



Legal Staffers Sound Off

[8-9- 2004 by LawCrossing Staff]

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 just spoke to a recruiter who suggested I work as a temporary attorney on mass litigation, just to get "attorney experience" on my CV. It was the best advice I have gotten so far. Nobody else suggested this. However, I have been working in this field (Foreign Trademark Prosecution) since 1995 and switching to commercial litigation, working in a war room, bate stamping and punching holes in paper really doesn't appeal to me. I love Product Liability law, and am also interested in Tax, Nursing Home Abuse and Elder law (Probate, Wills and Trusts) I guess I need some advice on what road to pursue; is it possible to pursue them all? Should I stick with the field I have a "leg up" in, or start at the bottom of something new? I am bored to tears doing what I'm doing. I think that as an attorney in Trademarks, it would be much better. I would need a mentor, a small TM group. I am willing to relocate.

- Natalie L., Paralegal/JD

Well, I personally think getting experience doing project litigation work is not necessarily a good thing. In fact, it won't really help you get to where you really want to go, as you will still be considered inexperienced in that particular field. Trademark work is fairly competitive (that does not mean that work is not out there, though, so I think you should keep trying there, too), but tax, elder law and probate are thriving fields. Do a search on LawCrossing in these practice areas - it's free to do the search, so see what you come up with.

2) I am looking to enter the paralegal field, but I keep getting turned down since I have no experience working as a paralegal. I have

office experience as a secretary, a bachelor's degree in science, a degree in paralegal studies and two paralegal certificates. I have internship experience from college. I am frustrated. I can't afford to do an unpaid internship -- I need full time employment and I don't want to temp since it is financially temporary. Any advice?

- Julie K.

You seem to have enough education to qualify you to be a paralegal -- the problem is that some firms will hire "home grown" paralegals who they train, and its very hard to break in as one of these. Luckily, others require a certificate and will be more lenient about experience so long as the person has relevant educational experience. The best indication of what a firm wants is how they word their advertising -- if the advertisement requires a certificate, you should certainly apply. Legal staff recruiting companies can actually be fairly helpful here. Find a company who is willing to work for you on temp-to-hire positions and they may be able to help you get your foot in the door.

3) I have a bachelor's degree, and I have been unemployed for several months. I have not been able to find a professional job. I applied for a clerical position at a law school. It's low pay, and it's not a professional job, but I am eventually going to law school, so it might help to be in the environment. Can you give me some advice?

- Jo, Recent Grad.

Well, a first job is just that -- a first job. If you are interested in the law, a job at a law school can be a great opportunity, especially

if it allows for contact with students and faculty. If the pay is livable, you should give it a shot.

4) The school that I go to doesn't have a job placement office/service. Is it best to try looking for temp agencies that specialize in finding an entry-level job working in a law office?

-- Gary, BA

A temp agency can be useful since they will often work with you and help you write a resume. You can also use a job board like this one, and apply to advertised jobs.

5) I am an experienced legal secretary. I have temped in the past, but would like to have a small business out of my home. How would you suggest I go about making myself "known" without too great an expense? I can do specialized jobs for attorneys.

Lesley, Legal Secretary

Many legal service professionals work on a contract basis. One way would be to temp for a while, build a reputation, and then go in by yourself. However, you have to wait six months to work independently for a firm that hired you as a temporary employee. You can also attend legal conferences; offer to work for lower rates for some clients to build a reputation.