6 Tips to Becoming a Freelance Paralegal

Written by Charlie Braithwaite

There's never been a better time to become a freelance paralegal. By going the freelance route, paralegals gain experience working with multiple clients across different sectors. They set their schedule and fit their work around their life—not the other way around. Freelance paralegals can also learn the ropes of running a business and are entirely responsible for their career trajectory.

Fortunately, freelance paralegal services are rising in popularity. The demand for paralegals will increase at twice the rate of lawyers until 2026, with the job growing at roughly 12% per year in the U.S. And given that firms are looking to cut overheads (such as full-time paralegal salaries) as they grapple with an unprecedented labor shortage, many are now choosing to hire a freelance paralegal for administrative support.

Let's discuss how traditional paralegals differ from their freelance counterparts, dig into the benefits of being a freelance paralegal, explain how to land new clients, and provide six key steps to help you become a successful freelancer.

Learn more about becoming a paralegal in a specific state.

How do traditional paralegals differ from freelance paralegals?

While they handle the same types of administrative tasks, traditional paralegals are employed full-time, whereas law firms hire a freelance paralegal on an ad hoc basis when required.

The benefits of being a freelance paralegal

Being a freelance paralegal offers many benefits you wouldn't gain working full-time at a firm. These include:

Increased flexibility

Freelance paralegals decide what they want to work on and for which clients. They choose where they want to work and for how long each day. In other words, they're in complete control of their job. If they want to work from abroad, they can do so. If they prefer working evenings, they can work after the sun goes down.

Supplementary income

While many have made the plunge and are now full-time freelance paralegals, you can instead hold onto your day job. On top of your regular work week, you can take on a few hours of freelance paralegal services to supplement your income. Working an hour per evening (or a couple of hours each day on the weekend) is enough to generate a tidy sum of additional earnings. Don't feel like you need to wave goodbye to your stable job if you want to dip your toe into freelancing. You can always do both while seeing if the freelance life is right for you.

A wider breadth of experience

Freelance paralegals often work with various clients across multiple sectors. In fact, they can even do so simultaneously, bouncing from one client to the next in the space of a single day. This exposes them to different areas of the law, meaning they gain a ton of cross-sector experience. Conversely, full-time paralegals working at a single firm handle the same tasks, for the same team, for the same type of clients, in the same sector—all of the time.

By learning from different clients across multiple sectors, freelance paralegals maximize their individual growth. They find out more about which sectors they like and dislike. They can spot opportunities to grow their career or solve their clients' problems, making them more valuable to firms.

Greater networking opportunities

Freelance paralegals must embrace networking to build a strong client base and grow their business. But the benefits don't stop once a new client has signed a letter of engagement. By working closely with firms and demonstrating their worth, freelance paralegals can make invaluable contacts and will enhance their reputation throughout the industry.

If they ever want to switch over to being a full-time employee, they'll have lots of potential suitors. Or, if they want to pursue a JD and need a job when they finish, they'll have already proved their competence to multiple firms. Utilizing paralegal organizations for networking opportunities is a great place to start.

How do freelance paralegals find clients?

Freelance paralegals find clients by getting their name out there and promoting their freelance paralegal services via a website, social media, and networking.

Six tips for starting out as a freelance paralegal

Enough of the theory—let's dig into the six tips would-be freelance paralegals need to know before they get started.

1. Know what kind of work you want to do

Everybody has their own strengths,weaknesses, and inclinations. But how do you know which yours are?

Through experience.

When you first get started, try a little bit of everything. Typical freelance paralegal services include organizing meetings, taking notes in court, writing letters, conducting research, compiling witness statements, drafting/proofreading documents, liaising with clients, etc.

Once you've given them all a try, you'll know which tasks you excel at—and enjoy—and which ones you'd rather never do again. If you're struggling to decide, remember the 80/20 rule (80% of results come from 20% of your efforts). Focus your business around the 20% of tasks that give you 80% of your enjoyment, or the 20% of time you spend on tasks that provide 80% of your revenue.

2. Feel confident about your rates as a freelance paralegal

New freelancers always struggle to decide what rates to charge. Unfortunately, there's no one-size-fits-all answer here. Freelance paralegals need to factor in their levels of experience, location, specialization, and the complexity of the jobs that they will be taking on. Experienced paralegals with specialized knowledge that live in large, urban areas and work on complex projects can charge the most.

Generally speaking, however, freelance paralegals usually bill anywhere from $22 to $45 per hour. Consider positioning yourself towards the lower end of the scale when starting out. Depending on the demand for work, you may have to charge less to attract new

clients. Once you have a solid bank of experience, you can gradually slide up your prices and pursue better-paying clients. As well as be more selective with the work you take on.

It's worth mentioning rates should include predicted time spent on back and forth client communication (which can often go unbilled.)

3. Get everything in writing

Law firms understand the importance of getting clients to sign engagement letters —and so should freelance paralegals. Before you begin working with a new client,send thema detailed, legally binding contract/letter of engagement. This document should outline the scope of work (i.e., the freelance paralegal services you'll provide), timelines, details, compensation, and points of contact. Only begin working for the client once all key parties have signed on the dotted line.

4. Find the right clients

First things first, you need to be proactive if you want to build a successful career as a freelance paralegal. Nobody's going to stumble upon your website unless you happen to be an SEO expert . Make a daily habit of connecting with potential prospects on LinkedIn, dropping them a note explaining what you do and how you can help their firm. Paralegal networking can help you meet potential clients.

If you have a particular specialty or niche—for example, reviewing M&A documents—you need to make this as clear as day. By positioning yourself as *the* specialist who does X job for Y industry, you will find it far easier to find the right clients, instead of taking on anything and everything for everybody.

Ensure to also regularly attend industry conferences and network with potential clients—though we'll touch on this in more detail below. Having completed a job successfully, ask clients for reviews/testimonials that you can share on your social media profiles and on your website. Better still, ask for referrals—clients might know other firms that also need to hire a freelance paralegal.

Once you've worked for one firm in a particular sector/location, you can then get in touch with similar firms that do the same type of work (unless, of course, you've signed a non-compete). You'll be able to show that you have experience in their sector, which will make you a more attractive prospect.

However, before beginning to work for a client, dig into their website. Explore the types of cases they've worked on, and check out their Glassdoor rating—this will give you a great insight into their culture. If you know who you'll be working with, do some research on them

and find out as much as you can about their reputation in the industry. If you encounter any red flags, such as a Glassdoor review from a fellow contractor with a poor experience , consider pursuing other clients instead.

5. Invest in your workspace and tech stack

Many freelance paralegals choose to work from home. While this is fine, most homes aren't designed with productivity in mind. Therefore, you might need to invest in setting up an appropriate workspace.

Make sure you have a good office chair with excellent lumbar support, a desk, and a monitor. This will keep your eyes level as you work, so you won't have to crane your neck or slouch over to see your screen properly.

If possible, set up your own private workspace free from distraction. This will allow you to produce deep work, defined as "Professional activity performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limit", which produces the best results. Prioritizing deep work will make you more efficient, improve the quality of your work, and make you more valuable to your clients.

Consider decorating your workspace with plants. Research shows that people feel happier and more productive when surrounded by plants—it's unnatural to spend all day, everyday inside looking at a screen. You can improve your mood and overall well being by dotting plants around your office, even when you are working non-stop around the clock.

Lastly, you need to make sure you work with innovative tools. Relying on cumbersome documents and spreadsheets will only end in disaster and missed deadlines as you take on an increasing number of projects. Implement a solution like Clio Manage and create a single source of truth for your entire freelance paralegal business. Store documents, communicate with clients, and manage your finances all from one place.

6. Prioritize networking

If firms don't know you exist, you'll struggle to find clients—let alone sustain a successful career as a freelance paralegal. This means you need to get out there and network.

Get started by signing up for The Law Community, our online network of global legal professionals. Meet industry experts, learn about the latest must-know developments, and gain new skills via our paralegal resources hub to propel your freelancing career.

There are also great networking groups that you can join on LinkedIn and Facebook. However, remember that joining a group alone does little. To derive maximum value, you need to regularly engage in discussions and contribute something positive—don't just sit back and expect the benefits to come to you.

With the pandemic now in the rearview mirror, you should also make a concerted effort to join in-person events and industry meetups. Consider joining the following paralegal associations to find out more:

- National Association of Legal Assistants.
- TheAssociation of Legal Administrators.
- You can also check out the directory of approved paralegal education programsfrom The American Bar Association (ABA) and learn more about itsStanding Committee on Paralegals.

Get ready to launch your freelance paralegal journey

Being a freelancer isn't for everybody—it requires having plenty of discipline and a proactive, go-getter attitude.

But if you're looking for increased work-life flexibility, the opportunity to gain a ton of cross-sector experiences, and the chance to be in charge of your own career, then being a freelance paralegal might be for you.

Remember the six tips discussed above when starting out. Be specific on the work you do and the rates you charge—this will help you find the right type of clients. Treat yourself like a business, investing appropriately in your workspace and ensuring all new clients sign legally binding letters of engagement. Lastly, embrace the power of networking to make new contacts, expand your client base, and increase your reputation in the industry.

Good luck!

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