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**Paralegal Billing Rates Around Wyoming
BY: Amanda Nelson, ACP**

In January, 2017, LAW conducted a quick survey inquiring about local paralegal billing rates. I have incorporated the results from our survey for your use, which evidence a wide variety of rates throughout the state. Depending on where your current billing rates fall, this may be an area you would like to discuss potential changes with your employers. Please see the billing chart for more information.

In addition, I thought this would be a great opportunity to provide some ethical billing tips to ensure you are paid for your work! There are many great resources out there on ethical billing and billing guidelines - I encourage everyone to periodically review information on billing and the current ethical obligations associated therewith.

Below are some tips, not simply for paralegals but for firms in general.

1. Always have a written fee agreement, even though it may not be required. Memorializing your fee agreement in writing

eliminates later confusion and misunderstandings between clients and counsel. Written fee agreements should clearly line out who is the client (and who is not), what is the scope of representation, and what are the fees and costs associated with this representation.

2. Send regular bills – even if there is no balance due. If you are consistently (preferably monthly) sending itemized bills to your clients, it reassures them that you are actively working their case. They do not see the research you complete, the drafting of documents, or the negotiations with other counsel. Providing them a monthly bill essentially provides them a monthly log of time expended on their case.

Area Within Wyoming	General Range of Rates
Gillette	\$70 – 110/hr
Laramie	\$75 – 90/hr
Sheridan	\$90 – 110/hr
Casper	\$65 – 150/hr
Cheyenne	\$85 – 110/hr
Worker's Compensation/ Government Rates	\$40/hr

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3. Use complete sentences in your billing statements. Clients do not always understand acronyms that are using in billing, nor is it appropriate to simply describe your work as “research”. You are ethically required to be specific in your descriptions of work completed. Case law shows that work billed as “research” is much more likely to be cut than work billed as “research completed in preparation of the Motion for Summary Judgment; reviewed case law from 10th circuit”. Provide as much detail as possible so there is little room for confusion about the exact tasks completed.

4. Proofread. Although this seems unnecessary, it is not comforting to a client when they receive a bill with their name spelled incorrectly. All work leaving your office should be in final form, this includes billing statements.

5. Keep track of your time, even if it is a contingent or flat fee matter. It is simply good practice to continually keep track of your time – regardless of the case. If it provides no other purpose, records of time keeping can be useful in determining if the flat fee or type of case was economically wise for your firm. Perhaps the flat fee was just too low and next time it needs to be set higher. Perhaps the flat fee was way too high. Records of time expended on all cases can be useful in determining fees for future cases, and imperative when arguing the fees were reasonable during a fee dispute.

Resources:

Lynda C. Shely, [Ethical Billing Tips to Get Paid](#), Wyo. Lawyer, December 2009, 30.

The Struggle is Real: My Experience with Working Remotely
BY: Ashley Barkley, CP,

Working from home has been both a blessing and a curse for me. Before my maternity leave I was excited about the option of working remotely, as often times being a working mother means trying to juggle work deadlines and kids’ schedules. My dream of perfection was quickly cut short.

I assumed that working remotely would mean having the exact same access to our server that I took for granted at the office. I am not a super tech savvy person and have never been able to work remotely. My firm was gracious enough to replace my desktop with a laptop so that while at home for maternity leave I would have the option of working from home if I felt up to it. Our tech specialist added a remote access program to my computer and provided me with a login. I didn’t think twice about it.

Working remotely has come with a set of challenges that I didn’t initially consider. My expectations have proven to be overly optimistic. After my first failed attempt at connecting remotely I contacted the office to inform them of my failure. The problem has been fixed after a quick visit with our technology specialist.

As many of us often do, I decided to look to Google to advise me on options to help ease my transition. Google quickly produced a myriad of sites and articles with the latest tech options and tips. Below is a list of things to consider before attempting to work remotely. These are based on my personal experience and are in no way the ultimate survival guide for remote connection.

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Technology troubleshooting: If you are super tech savvy this category may not be as important for you. However, if you are not the next Steve Jobs (or some other tech guru that I don't know the name of because technology has proven to be my enemy), I would suggest a few things before starting your remote access journey. First, know your resources! If your firm has a technology ("tech") specialist, they can be a life saver. If you don't have such a person available, Google it! There are videos and how-to instructions that can explain a variety of technology resources and issues. Second, know your technology! Take the time to test out whatever connection or program that you intend to use. This test run should be completed before you start a project if at all possible. The added stress of not understanding your program while up against a strict deadline is the last thing anyone wants to deal with.

Work environment: As I sit here attempting to write this article, I am pinned on the couch with my month-old baby on one side of me and my three-year-old on the other. In this moment, I start to miss the solitude and quiet of my office. I envisioned the perfect blend of office productivity mixed with my favorite at-home comforts (yes, I am talking about working in my pajamas). I didn't account for the various distractions and pressures that plague me at home. I wasn't up against a huge deadline, which allowed me a laxer work ethic than my usual office demeanor. If this is not the case for you, I would suggest trying to control your environment in a way that best suits you. If you are capable of pumping out drafts for work while tending to your children, your pets, the housework, or whatever chaos you have at home, I salute you! If you need at least a little calm and quiet to efficiently get things done, I am you! Do what works for you.

Professional contacts: Remember your fellow paralegals. Some of us work remotely on occasion because of a sick kid while others work remotely on a daily basis because of their geographic location in our rural state. Regardless of the reason a person works in a non-traditional setting, there is a good chance they have thoughts, ideas and solutions that can help contribute to your success. Don't underestimate the power of a fellow paralegal who has been there and done that. Every LAW member that I have encountered has something they bring to the professional "table" and is more than willing to help. Don't be afraid to reach out.

Communication: Ensuring adequate communication during a big project can be more difficult when you are not in the office next to the attorney/paralegals you're working with. Being in the middle of a time sensitive project without the ability to reach counsel can be extremely frustrating. Be sure to establish clear expectations about availability for calls, emails, and texts when working remotely. How often will counsel check their phone/emails? Are there hours of the day that either party cannot be reached? If you are trying to collaborate with a large number of people, consider a telephone/video conferencing service. Many services available can be utilized for free or at a minimal cost.

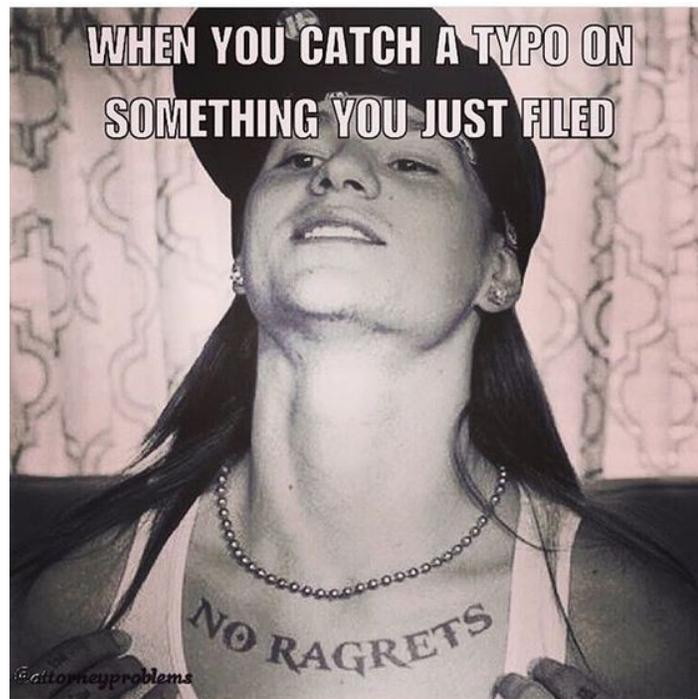


SAVE THE DATES!!!

MARCH 1: Future CLA Attainment Application

**APRIL 1: NALA Exam Application deadline for
May testing**

**APRIL 28, 29: Annual Meeting and Spring
Seminar in Cheyenne**



Building Camaraderie in the Workplace

BY Barbara Heisner, CP

I know, as soon as you read the title of this article, you were skeptical. Sure, we all have friends in the office, but sometimes the seemingly cheesy, forced office get-togethers and team building activities are a little much. I work in a large office, with many other women secretaries and paralegals. Some of those women are my best friends. Whether or not we are all the best of pals or not, several of the staff members have started a couple group activities that benefit each of us individually and also allow for us to talk to each other about something other than work, which can be a much needed break. These ideas can work with a mix of men and women, and groups large or small.

With the coming of each new year, many people try to make lifestyle changes to improve their health. At my office, we (the staff) have tried multiple ways to motivate each other and ourselves to eat healthier and get into better shape. When the year started, one of our paralegals, Jodi Borino, CP, suggested we try out a "lunch club," an idea she had read about various places online. So far, we have all thoroughly enjoyed it. How it works:

We split our interested participants into two groups (four people were in each group in January).

Each person was assigned a day of the week (Monday through Thursday only).

On each person's designated day, she would bring a meal for the rest of her group members.

We try to stay as healthy as possible, but the only true restrictions are allergies of anyone else in the group.

We leave Fridays as a free day, where everyone is on her own for lunch.

The idea is really simple, there aren't many limitations (except for my poor group who has to go gluten free on my account!), and there are many benefits. Except for one day a week (less often if your group has more people), you don't have to worry about fixing a lunch for yourself or where you're going to go to eat, or if you have time to leave your desk, etc. You know that you always have a home-cooked meal waiting for you, and different people cook different things so there's always a variety. (The ladies in my group are probably growing tired of my Asian cuisine!)

Another huge plus of the lunch club is how much money is saved from not going out! Once a week you might spend \$20.00 to \$30.00 (or less) buying ingredients for your meal for the lunch club, as opposed to going out every day and spending \$15.00 to \$20.00 a day or more.

As for the social aspect of the lunch club, you can be as social or non-social as you want. The women in my office typically all gather in one conference room and eat together around noon, but some take their lunches to their desk or eat later if they have a commitment over the noon hour or errands to run.

Personally, there has not been one meal made yet that I haven't liked. Some meals we have had are cheeseburger soup, taco chili, chicken enchiladas, turkey burgers, cashew chicken, chicken lettuce wraps, chicken tortilla soup, and salads with all the toppings and fixings.

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The LAW Board is always looking for substantive contributions to the quarterly LAW Newsletter! Submit yours today by contacting Amanda Nelson at amandanelsonacp@gmail.com

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The fact that our office has made it a month already without giving up on the lunch club seems to be pretty promising that it will last!

One other idea that I will mention is an office place book club. My coworkers and I haven't gotten too far on this one yet; we will start our first book in February. This idea came from Jodi Borino, CP as well two legal assistants in our office: Kristie Whittle and Jennifer Kruger. Each month, a different participant chooses the book that everyone will read. In February, we are reading *A Place at the Table* by Susan Rebecca White (Jenn Kruger's choice).

The book club does not have a strict structure or guidelines (at least not yet). We can discuss the book at our leisure, perhaps during lunch club. Personally, I love to read, but don't make a lot of time for pleasure reading. This book club gives us motivation to make time to read, for fun.

Of course, the best thing about the book club and the lunch club is that anyone can quit or join at any time. No pressure.

We see the people we work with as much, or possibly more, than we see our own families, so we might as well have the best relationships we can with each other. Having activities to share outside of work product makes us grow closer and learn new things about each other.

ATTEMPTING STRESS RELIEF THROUGH NUTRITION AND THOUGHT PROCESS

BY MARK ROBBINS, CP

I don't have to tell any of you that our jobs are sometimes (who am I kidding -- generally) pretty stressful. Even after working as a paralegal for five years, I often find myself feeling overwhelmed, but have set a goal to make some changes this year that I hope will alleviate that. I don't have specific research to quote, but I am certain that it has been proven that stress can take a toll on your body's natural defenses, and that eating the right foods can offer relief.

I did a little online research, using the search term, "stress relieving foods" and from an *Eating Well* article found at: http://www.eatingwell.com/nutrition_health/Mind_body_spirit/7_foods_for_stress_relief as well as from a *Food Network* blog found at: blog.foodnetwork.com/healthyeats/2010/04/15/top-10-foods-for-stress-relief/, and compiled the following nutrition tips that I found to be common to both sources:

Avoid the junk food. Although the sugary and high calorie snacks in the vending machine are mighty handy, the effect of thinking we feel better is just a trick, a short-lived and unhealthy choice.

Nuts are a great snack. Nuts contain Vitamin B, which is depleted by stress. They also contain

potassium, which can lower blood pressure and reduce the strain of stress on the heart.

Add red peppers to the diet. Red peppers contain a ton of Vitamin C, which has also shown to lower blood pressure.

Omega-3s. Two servings a week of salmon are recommended. I am not personally a huge fan of salmon, but omega-3s have been shown to reduce anxiety. Walnuts, soybeans and spinach (which I love) are a few other omega-3 containing foods. Spinach is also rich in magnesium, which may be related to stress relief.

Oatmeal. Oatmeal is comforting, and helps the brain generate serotonin.

Tea. I love my coffee, but have for some time now limited myself to 2 cups in the morning, period. I get the initial caffeine kick, but avoid the jitters that come with an “overdose.” I find decaf, and especially herbal teas to be calming and soothing later in the day.

Carbohydrate-rich foods, carrots, Swiss chard, yogurt, milk, bananas, avocado and chocolate were all also dietary recommendations in the relief of stress.

Something else that I have really been really concentrating on is focusing my concern on today. I have spent too many years worrying about yesterday (which is always gone, by the way) and worrying about tomorrow (which has always, so far, proven that it will come, and can be dealt with at that time.)

I TOO OFTEN stress myself out (especially when it comes to filed documents) when I discover little mistakes from yesterday that need to be cleaned up. In our business, guess what I have found to be true? There are very, very few pieces of paper that can't be fixed with another piece of paper! When I find myself in situations where I discover that something does need to be corrected with the court, I approach my boss with the solution, rather than with the problem alone.

When I find myself at explosion point with what today has offered up, I have found that if I take just a few seconds to compose, re-direct, and concentrate on doing the next, highest priority thing, and doing it well, relief does come. It really does, and everything will get done. When I took my Law of Evidence course from Craig Silva a few years back, I remember him asking, “How do you eat an elephant?” (One bite at a time.) I have heard this other times as well – it is good advice.



U.S. IMMIGRATION LAW

BY Rachel Krueger, CP

U.S. immigration law is considered one of the most politically influenced areas of law, and has been subject to constant change over the last 200+ years. For those of you worried this will get political, rest assured, immigration laws and history are what's on the docket for what I like to call, "U.S. Immigration Law 101." Let me start with a brief timeline for key dates and landmarks in United States immigration history:

- On March 26, 1790, the Naturalization Act of 1790 establishes a uniform rule of naturalization and a two-year residency requirement for aliens who are "free white persons" of "good moral character."
- In 1819, the Secretary of State is required to report annually to Congress the number of immigrants admitted.
- In 1848 through 1850, gold is discovered in California. The California gold rush spurs immigration from China. For the first time, the United States Census surveys the "nativity" of citizens (born inside or outside the US).
- In 1870, The Fifteenth Amendment is ratified, granting voting rights to citizens, regardless of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The Naturalization Act of 1870 expands citizenship to both whites and African-Americans, though Asians were still excluded.
- In 1891 and 1892, Congress makes "persons suffering from a loathsome or a dangerous contagious disease," those convicted of a "misdemeanor involving moral turpitude," and polygamists ineligible for immigration. Congress also establishes the Office of the Superintendent of Immigration within the Treasury Department. The following year, Ellis Island, the location at which more than 16 million immigrants would be processed, opens in New York City.
- In 1924, the Border Patrol is created to combat smuggling and illegal immigration.
- In 1940, the Alien Registration Act requires the registration and fingerprinting of all aliens in the United States over the age of 14.
- In 1948, after WWII, Congress answered with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, offering hundreds of thousands entry into the United States. By the early 1960s, calls for immigration reform were growing louder. In 1965, Lyndon Johnson signed the Hart-Cellar Act into law. Gone was the quota system favoring Western Europe, replaced by one offering hope to immigrants from all the continents. The face of America was truly about to change. The effects of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 were immediate and significant. Within five years, Asian immigration would more than quadruple. This trend magnified even further by the surge in refugees from the Korean and Vietnam wars.
- In the 1970s through 2000, immigrants can enter the country by air, by sea, and by land routes through Canada and Mexico, making it easier than ever to enter the country illegally. Through the 80s and 90s, illegal immigration was a constant topic of political debate. In 1986, the government gave amnesty to more than 3 million aliens through the Immigration Reform Act, but during the recession years of the early 90s, there was a resurgence of anti-immigrant feeling.

Today, there are a multitude of ways immigrants and non-immigrants can enter the United States. The U.S. offers non-immigrant work, student, and visitor visas, along with an immigrant visa, also known as

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an adjustment to U.S. Permanent Resident, or “green card” holder. The processes are very different from one another, and is dependent on the type of visa a foreign alien applies for:

A **non-immigrant visa** is a visa with physical presence limits. Non-immigrant visas include work visas, student visas, visitor visas, foreign diplomat visas, and many more. These visas are considered non-immigrant because the foreign national (alien) holding this type of visa is not entering the United States with the intention to immigrate, but only to perform what his or her visa allows. When non-immigrant visas expire, visa holders are required to return to their home-country.

The **immigrant visa** and adjustment to permanent resident process provides a procedure that allows for aliens to enter the United States with the intention of becoming a permanent resident. The National Visa Center categorizes immigrants coming to the U.S. based on sponsorship by a U.S. citizen or permanent resident family member, through an approved K1 fiancé visa, a U.S. employer, or by refugee and asylum applications. There are hundreds of guidelines and investigatory processes involved with any adjustment to permanent resident, including the alien’s current or previous illegal presence, type of relationship with their U.S. citizen or permanent resident family member, the area of work performed for an employer sponsor, criminal history, and many others. Permanent residents are also subject to regular renewal of their card that include new background checks. Permanent residence can also be revoked from immigrants based on criminal history and length of absence outside the United States as a permanent resident.

The third and final process is Naturalization. Naturalization is one of the quickest and most rewarding immigration processes available. Some requirements for naturalization include the ability to read and write in English and answer basic history questions regarding the United States, our Congress and Constitution, along with an approved criminal history and background check. Permanent residents that apply for naturalization are required to hold lawful permanent residence for a certain number of years, depending on the visa bulletin category their adjustment was processed under. If an immigrant adjusted based on marriage, he or she is eligible for naturalization after 3 years. If an immigrant adjusted based on sponsorship from a non-spouse family member, employment, or refugee/asylum, they become eligible for naturalization after 5 years.

Immigration law in the United States will continue to change so long as immigration is an option. Political influence mostly causes these changes; however, national security also plays a role in U.S. immigration law. The United States has always been known as the globe’s melting pot and has made immigration a very large part of American culture. Based on history, it is difficult to predict the consequences of policy changes that are engineered in Washington. Some may be beneficial; some may do harm, but the impact is often unforeseen and unpredictable. However, basic understanding of immigration processes is a good start for those lacking knowledge of immigration procedure.

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