A Guide to Working with Outsourced Remote Paralegals

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It's no secret that most attorneys could use a few extra hours each workday. The newest *Legal Trends Report* research found that the average lawyer completes just 2.9 hours of billable work per day. While no one can slow down time, savvy lawyers can increase their capacity by tapping into strategies and tools to improve productivity. These strategies include delegating non-billable tasks to remote paralegals for flexible support when necessary.

By taking on various supervised, substantive legal tasks, experienced paralegals can greatly reduce lawyers' workloads and increase their availability for billable hours. At the same time, remote paralegals can help firm costs down because they don't demand the same higher hourly rates that lawyers do. Lawyers can benefit from working with on-demand, outsourced virtual paralegal services during high-volume periods. This is because lawyers don't have to bear the ongoing costs of having additional staff during slower business periods.

Wondering if outsourced remote paralegals could be a good fit for your firm? Read on to learn more about virtual paralegal services and how they can help your law firm become more efficient and profitable.

What is a remote paralegal, and how do they compare to virtual legal assistants?

Virtual paralegals and virtual legal assistants are similar as they both:

- Work remotely (often from home) to help law firms run more efficiently
- Help reduce the workload of lawyers by taking on non-billable tasks

However, the two roles differ in the type and scope of work they can take on.

- **Remote paralegals**: A paralegal is a legal professional with the skills and experience to take on substantive legal work specifically assigned and supervised by a licenced lawyer. In addition, a remote paralegal is a type of paralegal who works remotely, often as an outsourced, freelance paralegal. A virtual paralegal can potentially review client files, conduct legal research, interview clients, draft certain written documents, and more at the direction of a lawyer.
- **Virtual legal assistants**: Virtual legal assistants focus on routine administrative tasks on behalf of a law firm. Typical tasks for a virtual legal assistant may include scheduling appointments and meetings, managing client communications, billing, and managing contacts.

Can paralegals work remotely?

Paralegals can work remotely as long as an attorney properly supervises them. In addition, paralegals (and the law firm) need to have the technological capacity to facilitate secure remote work. Note that attorneys must supervise all paralegals since paralegals can't practice the law. Because virtual paralegal offer their services remotely, virtual paralegals must communicate with their clients, lawyers, and law firms through secure channels of communication. These communication channels include encrypted email and cloud-based software.

What accreditation do remote paralegals have?

Remote paralegals must be paralegals. Remote paralegals can get their experience from learning on the job, formal paralegal training or certification, or both. For example, NALA and NFPA are reputable certification programs for paralegals.

For more on guidelines for lawyers working with paralegals, you can review the *ABA Model Guidelines for the Utilization of Paralegal Services*.

Note: Some states do not certify or licence paralegals, while other states require paralegals to be certified. That's why it's essential to check and abide by your state's rules before hiring a virtual paralegal (or any type of paralegal).

How can lawyers benefit from outsourced remote paralegals?

Working with paralegals can help lawyers improve their practice in general. But outsourced remote paralegals—who offer more flexible support—can benefit attorneys in the following additional ways:

1. Save time and spend more time on billable work

There are only so many hours a lawyer can work in the day. Delegating appropriate substantive legal to qualified paralegals frees up time for an attorney to focus on billable work or clients. Outsourced remote paralegals can take tasks off of a lawyer's plate to save time during busy periods—where those focused hours are crucial for lawyers.

2. Save money

When your firm is busy, supervised paralegals can save your firm money by taking on substantive legal work at a lower rate than lawyers. Paralegals can also improve productivity that ultimately leads to better law firm cash flow.

However, some firms may not need to hire a paralegal full-time—this is where outsourced remote paralegals offer a unique cost-saving opportunity. Turning to outsourced virtual paralegal services instead of hiring a full-time in-house paralegal may be a better financial choice. By paying outsourced contractors on an as-needed basis, you save on full-time expenses. That means you don't have to worry about your outsourced paralegal's vacation time. You also don't pay for slow periods where your paralegal would have little to do.

3. Pass on cost savings to clients

Saving money by using paralegals isn't just good for your firm's bottom line—it can also be an opportunity to deliver a better client journey and experience.

When you use a virtual paralegal to complete non-billable tasks at a lower rate than a lawyer's, you save money. By passing those savings on to clients with a lower bill, you can deliver the same services at a lower price. Lower lawyer fees ultimately help you provide your customers with a better client experience.

4. Tap into a larger talent pool

Paralegals are versatile and have a wide range of experience, specialized training, and skills. In addition, paralegals can have an extensive background in a specific practice area or experience working with legal technology. That's why paralegals' skills and experience can benefit lawyers and drive innovation at law firms.

Services like Hire an Esquire can connect law firms with qualified on-demand freelance legal staff like paralegals. At the same time, these outsourced paralegal services can help you tailor talent to your firm's specific needs.

How to work with a remote paralegal

Working with a paralegal comes with specific challenges and responsibilities for lawyers. Most notably, it's always the licenced lawyer's responsibility to assign work to and supervise any paralegal. But lawyers can take steps to make their working relationship with remote paralegals as efficient and productive as possible. Consider these tips:

1. Use cloud-based legal technology

When working with an outsourced virtual paralegal, cloud-based legal technology is crucial for collaborating and communicating smoothly and efficiently when working remotely.

Cloud-based legal technology can also help facilitate data security when working with a paralegal remotely, which is essential when working with sensitive client documents and data.

Whenever anyone is working on behalf of your firm, they must use secure encrypted communication channels to keep client information safe and confidential. Passing files through unencrypted emails leaves data vulnerable. Cloud-based software like Clio helps protect client information and firm data through multiple security features and protocols.

2. Make sure your remote paralegal fits your law firm's needs

When hiring for an in-house position, you would thoroughly vet a candidate. Hiring an outsourced remote paralegal should be no different. Take the time to consider what specific background and traits a remote paralegal would need for an ideal fit with your firm. Consider technology skills and experience with software, in addition to other needs. For example, experience in your specific practice area.

3. Consider your work and management style

Since you'll be working with a remote paralegal, you should also think about your management style so that you can find paralegals that are a good fit. Think about how you prefer to delegate work and how you prefer to communicate with coworkers and staff members.

4. Set clear expectations

While law firms can benefit from virtual paralegals to cover heavy workloads as needed, the swings between high volume and slow periods can be stressful for paralegals. To maintain a mutually effective and beneficial working relationship with remote paralegals, you need to set clear expectations from the start. After all, a paralegal suffering from paralegal burnout is a loss for all involved.

By clearly outlining your expectations in key areas like timelines and scope of work, you can give remote paralegals a better sense of control and more defined parameters to meet.

5. Establish clear channels of communication

Similarly, clear channels of communication are vital to working with an outsourced paralegal remotely. Establish *how* you will communicate and *how often* you expect to communicate with them from the start. For example, through email for check-ins and through a specific video conferencing platform for calls.

6. Stay organized by establishing processes and workflows

Each law firm may do things differently, so you can't assume that a remote paralegal will understand your preferred processes automatically. Because an outsourced remote paralegal isn't a permanent staff member, it's especially critical to establish clear processes and workflows, so they know how things work at your firm. For example, outlining which apps and tools your law firm uses and for what purposes.

By taking the time to establish clear processes and onboarding virtual paralegals, you can help create a smoother, more seamless working environment.

7. Give clear instructions

Prioritize clear, detailed instructions for any tasks you assign to an outsourced remote paralegal. Because you're working in a virtual environment, there is more opportunity for unintentional miscommunication. So, be explicit when assigning paralegal tasks to make it easier for them to complete the task to your standards.

Your law firm can benefit from an outsourced remote paralegal

Achieving success as a lawyer doesn't have to mean overwhelming yourself with work. Use the right resources to help your firm become more productive during busy times.

With the help of modern cloud-based legal technology, lawyers can hire outsourced remote paralegals to assist them with substantive legal work. For firms that don't require full-time paralegal assistance, an outsourced virtual paralegal can help lawyers complete non-billable legal work as needed. This way, outsourced paralegals can save lawyers time and money—and lawyers can pass those savings on to clients.

While it's important to choose remote paralegals carefully to ensure a good fit, virtual paralegal services offer the added benefit of presenting a larger talent pool. You can hire virtual paralegals from varied backgrounds and experience levels to suit your law firm's unique needs.

About Clio

Clio is the global leader in legal AI, powering legal work across the profession, from law firms of every size to corporate legal teams, government agencies, and courts. Its Intelligent Legal Work Platform unites the business and practice of law, connecting the people, information, and processes behind legal work. Clio's AI brings the context together with legal sources drawn from Clio Library, a growing collection of more than one billion legal documents. Over 400,000 legal professionals in more than 130 countries rely on Clio to run their legal world. Learn more at www.clio.com.