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More Reasons Your Firm Needs a Law Librarian

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Many managing partners and law firm administrators are often under the impression that anyone can shelve books and keep the routing lists going. While this may be true in certain contexts, law libraries are more than shelving. A professional law librarian can improve the use of information and improve the way your library functions in ways that your partners never dreamed about. Below is a selected list of improvements that can be realized by hiring a professional law librarian.

Service: A law librarian will provide extensive knowledge of materials that benefits attorney work and allows them to work on more billable matters. Librarians have experience with materials and know the hidden gems. Additionally, law librarians have experience using online research tools, the web and local law libraries, which speeds the time it normally takes attorneys to do research.

Contracts: Information vendors, especially online database providers, offer a variety of ways for your attorneys to access their services. When attorneys access online databases the blood pressure of billing partners rise. A law librarian can help ensure the firm has the best contract. S/he knows many of the vendor representatives and has experience negotiating contracts. S/he can help you negotiate a favorable contract that works within your budget, reflects your actual usage and includes training and tech support.

Client Development: Law librarians have tools that can help the firm maintain current clients and provide background for potential clients. Current clients want to know that you are thinking about them. Your librarian can help you monitor trade journals relevant to your client's industry. Armed with knowledge about your client's business, you will have topics of conversation when you next meet. This newfound information will also assist you in formulating questions that you may not otherwise think to ask. By reading up on the industry you will get a better sense of where your client is positioned within the industry.

Librarians often work on providing a comprehensive package for an attorney meeting with a potential new client. This information can include articles, recent financials, bios of executives and product information. There is no magic pill, the techniques and tools come with a librarian's experience.

Insurance: If you have library materials and they are not organized in a manner that can be readily documented in case of a disaster, your collection may not be insured for its full value. Not only will a catalog make your insurance company happy, but it will allow your attorneys to find and use materials already in your collection.

Special collections: Do you have special bits of information, like special reports, or government documents, that are unorganized and hard to use, but valuable? A professional law librarian is an expert at making special collections available for use. Once organized, a collection can aid attorneys and prevent the recreation of the wheel.

Training: Helping attorneys understand the tools can make working with library materials much easier. If your firm demands that attorneys rely on electronic information, a professional law librarian can help coordinate training sessions, providing attorneys with the knowledge that they need to work with the tools. Additionally, law librarians are excellent trainers. Many law librarians teach legal research and writing, technology topics, web search, etc. By having a law librarian coordinate training, your attorneys' MCLE hours will be completed in a much more organized manner.

Technology: New library and information-related technology changes nearly as frequently as you fill your coffee cup. A librarian keeps abreast of the newest databases, changes to your online database vendor's products and services, the latest trends in library automation and web searching improvements. Your librarian will alleviate the need to have many people trying to make sense of this ever-changing world.

Contacts: Professional law librarians (MLIS or equivalent) have contacts in areas that will benefit your practice, your research and your clients. Law librarians know other law librarians in the area. Librarians are familiar with the expertise of their colleagues. Additionally, law librarians keep in touch with each other through a variety of technology resources. These e-mail lists, bulletin boards and blogs provide a quick way to get answers when your deadline is tight. Many of these resources are only available to professional law librarians. When you need the instructions to a 1991 IRS form 709, a law librarian will know who to call, will you?

To get someone who can do all of the tasks listed above, you will need to pay well. If you think you can't afford a professional law librarian, think about hiring someone part-time. A part-time law librarian is a good option for an under 30 attorney firm or for a firm that wants someone to work on special projects.

There are many law librarians who work part-time, for a variety of personal reasons. Professionals who work part-time are generally reliable and stay in positions for a long time. There are also a number of library temporary staffing agencies that can provide a professional law librarian on a regular temporary basis. This option would allow you to try out the services of a librarian to see if such a position would benefit your firm.

Your library is a resource on which your firm spends a lot of money. Without a professional law librarian, the library is not fully utilized. Consider the benefit to your practice and hire a professional law librarian.

For further information, contact the NOCALL Consulting Committee or see <http://nocall.org/officers/Consulting-Committee-Questionnaire.pdf>

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