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## eGuide Virtual Paralegal Business FAQ & How to Transition to a Virtual Paralegal

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## **Characteristics of a Successful Virtual Paralegal**

*“The five essential entrepreneurial skills for success: Concentration, Discrimination, Organization, Innovation and Communication.” Harold S. Geneen*

Success can be defined in many ways but there are several common characteristics that are shared by successful business people. Most can be learned with practice and by developing a winning attitude, especially if you set goals and apply yourself, through strategic planning, to reach those goals in incremental and measurable stages.

- Most successful people are passionate about their business. If you like what you do; you will do whatever it takes to succeed.
- They always think success and do everything in their power to achieve it. Failure to them is an opportunity to try it another way.
- They believe they can operate a successful business and are confident in the quality of their services.
- They always set realistic goals. Put your goals in writing. Every time you accomplish a goal, set another goal and work to achieve it.
- They are always willing to learn. A sure way to know how your business is doing is to solicit feedback from your clients.
- They have self-discipline. They do whatever it takes to improve their business.
- They are persistent. They face obstacles and challenges, but they never give up.
- They never talk negatively about their business. A positive attitude can get you a long way.
- They always stay in touch with their clients and work on how to create and improve value with them.
- They are hard workers. You cannot have a successful business if you do not put in the time and effort it needs to succeed.

## Is the Virtual Paralegal Business Right for You?

There are several reasons why paralegals launched virtual paralegal businesses but regardless of the reason why you decide to start a business; you must first determine if you want to be an employee or an entrepreneur?

Determine your motivation for wanting to offer your services remotely as opposed to working in a law office? Do you want to operate your own business, or do you just want the flexibility of working from home?

If you are looking for flexibility and the chance to reduce your commuting hours; here are some steps you should take:

- Discuss working from home with your current attorneys.
- Start by asking your attorneys to let you work from home on a trial basis 1-2 day per week and if that works-out well for them, then you should consider increasing your days up to a full week.
- If initially your attorneys do not respond to your request in a positive way; be prepared to offer them incentives. You must be persuasive in your argument that you can be more productive working from home than you are in the office.
- For starters, your attorneys will be concerned about how you will handle confidentiality and conflicts of interest working from your home office. In such case, have your confidentiality agreement ready for them to review.
- Workers' compensation will also be a part of the discussion and decision. You may have to sign agreements waiving your right to bring a suit against the law office and/or attorneys if you were injured while working from your home office.
- Outline the benefits your current employer will receive if you work from home such as; a significant reduction in their over-head costs.
- The more incentives you offer your attorneys such as, giving up some, not all your vacation or sick days in exchange for a flexible schedule; is the more likely they will at least consider allowing you to work as a part-time virtual paralegal.
- However, be careful when discussing benefits such as: medical, dental and retirement. If you are not launching your business and only offering to work from home; you should not give up any of your core benefits.
- If your current employer will not consider you working from home, you should consider working for a virtual law office.

- They already know and understand how to practice law virtually, so they will be more open to hiring virtual paralegals.

## Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Start a Virtual Paralegal Business

If you are thinking about starting a virtual paralegal business, the more specific question you should be asking yourself is, “Should I start this business or not?” The more you understand the leap you are about to make into starting a business the better chances it will be a successful one. Here are some questions you should ask yourself before you start a virtual paralegal business.

### Are you capable of working with little or no supervision?

- A virtual paralegal is a business owner; your clients do not have the time to supervise you as they would if you were working in their law office or legal department.
- The expectation is that you can manage your business without supervision and still deliver the services that you were hired to do.
- Attorneys and legal departments expect you to have the skills needed to perform your duties as paralegals; in most cases, there is limited or no on the job training.
- One of the main reasons attorneys use virtual paralegals is to reduce their overhead costs which would normally include the time and resources it takes to train their paralegal.

### Are you capable of working on deadline sensitive projects?

- It is highly recommended that you have worked in a law office or legal department before launching a virtual paralegal business.
- Most successful virtual paralegals have many years of experience and specialized skills in one or more practice areas.
- There are going to be times when you have more than one project with the same client or back to back deadlines for the same or different clients.
- Your clients are not going to care that you have other clients; they only care about the projects they assigned to you.
- It is your responsibility to get your assignments completed on or before the expected deadline.

Are you comfortable working with different level of management?

- Whenever a client hires you they will expect you to assist other members of their firm; which may include the CEO, CFO, managers and other attorneys and paralegals.
- You must be comfortable working with different personalities and different level of management.
- Keep in mind that it is not the individual who hired you; it is the firm, which is your client.
- There will be instances where you must work and interact with government agencies such as the SEC, the Courts and other firms on behalf of your client to complete your assignments.
- Depending on your practice areas and the level of trust you have with your clients they may also allow you to interact with the firm's clientele.

Is there a demand in the market for your practice areas?

- You may launch a virtual paralegal business in any practice area if you can deliver your services remotely.
- However, not all practice areas have a lucrative market.
- This is usually in the cases where the practice areas are often provided by large law firms for Fortune 500 companies and are rarely offered by the virtual paralegal target markets, which are solo practitioners, small law firms and legal departments.
- This does not mean that you should not launch your business offering these services; it just means that you must work twice as hard to build your clientele.
- The upside to a niche practice is that you can get away with setting your fees on the high-end spectrum because clients are more concerned about the quality of work than the price.

## **Do you have the Right Qualifications to Start a Virtual Paralegal Business?**

**Virtual Paralegals** are contract, independent or freelance paralegals **qualified** by education, training or work experience who are employed or retained by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity and who performs specifically

delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible on an as needed basis with such services being supplied using technology and remote access systems.

### **What are the legal restrictions for starting a virtual paralegal business?**

Virtual paralegals are not required to hold a license to perform their duties as paralegals.

However, the **legal restriction** for operating a virtual paralegal business is for the virtual paralegal to work exclusively under the supervision of licensed attorneys to prevent unauthorized practice of law.

Virtual paralegals must always represent themselves as the paralegal and never an attorney and maintain a log of all their clients and projects to prevent any conflicts of interest.

### **What education and skills are needed to start a virtual paralegal business?**

Virtual paralegals must be able to work accurately and effectively in a highly confidential, detail and result-oriented environment. They must have effective interpersonal, customer service and communication **skills** to interact effectively with all levels of management and regulators. Virtual paralegals are self-motivated and can work both independently as well as in a team.

The **education** necessary to become a virtual paralegal is the same as a paralegal who works in a law office. Paralegals may have a variety of formal education. Some obtain a one-year certificate, while others have two or four-year degrees in paralegal studies. Some paralegals have a combination of some form of paralegal education and a four-year degree in some other area of study.

### **What is the required work experience for virtual paralegals?**

Most virtual paralegals have several years of **experience** working in a law office and/or in-house legal departments. It is recommended that before starting a virtual paralegal business you should have worked as a paralegal for 3 or more years. Though it is not required, most virtual paralegals specialize in one or more practice areas.

### **How do virtual paralegals communicate with their clients?**

Virtual paralegals **communicate** with their clients in several ways that may or may not include face to face meetings:

#### ***Some methods of communication for virtual paralegals may include the following:***

- Online video conferencing such as: Skype
- Online workspace such as: Dropbox.com
- Practice management software
- Social media
- Email/Text

- Instant messaging
- Telephone
- Direct mail

### **Where do virtual paralegals work?**

The term “virtual” means that the paralegal performs his/her duties outside of a traditional law office.

#### Home Office

Most virtual paralegals work from their home office using laptops & tablets. With secure internet connection, they can complete their assignments anywhere.

#### Internet

They also have an online presence. Most virtual paralegals have a website, blog and social media pages.

### **What are the practice areas suitable for a virtual paralegal business?**

A paralegal may launch a virtual paralegal business in any **practice area** that allows them to offer their services remotely. It is highly recommended that you start your business in the areas where you have substantial experience.

Virtual paralegals are usually experts in their practice areas. There is little or no on the job training.

### **What are virtual paralegals target markets?**

The **target markets** for the services of virtual paralegals are solo practitioners, small law firms and in-house legal departments. Some virtual paralegals work with government agencies as well as with other virtual paralegals.

### **What is the minimal cost for launching a virtual paralegal business?**

The general **start-up cost** for a virtual paralegal business can range from \$500 to \$5,000. If you already have a computer/tablet or smart phone you already cut your start-up cost in half.

### **How much can you make working as a virtual paralegal?**

Generally, virtual paralegals fees range from \$15 - \$100 per hour. Your fees will depend on your practice areas and the demand for your services. You should also factor in the geographical location of your clients.

### **What type of tasks do virtual paralegals perform?**

The type of tasks that are delegated to virtual paralegals depend on their practice areas.

An attorney may ask a corporate paralegal to draft an article of incorporation, by-laws and organize company records whereas; a bankruptcy attorney may ask a virtual paralegal to draft petitions.

## 7 Major Challenges when Working as a Virtual Paralegal

In every start-up business, there will be challenges and obstacles; the virtual paralegal business is no exception.

The good news is, with the right attitude, hard work, perseverance and the proper research you can overcome these challenges. The most common obstacles and challenges when starting and operating a virtual paralegal business are:

### Practice Areas Software

- As a virtual paralegal, you must have the necessary software and equipment to complete your assignments. It is essential that you discuss the software and equipment needed to complete your assignments in your initial interview.
- Some virtual paralegal practice area software can be very expensive so I usually advise against purchasing software before you have a client.
- You must research the software commonly used in your practice areas by solo attorneys and small law firms that will allow you to work remotely.
- You must know the costs and how they are delivered, for example: are they available for instant download.
- This way you can manage your expenditures as well as have access to the software when you need them.
- Another reason to hold off on purchasing software is, some attorneys will give you access to the software they use in their office for consistency and confidentiality purposes.
- It is good rule of practice to be prepared but you still want to avoid spending money until you absolutely must.

### Administrative and Technical Support

- Most paralegals are used to having administrative and technical support at their law office employment but as a virtual paralegal you will be responsible for your own administrative and technical support among other non-legal work such as: billing your clients, ordering office supplies and marketing.

- Whenever you have the opportunity you should invest in paid or free courses that will improve your administrative and technical skills.
- Joining a paralegal association is one of the best ways to take advantage of legal assistant courses and workshops as part of your membership.
- They also provide continuing legal education in your practice areas that can help you stay current with the law.
- Another way to improve your administrative and technical support is to partner with a virtual assistant on an as needed basis to assist you when you need help.

### Confidentiality

- One of the biggest challenges you are going to face when launching your virtual paralegal business will be convincing attorneys and law firms about your confidentiality practices.
- Most attorneys are hesitant to use virtual paralegals because they are concerned about violating their client's confidentiality.
- You must have a confidentiality agreement in place; along with your privacy policies and procedures to protect the attorney and their clients' information.
- It is common practice for a virtual paralegal to have their clients' files locked away in a safe place or password protected online.

### Outsourcing Rules

- Attorneys are also concerned about the legal rules on outsourcing their clients' work; in these cases, you should refer your clients to the ABA rules on legal outsourcing.
- ABA Ethics Committee Issues Opinion Detailing Lawyer Responsibilities When Outsourcing Legal Work Domestically or Internationally.

### Unauthorized Practice of Law

- Virtual paralegals must be extra careful to avoid unauthorized practice of law in their business. As senior paralegals, we sometimes know as much about the law as the attorneys but without a license to practice law we are prohibited to give legal advice.
- The best way for virtual paralegals to avoid unauthorized practice of law is to work exclusively under the supervision of a licensed attorney.

## Marketing

- All virtual paralegals will tell you that marketing is by far the most challenging aspect of launching and growing a virtual paralegal business.
- A few years ago, the term “virtual” was new to attorneys and law firms which made it difficult to market to them.
- However, advances in technology have brought into being several virtual law practices and attorneys today are now more comfortable working with virtual paralegals.

## Loneliness

- Working as a virtual paralegal at home can be isolating at times. It can be a culture shock for you at first, not having a supporting staff and colleagues down the hall from you. However, you can create a work life balance through networking, social media and getting involve in Pro- Bono work.

## **4 Myths Associated with Operating a Virtual Paralegal Business**

There are several myths associated with virtual paralegal businesses. Most paralegals believe that all they need is their paralegal skills, a computer and a smart phone to operate a successful business. However, there are responsibilities, sacrifices, and disadvantages to owning and operating a virtual paralegal business.

### Responsibilities

- You will be responsible for hiring competent employees or independent contractors that reflect your business ethics and policies.
- You must deal with the different personalities of your clients and employees or independent contractors.
- When you assign a project to one of your employees or independent contractors your company as a whole is responsible for the completion and accuracy of the assignment.
- You must be able to anticipate problems before they arise and take pre-emptive steps to avoid them.

### Sacrifices

- You may have to work longer hours; owning a business is more than a 9-5 job.
- You may have to reduce your vacation, personal and sick days until your business is established.

### Disadvantages

- Your clients become your bosses. If your business does not do a great job; your clients can fire you.
- You are responsible for your benefits such as, healthcare, retirement, sick and vacation days.
- It can be a financial risk and you could lose everything you have invested.
- It may not be a steady income and the lack of job security.
- You are responsible for client development.

### Advantages

With all the responsibilities, sacrifices, and disadvantages that comes with launching and operating a virtual paralegal business; there are also many advantages:

- You get to create your own schedule.
- You get to decide what services you would like to offer.
- You get to decide which projects you would like to work on.
- You will have the chance to work and form relationships with your clients.
- You will be able to eliminate the middleman and make most of the money.
- Even though your clients can fire you if they are not satisfied with your services; you can also fire a problem client and keep your business.

# How Long Does it take to Launch a Virtual Paralegal Business?

The length of time it takes to start a virtual paralegal business depends on the complexity of your practice areas and the type of services you plan to offer. We all would like to think that it's as easy as purchasing a domain, getting our website built, and firing up our social media profiles.

Once all of that happens, we'll just start to grow naturally, right? There will be times when you put a lot of time, energy, passion, and hard work into growing your business, and you won't have anything to show for it for a long time. So, before you get started ask yourself the following questions:

## How much time do you have to focus on getting your business started?

- Do you have time to dedicate to starting and operating a business? Do you still have a full-time job and a family that demands most of your time?

## How much research have you done so far?

- The first thing you need to know is if there is a demand for your practice areas.
- Research your practice areas to make sure that there is a demand for the services you intend to offer. In addition, you must know the software and equipment commonly used for your practice areas and the services you can offer remotely.

## Are you financially ready?

- You should make sure you are financially stable before starting your virtual paralegal business. If you are going to start your business full time, make sure you have enough income saved to pay your bills while you grow your business.
- A virtual paralegal business is a relatively cheap business to launch because most people already have the essential equipment and software such as, smart phones and a laptop or tablet.
- In addition, you will need task management and practice areas software which varies on price depending on the areas of law you will practicing.

## Are you currently unemployed?

- If you are currently unemployed and plan to start your business full time; you should be able to launch within 6 months or less providing you have money saved.

### Do you currently have a job?

- If you are currently employed it may take you a bit longer than 6 months to transition from the office to virtual depending on how far you are with your planning. However, you can start your business on a part-time basis and gradually grow it into a full-time position.

The virtual paralegal business is no different from any other businesses. It is going to take hard work and determination to succeed. The reality is, not everyone is meant to be an entrepreneur. Not every paralegal wants to own a business; some just want a flexible schedule. But if you are one of those who want to start a virtual paralegal business; make sure that you have the necessary qualifications and you understand the work and commitment it will take to have a successful business.

## **How do Paralegals Transition from a Traditional Law Office to a Virtual Office?**

Changing your career track from being an employee to entrepreneur is a very big step. The rewards can be great, but so are the risks. You will lose the steady paycheck that you enjoy as an employee. You will even have to wear many hats and do a wider variety of tasks that you may not know or even like to do but unfortunately you must do. Generally, the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship is a far cry from the steady routines of employment.

There are lots of unknowns in starting a business; hence it is but natural to experience fear, insecurity and uncertainty when making the jump. To ensure a successful transition from being a hired worker to becoming your own boss, here are things you need to consider:

### **7 Steps to Transition from a Traditional Law Office to a Virtual One**

#### **Step 1**

- If you are currently employed, make sure the planning of your business does not interfere with your current job.
- Do not quit your job abruptly. You can work on your business on your own time while you remain in your full-time job.
- Never burn your bridges. Leave your job on good terms. You will need their references and they may refer work to your new business.

- Do not use your current company's email to find prospective clients. Most companies retain their emails for years even after you have deleted it locally.
- Your current boss and co-workers should not know about your business before you put in your resignation. If your company decides to downsize you may be the first to get let-go before you are ready to leave your job.
- When you decide to resign your current position, give your boss enough time to find a replacement and continue to provide an honest day's work.
- Do not take or use any of your company's confidential information in your current business.
- Your current employer can sue you for confidentiality violation.

## **Step 2**

- Before you quit your day-job ask your boss to review all the contracts and policies you signed as an employee to avoid conflict of interest in your virtual paralegal business.
- Ask your current boss to review with you any stock options or securities benefits you may have received from the company, if applicable.
- Most stock options expire within 90 days after your termination date. Therefore, you must decide if you are going to exercise your stock options once you leave your current employment.
- Ask your current employer for clear instructions on how to transfer your 401(K) plans, along with other benefits.
- Find out how they will handle your "paid-time-off" that you have not used. Do you need to use them before you go, or will you be compensated before you leave?

## **Step 3**

- In general, most transition may take up to six months from employee to entrepreneur.
- Do not rush yourself. If after six months you think you still need more time, take the time to prepare yourself properly.

- Determine how much money you will need to maintain your personal bills and start saving right away.
- Determine your practice areas and make sure you have extensive experience in the services you will offer.
- Research your practice areas to make sure there is a demand for your services and you can deliver them remotely.
- Ask other virtual paralegals how they got started and how they would do things differently.
- If you have a full-time job, consider starting your business part-time or after-hours and gradually grow your business.

## **Step 4**

- Determine what will set you apart from your competitors?
- Do test run on starting your virtual paralegal business by offering your services pro bono?
- Make sure to put in as much work as you would for a paying client.
- Apply for work at virtual law offices. They already understand the virtual world and it would be easier to convince them to hire a virtual paralegal.
- Consider working with an experienced virtual paralegal before branching out on your own.
- Partner with another virtual paralegal to reduce the pressure and expenses of starting your business.
- Apply for contract or temporary positions for added experience and money to help with your transition from the office to your business.

## **Step 5**

- Read books, articles and blogs about starting and operating a business.
- If you have the time or the money; enroll in business and administrative classes. You will need these skills to help you operate your business.

- Volunteer and attend seminars, conferences and workshops in your practice areas.
- Join business and legal associations. Join their Board of Directors or assist someone on the Board.

## **Step 6**

- Before you leave your current job or if you are currently unemployed start gathering your references and recommendations. If you are an experienced virtual paralegal gather your testimonials.
- Ask your current boss and co-workers for written references before you resign.
- Ask your current boss and co-workers permission to use them as professional references should a potential client want to verify your past employment and experiences.
- If you are a new virtual paralegal, ask your previous managers and supervisors for references.
- Ask your professors and teachers for recommendations.
- You may also get recommendations and references from your pastor/priest, colleagues and supervisors from internships and pro bono work.
- If you are a member of any paralegal or business associations, ask the members including board members and officers for recommendations.
- If you are an experienced virtual paralegal, ask your clients for their feedback.
- Improve on the negative and use the positive in your marketing materials and on your website.
- Ask your clients to write you testimonials to use on your website.

## **Step 7**

- Create your business resume.
- Draft your business plan.
- Draft your marketing plan.

- Create an introductory packet for clients.
- Create a welcome packet for clients.
- On your last day of employment leave your business cards with all the attorneys, paralegals and secretaries you work with and ask them to refer you to their friends, family and colleagues.

## **eBooks by the Virtual Paralegal Training Center™**

[eGuide Virtual Paralegal Business FAQ](#)

[eGuide How to Start a Virtual Paralegal Business](#)

[eGuideHow to Manage a Virtual Paralegal Business](#)

[eGuide How to Market a Virtual Paralegal Business](#)

[eSample Virtual Paralegal Marketing Plan](#)

[eSample Virtual Paralegal Business Plan](#)

[eSample Virtual Paralegal Resume](#)

[eSample Virtual Paralegal Client Information Packet](#)

[eSample Virtual Paralegal Client Welcome Packet](#)

[eReport Setting your Virtual Paralegal Fees](#)

[Virtual Paralegal Sample Contracts & Agreements](#)

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