

You're a what? Freelance Paralegals Defined

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Freelance paralegal? What's that?

Virtual paralegal? What's that?

Have you ever heard these terms and wondered?

Have you ever wondered or wished there was a way to get help with your caseload when hiring isn't an option but you and your staff are struggling to meet demands or deadlines? Have you ever thought, "It would be so nice to be able to delegate just this one thing?"

Those two terms above represent the answer to such questions.

Freelance paralegal defined

A freelance paralegal, sometimes referred to as a virtual paralegal, is a paralegal who works as an independent contractor providing substantive legal support to attorneys, firms, corporations, or governmental agencies on an as-needed basis. Depending on the attorney's need, a freelance paralegal may provide paralegal support services occasionally – only when the need arises – or regularly – providing daily or weekly support. As independent contractors, freelance paralegals are business owners providing paralegal support services to attorneys who have contracted with them for support. These support services are generally provided from the freelance paralegal's office or place of business, although some freelance paralegals do occasionally provide on-site support to their local clients.

What's the purpose?

A freelance paralegal is not a paralegal looking for a job or employment. On the contrary, a freelance paralegal is a service provider as your CPA and local UPS store are to you (and as you are to your clients). When you need these other services, you call upon them for their expertise and support. But when you need help providing your services to your clients, where do you turn? You may not have the income or overhead to hire an[other] employee; you may not have enough work to hire an employee anyway. Similarly, you may not have the cash flow to go through a legal staffing agency (if you're fortunate enough to have one in your area). When all else fails, that's what a freelance paralegal is for. Besides, freelance paralegal services are more cost effective than other alternatives. Freelance paralegal services are not just for you, as the attorney; they're for your whole legal team. Paralegals generally have a substantial caseload for which they are responsible; and, they usually work simultaneously with multiple attorneys.

Having multiple, competing priorities is not uncommon and can add to the stress of an already fast-paced, deadline-oriented career. When there's not enough time in the day for you and your paralegals to accomplish everything that must be accomplished, it can impact both your ethical duties as an attorney and your reputation. A freelance paralegal can help both you and your paralegal(s) manage your respective caseloads and increase client satisfaction.

Every freelance paralegal, or virtual paralegal, has his or her own reason or personal story for wanting to support attorneys as an independent contractor so I will not begin to suggest we all do it for one reason and one reason only. However, I can provide a little insight into the purpose for providing paralegal support services, at least from my perspective. You see, when I worked in the private sector we had no backup system for when someone was sick or had too many tasks to juggle so we worked, no matter how sick or how late it was, regardless of the personal cost. In contrast, we did have an overflow system in place when I worked in the public sector. If a person was sick or had more work than could be completed, someone else jumped in to help. As you might imagine, the difference in stress level and morale from one place to another was astounding. Just knowing a backup system is in place, even if it's not needed, can reduce stress and increase productivity. So, the purpose for providing paralegal support services, at least from my perspective, is to provide the peace of mind in knowing you and your legal team have a backup system available to you anytime it's needed.

So what does a freelance paralegal do?

What, exactly a freelance paralegal can do for you and your practice depends on your needs and practice area(s). A paralegal, in general, can perform any task you do short of actions identified by your jurisdiction as unauthorized practice of the law (UPL). (The post on [what a paralegal can and can't do for you](#) and the brochure "[What is a Paralegal?](#)" provide information on paralegal utilization and UPL). You can receive pretty much the same support when obtaining freelance paralegal services. The difference is you and your team receive the support you need when you need it without incurring any of the employment-related costs or liabilities that come with hiring a full or part-time employee. Whether you need assistance with a one-time task, with one case, or for an hour or two each day or week, a freelance paralegal can support your needs. If you want more information or suggestions on working with a freelance paralegal, find out [how a freelance paralegal can improve your practice](#).

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