

## **What Makes a Legal Virtual Assistant Special?**

I was an experienced and highly skilled administrative assistant for over 15 years when I decided I wanted to work in the legal field. Since I had worked in different offices advancing rapidly as I went along, I thought I knew pretty much all I needed to know about assisting in any kind of business setting. So I was a bit shocked to discover that employment agencies weren't interested in sending me out for interviews with law firms because I had no experience in the legal field. The classic "Catch 22" – I couldn't get experience because I had none.

"How much different could it be?" I thought. The equipment I'll be using is the same – my typing skills were second to none – I picked up new concepts quickly and I just knew this was right up my alley. But it didn't matter what I "just knew" in general – if I'd never worked in a law office, I could pretty much forget about getting into one now.

So when an agency called and said they had a temp opening in a law office to fill in for an attorney's vacationing secretary and didn't require specific legal experience, I jumped at the chance. Obviously I had the gift, because at the end of those two weeks, the attorney asked if he fired his present assistant, if I would take the job! In the next ten years, I had a chance to learn every aspect of administering and supporting a law office – from reception to secretary to office manager to paralegal duties.

In the process, I also learned why law offices want someone with prior experience in this specialty field. Not only does it have its own special language, there are requirements that if not met can have dire consequences for the attorney and his clients. Since the first attorney I worked for specialized in legal malpractice, I learned that deadlines are serious business; discovery responses must be complete, meet all the rules and served properly, along with a thousand other rules and conventions along the way before trial or settlement. Good intentions don't count – only results matter and efficiency and organization is the key to getting your desired outcome.

I saw many examples of simple forgetfulness to outright negligence on the part of lawyers and their assistants, sometimes forgetting to complete discovery and designate that expert witness timely and properly. Most times judges won't give you a "do-over" so forget about calling him at trial, seriously handicapping or blowing your case.

Lawyers are usually busy, Type A personalities – if they say "Draft voir dire instructions" or "Set our MSJ for hearing," or "Draft standard discovery requests," they shouldn't have to stop and interpret like they were speaking a second language. And it *is* a specialty career. How many general secretaries might think that the "style" of a case refers to the clothing worn by the parties? I've even seen paralegals fresh out of school not really knowing the difference between pleadings and discovery and the special requirements for these, whether it be in county, state or federal courts.

There are many other duties I can assist you with as your virtual legal assistant. When I schedule depositions after endless calls to all parties' attorneys to reach a consensus on timing, I won't forget to book the court reporter – or to put it on your calendar. When you want to take the rare day off, have me monitor your email and voice messages and contact you only if truly urgent.

Let me do some of the “hand holding” of your clients, keeping them informed with calls or formal case status reports.

Even for attorneys who do some of their own typing, armed with a digital recorder, they can turn unproductive “down time” (driving in the car, coffee break at Starbucks, waiting around in court) into productive “work time” -- my clients use these moments to dictate instructions to set appointments, respond to emails, draft short notes of thanks and file memos summarizing the meeting just concluded, etc. Sent to me via email, I can have these waiting for review before they even get back to the office.

I can keep your Outlook email organized, using rules and folders to make it easy to find what you need and archive when needed. There are many tools and programs available to make working with a legal virtual assistant easy and seamless, not to mention cost effective. The possibilities are virtually endless, but the most important weapon in my arsenal is my vast experience and the desire to put it all to use for your benefit. But don't just take my word for it – put me on trial and let me prove my case.

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