

The Allure of Using Paralegals

Thomas E. McClure, J.D., M.S.

Professor & Director of Legal Studies, Illinois State University

- I. Objectives
 - A. Introduce the model guidelines for utilization of paralegals.
 - B. Present the economic advantage of paralegals
 - C. Highlight key guidelines for utilizing paralegals
 - D. Offer the non-economic value of paralegals
- II. Educating paralegals
 - A. ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals develops and promotes policies relating to the education, employment, training, and effective use of paralegals.
 - B. ABA approved paralegal education programs focus on developing practical skills.
 - C. The Illinois State University paralegal program is ABA-approved.
- III. Utilizing paralegals - Guidelines on Utilization of Paralegal Services
 - A. Underlying concepts
 - 1. Attorney responsibility
 - 2. No unauthorized practice
 - 3. Confidentiality
 - 4. No conflicts
 - 5. Paralegals & money
 - B. Ten guidelines
 - 1. Lawyer ensures ethical paralegal
 - 2. Lawyer supervision
 - 3. No unlawful practice of law
 - 4. Third-party awareness
 - 5. Make paralegal status clear
 - 6. Confidentiality
 - 7. No conflicts of interest
 - 8. Billing for paralegals
 - 9. No fee splitting
 - 10. Promote continuing education and pro bono
- IV. Maximizing profits through shifting work from associates (\$300) to paralegals (\$125)

- A. Comparison of two examples – billable hours
32 hours by associate = \$9,600; 44 hours combined = \$7,600.
 - B. Fixed fee/contingency fee comparisons
- V. Amplifying return on investment
- A. Typically, paralegals become profitable immediately, whereas junior associates often take a couple years to begin realizing profits.
 - B. Paralegals also bring with them long-term profitability because they will become more efficient and knowledgeable while continuing learn to habits and preferences of their supervising attorneys.
 - Conversely, once associates regularly generate profits, they seek partnership to share in the firm's earnings or they look elsewhere for different opportunities.
 - In the firm--Contrast these revenue-generating associates with paralegals, who cannot become partners and will continue to produce profits for their entire careers.
- VI. Increasing client satisfaction
- A. Increased accessibility to client (interpersonal benefit)
 - B. Lower fees
 - C. Happy clients refer new business
- VII. Improving quality of life
- A. Higher profits for the partners
 - B. Happier associates-only tasks like depositions and court appearances; reduced resentment (tasks that non-attorney staff complete).
 - C. Happier associates = decreased turnover.
 - D. Increased paralegal use supports the firm's pro bono efforts by either allowing more attorney time in that area or by paralegals substantively assisting attorneys on pro bono matters themselves.
- VIII. Paralegal tasks
- A. Tasks paralegals can perform
 - B. Tasks paralegals cannot perform
- IX. Practical tips
- A. Managing paralegals
 - B. Acquiring paralegals