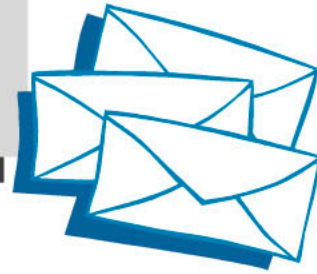

Ask Linda



Dear Linda:

I am interested in starting my own Freelance Legal Assistant Service. Can you give me some advice on how to get started?

The Skills Inventory

One of the most important aspects when making the transition from employee to freelance contractor is to know who you are and what you want to do. The best place to start is with a skills inventory. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Where have I worked and what have I done?
- Of these skills, which ones would I like to sell?

You will be holding yourself out as an expert, so be sure to select the skills you are most adept at and that you can deliver without delay and hesitation. Your clients will be buying your efficiency and mastery, and will want the best bang for their buck.

The Presentation

Come up with some sort of package for your self-promotion. I suggest that you compile your skills and services into a portfolio that will include:

- Resume
- Credentials: Degrees, certificates and transcripts
- Samples of your work
- Endorsements
- List of clients you have serviced
- Business card

You may want to consider putting your package on a web page so your prospects can access it at their convenience. Whatever you decide to use, make it look as professional and polished as possible because it is a reflection of your ability to communicate.

The Prospecting and the Promoting

Start by promoting yourself to the people you know. What about offering your services to your current and previous employers? It might be a smart way for your employer to transition while looking for your replacement.

Use your network to get referrals to firms and corporations you would like to work for. Ask the legal professionals you know to refer you to attorneys who have special projects that require temporary staffing.

Other forms of promotion that will give you exposure while positioning you as an expert:

- Articles
- Public speaking
- Advertising
- Sponsoring events
- Participation in professional organizations

The Business

Your service should be setup just like a business. Talk to an accountant about helping you pick a business entity, setting up your tax payments and purchasing insurance. Open a business checking account and get a business charge card.

Draft an Agreement that you can customize for each client. Make sure the Agreement states specifically your terms for doing business, how you will collect, and how you will be paid. Have every client you do business with sign your Agreement.

Find a space that you can set up as your office, either in your own home or in an outside office. Install a business telephone number, a fax number and get an email address. If you are going to be working on client matters in your own office, make sure you have lockable file cabinets and that you back up your computer work securely and regularly.

Most of all, have fun. Going freelance is a great option if you want more flexible hours, like variety and want to be self-employed.

Linda S. Jevahirian is a Legal Assistant and Founder and President of Legal Search & Management, Inc. She is also the past Editor-in-Chief of The Michigan Legal Assistant, and a published author and speaker. Ask Linda is a regular column featuring information about the legal assistant profession. Questions can be submitted directly to Linda at lindajev@aol.com.



Linda will present a talk on The Freelance Legal Assistant at the State Bar of Michigan, Legal Assistants Section Seminar in Grand Rapids on May 4. She will also address the Macomb County Legal Assistants Association at a dinner on May 8 at PJ's Riverhouse in Mt. Clemens.