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## Vacationing for lawyers great misnomer in age of cellphone

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The Vacationing Lawyer.

In concept, it would stir envy for the practitioner contrarian enough to use it as an autobiography title. In practice, it's an oxymoron.

I'm just back from a long-planned 10-day African getaway, and rather than actually getting away, it sure felt like work stowed away. I was expecting more from the international customs officials, but without a ticket or even an invitation, work was waved right through.

It's old hat by now to complain about ubiquitous cellphones and tablets, borderless email and texting, and the long reach of the office.

Per bestselling author Curt Steinhorst, we check our cellphones every 4.3 minutes and receive more than 200 emails per day. (It's slightly off-topic, but Steinhorst also notes we spend 60% more time at home connected to digital devices than conversing with our significant others.)

The point is accessibility is expected, and for most lawyers, it's taken for granted. However, it's one thing for clients, cases or colleagues to crash a Door County golf trip or interrupt a Florida beach excursion; it's quite another when they all tag along across the Atlantic to the very origin of civilization.

The calendar promised a relatively quiet April stretch. It lied.

We barely begin our safari when my opponent from an arbitration completed some three weeks earlier files an unexpected motion to reconsider or amend the award. Before I can even read the (unreasonably lengthy) brief and appendix, the arbitrator directs a response filed within seven days.

Such an aggressive schedule would be pushing it were the case file and all the resources of the office available, but from the bush?

Naturally, I email to explain my out-of-the-country status and humbly seek an extension. The routine request meets no opposition. Yet, the arbitrator makes no response.

Instead, we remain scheduled for a telephonic status conference the day after I get back. Perhaps he just wants to hear tales of leopards dragging prey up a tree. Maybe I'll offer to share my pictures.

Next, a response brief gets filed to the amicus curie (or "friend of the court") brief submitted in the appellate court by some national associations supporting our cause. Contrary to earlier advice received, our local counsel now suggests that we, not the amici, file a short reply.

While the family sleeps, I edit the freshly drafted reply, but am unable to prevent the effort from intruding on the next day's activities. This doesn't go over big with my traveling companions. ("See, Mom? I knew it. He can't help himself.")

Meanwhile, it turns out that as I watched that hungry leopard hoist his zebra corpse up a marula tree, clients were forwarding contracts for review. These are the same contracts promised weeks earlier.

Accordingly, inspired by the leopard, I growled at these clients and told them in no uncertain terms that their legal needs would have to wait until after I returned.

Sure, and next I swore off beer and pizza.

Skipping breakfast, I revise the contracts and email them back, reminding myself that contract review paid the African airfare. Still, I tell my kids it will not pay for the "authentic" African animal sculptures they admire.

Leaving the safari and my laptop behind, I am ready to make my long walk to freedom by heading to a renowned local winery. It is then that my first African cellphone call arrives, and it appears to come from Chicago. I figure a dozen of the coveted sculptures could likely be purchased for the price of answering this call. Besides, it's probably coming from nearby Nigeria with an incredible investment opportunity.

I pick it up.

Turns out it was worse than a solicitor. It was my doctor, reminding me to take my anti-malaria meds. A fine time to think of it, doc. Sort of like remembering the trial exhibits after the jury starts deliberating.

Several African glasses of wine later, as the Talking Heads serenade us at the last vineyard with "There's a party in my mind, and I hope it never stops," the Firm's recruiting efforts suddenly require attention from 8,500 miles away. Unlike a good mind party, whenever the ongoing beast that is recruiting comes to mind, I long for the day it stops.

Reminiscent of college football prospects, lateral recruits are seemingly targeted nonstop. Headhunters must always have access and recruiting strategies must constantly be developed and updated, apparently even from the world's oldest inhabited continent.

Inexplicably, I now know that the best opportunities present only upon crossing the international date line.

With a vengeance, the Firm emails erupt as all constituencies weigh in. Questions with seemingly two possible answers stir no fewer than five different responses.

Experience has shown lateral recruiting is about as scientific as it is surefire and approaches taken to landing prime candidates are often riddled with contradictions.

Smaller firms market themselves as ideal environments for candidates seeking to advance their careers and build their books of business, yet their members suspiciously probe the decision to leave a current gig.

Adding practice areas is frequently discussed, but when a well-qualified candidate emerges with experience in a diverse field, the “synergies” associated with such a move are routinely second-guessed.

It’s clear where all this is headed. Jet lag, schmet lag, the day I get back I’m ensconced in Firm recruiting meetings.

A true vacation beyond reach of the office remains possible, I am told. Certain islands and mountain ranges still exist impervious to cellphone towers and email. Before these sanctuaries too are breached and every corner of the globe confronts connectivity, vacationing lawyers must consider racing to Tristan de Cunha Island or Yakutat, Alaska, to find true refuge.

Otherwise, vacations, even of the rare intercontinental variety, can no longer promise carefree dalliances from the office. At best, they amount to mere relocations of the office, enabling — or requiring — working with extreme remoteness.

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