

Paralegals: Your Small-Firm Growth Partners

February is Paralegal Month, a good time to consider the value paralegals can provide to your law firm.

BY DAN D. GARTZKE

Many large firms have learned how to leverage paralegals strategically. In a solo or small-firm practice, you wear every hat: attorney, marketer, client coordinator, office manager, and timekeeper. A skilled paralegal can be a game-changer, helping you expand capacity, improve service, and protect margins without burning out.

A strong paralegal can serve as your front line for routine engagement: responding to common questions with accurate information, preparing timelines and checklists, assembling documents, and sending consistent status updates. Smooth communication builds trust, repeat business, and referrals.

A good paralegal can also help create systems that are hard to build and maintain alone: templates for common matters, standardized intake scripts, and a simple knowledge base for your most frequent issues. With those tools in place, you can run more matters in parallel without your inbox becoming the bottleneck. The goal is to have better systems, not longer hours.

Quality and risk management drive growth, too. A capable paralegal can track deadlines, run prehearing and trial checklists, organize disclosures, and conduct document reviews that surface issues early. Such teamwork reduces stress and helps prevent avoidable errors that can derail a case and damage your reputation.

Business development becomes more practical when you have support. A paralegal can help assemble proposals, respond to requests for proposals, prepare client updates and reports, and track outcomes to demonstrate measurable results.

On the financial side, assigning work by task and skill level helps you forecast more accurately, reduce overtime, and keep matters moving steadily. Less last-minute scrambling usually means better control over staffing costs.

To put this into action, map a typical matter from intake to close. Identify where a paralegal

could save time, reduce risk, and improve communication. Consider a 60- to 90-day pilot with clear metrics such as time to first draft, client-satisfaction signals, and matter-progression milestones. If the pilot performs, you have a business case for a part-time role or a long-term hire.

Finally, invest in capability. One way to deepen your firm's knowledge and strengthen service is by employing a State Bar of Wisconsin Certified Paralegal (SBWCP™).

This credential signals Wisconsin-specific legal knowledge, including ethics, substantive law, and procedural competency, which can reduce the level of attorney oversight needed for substantive tasks and free you to focus on strategy and advocacy.

The State Bar offers three pathways to certification: 1) paralegal education plus experience (a paralegal studies degree from a qualified Wisconsin program plus 2,000-4,000 hours of substantive experience); 2) paralegal education plus exam (21 credits of Wisconsin-focused continuing education (paralegal or legal) (CLE) plus the General Certification Exam); and 3) other education plus coursework plus exam (at least 18 credits in paralegal courses plus the General Certification Exam).

Certified paralegals maintain the credential with 15 CLE hours every two years, including three ethics credits, ensuring they are up to date. For more details on eligibility and how to obtain certification, visit <https://www.wisbar.org/Paralegal/Pages/Certification.aspx>.

Interested? Contact State Bar Learning and Development Specialist Dan Sitzler: dsitzler@wisbar.org; (608) 250-6079.

Bottom line: Employing a good paralegal can be a sound business decision. Encouraging SBWCP™ certification is a strategic investment that strengthens your team, enhances client trust, and reinforces your firm's professionalism and efficiency. **WL**



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