

The Role of a Legal Assistant

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THE ROLE OF A LEGAL ASSISTANT

INTRODUCTION

The role of a Legal Assistant is so much more than just typing letters and legal documents. Your ability to organize yourself, your lawyer, and develop systems specific to how your lawyer works, can greatly impact the success of a law practice. Developing good work habits that enable you to become faster and more efficient, but without sacrificing quality and quantity, are the hallmarks that make for a great assistant.

What Does a Legal Assistant Do on a Daily Basis?

The duties of a Legal Assistant vary day to day, but generally consist of the following:

1. Reviewing, responding, printing and posting emails;
2. Reviewing and posting for incoming fax and courier correspondence;
3. Time entry;
4. Diarization and filing;
5. Pulling files for the day;
6. Reviewing voicemail, returning calls, and booking consultations;
7. Dictation;
8. Taking the next step on files without being directed to do so such as drafting a Response to Notice to Disclose, divorce documents, and letters;
9. Billing and collections.

MAKING YOURSELF STAND OUT

There are things that an assistant can do to make herself stand out and leave a lasting impression.

Attention to Detail

This is paramount to EVERYTHING that you do, and can really set you apart from the pack. It takes time to train yourself to pay attention to all the little things, but it pays off when your lawyer remarks how well written something you drafted was, or a Justice specifically mentions in Special Chambers that the manner in which you organized and collated the Confirming Letter was outstanding. Remember, what you send out is a reflection on you and your lawyer. Your clients are paying very

good money. They do not want documentation that looks like it was typed up in someone's basement, or has typographical errors in it.

- Read what you type as you type it while doing dictation. This also allows you to fix typographical errors as you are typing, put in punctuation where necessary, or convert a run on sentence into two sentences so the paragraph flows well when read. It also helps you learn the way your lawyer speaks when writing letters, so can then mimic him when you draft letters on your own;
- Do take a minute to read over the letter or document you drafted. Sometimes a quick skim can pick up something you missed while typing;
- Look at your letter or court document after you have typed it. Clean up the way it looks so paragraphs, titles and information are not crowded and messy;
- Do not let paragraphs run over to the next page by one sentence. Move the entire paragraph to the next page if necessary, or put a page break in where it makes more sense;
- Consider using a time stamp on each email as you enter the time in your accounting software (e.g. Emails from client (09:42, 10:52; 13:58 and 14:24). In one day you could receive 20 or 30 emails on one file. If you are able to confirm the time of each and every email in the 0.5 lump you posted for, it is clear to the client that there was a lot to review and respond to and they are getting their money's worth.

Weekly File Review with Your Lawyer

- Consider sitting down once a week at the beginning of your work week for about an hour or so just to review your active client list with your lawyer;
- The purpose of the meeting consists of:
 - Reviewing the calendar for the current week and following week to see what deadlines must be met or what work must be completed;
 - Reviewing the active file list file by file to discuss what is happening with each file, and for you to receive instructions on some work that you could do on your own (e.g. calling a client to schedule a telephone appointment, follow up with someone about documents that were drafted, or receiving instructions to draft divorce documents, etc.). This also helps your lawyer to be more efficient and proactive in managing his client files;