

CORONAVIRUS, JASPRIT SAHNSI (SELECTA): «THIS PERIOD WILL MAKE US ROBUST LAWYERS»

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Home office, force majeure clauses, new tasks: for in-house lawyers these were probably the main implications during Covid-19 pandemic. As it was for Jasprit Sahnsi, Deputy General Counsel at Selecta and Board Member at Association of Corporate Counsel Europe. She shares her personal experience with *Legalcommunity.ch*, taking part to [«how are you coping with the pandemic»](#) initiative, and underlying how human aspect is key in keeping up with this crisis.

What has been the major impact in your work?

I am used to working in a fast-paced environment where any given day is not the same. However, since the coronavirus which hit Switzerland just over 2 months ago I feel that I am having to be more versatile in my approach in any given topic and also think on my feet about non-legal issues. Our colleagues have many urgent requests that have a real impact on our businesses and there is pressure to ensure we deliver the most succinct and practical advice that can be used in commercial discussions. The ACC did a recent Covid-19 member [flash poll](#), which provided insights

on the challenges that in-house legal departments are facing as a result of Covid-19.

What opportunities do you foresee for the legal field?

One of the opportunities I see for in-house counsel is to have a seat at the table during this pandemic. Businesses need solution orientated lawyers that can advice on the law but also strategise on how risks can be minimised during this unprecedented period. I believe the legal function is no longer the gate keepers but the influencers that help shape our company's future and are under the spotlight to shine as a true business leader. The ACC have been advocating for Lawyers to have Seat at the Table and further details can be found [here](#).

And threats?

The threats of not being able to deliver as a business leader during this critical period can mean that you will not be that trusted advisor which goes to the heart of an in-house counsel.

How are you coping with remote working?

As an in-house legal function we are used to being flexible and adapting to our environment. Often we are able to locate important documents online at any time of the day! What no one could have prepared me for was working from home for this period of time and having my husband working (often on conference calls) and 2 children in the house. When I look back to the first weeks I remember it as a blur as it was quite difficult, managing the demands of work, looking after a 7 year old and a 3 year old and still finding time to feed the family!

What solution have you adopted?

The situation meant we had to work well as a family and that's what we did – my husband and I took it in turns to look after the children but most of the time our work schedules conflicted and luckily our daughters were happy to play in the garden and dress up in their array of costumes! Now my children are back at school and nursery, my husband and I are working from home as if it is our new norm.

How do you imagine the legal field after Covid-19?

Whether you are part of a large legal team or a small team, whether you are a specialist or a generalist, this period will make us robust lawyers and shape us for future emergencies. I believe we will be utilising technology more within our functions and for some companies this will be very new. We will be asked to do more with less travel and face to face meetings, and this is where our key skillset of being a people's person will come into play as we will need it more than ever when connecting with our stakeholders over zoom calls. We will focus on creating digital systems which allow us to free up precious time so that we can spend that on quality legal work and being the sound business advisor.

As an in-house lawyer what is your personal takeaway till now?

Whilst I believe we can spend a lot of time reviewing existing contracts for force majeure clauses and other ways to minimise any exposure on the business, ultimately, I believe it is about being a human being when negotiating with the other side. My preference is the non-aggressive negotiator who uses their EQ in this difficult time, and I believe these are the business partners that will succeed as they will be remembered for listening and understanding.

A particular story you want to share...

A few days before lock down I was due to travel to the UK to provide some contract training to our sales team. That training was of course cancelled as the situation was very volatile. A week on, I found myself in a situation whereby the sales community had so many questions about existing and new contracts and how to deal with force majeure. I did something very impromptu – I decided to

hold a legal clinic for a slot of 1 hour a week on zoom where anyone could join the call from the sales community and there was no agenda, no slides, just the camera, the sales community and me! It was fantastic – it allowed me to answer all their burning questions and also allowed for other colleagues to learn from one another. I was able to speak in their language without any legal jargon, the fact I had spent time on the ground as a merchandiser filling coffee machines and replenishing vending machines meant I understood their queries all the better. There was a lot of practical and pragmatic answers for the business community to go away and feel empowered to respond to their respective customers. This became a regular event for a few weeks where the business folks would drop in and ask questions – this proved the beginning of many important relationships I have since built.