

They were also working from home, with immediate access to emails demanding immediate responses. One of the first tasks was to set expectations of response times.

For some of us, the tech produced its own challenges. But with unexpected tech support from my elder son, who had decamped from London to work from home, I soon got to grips with 3 screens and Zoom!

One of the difficulties has been to try not to be glued permanently to your keyboard; to try and find that thinking time and not get drawn into quick exchanges of emails without having a chance to reflect. It also became difficult to separate work from home life and take a break – after all what else was there to do apart from work?

The firm already had a committee looking after the wellbeing of staff called ‘Wellness & Gunn’. They got into gear; with Monday Motivators; words of encouragement and positivity to start the week. With several members of the Family Team having to juggle home-schooling with work; we tried to involve families in activities; for example, getting the children of various team members to write and take part in our weekly Zoom quiz. We also introduced online Pilates.

As we come out of the pandemic and look to the future, we have introduced a Hybrid Working Model, but in the last 18 months, allowed staff flexibility; working core hours and largely from home.

The firm obtained some funding from the Welsh Government to help develop and grow the business including a project which we called ‘Blast Off’, where clients can now book Zoom appointments online at the click of a button.

We introduced what we call ‘Blueprint’, a one-off piece of advice for a fixed fee.

The firm applied for ‘Great Place to Work’ status and achieved it following a wide survey of all staff.

The activities the firm has undertaken has made it easier to recruit new staff in a difficult recruitment market and the Family Team has grown.

With everybody now working online and at their laptops, increasing new business enquiries come via the website. We took the decision to outsource our live chat and have clients from a much broader geographic base. That in itself has brought challenges; no longer engaging with other lawyers you know in the area and the temptation to “hide” behind emails. That is where membership of Resolution has come to the fore. When dealing with firms that I have never dealt with before, I first look at the lawyer’s profile on the Resolution website and see whether or not they are members and accredited specialists. The second thing I do is pick up the phone and try to speak to the other lawyer to start to build up that rapport.

But, despite all this, I do miss the day-to-day connection with fellow family law professionals; the chats at Court while waiting and the gossip of the robing room.

In short, life will never be the same again, but in many respects the pandemic has had a positive impact on the work and growth of the Family Team at Watkins & Gunn. Whilst we all hope that we will be over the pandemic, the lessons learnt, the skills gained, and the resourcefulness of the individuals and the team have ensured not just survival but being better and stronger for it and for that I am immensely proud.



*Sophie Hughes is Head of the Family Law Team and a Director at Watkins and Gunn, a 3-office practice in South East Wales. She is an Accredited Specialist of Resolution and a Collaborative Practitioner.*