



Legal Staffers Sound Off

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Do you have a question about working in the legal profession? About LawCrossing? No matter the topic, + send us an e-mail and we'll be glad to answer it for you!

I just received my Paralegal Degree, and I have no experience. No one seems to be willing to offer an opportunity so that I can get the experience. How do I get the doors to open for me?

Nancy P.

The best way is to get your foot in the door. The strategy should always be multi-faceted. Talk to just about everyone you know and let them know you are looking for work. Make sure you start with your paralegal school, family, and friends. You can also try and get in as support staff for a firm and work your way up to the paralegal position you want, making sure that your employers know that you are certified. Take initiative, offer to work overtime if there is a need, and talk to everyone about the fact that you are a certified paralegal. Another way to get your foot in the door is using a legal staff placement agency, most will place you in a position you are slightly overqualified for at first, but eventually you will get a chance to prove yourself.

I was hired to work in a specific department of a law firm as support staff. Recently, I've been asked to assist with projects in other departments even though each department has its own staff. If I don't help, I'm seen as not being a team player. But I feel it isn't my responsibility to help another department, as I was hired specifically for one department. Also, I don't think my salary is high enough to warrant the extra workload. Should I ask for my job description to be rewritten and ask for more compensation or just stay where I'm put? Any input would be greatly appreciated.

Karen C., Legal Assistant

Though we at LawCrossing are sympathetic to your predicament, we also recognize it as an occupational hazard of the legal staff field. Often, both small and large firms will either have a surge in business, with which staffing must catch up, or a certain department is mismanaged to the point of never having enough people, and other, better-performing departments end up picking up the slack. Here's my suggestion. If the person asking for help is directly in your chain of command - and someone who may control your pay increases, promotions, and bonuses - I'd say suffer through it and then make sure your extra help is remembered. If, however, the extra work is more of a favor to a poorly performing colleague and designed to hide the ineffectual management of a certain department, then politely refuse or make sure you draw attention to the fact that you are working extra. Also make sure you make a note of the extra work to your supervisor.

I have a question about panel interviews. I had an initial interview with the person I would be replacing, then another with a supervisor, then a panel interview. Why did I have to jump through so many hoops?

Gregory G., Legal Administrator

An initial interview with the person you are replacing is a good sign. This person knows best what the job needs. Many firms will have the person who knows the person best do the initial screening, and then the supervisor would decide whether she can work with you. I think a panel interview is often a way to see how a person reacts under pressure. If you made it that far, however, you have a very good chance of landing the job.

Are career fairs a good idea for professionals in the legal field?

Cary G., Student

Yes, as a general rule, but everything is relative; so let me explain. Legal jobs are readily acquired through personal connections. Often, when you apply for a job at a firm or get an interview there, it's great to be able to name-drop. Hence, any place where you can meet and greet people who make hiring decisions at firms is definitely useful. Having said that, however, I think you will still be competing with all the other people at the fair. You will still be judged on your resume, your academic performance, your class rank, and other factors depending on the firm. So I would suggest going to these fairs and other conferences, but if you are in need of a job, this should only be one tool in your multi-dimensional job-hunting arsenal.

I'm planning on relocating and want to start looking for a new job. My move is probably a year away. Should I contact firms now and in the coming months and then apply when I move? My thinking is it would be a good way to get my name out there. What do you suggest?

Dennis M.

Making contacts is a great thing to do in a new city, for employment or otherwise. If your move is a year away, I would suggest contacting firms for informational interviews rather than applying for jobs. Another thing to do is working with some agencies and going out to see recruiters, if you have the requisite experience. Another thing I'd strongly recommend is getting a local address to put



on your resume when you do start applying to out-of-state jobs. If you do not have an address there, get a P.O. Box. Anything you can do to keep your resume from being flagged as out of state would be helpful, especially if you are moving far away.

I interviewed at a company and everything went well. However, the company ending up hiring another candidate who had more experience. The company is now hiring for the same position. This time there are two openings. Should I reapply? If so, should I mention my previous application and interview?

Jennifer B., Receptionist

Yes! Absolutely. Especially if you are certain that your lack of experience was the only reservation the company had about you. More than likely, the company is expanding and needs more people. If they are hiring two people in a support position, they are probably moving the more experienced person into a supervisory role, and you might be able to get your foot in the door.