

PARALEGAL STAFFING – WIN WIN WIN By Shawn R. Olley

Paralegals – how much do they cost, and how much can your firm make on their services? Aside from the supportive resources that paralegals offer to attorneys, the bottom line, truth be told, is often times the determining factor in how many paralegals you have on staff, and what investments you make in cultivating their continued education.

What backgrounds do you require of those that you hire, and how much does the employer invest in their continued education? Investments in conference attendance and software training, when bundled with the sky-rocketing benefit packages, causes the billable hours requirement to continue to rise.

A recent survey showed billable rates ranging from the lowly paralegal clerk's \$95.00/hour to senior paralegal managers at \$210.00/hour. The 2007 median billing rate was \$160.00/hour. Obvious mitigating circumstances, such as specialties and years of service, can spike these rates. Think of it. There are no state or national standards in place to justify the title "Paralegal" and hourly rates that, at times, match associate rates. The time to show the staff's value to the client is not after the invoices have been mailed. If you need assistance at a peak time in your firm – filling the chair with a warm body billed at a professional rate, rather than an actual professional, can wreak havoc with a clients' good will when questions are asked on the billable rate and its associated staff.

Midwest Paralegal Services is locally owned and operated with offices in Milwaukee and Dane counties. The experienced staff of more than forty employees is a mixture of paralegals and technology support specialists able to assist a law firm or department manage the peaks and valleys of staffing. All salary, benefits and costly training of its paralegals are managed by Midwest. Due to the training, which spans a variety of tasks, Midwest's team can provide on-site support or take transferable projects back to our offices, utilizing our state of the art hardware/software resources. The obvious benefit is a paralegal resource that can accomplish projects at a high-level with

minimum supervision. If you are taking time away from the permanent staff to train the temporary hire, your net gain is reduced. Providing dependable, productive paralegal/IT assistance is the niche Midwest has filled since 1989.

Those that have taken the step of using Midwest have handled the billing from two different points of view. The rate, currently \$69.00/hour, can be sent on to the benefit of the client as a passed through expense. Some firms have taken the invoices and charged an administrative add-on fee to create a profit margin from the hours Midwest

works. Compensation for the attorneys "supervision" and ownership of the management they have taken of the file has been the philosophy provided to Midwest for this style of billing.

Regardless of the choice made, the client benefits from a flat lined service flow, because the work is done more timely than if permanent help isn't available, and when the need is eliminated, so is Midwest. No required time is contracted. Assignments can be task based, time based or simply at the whim of the court's calendar. Some clients of Midwest have had paralegals on staff for years, some for days – and some call with a need that can be accomplished in a few hours.

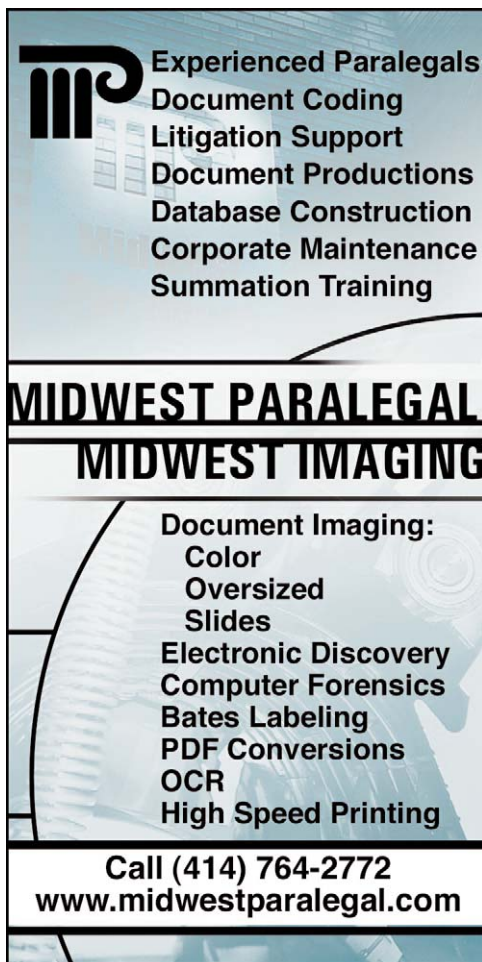
Conflict checks are strictly enforced, and most large pieces of litigation have been contracted on a first come, first serve basis. Collaborative efforts for firms that want to "share" some discovery costs are also administratively coordinated by Midwest. This is often times heralded by judges and clients as a fiscally responsible decision – and releases some of the cherry-picking that can take place on invoices that seem less conscientious when it comes to rates.

Repeat customers are a great demonstration of Midwest's staying power and the quality of paralegal services it provides. Midwest boasts many repeat customers, who have been advocates, supporters and, at times, nearly boosters of the contract paralegal option and Midwest's role in it. The simple fact is, it makes sense. The in-house paralegal welcomes the prudent staffing decisions to use temporaries as a way to eliminate a drain on the sometimes overflowing billable hour pool. The attorneys welcome the support during the critical times, saving valued permanent employees from the overworked, burn-out syndrome. The client is thrilled with any relief reflected on its legal services invoices. It's hard to argue with a Win Win Win scenario.

The complete survey can be found at www.altmanweil.com

For more information on Midwest Paralegal see www.midwestparalegal.com or call 414-764-2772. 

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