

How to Maximize Paralegal Support

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Are you getting the most out of your paralegals?

If you don't have paralegals, but are getting ready to start using them in your practice, do you know how to maximize their potential?

The paralegal profession was created to take a load off of attorneys by allowing paralegals to perform much of the substantive legal work traditionally handled by attorneys.

Paralegals receive specialized training to learn these skills, whether from the attorneys they work for, through formal education, or both.

Certain types of attorneys know how to capitalize on a paralegal's skills and value, but many more struggle to wrap their arms around the breadth and depth of support available from paralegals. Here are a few tips to help you maximize paralegal support to its fullest potential:

- Get to know your paralegal. Seriously. There's a strong bond between an attorney and his or her paralegal. It's a professional relationship built from trust and respect. If you can't trust your paralegal, and vice versa, you'll never maximize that value. Develop that relationship by getting to know your paralegal.
- As you work together, you'll get a good idea of how capable your paralegal is in general; you'll also get a feel for his or her strengths and weaknesses. Use this knowledge.
 - If your paralegal is very capable in general, then you have a lot of potential to work with.
 - Capitalize on her strengths by delegating more substantive tasks that utilize those strengths.
 - Help her strengthen her weaknesses by mentoring her or sending her to seminars that will help her improve in those areas. If you have a paralegal who is eager to learn, you have a gem. Don't lose it.
- Learn about your paralegal's training and experience.
 - What tasks has he performed for other attorneys?
 - What courses has he taken?
 - What skills did he take away from those courses?
 - What seminars or conferences has he attended?
- Have a conversation. Or two, or three. Ask:
 - What your paralegal feels like she is capable of doing;

- If she feels like you're fully utilizing her skills;
- If she feels like she can do more than she is currently doing for you;
- What tasks she is interested in doing or learning;
- What tasks you do that she would like to assist with and/or do for you.

(**Hint:** These questions, in particular, are vital to capitalizing on a paralegal's value.)

All too often, paralegals are grossly underutilized. Their potential is waiting to be released.

Paralegals come with significant knowledge and training to perform high-level legal work.

They're there because they want to help you; they want to help the clients. Don't let that knowledge and desire to help go to waste.

Take these steps and you'll be well on your way to maximizing the support you receive. When you do, you'll also be on your way to a happier you and happier clients. After all, isn't that why you use, or are thinking about using, a paralegal?

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