

Contract Paralegals: An underutilized but valuable resource

In today's tough economic climate, it is imperative that everyone, most especially small business owners, find ways in which to cut their costs of doing business. Unfortunately, sometimes this translates to layoffs of personnel and downsizing of larger firms. The costs saved by reducing staff will be almost eliminated when you, the attorney, has to spend critical billable hours in the law library doing your own research. For the solo practitioner, this can be a daunting task since solos usually are "the firm." Between balancing your casework, trial appearances and recruitment of new clients, the solo practitioner has time for little else except actually practicing law.

By contracting paralegal services, you gain the knowledge and expertise that an experienced paralegal can offer without the added employee expenses. Today's paralegals are not only providing exceptional litigation support services but also law office management, file organization and diary management systems. The full array of paralegal support services are no longer stereotyped as peripheral. In many instances, paralegals play as an important, if not more vital, role in the attorney/client relationship by virtue of their versatile responsibilities.

Contract paralegals are very similar to expert witnesses – they provide a service, usually for a specific case, and you only use them when you need them. Think about it – say you have to find case law to apply to your client's issue. You could go on Westlaw and do the research then analyze the facts and eventually come up with your answer. On the other hand, you could delegate that task to your paralegal whom bill at a fraction of the cost and thereby save your client money, which your client will greatly appreciate. On an average, an attorney will spend approximately 2 hours a day doing tasks that he/she should delegate to support staff.

Now, some of you may be saying, "Well, we have a confidentiality issue." Actually, you do not. Emails transmitting client documents are encrypted, sent securely and your subcontractor's agreement addresses the issue of confidentiality. Above all, the most enticing aspect of this opportunity is the fact that you get well-trained, very experienced legal support staff that can provide the assistance you need without the expense of an employee. Solo practitioners and appellate attorneys should give contractual services serious consideration when thinking about support staff. The savings for everyone concerned far outweigh any perceived negatives.