

Providence Business News

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Coping with COVID-19: Marcum LLP

By **Cassius Shuman**

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THOMAS LISI is a partner for tax and business services at Marcum LLP. / COURTESY MARCUM LLP

Thomas Lisi, a partner for tax and business services, and James Wilkinson, a partner for assurance services at Marcum LLP, a tax, assurance, advisory and litigation support services firm, said their company acted swiftly in adapting to a virtual model to conduct business operations, with IT solutions providing “game changing” results. On the personal side, both men, who work at the company’s Providence office, have family members who are working on the front lines in the medical field.

“Ordinarily, I never work from home. I am at the office all the time,” said Lisi. “This has been a significant change for me and I can’t say it has been easy. I am developing bad habits like not going outdoors and overeating. Thirty days into this and only my dogs are happy. My wife is a nurse and has already been tested twice for COVID-19, so this has

presented another perspective. The fear we have is potentially affecting others. We are trying to be precautionary and careful.”



JAMES WILKINSON is a partner for assurance services at Marcum LLP. / COURTESY MARCUM LLP

“Being busy with client engagements, office responsibilities, and random walks and drives with family have served as great distractions,” said Wilkinson. “My sister is a nurse and our parents are at heightened risk due to their age, so we’ve been in contact by phone and video calls more than usual, allowing us to check-in on each other and retain some new normalcy.”

PBN is asking local business owners and leaders five questions in a survey designed to understand how the new coronavirus has affected them and their businesses and what they have learned from the unprecedented challenges. Here are Lisi and Wilkinson’s responses:

How are you coping amid the COVID-19 crisis?

Certainly, this crisis hit at the busiest time of year for us and we have only gotten busier. Firm-wide, we closed our offices and moved to a completely remote team on the March 15th filing deadline and immediately began advising clients on a variety of business continuation and survival initiatives. Our close relationships and in-depth knowledge of client businesses have allowed us to provide this valuable support. While professional standards and expectations have not changed, our associates have quickly adapted to this new virtual firm model. – Thomas Lisi

Have you found silver linings in these difficult times?

Our IT group members are now regarded as IT gods, as their proactive plans and systems have allowed us to decisively flip the switch and seamlessly become a virtual firm of 2,500 associates. Because of the strength of our systems and processes, we have been able to do everything we normally accomplish and expand services in response to the crisis conditions our clients are dealing with. Robust applications accessed within our secure network, and cutting-edge cloud-based apps that are used internally and in collaboration with clients, are proving to be game-changers as our in-office workflows have shifted to home-based delivery. – Thomas Lisi

How are you maintaining your company culture?

Our office culture is very important, as is ensuring that those casual five-minute chats that would randomly occur naturally in person during the day continue to keep us connected. We've always done our best to take action on ideas and thoughts raised by everyone in the office and this hasn't changed. Now these interactions are being done via WebEx, Skype and Zoom, and include virtual lunch rooms, happy hours, trivia contests, and simple half-hour breaks to catch-up, joke about someone's work-at-home style, and just absorb the impact that this crisis is having on our team. We are continuing to learn and adapt, as well as build deeper relationships across the office. – James Wilkinson

Did your business continuity plan work or were there surprises?

We knew that the technology to work remotely was in place and have been very grateful for the lack of technical issues that have been encountered. The new challenges that we have been supporting our team to overcome have largely been very personal; providing flexibility to parents to work from home while integrating activities and needs of their children into their days, being there for associates who are caring for parents or relatives, and supporting the boundaries that must be put in place to achieve necessary work-life balance (just because we can now work at our home workstations 24 x 7 doesn't mean we should). The need to plan and schedule some of these interactions has been a change in our day-to-day

activities, but we continue to operate as a cohesive team and support everyone in getting through these times. – James Wilkinson

Do you have advice for other local companies?

Embrace technology and strive to adopt the most efficient digital business processes regardless of your industry, environment and nature of operations. Our clients all have quickly identified areas and tasks that can be improved upon in their businesses as a result of our shift to a virtual work model. Remote work and disaster recovery plans (and the testing of those plans) should no longer be viewed as less than high priority initiatives. As we all begin making plans to return to our offices and workplaces, build in considerations to make sure everyone feels safe and that the varying needs of team members and their families are recognized and addressed. We will all be facing new work environments and we need to be prepared for changing our old, adopted protocols and expectations. Maintaining and strengthening our networks of friends and business partners is as important as our IT networks, and while connecting over coffee or a meal is not in the cards today, staying in touch is imperative. Consider hosting a virtual meeting room, connect on the phone, send a text or e-mail –don't lose touch just because we are no longer in our offices. The nurturing of these connections provides a great deal of comfort in knowing that we are all facing avalanches of change, and listening to someone's story on how they are planning to deal with an issue of the day can certainly be leveraged to provide insights to them and others in similar situations. We're all in this together and sticking together will get us all through. – Thomas Lisi

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