

Finding the right virtual paralegal

A decade ago, virtual paralegals were widely viewed as a fleeting trend. Fast forward to today and, not only are these remote legal professionals still around, but many of them provide valuable services to numerous legal practices. These lawyers find virtual paralegals an attractive option because they meet support needs without the added overhead of expanding the physical office staff.

If you are considering a virtual paralegal or have already decided to take the plunge, here are some tips to help you make a smooth and effective transition.

- **Accurately assess your needs** – Hiring a virtual paralegal does not have to be an all or nothing situation. You can tailor the arrangement to fit the specific needs of your firm... but first you have to figure out what those needs truly entail. Sit down and do a real assessment of the tasks a virtual assistant could take on for the firm's benefit. Next, consider your financial resources and how much you are willing to pay for completion of these tasks. Work schedule and time frames are also a part of the equation, as are labor laws. If your goal is to create an independent contractor relationship, make sure you know the regulations regarding this type of employment arrangement, or else you could inadvertently find yourself with an employee, instead of a contractor.
- **Conduct a thorough search** – A paralegal's role is far too important to just pick a name from Craigslist. Not that there can't be viable candidates on Craigslist, but you may want to give this search a little more time and effort. If you do have the time and resources, conduct your own thorough search, just as you would for an in-office position. Look for candidates with the skills and experience this type of position demands. If you don't have the time or desire to handle a search on your own, consider using an agency. Several employment agencies offer

virtual and contract paralegal staffing. For a fee, you can let them handle the search while you focus on the firm's more pressing issues.

- **Background check** – This is not the time to skimp on a background check. You are looking for an individual to assist with confidential data and it is your duty to ensure that he or she is as trustworthy and reliable as possible. Speak with former employers and clients. If the individual operates as an independent business, check for state registration and proper insurance. Take the appropriate steps to conduct a thorough background check. Bringing a paralegal into your office without a proper background check can prove disastrous down the line.

A virtual paralegal can be a viable option for the assistance you need in your practice. Just be sure to take the process seriously, in order to protect you and your firm.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.