

## Leading the Way: Manuel Garcia-Linares on What Lawyers Want From Firm Leaders, the Pros of Going Remote, and Mental Health

by Dan Roe

### What You Need to Know

- Manuel Garcia-Linares joined Day Pitney via a merger in early 2019. A year later, his role as Florida office managing partner went remote.
- The firm continues to make moves in Florida, including recent hires in trusts and estates and signing a new lease in Boca Raton.
- Garcia-Linares said his biggest lesson of the pandemic was the importance of supporting his people.

*Editor's note: Welcome to Leading the Way, a weekly Q&A with South Florida law firm leaders about how they're navigating novel challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thanks for reading! We'd love your feedback, so please send thoughts and tips to Dan Roe at [droe@alm.com](mailto:droe@alm.com).*

Day Pitney Florida office managing partner Manuel Garcia-Linares' first few years at the firm have been marked with challenges he never knew he'd face when his former firm, Richman Greer, merged with the Connecticut-based Am Law 100 firm in early 2019.

Almost three years later, Garcia-Linares has recently reunited with

colleagues in the firm's Florida offices, which include locations in Miami, Boca Raton and West Palm Beach. All 13 of the law firm's offices went back to work this week on a hybrid schedule that sees support staff showing up three days per week, and attorneys attending two to three days weekly.

Day Pitney is heavily focused on trusts and estates—the practice comprises a third of the firm's 300 lawyers—and that means an increasing focus on Florida. In a recent interview, Garcia-Linares discussed his experience of taking the lead in Florida before the pandemic and the firm's expansion plans in 2022 and beyond.

Garcia-Linares sat down with the Daily Business Review to discuss how the pandemic has disrupted the legal industry in South Florida, and how he and his firm are responding.

The following conversation has been edited for clarity and length.

### What's keeping you up at night, Manny?

Making sure that our folks are properly trained, that we're being able to supervise the younger attorneys. There's no question that, even though we did a pretty good job of

teaching by Zoom, being able to go back to in-person hearings, some in-person depositions, and in-person meetings where they can follow you and work with you in person, will make us

better mentors and provide better skills to our younger lawyers.

The other thing is mental health. There's no question that for some people who may live alone, this has been terrible for them. If they don't have a family, it's terrible to be by yourself in your house. And for families with younger kids, it's been tough. I think we've done a pretty good job of being supportive; there's a working parents group we put together with speakers to give advice to working parents on things you can do, but it's a matter of getting folks back together.

### How else have you addressed attorney and staff mental health issues?

We've had town halls with the associates and staff. There were



Day Pitney, Florida managing partner, Manuel Garcia-Linares.

Courtesy photo

surveys that went out when we announced initially that we were going back the day after Labor Day, and surveys when that got postponed to now in October. We're letting people ask questions: Did you have any concerns? What are you thinking? With that, we've been able to see where people are. From what I understand, most of the firm is excited to be back.

### **Have there been any positives to remote work?**

We've gotten to know our people better, seeing them where they're at, at home. A child jumps into a conversation, a pet that's there—working from different spaces, we've gotten to know our people, not just in Florida but people in other offices and what they do. We've had a lot of activities where associates got to know their partners to keep people connected.

### **How did you arrive at the hybrid model in the Florida offices?**

I think something we all learned from the pandemic is you don't need to be in the office five days a week. We knew this before, but I think the pandemic has confirmed that you can basically work from anywhere as long as you've got a computer, phone and internet. While there are definitely a lot of benefits to being in the same place together, I don't think it's necessary or that we'll go back to five days. I don't think that, long term, many firms will be back five days per week.

### **Why is that?**

It's just worked too well. [Before the pandemic,] you'd get on a plane, spend all day flying there and back for a one-hour meeting, or go to a

courthouse as a litigator and stand outside for the motion calendar for a five-minute hearing. I don't think that those things are going back. I don't think that clients are going to pay you to be on a plane for a one-hour meeting when you can do it virtually.

With trials, I'm a big proponent of them being in-person. For two-plus-hour hearings in person, it's easier to keep people's attention, but we've been able to function for almost two years doing everything by zoom—my world is Zoom—and we haven't skipped a beat.

### **Which Day Pitney practices are expanding in Florida?**

The number of wealthy clients moving south has increased because of the pandemic, so the family office and trusts and estates practice of the firm has continued to grow and expand in Florida with those moves.

We've got a new real estate partner in the Miami office, and we've added a number of trusts and estates lawyers and international tax lawyers in Miami and West Palm Beach.

### **How difficult has recruiting trusts and estates lawyers been in the current talent market?**

I can't say it's been very tough. When we've been looking for a new lawyer or paralegal we've been able to hire them. It's not like we're paying a premium, but there's no question the market in Florida is tight right now with regard to all lawyers. I was on a Florida Association of Managing Partners call and the group said that this is the tightest legal market any of us have ever had to experience.

### **If not more money, then how are you landing recruits?**

When it comes to the trusts and estates field, I don't think there's another large firm in the country that has the breadth and the amount of lawyers who do trusts and estates work that we do. We're about 300 lawyers and a third of the firm is trusts and estates, so we become very attractive to the folks who have joined and the folks who are speaking to us about joining.

### **What do your prospective recruits want from their law firm?**

I think the whole legal market has changed. Folks want flexibility, they want support. There's definitely a desire toward a hybrid model where you're not in the office five days per week.

### **Since March 2020, what's the biggest lesson you've learned as a leader?**

I would say that continuing to be supportive of folks goes a long way. I think when your staff respects you and really enjoys working with you and sees that you're a supportive person, that shows in that we've been able to retain our top talent and top staff.

And we're being flexible in terms of the return to the office. I got an email this morning from an associate who's telling me he can't return to the office immediately because he's got a situation at home. And we take that into account, I'm not there like a school teacher taking attendance. We understand that when family and other issues come up that are important, we have to be supportive of everyone.