doubled our staffing and probably doubled our gross revenue. We've acquired two law firms and developed the satellite office arrangement to have more geographic reach.

How has business changed in the last few months?

We've seen surges since the end of February and beginning of March, in a couple of ways. It appears everyone's eyes have been opened about the importance of being prepared in life.

One of the most notable things we've seen is the number of frontline workers who reached out to establish routine estate planning documents. They want something in place just in case they get ill. They see the struggles of patients who don't have that paperwork in place, and they want to make sure it doesn't happen to them.

We've also had people who are social distancing at home, who have time on their hands and want to accomplish estate planning. Most people, in the daily grind of life, just can't make the time. As we've all hit this lull in life, people are getting around to things like estate planning they've been meaning to get to.

Has coronavirus impacted your clients directly?

We've had a number of clients pass away from the coronavirus, and their families have reached out to get their affairs in order. It has maybe been a half dozen or so of our clients who have passed away.

Why do you think more people are seeking you out?

Fundamentally, when people come to us for estate planning, it is just for peace of mind. When people are having to wear masks and gloves to the grocery store, they are operating at a heightened sense. Having their estate planning in place is just a different kind of protection.

Are your operations impacted at all?

There are a lot of things you normally do when someone passes away, like going to banks and the courts. Now, it is taking longer to deal with these matters, because these organizations just aren't moving as quickly as they normally do, as they responsibly follow the rules of social distancing.

Our signing meetings have been challenging, because they require notaries and everyone to be in the same room. We clean everything and set it up so people can still be six feet apart, but it is difficult. Just a few days ago, virtual notarization was made legal in Massachusetts. People can now sign in the safety of their own homes. We've yet to use it, because it literally just went into effect.

How have your revenues changed?

As routine and non-priority things have leveled off, the surge has taken its place. We've at least held steady. Our day-to-day schedule might feel lighter because we don't have the same amount of foot traffic in the office or us speaking at community events, but our workload has been very steady with those other aspects of our business.

We have worked hard to cultivate a really flexible work environment, so our staff was more comfortable jumping right into working remotely. We reduced hours for a few staff members, and that was mostly to account for fewer in-person meetings in the office, as well as accommodating our staff members' own health and family concerns. Right now, we anticipate no changes in our staffing. Our core focus from the start has been to emerge on the other side of the pandemic with as little impact on our staff and our services as possible. **W**

This interview was conducted and edited for length and clarity by Brad Kane, WBJ editor.



Linda Cammuso

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Estate Preservation Law Offices,
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Satellite offices: Leominster,
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Founded: 2009

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Cammuso's birthplace: Worcester

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political science from Assumption
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