



John Remsen:

Gerry Riskin is a former managing partner in Canada and Hong Kong and is the chair of Edge International, an international global consultancy to the legal profession. Gerry and the I have been acquaintances for a long time, but friends in more recent years: he's been on our faculty and really dispenses some good-wise advice to firm leaders... so we thought we would end our day inviting Gerry to join our wrap up.

Gerry has asked for about seven minutes or so to talk about leadership, how important leadership is and *agility as a firm leader in the face of fragility*. So, Gerry, let me give you the microphone for a bit here.

Gerry Riskin:

A quick hat tip to you, John Remsen, and Uri Gutfreund for the imagination required to conduct this Virtual Managing Partner Forum WEBINAR and keeping it so on track. Great Job!

I was asked to do a paper for the ABA, which will appear in the Law Practice Management Magazine... I called it ***Leadership: Agility in the Face of Fragility***.

The law firm leaders here today do not need a lesson on agility. They do respond, they do think, they do adapt, they are resilient. Now, they want tips and ideas and expertise, which this seminar has afforded them so well today. But they're pretty good at that. The other part of the equation is *fragility*. And *fragility* is defined as the *quality of being delicate or vulnerable*. Now (presenters) [Dr. Sharon Meit Abrahams](#) and Don Smith did allude to that in many ways in the last session, beautifully so, but that's where I want to focus for the moment. We all know if you've hung out with Managing Partner Forum, you know PhD psychologist Dr. Larry Richard really well (find him at his amazing website [LawyerBrain.com](#)). Larry says the following (I took this from him a recent interview):

We as lawyers have a high need for predictability and we don't like not having predictability. And there are three kinds of changes that are devastating to us. Change number one, is change that comes without warning. Change number two is, change which takes away our control. Change number three is, change which has the possibility of injury or even death.

So, where the heck are we right now on that checklist? Now you have got some feedback from the polling you do and the surveys you do, and I talk of course to my clients, managing partners and so on.

Anyway, you ask a good managing partner, maybe even some of who are here today:

"How are you doing?" Answer: "Okay"

"How's the firm doing?" Answer: "Not bad"

"How will the firm weather this pandemic?" Answer: ""We're doing pretty well... pretty well.""



I call **baloney**, big time, to all those answers. And it's not believe me, because I don't respect and cherish those people, it's just that, folks, we are in a state of self-deception. I'm going to go to predictability for a moment because I made a list. Well, what can we predict right now? And I'm going to do this quickly...

Here's some things that we cannot predict:

Social unrest. All the trends in health regulation. In one place it's the county, in another place it's a city, in another place it's a state or a province in another place where Uri is right now, Israel, it's in lockdown. I mean, the point of the matter is that we've got a trillion different regulators giving us a trillion different bits of information. So that's pretty uncertain.

Schools. Are they open or are they closed? And if they are open, are they closing again because there's a little problem and then are they going to open again?

A vaccine. Oh, my goodness. If you really study the vaccine scene, you'll see that some of these vaccines if really efficacious, will have to be stored at minus 80 Fahrenheit. Nobody has the equipment to store this stuff at minus 80 Fahrenheit. I'm not going to go into the problem or the solution. It's just that, will we have a vaccine? How many shots will we need over what period of time? Will it last and how long? And when, if we need a booster, by when? All sorts of uncertainty and unknown.

Do we have an effective **medical treatment** if we get sick? People are trying, trying their hardest and we've got some potentials. But no, we don't have a bullet yet.

Hospital beds. I live in a little country that doesn't have an ICU, but never mind me. It's not all about me it's about you. You may be in a different city, a different small town, whatever, where the hospital facilities for you are very questionable or challenged with what the demand is.

Protective equipment. You think we've all got protective equipment? As of yesterday, there were doctors crying out that they did not have the protective equipment they need.

Geographical upheaval. People are moving from some of these delicious cities we've talked about because they figured out, they can work remotely, and they aren't staying. Okay? We have staff seeking to work remotely, even some of your staff when they find out they can get a delicious job remotely might want to leave.

Working from home. Oh my God. Is the chair at home as comfortable as the chair in the office? Maybe yours is managing partner, because you've got the resources to have a nice chair, but there are people at both ends of a living room, dining room table, two spouses. One of them is worried about the three-year-old. They're worried about not being on video calls at the same time because they need quiet. It's madness for them.

People have **aging relatives** that somehow have been hit so hard in some of these facilities that have been so vulnerable.

Some **adult kids are moving home.** Uh-huh (affirmative). Even the ones that didn't move out and some other ones are moving back.

Spouses and kids, some of them are losing jobs.



This government money that we talked about earlier in the conference today, and by the way, brilliant, brilliant, brilliant question wasn't it? Uri liked it. About, "Hey, how are firms going to account for the money?" Depends on culture and so on. But anyway, guess what? That assistance is going to end. There is not an endless faucet. And finally,

Office space. Are people coming back to the office? Are they staying away from the office? Do we want them to come back to the office? Are we reimagining that?

That was a partial list I just went through of things that I'm sorry, are not predictable. What does this mean?

If we're not in self-deception and if we actually engaged in realizing what we're facing, the unpredictability and those changes, there is an element of clinical depression for many. There is an element of anxiety. There is drug and alcohol abuse. There is family breakdown. There is I'm sorry, suicide. Now, the ABA's had a taskforce. The American Bar Association has been thinking about wellbeing for a long time. I'm not going to get into all that. But the point of the matter is that they've done their level best and it's now on steroids trying to help people. So, hashtag, what's the action? What's the action? Estee Lauder before she passed away, had a personal income that matched Deloitte Consulting's USA income, 9 billion. She made 9 billion. The same year. I reminded Deloitte Consulting of that. Estee Lauder's punchline: she said, "I'm not famous for my ideas. I'm famous for what I have done."

My final comments to you, honored assembled group, I'm not too interested in what your ideas are, thank you. I know you're brilliant. Your discussions will be wonderful. I want to know what you're going to do. You've heard some glimpses, even from the Dons and the Sharons, just a few moments ago. What is your outreach program to you for yourself? Are you sleeping? Are you eating properly? If not, how about you get some help. Yes, you're a human, a vulnerable one. Secondly, your people, your staff, are you checking in with them to find out what's going on with them? Are you showing care and concern and appreciating them? They will love you forever for that — they need your help in some cases. Finally, the clients and prospective clients, they're suffering too. They've got the same list I just gave you.

So, final comment is someone call the client, instead of being a lawyer, "So, yeah. I understand you've got some real problems with labor and employment because your cash is drying up in your restaurant." How about we ask first, "James or Janice, how are you doing?" And when they say, "I'm okay, I'm good." Answer: "No, no, no. I really want to know. I've been working with you for many years now. I really want to know how's it going for you?"

That's my wrap-up. I want to be the poster child for **fragility** right now, because it's being overlooked by all of us.

John Remsen:

Gerry ...you brought us to a close and I think you are spot on.

Gerry Riskin:



Thank you for letting me do this.

John Remsen:

Books on law firm leadership, organizational leadership, speak to this. Take care of you. Put your mask on before your fellow passengers. Take care of your people. A lot of them are going through a challenging time and may or may not admit it. I agree. I was surprised some of those polling results. Everybody thinks it's great. Everything's great. Everything's great. I think there might be a false sense of optimism and security here that's not showing up in our numbers. We're hearing it anecdotally off record. It's there. And the stigma, you referenced the ABA study, read that people. Lawyers are fragile personnel.