A Big Secret of Paralegal Time Management

Every paralegal needs to learn time management in order to survive. Still many paralegals who are not proficient in time management keep on working hours for which they are not paid. Though some blame either their fate or the law firms, it's inefficient time management which is to be blamed, as illustrated in this article.

While browsing the web searching for nuggets of wisdom, I chanced upon an old post here http://superlegalfun.blogspot.in/2010/11/lesson-on-billable-hours.html that seemed to illustrate what I felt I needed to say quite succinctly. As the author mentions, paralegals are usually paid hourly or by salary, and their bonuses are based on billable hours – and that creates quite a problem for a paralegal who is not conscious about time management. Inefficient time management can have all sorts of consequences, from having your hours stolen from under your feet to getting fired – none of which are savory prospects.

When do you end up wasting work hours?

The answer is that certain types of work, which paralegals need to do, are not counted towards billables. Such work may include purely administrative work like secretarial duties, or working on contingent cases. However, as long as you work in a law firm, the billable hour is one of the major benchmarks of your value and usually, as the author of the referred post puts down – here is the math:

The normal law firm requirement on billable hours doesn't really seem so tough as it is about 7.5 hours daily, or 150 hours monthly or about 1800 hours yearly. However, the hours that are stolen include:

- About 20 hours of work on contingent cases each month
- About 20 hours of non-billable purely administrative work each month like copying, mailing, reception duties etcetera

So, on an average, a paralegal is working 190 hours per month and getting a salary for 150 hours.

How to maximize work-hour to billable-hour conversion

Here is the nugget of wisdom, admitted by the author of superlegalfun:

“My salary is based on 8 hours per day, meaning that the firm needs to pay me, and I have to work 1.5 hours extra every day to meet the minimum requirements (which is approximately 16.5 hours extra per pay period).

Now, if I were to exceed the requirements, I would increase my bonus that much more. If I cut back on 0.2 administrative hours each day (12 minutes), I could increase my billable hours by 4 hours each month or take a half day off each month without cutting into my billables.”

So, it's entirely up to you whether to complain of being overworked and losing the will and quality in work, or manage your time intelligently and emerge the winner.
The job scenario for paralegals continues to be rosy and the BLS declares that through 2016, the paralegal occupation is going to have a 28% growth prospective. Though it is not known whether the demand would be filled by more paralegals joining the industry, or more new law graduates choosing to become paralegals, one thing is certain, if you can manage your time – you would succeed in the industry.

Time management is the key – learn it, and things would change. And it wouldn't matter who you are competing against.