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by Paul McLaughlin

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Geoffrey Heineman's decision to disobey one of the strict security rules of One World Trade Center (WTC) probably saved his life and those of about 20 colleagues. At 8:45 a.m. EDT on September 11, 2001, Heineman, Managing Partner of the mid-size New York City law firm Ohrenstein & Brown, LLP, was shop-talking with several other lawyers in their 85th floor office when a horrible sound descended upon them and the building began to sway, as if dislodged by an earthquake.

When the 110-floor north tower righted itself, Heineman, 43, raced to a window and gasped as chunks of flaming debris poured down from some point above. Like so many others, he thought the building had been hit by one of the many commuter planes or helicopters that constantly buzzed around the gigantic north and south towers. He had no idea at the time that terrorists had commandeered American Airlines Flight 11 out of Boston en route to Los Angeles and screamed it into the 90th floor of the famous trade tower.

Despite the absence of any alarms, and contrary to the WTC's interdiction that tenants must stay in their offices during an emergency until notified by building security of what to do, Heineman ordered his co-workers to evacuate. Advancing smoke forced them to search for a negotiable stairwell, but it only took them to the 78th floor. "There was a locked door that kept us from going any further," Heineman says. "We exited on 78 and were lucky enough to find another stairwell that eventually got us down." It took them an agonizing 70 minutes to reach the bottom, just a three- or four-minute grace period before another danger threatened their lives.

Down on the 33rd floor, the impact of the Boeing 767 exploding into the top of Tower One was felt more than it was heard. Fred Van Remortel, an associate in the four-lawyer firm Conway & Conway, was scrolling through overnight e-mails when a loud, metallic sound silenced the room, as if workers on the floor up above had dropped a heavy object. The building immediately began to shake and then, terrifyingly, to rock back and forth. "It always sways in the wind—you can see the water in the toilet bowls swirling—so you get used to it moving a bit," says Van Remortel, "but this time I really thought the building was going over on its side."

As soon as it seemed safe to move, Van Remortel, 37, and four colleagues, after "hemming and hawing for awhile" about whether to wait for instructions from security, also decided to bail. By the time they entered a stairwell, it was beginning to clog with descending tenants and firefighters lugging equipment on the way up. "It took at least 15 minutes to go from 33 to 28 and at times we weren't moving at all," says Van Remortel. "When we made it to the low 20s, they were beginning to bring down people who were badly injured. There were women with their pantyhose all melted up in a ball on their thighs. And one woman I remember, the whole side of her face and head was burned off."

As Van Remortel, Heineman and others fleeing the building encountered horrors once unthinkable in their lives, many of the approximately 1,340 lawyers who worked in the World Trade Center had either not yet arrived or had appointments elsewhere when the first hijacked plane hit the first tower. Gunther Buerman, Managing Partner of Harris Beach LLP, a top 250 law firm with offices throughout the northeast US, was in Rochester, NY watching CNBC when regular programming was pre-empted to cover the breaking news.

Although his firm's New York office, with 50 lawyers and a total staff of 113, was located in Tower Two, he immediately phoned and insisted that everyone leave. "Our building wasn't in danger at the time but I said you never know what can happen, so get out of there."

It was a gut instinct that proved prophetic. Less than 15 minutes later, at 9:03, United Airlines Flight 175, also from Boston to Los Angeles, was deviated by terrorists into Tower Two, also 110 stories high. The doomed plane struck the building at the 85th floor, where Harris Beach was located. “I watched the second plane hit, live on TV, and I was just astonished,” says Buerman. Although most of his staff made it out alive, five did not, including three lawyers. “We believe that while our people had begun to evacuate there was an announcement that our building was secure,” he says, his voice soft with sorrow. “The people we lost may have decided to go back up or not to go down any further.”

A few minutes later, Fred Van Remortel and his group made it to the lobby of Tower One. By then they knew, from people who had logged on to their BlackBerrys in the stairwell, that both buildings had been deliberately hit by hijacked planes. Despite this awareness, they were not prepared for what they saw when they reached ground level. “We expected the lobby to be okay but it was just blown to crap,” says Van Remortel, who had to wade through six inches of water choked with floating chunks of drywall, doors and other debris. “When the plane came into the building and exploded, the path of least resistance for the force was the elevator shafts,” he says. “It apparently turned the cars into missiles and launched them down to the bottom.”

It took much longer for Geoffrey Heineman and his colleagues to inch down to the lobby. Emergency workers then hurried them out to the street, directing them to go north on Broadway. About three or four minutes later, Tower Two collapsed, at 9:58 a.m. Heineman, now a block and a half away, scurried for cover under the Brooklyn Bridge. “It was surreal, like watching a science fiction movie, when that white cloud began to envelop downtown,” he says.

Counting his blessings that he and the others had narrowly escaped two encounters with death, he was unaware as he watched the “nuclear winter” of dust and debris all around him that two staff members of Ohrenstein & Brown were not so fortunate. “They weren’t in the office when we left,” he says, “so the best we can guess is that they were in the elevators on the way up.”

Though any death is one too many, it appears the legal community suffered a relatively small number of fatalities in the terrorist attacks of September 11. In addition to the seven lost at Harris Beach and Ohrenstein & Brown combined, the missing and presumed dead include a support staff member of Sidley Austin Brown & Wood (the largest law practice in the WTC), five in-house counsel at the ill-fated securities firm Cantor Fitzgerald, the chief corporate counsel of Fiduciary Trust, and two lawyers and two support staff of The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey.

The toll would almost surely have been much higher but for three principal reasons: the bombing of the WTC’s underground garage on February 26, 1993, which killed six people, had resulted in much improved safety and evacuation procedures for the buildings; the tenants knew how to conduct themselves in an emergency thanks to ongoing fire drills, which they took seriously; and, perhaps most importantly, the official starting hour for many of the law firms was 9:00 a.m. or later, which meant that many employees were still on their way to work when the carnage began. But when the twin towers each collapsed from the jet fuel-stoked inferno, all 30 law firms that resided in the WTC became instant victims.

“What do we do now?” Gunther Buerman of Harris Beach wondered as he watched his TV in horror. “Our office has been blown out of the sky.”

Because of the 1993 bombing, some of the firms destroyed in 2001 had a disaster recovery plan already in place. None factored in the possibility of the buildings crumbling to the ground, based on the interviews conducted for this article. But they did anticipate many of the problems that resulted, although not the magnitude.

Those that had existing plans seem to have had an advantage over those that didn’t. In preparing this article we have heard numerous inspiring tales of fortitude and resilience as the firms rose, literally from the ashes, to take up business again, often within a remarkably short time. That they have done so while mourning the deaths of friends and colleagues, and while their emotions were surely conflicted by shock, denial and rage, is a testament to the ability of New York’s legal community to fight back against immeasurable adversity.

The new offices of Thacher Proffitt & Wood are “not as pretty” as the three floors (38, 39 and 40) the full-service firm occupied in the south tower of the World Trade Center, sighs Omer “Jack” Williams, the firm’s 61-year-old Managing Partner.

“I used to have a beautiful view of the Narrows Bridge, Ellis Island, the Statue of Liberty,” he says. Now his 11th floor window looks down on crowded 42nd Street at Fifth Avenue, kitty-corner from New York’s famous Public Library and its twin guardian stone lions. It’s by no means a shabby address, but the aesthetics have definitely changed.

The most notable difference is the overall look of the surroundings.

“It’s not really law firm space, it needs to be renovated,” says Williams. He’s sitting at a utilitarian desk that suggests articling student rather than senior counsel. The only decoration in the sparsely furnished office is a small framed photograph of mid-town Manhattan that he inherited from the previous tenant.

“We need more light, need to raise the ceiling a bit, create more perimeter offices, stuff like that,” he says. “It’s a big job but I want to stay here for a while and see if it’s doable.”

Despite the dramatic shift in Thacher Proffitt’s trappings, Williams is not complaining. None of his staff was lost on September 11; and through hard work and good fortune, the new office is up, and somewhat running, a scant two weeks later. A friendly man with an open disposition, Williams proudly details the exhaustive efforts that have consumed the lives of his firm’s personnel since the moment they watched their previous home implode to the ground. Founded in 1848, Thacher Proffitt was the second-largest law firm in the WTC, with about 150 attorneys and a total staff of 300. On the morning of September 11, Williams and his wife were on an airplane on the runway at Newark, New Jersey waiting to take off for Dallas and, later, a convention in Colorado Springs.

“The pilot told us we couldn’t leave because of an incident in the city,” says Williams. “My wife looked out the window and said there was smoke coming out of the World Trade Center. We eventually got back to the terminal and I got on the phone to find out what happened. Then my wife ran over to tell me that our building had collapsed.

I said, ‘Oh my God, our people are in there.’”

Several frantic hours later, Williams established a “command centre” in Thacher Proffitt’s office in White Plains, NY. From there he coordinated a conference call with whatever partners he could round up. Having survived the ’93 bombing, they had an existing disaster recovery plan and used it to strike three central committees. They focused on locating and assisting their personnel, responding to technology issues and obtaining new real estate.

“Finding people was the absolute priority,” says Williams, a process that wasn’t completed until an errant partner phoned in two days after the attack. Next time, he says, they’ll have a central phone number that people have to call if there’s a disaster.

Although people came first, he knew that real estate was likely going to be the biggest challenge. “There were about 12 million square feet of office space in the World Trade Center and the estimate our real estate people were getting was that only about ten million square feet was available in Manhattan,” he says.

The real estate committee descended on New York City on Wednesday, September 12. By the end of the following day they had found the space on West 42nd Street—the 9th, 11th and 12th floors of a low-rise midtown building, albeit requiring changing elevators to get from 9 to 11 and 12. At 105,000 square feet, it was some 25,000 square feet smaller than what they’d occupied in the WTC, but not all of the space there had been used. By Friday the deal was wrapped up, and on Monday, September 17 they signed a lease.

“I’m not sure we would have taken this space if we had more time,” Williams admits candidly. “But there were two or three other bidders and we had to act quickly. We got it because we had spoken first. The sub-landlord was honourable and did not extort us.”

Getting space so quickly was “a miracle,” Williams says, one that was further enhanced by the sub-landlord’s willingness to sell its working phone system, along with some office furniture. A few days later, the technology committee arranged to send a truck to Dell Computers in Austin, Texas to pick up 400 new computers. They arrived on Saturday, September 22, followed the next day by a truckload of monitors.

In a scant ten days, Thacher Proffitt had a new home and the basic equipment to set up shop. It needed a lot of fixing up, but they were back on their feet, and they were amazed at how quickly it had happened.

Relocation happened even faster for Sidley Austin Brown & Wood, which was by far the biggest law practice in the WTC, with 600 people working on five floors in Tower One (54, 56-59). It had become the fourth-largest law firm in the US last May when New York-based Brown & Wood merged with Chicago-based Sidley & Austin. The securities and litigation specialist had planned to move its mid-town Sidley & Austin people to the WTC later this year, but reversed that decision on September 12. Instead, they leased four additional floors at their Third Avenue location that day, enough space to accommodate 160 attorneys and support staff. By the following Monday they sent out a press release announcing their dislocated WTC office was once again functioning.

Others were able to get back to work thanks to the generosity of clients. Ohrenstein & Brown dispersed some of its people to offices kindly made available by Kaye Insurance Associates, and housed others at their Long Island location, where their landlord has provided additional space at no charge until they find a permanent new home. Harris Beach also had a client play guardian angel, offering them 23,000 square feet in a mid-town location that it was about to vacate. Although not enough to accommodate everyone—they have funnelled people to several other locations as well—it has given them a place to “meet and grieve” their five lost colleagues, as Gunther Buerman sadly puts it.

Smaller firms without the resources or satellite offices of their larger counterparts faced a more onerous task of finding a new space. But, in a theme that would prove to be the rule rather than the exception, their fellow lawyers rallied to assist them. “We put the word out [that we needed somewhere to relocate],” says Fred Van Remortel of Conway & Conway. “The outpouring was phenomenal. Within two or three days we had offers from five or six firms saying come stay with us, we have extra room.” They decided to camp in with Baker & Hostetler LLP on Fifth Avenue, and will spend the next few months searching for a new space.

“We’ve decided we’re not going to be on a high floor, and we’re going to choose a ‘no-name’ building,” says Van Remortel, echoing a shift in thinking shared by many other former WTC tenants.

While scrambling to find new space, the law firms also had to contend with cases that needed their attention.

“Litigation had less of a problem than anyone because everything is adjourned,” says Williams. “But we had about eight to ten structured financial deals—what we call quarter-end deals—that had to get done by the quarter end and those deadlines got met. Some of the people worked at home, some at a bank, some at another law office.” Other lawyers reported that clients almost universally have been extremely cooperative, extending deadlines as they extended their sympathies. For practical purposes New York’s normally scabrous business practices ceased.

The images of Ground Zero on television do not fully convey the apocalyptic devastation unleashed by the terrorist attacks. Witnessing it firsthand really does take an observer’s breath away, and leaves the person, at least for some moments, drained, silent and disturbed by the vast wasteland of death and destruction. As of the last week in September, about 1,000 tired, yet tireless, workers had removed, virtually piece by piece, more than 115,000 tons of gnarled steel, pulverized concrete, shattered glass and other debris from the 16-acre area. To put that accomplishment, and the extent of the

carnage, into perspective, estimates for clearing out the rest of the 1.2 million-ton mountain of rubble range from six months to a year and a half to your guess is as good as mine, it's that uncertain at the moment.

The workers are also having to cope with harrowing discoveries of body parts, articles of clothing and other reminders that more than 5,000 people perished on September 11. Although the nearby streets have been relatively cleared of debris, dust remains everywhere, including on the ledges of the buildings surrounding the site. Looking down from the 24th floor of a building that had many of its west-facing windows blown out when the towers collapsed, an observer absent-mindedly places his hands on the ledge to get a closer look. He then remembers what a minister at a local church told an NBC producer—"Everywhere there is dust is sacred soil"—and recoils at the thought that he may have inadvertently defiled the remains of the victims.

Amidst the ruins below lie the shattered memory of every computer and its contents not carried out of the towers by evacuees. The pile also contains the ashes of millions of pieces of paper. Those not burned were launched into the atmosphere, some landing as far away as Brooklyn. One story, unconfirmed, had a piece of paper imbedded into a car tire by the power of the explosions.

For the large law firms in the WTC, retrieving electronic files has not been that difficult. Most regularly backed up their tapes off-site and lost just a few days' worth, if any at all. Combined with the tendency of many of their lawyers to keep copies of files on home computers, as well as the willingness of adversaries and clients to provide copies of missing e-mails and attachments, the biggest technological challenges have been to obtain the hardware and to wire their new offices.

For some smaller practices, the destruction of their electronic data has become a staggering problem.

Taufiq Choudhury moved into Tower One two weeks before the '93 bombing. An immigrant from Bangladesh, the now 45-year-old perceived his World Trade Center office as the embodiment of the American Dream. A sole practitioner, with a staff of three, Choudhury did not back up any of his electronic files off-site. "I am trying to get copies back from wherever I can," he says, "but I will have to do almost all of it on my own. It's going to involve a lot of effort and resources."

The same laborious and, ultimately, incomplete process has begun for Martin Domb, a partner at the 20-lawyer firm Hill, Betts & Nash LLP which had offices on the 52nd floor of Tower One. "We didn't back up off-site so it's pretty well all gone," says the 48-year-old. He was already at work when the first plane hit the north tower and made his escape down a stairwell that, near the bottom, was treacherously flooded with water. "I know these issues [lost files] are on a completely different scale than loss of life, but they're still important," he says.

Of particular importance are the accounting records. "For firms that weren't backed up, how will they ever be able to recreate their financial operations?" asks Fred Ohrenstein, a founding partner of Ohrenstein & Brown, which did have off-site back-up. "All unbilled work, and time, and analyses. There's not a way to recreate that. How could you ask lawyers to try and figure out what they did months ago?" Even harder to recover than the electronic files are the pieces of paper. "Important documents are gone forever," says Choudhury, "as well as books and my office lease and my bar admissions certificate. I can get a copy of that but not the original. The judge who signed it is long gone." Also irretrievable are legal research materials that contain handwritten notes and analyses. "Those don't get put into any file," says Domb.

Although it will take time and energy, copies of an unknown percentage of the paper documents can be obtained from the courts and other legal entities, clients and competitors. "The community has been terrific in this regard," says Gunther Buerman of Harris Beach.

"With a few chilling exceptions, the overwhelming majority have been very supportive."

That support is perhaps best illustrated in the attitude many clients have adopted towards paying their bills. "We went through a million dollars pretty quickly," says Thacher Proffitt's Jack Williams, "but our cash flow is fine." The firm's healthy line of credit is one reason, but so too is the willingness of clients to help out financially. "Some are saying, just send us an estimate of what we owe," says Williams. Michael Brown, the other founding partner of Ohrenstein & Brown, has encountered a similar response. "Clients who had bills in the pipeline are saying just send us an e-mail for what we owe you and we'll send

you a cheque,” he says. “Not all, but most.”

At Hill, Betts & Nash, all current billing records were lost. “Normally a bill would have chapter and verse, fractions of hours,” says Martin Domb. “But I think any client worth keeping is going to understand and pay an estimate. There’s been great cooperation.” Even the insurance industry, typically a stickler when it comes to process and procedure, has tended to adopt a “tell us what you need” approach. “We’ve received a couple of advances from insurance companies,” says Williams. “We have pretty good coverage, including business interruption insurance. I can’t tell you it will cover all but we should come out okay.” Gunther Buerman admits that he cringed when President George W. Bush referred to the attacks on September 11 as an Act of War, but his concern was short-lived when several major insurers announced, soon thereafter, that they would waive the war exclusion—if it even applied—prompting all other major insurers to follow suit.

But while the large firms are likely well-served by their insurance coverage, some of the smaller ones are not as protected. “We just had to drop \$25,000 on computer equipment,” says Conway’s Fred Van Remortel, “and I’m not really sure if we’re insured for this kind of thing.” H. Taufiq Choudhury is almost certain that his coverage will not meet his needs. “I found out yesterday (September 27) that my insurance covered personal property for \$5,000 only,” he says, “and that ‘personal property’ includes the furniture, the equipment, everything. I have other coverage for loss of documents and loss of income, although I don’t know how much it will cover.”

Choudhury has taken the first few steps in what he guesses will be a six- to 12-month uphill climb to get his business back to “normal”, a word most people in New York use with a certain tinge of irony these days. He’s determined to succeed, no matter the cost, which he now knows will have to include a crisis and disaster planning budget. “Before it seemed very burdensome to me, things like storing documents and backing up my files at an off-site location,” he says. “But I think one now has to consider this as a cost of doing business, no different than buying a desk.”

Choudhury would get no argument on that count from Brian Rose, a senior corporate lawyer in the Toronto office of Stikeman Elliott. The towering 56-year-old knows only too well that disasters can indeed occur. He spent an agonizing half hour on September 11 trying to locate his wife, Ellen Kratzer, by telephone in New York the minute after he learned of the attack on the north tower. That process became more urgent after the second hijacked plane crashed into the top of Tower Two, where Kratzer served as an investment advisor with Fiduciary Trust Company International. Fortunately, Kratzer was in a cab on the way to work when the disaster struck. But about 90 of her colleagues, who had offices on floors 90, 94, 95, 96 and 97, were killed.

As soon as he heard from her, Rose left the office and drove to New York, a journey that took him about 12 hours. The next day he joined his wife as they toured the temporary location of Fiduciary Trust. Prior to the ’93 bombing, Fiduciary had developed a comprehensive disaster recovery plan, which included an arrangement with Comdisco Inc., a company that supplies a complete turn-key office site—including desks, phones, computers and data recovery assistance—to companies that have lost their premises. That foresight paid off in ’93 and again in 2001. “It was incredible to see how they could be back in operation so quickly,” says Rose. Fiduciary wasn’t the only firm to turn to Comdisco. About 35 other tenants from the WTC also moved into Comdisco space. “Two out of five enterprises that experience a disaster—such as the World Trade Center attack—go out of business within five years,” says a news release by the Gartner Group, a business consulting practice based in Connecticut. “Business continuity plans and disaster recovery services ensure continuing viability.”

Rose has his office near the top of Commerce Court West in Toronto. At 57 floors it’s one of the tallest corporate towers in Canada. From a 53rd floor conference room, there’s a calming view of Lake Ontario, and of the planes making their final descent into Toronto Island Airport. Stikeman Elliott has had a sophisticated disaster recovery plan in place for some time, but Rose thinks what happened in New York may predicate an update, particularly in reference to paper documents. “We are looking at making an optical image of every piece of paper that comes into our office,” he says.

His firm had considered implementing this previously but never acted. What happened on September 11, and the fact that “storing documents off-site has become prohibitively expensive,” says Rose, will clearly influence Stikeman Elliott to bring the matter to the top of its agenda.

A few blocks east of Stikeman Elliott and about 20 floors closer to the ground, Paul Burns, a youthful looking 43-year-old partner at Baker & McKenzie, says his firm may also switch to optical imaging. They too had explored this option previously, but cost and the state of the technology at the time deterred them.

While the New York tragedy has heightened the firm’s awareness of the need for an effective disaster recovery plan, that process had actually begun last June. At meetings some five months ago, Baker & McKenzie discussed several ideas, including signing contracts with hardware vendors to provide the firm with computers within 24 hours of a disaster. There was also consideration of entering into an agreement with a landlord to assure a space would be available if an event prevented them from using their offices in BCE Place. “As part of a big multinational firm we do have the ability to move people to other offices,” says Burns, “but [having other space available] is an option we are looking at.”

While it’s too soon to know what big steps Baker & McKenzie will take, Burns says some small ones will be implemented immediately “We’ve got policies that aren’t that well enforced,” he says, offering an example. “You’re not supposed to leave files on your desk at night in case there’s a fire or the sprinkler system goes off. But people do it all the time. That rule will likely be enforced from now on.”

At Stikeman Elliott, Brian Rose echoes that observation. “Everyone in Canada has had a wake-up call,” he says. “If there was a fire drill in the building before September 11, people would go ho hum and pay no attention. I can guarantee you people will now take it more seriously.”

Paul Burns concurs. “The awareness level of the need for disaster planning has gone way up,” he says.

“Although you have to do a risk-benefit analysis, I think you could do a lot that wouldn’t be that expensive. And you get a good return on your money—by protecting your employees and keeping your business up and running.”

In the weeks following the terrorist attacks, business in New York was typically down, especially on Broadway, where some shows were forced to close. With one exception. The woman at the front of a 30- person line-up for cancellation and standing room tickets for Broadway’s biggest hit, *The Producers*, arrived at 6:30 that morning. “She’ll get in,” says a thin barker standing guard by the entrance to the St. James Theatre on 44th Street, just west of Times Square, “but most of the others won’t.” It’s still two hours to curtain and, as a constant flow of hopefuls advances towards the box office, he shouts out the same refrain every few minutes: “First obstructed view tickets available are in February. First unobstructed view tickets are in April. Please note that the contracts for Matthew Broderick and Nathan Lane [the show’s stars] expire on March 17.”

Why has *The Producers* bucked the attendance trend and continued to sell out? It’s as if New York, and its visiting guests, need some guaranteed laughs, which the winner of 12 Tony Awards is known to deliver.

The city has noticeably changed. Its insouciant swagger has been replaced by a sombre, even polite, demeanour. Just over two weeks since the attacks, a thick layer of shock and despair hangs in the air, like the still acrid smoke around Ground Zero. “People are slower, they take the extra moment to be helpful or patient, they make eye contact with sad eyes when before they would not have made eye contact at all,” says Dr. Paul Ofman, a psychologist with RHR International Company, who counsels senior corporate executives on leadership matters. He also has a voluntary leadership role himself, with the Red Cross of New York, dual functions that have made him very busy since September 11.

It's hard to escape from the new climate of uncertainty.

Security everywhere has tightened, and most office buildings in Manhattan, and some retail stores (even Broadway shows), require photo ID and/or bag searches before you can get in. "There used to be four entrances to our building," says Charles "Trip" Dorkey III, a partner in the New York office of Torys. "Now there's only one and I doubt that will ever change."

What also may never change is the painful memory of what happened on September 11, especially for those who worked in the WTC. How they cope with that memory, however, will vary according to each individual, and by how they deal with their emotions.

Lawyers may not be the best equipped to rise to that latter challenge, says Ofman. "They have been trained to put their own feelings about a particular matter aside and focus on the facts, the positions, the arguments," he says. "But you can't reason or argue your way out of what happened on September 11. It's going to affect everyone, in one way or another. You can't compartmentalize your feelings or cover them up with intellectualization. They're going to come out. They're not going to go away."

Ofman endorses the decision the law firms have made to focus on getting their practices restarted as soon as possible. "It's a healthy response to work 20 hours a day to get the business equivalent of air and water back and running," he says. But once "the hardware is back and working, what about the software, the people?" he asks. Ofman suggests that it's not good enough to refer employees to counselling services administered through EAP and other confidential programs. "It has to be workplace sanctioned," he insists. The firm has to "come together as members of a family" and openly discuss their feelings together about what they've gone through.

Senior management plays a critical role in the success of such an approach, he says. Just as the people at the top establish the moral and ethical tones of a firm—if the boss cheats on his expenses it increases the likelihood that so too will many of his employees—senior management will influence their staff on what kind of emotional reactions are acceptable. "If the guy at the top is saying that what happened on September 11 is no big deal," says Ofman, "it sends a message to everyone in the firm that that's how they will be expected to react."

That kind of message, he says, will backfire. "We generally know that 75 per cent of people exposed to trauma will get through it," he says. "That means 25 per cent are likely to have some sequelae that will impair their ability to cope."

He lists nervousness, depression, sleep disruption, difficulty concentrating and health problems among the possible reactions. Ofman also cautions lawyers that they may experience emotional aftershocks. It's a prospect that Jack Williams of Thacher Proffitt has also foreseen. "I'm afraid that once it all slows down it's all going to come back again," he says. "I'm feeling good right now about what we've done to get our business going, but it may hit me in a week or so." For some it has already hit. "I've never seen so many men between the ages of 30 and 40 sobbing like babies," says Conway's Fred Van Remortel.

Tragedies often bring communities closer, as they rally to help and protect their own. The heartfelt offers of assistance from lawyers and law firms in New York and throughout North America to the legal firms that were destroyed on September 11 will never be forgotten. For example, Harris Beach, which lost five people, has had other law firms and individual lawyers offer to contribute money to the fund established by the firm to assist the victims' families. "There will be lasting, positive effects on the legal community," says Michael Brown of Ohrenstein & Brown. "Personal bonds created out of this will continue after we go back to 'normal'."

There may even be a positive shift in how lawyers are perceived, suggests Gerald Hayes, a partner in the New York office of Baker & McKenzie. "The public may see lawyers now as the good people I know most of them to be," he says. Gunther Buerman of Harris Beach agrees. "The people who have been the towers of strength through this, like Mayor Giuliani,

Governor Pataki, Senators Schumer and Hillary Clinton, they're all lawyers," he points out.

The men and women of New York's legal community who were propelled into darkness on September 11 have responded with determination, courage and resourcefulness to the challenges thrust upon them. They deserve our respect and continuing support. We should also try to remember, particularly when business brings us into contact with them, that the healing process—and its timing—will differ from person to person.

Gunther Buerman knows that every time he flies into New York the memory of the World Trade Center crumbling to the ground will come back to him. "I flew down from Rochester [on September 19]," he says, "and when we came over the tip of Manhattan and the towers weren't there, it was like looking at your hand with a finger missing."

A lot has indeed been irreplaceably destroyed, but not the spirit of the law firms lost on September 11. It was bent far out of shape, but it has rebounded, and much quicker than anyone likely imagined.