



Feature

Immigration Law Offers Legal Staff a Diverse and Personal Work Environment

By Ursula Furi-Perry

Diversity is the cornerstone of immigration, and not only when it comes to newcomers. For non-attorney legal professionals working in the field, immigration law also reflects great diversity during any given workday.



"I work on a whole bunch of different cases, and each case might require different tasks," said Amber Blasingame, paralegal at Joseph Law Firm in Denver. Immigration encompasses several subdivisions, from more administrative family-based and employment-based cases and naturalization, to less

mundane matters dealing with deportation, asylum, and court-related activities. Paralegals and legal assistants help with form preparation and gathering clients' supporting documents, as well as court assistance in deportation and criminal cases. Although many immigration paralegals specialize in one specific area, most firms will require education and familiarity with all topics. "I mainly do family and business, but have worked on some deportation cases as well," Blasingame explained. "You can get some cross-training in law firms."

Perhaps the most important function of immigration paralegals is being the client's primary contact. "The attorneys take initial consultations, but then the case comes to me as a manager and I will assign it to a paralegal," said Cassandra Hunter, who manages a private immigration practice and also owns Hunter Immigration Paralegals in Tennessee. "There is so much personal contact with the clients that you really get to know them," Blasingame said. With its personal nature, immigration law can be a rewarding field. "When a client calls and says 'I received my green card in the mail,' it is at that point that you realize all the work on the case has come to a time in the client's life where they feel they can stay here and be part of the United States," Hunter stated. "Probably the reason I stayed in immigration for so long is the wins," Blasingame agreed. "I love being able to call clients and tell them they get to stay in the United States, especially when I have a client who's really appreciative."

Yet constant client contact presents many challenges. For one thing, it can make it hard for immigration paralegals to leave legal advice to attorneys, Hunter said. "It's challenging to be

careful not to give legal advice. Consultations with attorneys are only for so many minutes...and attorneys are often rushed for time," sometimes resulting in a slew of clients' legal questions directed at the paralegal. For example, "the foreign national may ask the paralegal how strong their case is," listed Hunter, "and it's very hard to talk to a new client and say you can't answer that." Additionally, cases can drag on for years and the government faces a lengthy backlog, causing clients to grow impatient. Blasingame recalled a top executive waiting on employment-based papers, who had a tough time understanding that his impressive resumé wouldn't make matters any more speedy. "You really have to be calm with the client and help them understand that the government can take a lot of time," Blasingame said. With the nature of this field, paralegals must keep track of constantly changing laws and regulations. "Many times, you're the front when talking to a client, and you have to be prepared for that," Blasingame explained.

Cultural and lingual issues can also prove tough when working with clients. "The language barrier can sometimes be a problem, but it's not absolutely necessary to know other languages," said Hunter, who speaks minimal Spanish and notes that many firms rely on interpreters when necessary. "A lot of times, clients will speak English. Others may speak it, but feel more comfortable speaking another language. It can be frustrating, especially when you don't have [someone who can translate] on site." Immigrants may also be more fearful of sharing information, making it tougher for legal staff to do their jobs. When it comes to cultural differences, Blasingame says understanding and patience are the key. She recounted facing some clients whose cultures tend not to value women workers, and explained that she countered the situation by standing her ground to get her point across, remaining professional and diplomatic, and not letting cultural differences get to her.

The diverse and personal character of immigration makes this a unique field for legal staff, one which continues to



Feature

experience growth and increased demand for paralegals and legal assistants. Also, "immigration tends to be a nine-to-five

job and actually allows you to have a balance in your life," Blasingame believes. "It's a very rewarding experience."

EmploymentCrossing is the largest collection of active jobs in the world.

We continuously monitor the hiring needs of more than 250,000 employers, including virtually every corporation and organization in the United States. We do not charge employers to post their jobs and we aggressively contact and investigate thousands of employers each day to learn of new positions. No one works harder than EmploymentCrossing.

Let EmploymentCrossing go to work for you.