

SALARY SURVEY FORECASTS RISE IN PARALEGAL HIRING AND COMPENSATION

SALLY KANE

After several years of deep headcount cuts and vanishing legal jobs, the Robert Half Legal 2011 Salary Guide offers a sign of hope for increased paralegal hiring. The Salary Guide, released at the end of last year by Robert Half Legal, a staffing service based in Menlo Park, Calif., specializing in the placement of legal professionals, shows a rise in paralegal salaries and growing demand among employers.

"We are optimistic that, as the economy improves, hiring will continue," said Charles Volkert, Executive Director of Robert Half Legal. "Who knows if it will ever go back to the market of 2007, but law firms and corporate legal departments are going to continue to put a premium on paralegals with experience in in-demand practice areas, especially those that contribute to firm profitability and the client-service nature of the practice area."

Paralegals with four to six years of experience at midsize law firms will see average base compensation ranging between \$48,250 and \$62,500, a 3.7 percent increase over 2010 projections, according to the Guide. Senior paralegals with seven or more years' experience at midsize firms will see a 3.1% increase in compensation in 2011 and can expect to receive a base salary from \$55,000-\$70,750 (see sidebar).

Growing Practice Areas

In addition to slight salary increases in 2011, paralegal hiring will rise, particularly in high-growth practice areas. According to the Salary Guide, hiring activity across the nation is strongest at small and midsize firms as they continue to add staff to lucrative practice areas. In addition, "Many large law firms that consolidated support roles during the downturn are hiring for critical positions, particularly those related to litigation and corporate transactional work," the Guide states. The Salary Guide predicts growth in several in-demand practice areas, including litigation, bankruptcy/foreclosure, intellectual property, contracts and licensing, corporate transactional law and healthcare.

In the litigation arena, Volkert noted that general corporate litigation, class action labor and employment and insurance defense remain strong areas of demand. Corporate work volumes are rising in cer-

tain areas as well. "On the corporate side, we're seeing increased demand for paralegals with contract and lease administration backgrounds," Volkert said. "Also, paralegals with increased knowledge base in e-discovery, litigation tools and electronic technologies are putting themselves before candidates that don't have those skill sets."

Hiring and Workplace Trends

Cost-conscious clients, corporate belt-tightening and diminishing workloads have prompted a more cautious hiring approach by many legal employers. Not surprisingly, the Guide reports a growing

community of project paralegals and attorneys developing in most of the major metro markets in the U.S. and Canada," Volkert explained. "Candidates in transition, such as those who have lost their jobs or are following a spouse, are treating project work as a profession, going from one engagement to another. It's a career decision; they take time off when they want it." For example, a paralegal might work for seven straight months without a break and, at the end of the project, take a month off to spend with her children.

Volkert is also seeing more work flexibility and alternative job arrangements such as flex-

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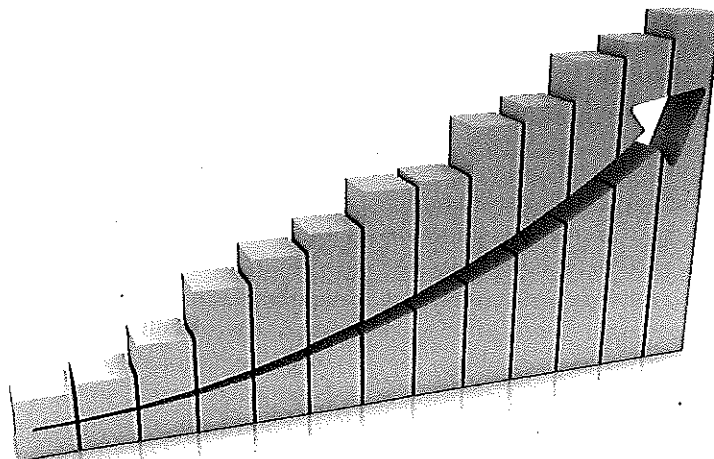
trend in the hiring of temporary and contract lawyers, paralegals and support staff. "Through the downturn, we saw small and midsize firms increase project and temporary staffing," Volkert stated. "We don't see that slowing down. In high-demand practice areas, in large and small firms, there will be an increased use of project paralegals and lawyers. [The increased use of project employees] is certainly a factor being driven by corporate legal departments to keep costs down."

Volkert noted that project work is becoming a more popular career choice on the part of overworked lawyers and paralegals. Project work often involves predictable, nine-to-five work schedules and permits downtime between projects, allowing for a better work-life balance. "There's an entire

time and telecommuting. "It's okay as long as work is getting done," he explained. "It's a 24-hour business in the legal world, and new technologies are creating more flexibility."

In-Demand Skills and Expertise

What can paralegals do to boost their income in a tough job market? Volkert noted that, based on his conversations with managing partners, practice group heads and general counsel, lawyers want a paralegal who is able and willing to do it all. "They need a paralegal that can wear many hats and take a case from A to Z," Volkert said. "We're seeing paralegals at midsize and large law firms take over roles that associates would have done in the past such as managing e-discovery project review. Senior-level paralegals are respon-



| Paralegal/Years of Experience | Firm Size | 2011 Salary | % Increase from Previous Year |
|---|--------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Senior/Supervising Paralegal (7+ years) | Large Firm | \$61,000 - \$81,250 | 1.40% |
| Senior/Supervising Paralegal (7+ years) | Midsize Firm | \$55,000 - \$70,750 | 3.1% |
| Senior/Supervising Paralegal (7+ years) | Small Firm | \$44,250 - \$56,750 | 1.8% |
| Midlevel Paralegal (4 -6 years) | Large Firm | \$51,000 - \$64,250 | 1.3% |
| Midlevel Paralegal (4 -6 years) | Midsize Firm | \$48,250 - \$62,500 | 3.7% |
| Midlevel Paralegal (4 -6 years) | Small Firm | \$37,750 - \$51,750 | 2.6% |
| Junior Paralegal (2-3 years) | Large Firm | \$40,000 - \$51,750 | 1.7% |
| Junior Paralegal (2-3 years) | Midsize Firm | \$38,250 - \$50,750 | 2.6% |
| Junior Paralegal (2-3 years) | Small Firm | \$32,000 - \$40,500 | 2.5% |

sible for the day-to-day oversight of these review teams.”

The Salary Guide also reports that legal support roles continue to include broader responsibilities: “Law firms seek candidates who possess technology skills and practice area expertise yet also can handle a wide range of administrative tasks.” The

Guide also reports an increase in hybrid roles. At smaller firms, for example, paralegals may be asked to perform duties in human resources, office administration or financial operations, in addition to their traditional responsibilities.

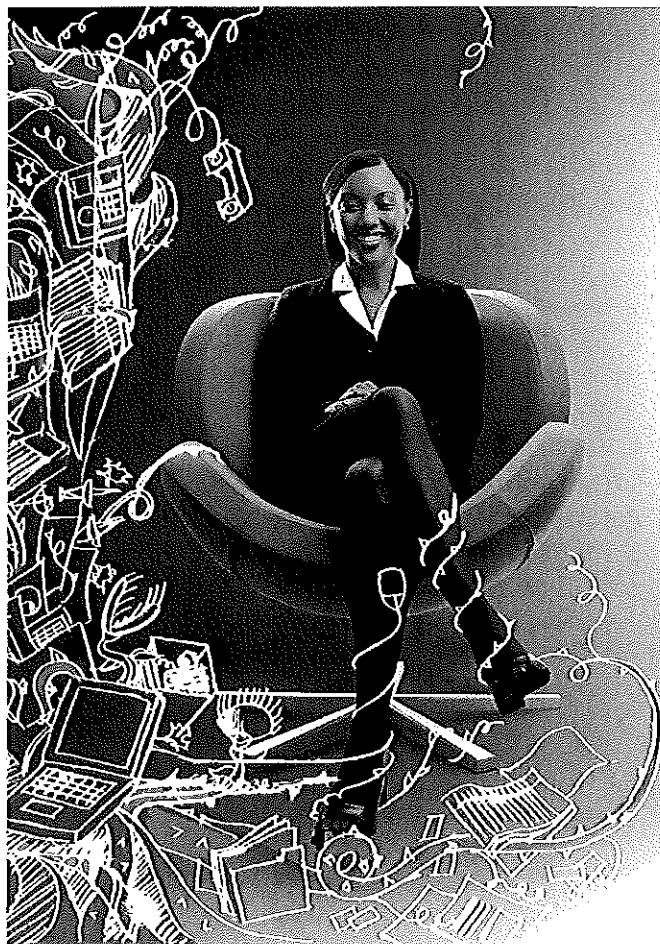
Volkert also noted that during the downturn, paralegals in slow practice areas were

complacent to let work come to them. In today’s competitive workplace, paralegals must be more proactive in seeking assignments. He advises paralegals to seek out mentorships and gain experience in multiple practice areas. “If you have an extra hour or half hour, reach across a practice area into a different specialty and ask if you can assist in order to get additional exposure in that area,” Volkert said.

The Guide also reports that paralegals with bachelor’s degrees and practical work experience are in demand. Certification and/or accreditation from an American Bar Association-approved program can improve a job candidate’s marketability. If you are seeking to boost your employability and earning potential, Volkert advises advancing your education, gaining certification and boosting your tech skills.

You can download a copy of the Robert Half Legal Salary Guide for free at www.roberthalflegal.com.

Sally Kane is editor-in-chief of Paralegal Today magazine and the Guide to Legal Careers at About.com (<http://legalcareers.about.com/>).



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