

# Working Smart

*By Kitty Bice, ACP*

**T**here is no such thing as a typical day for a paralegal, or even one that goes as planned. No matter in what area of law you work, there are days that your plan for the day is quickly changed. In order to meet deadlines, you must not only work hard, but also you must work smart. Working smart is not something that is learned from books and seminars. Working smart is a skill combining both mental and physical know-how. Working smart may incorporate different skills for different people. One needs to determine what works best for you. For me, to work smart I must incorporate organization, prioritization, delegation, and time management.

## Organization

Taking the time to keep everything organized saves time in the long run. Spending time looking for records or documents, restarting previously started tasks or projects that were misplaced or not finished, or trying to locate witnesses, experts, or vendors, takes time that one usually doesn't have at the time the document, project or person is most needed. Some people are comfortable with electronic organizational tools. Others want to visually see and touch what they need to get work done promptly and accurately. Use what works best for you. That is part of working smart. Use the organizational method that helps you be the best you can be. Use tools that help you stay organized, such as calendars, various organizational software, binders, and/or storage containers. Take the time to make lists, calendar



deadlines, put documents, names and contact information for people and projects where you can easily access them at a moment's notice.

## Prioritization

Prioritization is a two-sided objective. There are what you consider your priorities, and the priorities of your attorney and/or client. Often we hear that we need to get our priorities in order, but it is not your personal priorities that dictate what your day will include. There are ways to complete what you think is important to the needs of attorneys and clients, but they

won't be accomplished in an eight-hour day. In order to prioritize, one must first organize. Make a list (written or mental) of what needs to be done and what and who is needed to accomplish your to-do list. Often, you are not the only one that needs to determine the priority of items on your list. You may need to meet with your attorney and ask what he or she thinks is most important. You must also verbalize your need for more information to determine what is expected and when it is expected. You must also verbalize what else is on your plate so an informed decision can be made as to what task has the highest prior-

ity. Prioritization requires organizational skills, judgment and analysis skills and communications skills.

## Delegation

Working smart means you recognize your strengths and the strengths of those who are part of your team. In order to accomplish a task in a specific time period, one must know what is needed to meet the deadline. Multi-tasking is a requirement, but the paralegal does not have to complete all of the multiple tasks. As a paralegal, you are part of the team working for the client. Although I may think I do certain things better than others or like to do certain tasks more than others, delegation of tasks and managing all the parts of the project is important to the end-result and what is expected. Use support staff and vendors to help you deliver the end product on time. Delegation requires leadership skills and an understanding of time management.

## Time Management

When working smart, time management includes how you use your time both while at work and when you are not working. Time management is using your time wisely. When you are working, realistically look at what is on your plate and determine the best way to accomplish it. Do not over-extend yourself or make promises you cannot keep. When you are not at work, join your local paralegal association and meet paralegals in your area. These contacts provide an invaluable network of individuals with information and contacts you may not use in your current position. Take advantage of continuing educational opportunities. Often you will learn a skill used by paralegals in other areas of law that is helpful in what you do. Finally, take time for yourself. In order to be your best, you must first take care of yourself.

Working smart requires less physical effort than working hard. When I visualize what one describes as a hard worker,

I picture a person working long hours, never taking breaks, running around like a chicken with its head cut off and looking frazzled. When I picture a person working smart, I picture a paralegal.

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- Introduction and Sole Proprietorships
- General Partnerships
- Limited Partnerships based on the Uniform Limited Partnership Act of 1985
- Limited Liability Companies
- Limited Liability Partnerships
- Limited Partnerships based on the Uniform Limited Partnership Act of 2001
- Other Noncorporate Entities
- Special Issues
- Taxation

- Comparison and Selection of Business Forms
- This course is one of two Advanced Paralegal Certification courses for paralegals working with corporations and business organizations.

Certified Paralegals who successfully complete this APC course, and all requirements, are entitled to earn 20 hours of CLE credit, in addition to award of the Advanced Certified Paralegal credential.

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