



Feature

Legal Staff: Not Just for Law Firms

By Stony Olsen

When you think “paralegal” or “legal secretary,” law firms typically come to mind. And yes, the behemoths of the legal industry are where most paralegals and secretaries are found.



But legal staff jobs don't exist only at law firms or for solo practitioners. Corporations often will hire a paralegal or dozen as well.

This makes perfect sense, if you think about it. Some companies

legal departments really are like law firms in terms of size, amount of legal work, and number of lawyers. Think of companies such as Apple, for example: They have a huge legal department that is very active. Think all those attorneys might need a few legal staffers, too?

Yes, paralegals and legal secretaries are in demand in the corporate world as well. Corporate legal work is similar to law firm work — except you only have one client. That client, of course, is the corporation.

Working for a corporate legal department is much like any other work. The practice areas the attorneys deal with may be limited (there's no family law or estate law, etc.), but the work is the same. Researching cases and statutes, or administrative decisions, helping to negotiate contracts or agreements, document review — it's all very similar.

Litigation support is also involved in corporate work. Drafting court documents in the necessary formats, case checking, and so forth are needed just as much in the corporate world as in the biggest law firms around.

So how do you get a job in the corporate world? With law firms laying off staff left and right, it's important to realize

that many corporations don't advertise their staff positions quite as much.



First, many corporations view legal staff as just an extension of regular staffers. A secretary is a secretary, right? Of course not — but usually, staff decisions tend to not be thought about very much.

If you are lucky, you'll find a corporation that is looking for a legal staffer specifically. But many aren't. So, the first thing to do in most cases is to emphasize what a legal staffer does — i.e., what you do.

What do you do that a regular staffer can't do? Make sure you send your resume and cover letter to the legal department as well as the HR department (because they're the ones that will probably hire you). The attorneys themselves might not even have thought about it much. If you let them know the benefits you can provide over a regular “personal assistant,” though, they are much more likely to lobby HR to hire someone specifically for them.

Don't interview without the legal department there. If you want to work as a paralegal, then being interviewed by the human resources manager alone won't be satisfactory for either of you. The interviewer won't know what is important to the attorneys or be able to recognize your unique skills. If the interviewer is the attorney, it's just like any other legal interview.

Good luck!

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