



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!

1) I recently took on a temporary position for one of the largest international firms in the nation, but I am not happy with the responsibilities of my assignment. Not only am I not working in the department that I would like to work in, but the position is also not challenging and does not require me to perform any paralegal duties. I have a paralegal certificate, as well as experience in several areas of law.

Although I am happy to have my foot in the door at such a prestigious firm, I do not see opportunity for continued growth. I also plan to relocate within the near future, and the company does not have offices in that area. I would like to go into Intellectual Property, Corporate, Real Estate and Wills, Trust and Probate, but I do not have experience in any of those areas. Because some of these areas are very popular in the state to which I am relocating, I would like to have some experience upon arrival. I know that Intellectual Property and even Corporate Law are difficult areas to break into; so I have taken courses through NALA (National Association for Legal Assistants) which certified me in Intellectual Property and Real Estate. I am hoping that this will give me an advantage, but I still do not have the experience.

Although having worked at such a prestigious firm would look good on my resume, I strongly feel that I should seek other temporary employment in the areas that I desire. Not knowing what the future holds, I am concerned that I might have burned bridges by not finishing an assignment. The firm has departments in all of the areas in which I would like to work.

What should I do?

Christina, Paralegal

The answer to this depends largely on the length of this assignment, the immediacy of your move, and your ability to get a reference at this prestigious firm. First, if the assignment is short, I would suggest you finish it, as it will build a better reputation for you at the agency that placed you. They are more likely to place you in a position of greater responsibility once you have proven yourself. Experience is important, but not essential, when you have education. I suggest you continue to search at this time. While completing the assignment, try to search for jobs and network through NALA and other reputable legal staff organizations.

2) Hi. I have a few questions I hope you can give me some insight into. I have almost completed my AS in Paralegal Studies, but no one is hiring new graduates -- they all want experience. How can I get experience if I can't get a job as one? Catch-22, isn't it? 2. I'm an ex-nurse (LPN). How will that help/hinder me in getting the job? 3. I live in a very small town. The larger cities are a minimum of 70 miles away from me. Moving is out of the question, as we have lived here 12 years and don't want to move. The jobs here are few and far between. How can I get more access to jobs? I'm already on several job boards. Thanks!

Pauline P.

First, your lack of experience should hurt you less in a small town, since the firms and organizations located there probably do not have strict standards for hiring. What is

likely, however, is that personal contacts play a stronger role in hiring decisions, and fewer jobs are open, as people tend to stay at their jobs. You may have to increase your commute a bit if you do not want to move. You can also try working with a placement agency to get your foot in the door at a firm and make some contacts. Feel free to do a search on LawCrossing for jobs in your area. Since it's free to see the number of jobs available, you might get a better idea of what sort of opportunities are available. As for being a nurse, it should not hurt you in anyway; in fact, many firms who practice medical-related law seek out legal staff and attorneys with a health-related background. However, your location may not have any such firms. I would suggest showcasing your medical experience if you are applying at a firm that deals with anything related to health law.

3) I've applied to several jobs but haven't been hired. I suspect I've been getting a bad reference from an employer -- in particular, from the staff who didn't like me. How do I get around this? I wasn't a bad employee. I just wasn't buddy-buddy with the other employees.

Christie G., Legal Secretary

You should only put the name of the main Human Resources contact on your resume. Your past employer is not supposed to answer questions, other than the length of your employment and the reason why you left, unless you put them down as a reference. If you suspect your past employer(s), especially those who were not in a supervisory position to you, are giving you a bad reputation, refrain from listing them on your resume. If



the job you are applying for requires a past employer's contact, list only a main Human Resources contact.

4) How much can I trust a temp-to-perm position? I don't want to stay in a position for more than a year, all the while hoping for the permanent offer. Any tips? When should I think of moving on from a temp position if I'm not made an offer?

Lisa L., Receptionist (temp)

Most reputable staffing companies will tell you from the start whether that position is on the permanent track. I suggest you speak with your recruiter to find out your status at this firm. Also, staffing agencies would like to get you hired permanently; it's in their best interest. The more interest you take in finding permanent employment, the more interest they are likely to take in you. Furthermore, companies who use staffing firms routinely provide feedback about how the employees placed by that firm are working out; hence, you should be asking your staffing agency about what the company has been saying about you.