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PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

▶▶▶ INNOVATION

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### What are some of your proudest achievements from the past year?

**T**his year? My greatest achievement would be survival. Immigration lawyers like me and my colleagues at Fragomen were hit hard by the pandemic because international travel and immigration suffered profound and incessant turmoil.

Presidential proclamations and travel bans with little advance notice made it difficult to navigate an already complex landscape. Each change required a fresh examination and re-calibration of our efforts—how do we protect our clients' employees abroad? How do we get them home? Is there any creative way to bring them back, or do they remain abroad? If they remain, how do we set up remote work arrangements and all the attendant practical needs?

The last 12 months have been the most chaotic year for immigration law in my memory—maybe ever. And to complicate matters, the volume of work was unprecedented as well.

Late last year, the government advanced the green card filing dates, which resulted in a significant number of individuals becoming eligible to file their applications. In a normal quarter, we represent employees in a dozen of these requests; in the last quarter of 2020, we handled more than 430 and all from a work-from-home environment.

We put our heads down, did our jobs, met every deadline. It was pure survival mode, but we pushed through knowing that our clients have been waiting several years to file these applications. We were motivated to help them realize their goals.

### What, if any, obstacles stood in the way of your innovation, and how did you overcome them? As

we began to develop an integrated process and technology for the client, there were basic technical problems, of course. This included getting the different data types from the collaborators to 'talk' with one another—matching up date formats, for instance, and labeling corresponding pieces of data in a uniform way.

More significantly, I think we're helping our client adjust culturally.

Financial institutions have stringent control requirements and expectations. The new data-sharing platform is all about easing communication and cooperation; however, building in control and review capabilities that make a big institution comfortable might slow things down. So we've been using analysis and other tools to help them squeeze more efficiency from the process.

### What is the best advice for younger attorneys looking to advance their own innovative ideas or visions?

Review your work regularly and comprehensively.

Each year, I look back and ask myself: "What could I have done differently? What can I do better this year? How do I change the way I experience my job and my profession—how do I shake things up, push further, keep from becoming complacent?"

This annual process ties innovation to the actual circumstances of your job. People often think about innovation as inspiration—something that just hits you out of the blue. But I think that it comes from knowing your work and your profession intimately, in all its practical detail.

So instead of just throwing every idea you have out there, you're offering up critical changes that are inspired by what adds the most value for your clients and your team.

It's a great way to generate ideas that are innovative and practical—that stand a chance of being executed.

