

Oregon Law Practice Management

Practice Management Tips for Oregon Lawyers



Six Mistakes Lawyers Make with Staff, Part I

In my career as a legal recruiter and law practice management advisor, I have witnessed some regrettable decisions involving staff. I'm not referring to hiring, evaluating, or terminating employees. I'm talking about day-to-day choices made by lawyers – those decisions that *seem reasonable at the time*, but have a way of coming back to bite you. Here are four of the top six:

Lawyer as Controller

The lawyer who hires staff, but refuses to delegate any real responsibility always mystifies me.

You and your staff are a [team](#). Clients expect you to spend their money well. This includes proper utilization of legal staff. If you're not sure where to start, please visit the blog of [Vicki Voisin, The Paralegal Mentor](#), where you will find marvelous posts, including:

- [Don't Forget to Delegate!](#)
- [Are You a One Man Band?](#)
- [The Paralegal's Role in Managing the Law Office \(guest post\)](#)
- [Paralegals + Pareto = Who Knew?](#)

[Vicki](#) is one of my favorite paralegal bloggers. You can follow her on [Twitter](#) @VickiVoisin. Another source of spot-on advice is [Lynne DeVenny](#) who blogs at [Practical Paralegalism](#). Check out these posts:

- [An Associate Discusses Communicating with Legal Assistants](#)
- [Dealing with Micromangement](#)

Lynne's blog is worth viewing for her excellent content, terrific sense of humor, and helpful links. You can follow [Lynne](#) on [Twitter](#) @ExpertParalegal.

"I Don't Have Time to Train"

Is it me, or is it just a bit ironic that busy lawyers who need help are "too busy" to train? Training is time consuming – at first. The payoff comes *after the training* when your secretary or paralegal takes over a task and runs with it.

You can make the process of training much easier by creating and maintaining an office procedures manual. Sound daunting? It would be if you attempted to write the manual from beginning to end in one sitting. Use the "step at a time" approach instead. If you anticipate hiring staff soon, start your manual now. Include copies of your client intake form, file closing checklist, fee agreements, and other common office forms. Document procedures *as you*

perform them. If you learn how to restore a file from backup or change the ink in the postage meter, write down the steps. (Even if you never hire staff, having an office manual will help you remember how to do tasks that you don't perform often.) If you already have staff, ask them to gather office forms and take a stab at documenting procedures. Review their submissions and make any necessary corrections. (Be sure to explain why you corrected the procedure – this is another opportunity to train!) A sample Procedure Manual is available at no charge on the [PLF Web site](#). Select Practice Aids and Forms, then Office Manuals.

Staff Don't Need CLEs (Do They?)

Absolutely! Many a legal secretary or paralegal has trained a law firm associate. If you truly want to build a crack legal team, support continuing legal education for staff. CLEs are just one of the ways staff can improve their knowledge and help you get the job done. In many cases, bar associations and legal organizations allow staff to attend CLEs at a reduced cost.

Networking Isn't Just for Lawyers

Encourage staff to belong to professional organizations like [NALS: The Association for Legal Professionals](#), the [National Association of Legal Assistants](#), and the [National Federation of Paralegal Associations](#). These organizations and their chapters offer annual conferences, monthly CLEs, webinars, legal publications, professional certifications, vendor directories, membership discounts, and networking opportunities galore. [NALS: The Association for Legal Professionals](#) is particularly active on social networking sites. The official [NALS](#) group on [LinkedIn](#) has over 1,900 members.

Professional organizations and CLE boost your staff's competence, expertise, and effectiveness. When you support professional certification, membership in a professional organization, or CLE, you enhance your staff member's curriculum vitae. Enhanced credentials greatly improve the client's odds of recovering paralegal fees in actions where attorney fee awards are available. It's a winning proposition for everyone.

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