

Coping With A Pandemic: Crowell's Michelle Coleman

(April 8, 2020, 1:22 PM EDT)

With distancing and isolation now the norm during the COVID-19 pandemic, Law360 is sharing reactions from around the business and legal community.

Today's perspective comes from Michelle D. Coleman, a Washington, D.C.-based counsel in the government contracts group at Crowell & Moring LLP.



Michelle Coleman

What challenges has the pandemic created in your specific area of work?

My work involves companies that support the federal government. The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting every contractor, its employees, and the global supply chain in significant ways. Companies are trying to balance so many things — employee safety, customer demands, supply chain disruption, state-by-state shelter-in-place orders, and so much more.

Many clients have “crisis management playbooks” but almost none of them are particularly relevant to this situation. We are living in unprecedented times. The virus and the guidance related to flattening the curve changes by the hour.

Many of our clients are a part of the defense industrial base, which is considered critical infrastructure by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. As critical infrastructure, many of our clients have a special obligation to continue performing amid this national emergency. Therefore, our clients seek urgent practical advice on how to maintain critical operations while balancing health and safety.

Perhaps the most notable challenge for us as outside trusted advisers is to be able to think through the cascading series of issues around the clock with a constantly changing set of rules and priorities. We are working with senior company leaders making decisions that will have impacts for years to come.

How are you and your family adapting at home?

Managing work and kids is a balancing act for all professionals, even without COVID-19. The difference is having everyone at home all day. My husband and I are constantly juggling meeting the needs of our family while meeting the needs of our respective clients.

Thankfully, we have someone that helps with the kids during a portion of the day, but for the other times, we split duties and schedule family time/activities/duties, which allows us to balance work and

family. I am very thankful to be a part of a firm that focuses on clients' needs while ensuring the health and well-being of its attorneys and staff, which is important during a crisis.

What is the most creative or productive response to the crisis you've witnessed so far?

It has been fascinating to see clients who are taking existing capabilities and products and figuring out how to deploy them in novel ways to help with the pandemic. We are working with companies to figure out how to turn a traditional manufacturing line of a product into something that is needed on the front lines to combat COVID-19, e.g., the creation of masks or ventilators. There are many very interesting legal issues that go along with this real-time product pivot.

The opinions expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the organization, its clients, or Portfolio Media Inc., or any of its or their respective affiliates. This article is for general information purposes and is not intended to be and should not be taken as legal advice.