

The Virtual Paralegal – My Friend or Foe?

Recently, at a local paralegal association meeting, I was surprised to find that I was dubbed by some as their enemy and by others as their hero. Despite my natural inclination to associate only with my “fans”, I decided to find out why some fellow paralegals seemed offended when they found out I was a virtual paralegal (VP) and not a law firm employee or an in-house paralegal. After a few short conversations a pattern began to emerge; it was the fear of the unknown. The paralegals who saw me as their enemy had never worked with a virtual or freelance paralegal before and had several misconceptions about how we work. I would like to dispel the misconceptions and maybe we can all be friends, or at least most of us.

Misconception #1 – Virtual Paralegals Work Directly for the Public and Take Business Away from Law Firms - Yes, there are independent paralegals in the market place who work directly for the public. However, virtual and freelance paralegals work for attorneys only, and are very careful not to engage in any type of unauthorized practice of law. All of the work I do is supervised by an attorney. VP's take ethics very seriously because their business depends on their reputation in the legal community.

Misconception #2 – Virtual Paralegals Are Really Seeking Full-Time Positions in Law Firms – VP's are business owners, not temps looking for permanent positions. When a paralegal invests time, money and sweat into starting a freelance business, the goal is to grow that business. It becomes like a child that a mother will not abandon. I have been offered a permanent position in almost every firm I have ever done work for. I have refused the offers because that would be contrary to my goal.

Misconception #3 – Virtual Paralegals Are Expensive and Will Cut Into Firm Profits – VP's can save firms a considerable amount of money. My clients pay only for the time I spend on their projects. Firms save money by not being responsible for my office space, office equipment, vacation time, health insurance and the many other costs of a full-time employee.

Misconception #4 – Virtual Paralegals Make Law Firm Paralegals Look Bad To Their Employers – Many times, attorneys hire VP's because their paralegals have more work than they can handle, but not enough to justify hiring another full-time employee. By having a VP relieve some of the workload, the permanent paralegals meet their deadlines, complete their projects, and focus on high priority tasks. They look great to their employers!

I hope this clears up some confusion about how VP's work. Law firm and in-house paralegals should truly view the virtual paralegal as a friend and not a foe.