Tips for Creating a Legal Project Management Schedule, Part II

In the second part of this three part series, I want to discuss the process of assigning pieces of the elephant to individual project members.

While it may appear an easy task at first glance, it is in actuality a very important piece of the puzzle that can make or break the success of a firm matter. By taking the time to consider the individual requirements of a task and then allocating a specific amount of time for completion, you can better prepare the Legal Project Management (LPM) team for ultimate efficiency and profitability.

Assigning the Tasks

Before you begin matching any task with a firm member, it is important to first completely consider the elements of the task and exactly what is needed for successful implementation.

This is essentially the same thought process you used to analyze the entire project, but on a more specific level. Consider the following:

- What is the ultimate goal of this particular assignment?
- What are the specific tasks that are required to complete this assignment?
- Is there any special education or experience that is needed to complete this assignment?
- Are there any foreseeable roadblocks to the success of this task?

Once you have answered these questions, you will have a better understanding about what the task requires and what member of the firm is best suited to meet the need.

For example, the firm may be working on a property purchase matter and one of the tasks involves the resolution of a tax related issue. Analysis of the task reveals that a very specific taxation requirement may prove relevant. While there may be a number of tax attorneys at the firm, there is one particular associate who recently handled a matter regarding this exact taxation issue. So, obviously this associate is the best choice to handle this task.

Without adequate consideration of the individual task, this particular issue may have gone unrecognized until midway through the project cycle, possibly causing a delay in progress.

When choosing which firm member will handle which task, ask these questions:

- Has this member handled matters similar to this project as a whole?
- Does this member have an expertise that is relevant to this specific task?
- Does this member work well in group settings, where collaboration and regular communication are necessary?
- What, if anything, can this member contribute to the team that no one else can?

Allocating Time

Now that the tasks are assigned, it is time to allocate a set amount of time for the completion of each one. This is also a vital responsibility because it directly affects the fee charged to the client.

Though LPM utilizes a flat fee billing system, it still requires consideration to work hours and their value. When distributing time among the individual assignments, it is helpful to rank them from most relevant to least relevant in terms of the overall objectives of the matter.

Generally, those that are ranked high will require the most amount of time for completion. These are also the tasks that are easiest to justify in terms of time spent and the fee charged for the project.

Another vital component of allocating time is creating small buffers in case of unforeseen complications. Every good plan considers the unexpected and legal projects are no exception.

Now you are well on your way to planning a successful LPM matter. You have broken down the matter, assigned the tasks and allocated time for each one. In part three of the series, I will bring it on home with a final tip to get your project management goals off to a successful start.

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About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.