

# How to be a successful virtual paralegal - just like Brenda Studebaker



When you think about being a paralegal, the general picture that's conjured up is a bunch of attorneys, a paralegal an arm's length from those attorneys, a file clerk frantically looking for the document the attorney swears he never had, phones ringing, computers crashing (well, they do....), chaos, activity, energy, excitement and calm. Calm? Well, I thought I'd throw that in there.

Somehow, you don't conjure up a paralegal perhaps 600 miles away, doing your work, turning it in before the deadline, moving on to the next client, booking business, doing back office work, marketing, filling up her calendar months in advance and calm. Calm? Well, I thought I'd have to put that in there, too.

Meet Brenda Studebaker, virtual paralegal. Brenda is a member of the exploding cottage industry of virtual paralegals. That is, paralegals who no longer have to be 3 arm's lengths from the attorney to make him feel comfy, safe and satisfied that his/her work is going to be done. It's all on the Internet now. Zip, download, push button, send, Skype, run up to the Cloud or whatever you need to do to get the work done and into the attorney's ever filling computer. And let's not even go to where her job satisfaction has soared, her independence has strengthened and her income, well, we said we weren't going there but it's not a bad place to be.

Why does someone choose to work on their own? We're not talking about paralegals servicing the public. Let's not get mixed up those who prepare documents directly for the consumer. We're talking about real paralegals working directly for the law firm only they work from their own offices or even their home office. It's becoming a big business, particularly for the mid-size, small firm or solo. Who needs to pay for office space anymore when you don't need a paralegal on a full-time basis? The large firms seem to be laying off a tad lately and the business seems to be going to the smaller firms who cannot afford to hire full-time all the time. Here's a perfect fit if the paralegal has a business sense and knows how to market a business. Brenda Studebaker seems to have caught on to this here-to-stay-business model. I spoke with her recently. Here are a few highlights of that conversation from a Texas-born, now Arizona paralegal with 3 great kids making it on her own in a successful business:

CBE: how did you get into this business?

I have over 20 years experience in civil/commercial litigation as well as various other areas of law (i.e. family law, bankruptcy, white collar crime, employment, and others).

I actually got into the legal field when I was in school for architecture and a friend of mine who owned and operated an employment agency asked me to help her out as a litigation paralegal for a week. I was not at all interested as I knew nothing about being a litigation paralegal. I gave in and fell in love with the law and have been a litigation paralegal ever since.

What makes you like it?

What makes me really enjoy what I do is the challenge especially with

complex cases which are my ultimate favorite or any case that is interesting for that matter, the law and the many ways it has changed over the years and how it will continue to change, reading about various cases and situations, interacting with attorneys, clients, experts, witnesses and more, reviewing documents and learning everything about a case, as well as everything that comes with being a senior litigation paralegal, especially traveling attending trial.

Why did you go out on your own?

Over the years I have done a lot of contract/project work for attorneys/law firms and going independent was something I have always wanted to do. Expanding my services throughout various states has increased my knowledge and understanding of not just the law but various cultures as well. Being independent also gives me the flexibility for many things in life, including family and the ability to travel more for work.

What's your work history?

I have worked at various notable law firms such as Beus Gilbert and Mariscal Weeks as well as various other great law firms and attorneys.

What is your ability to work on your own?

I have an exceptional ability to work well individually as well as being a great team player. I am the type of worker who will review a file and see what needs to be done and perform such work all the while keeping the attorney in the loop at all times and if an attorney prefers to provide direction I am well suited for this type as well. Having a fully functional office allows me the ability to fax, scan, copy, communicate not only by telephone but email

and SKYPE as well allowing me to not only work well, but have excellent communication locally and nationally.

What is the difference between working in a firm and on you own?

Working on my own has been a great success not only for me but my clients as well, allowing me to work outside standard business hours.

Tell us a little about your background.

I was born in Texas and moved to Arizona when I was 12 years old but returning to Texas often.

For as long as I can remember as a small child I wanted to work for various companies around the United States. Having my own paralegal business wherein I specialize in offering my services to attorneys and law firms locally and nationally, has given me this ability. Having a strong ambition to achieve a new title of a "national senior litigation paralegal (yes, a new title for us paralegals who desire what I do)" is what I am working towards achieving and will soon.

What type of work do you do as a virtual paralegal?

I specialize in complex civil litigation as this is where my true passion lies, however, I offer services in various other areas of civil/commercial litigation.

Of course, everyone wants you to give your best advice to those getting into the field.

If your desire or dream is to be a paralegal and/or have your own paralegal business, do not give up. You may get knocked down, and often, but successful paralegals always get up and keep going, working towards their dream.

