

BANKRUPTCY PROFESSIONAL:

SPOTLIGHT



Pamela J. Starr
Founder & C.E.O.
STARRParalegals, LLC

With particular experience in the Bankruptcy & Creditor's Rights arena (litigation, adversary proceedings and preference actions), STARRParalegals is a virtual paralegal service that handles complex bankruptcy and litigation matters for its nationwide attorney clients. The firm emphasizes that its virtual paralegal service offerings "increase the value of our clients' billable dollars"—completing the "job more efficiently and economically."

By operating independently, STARRParalegals' services are especially important for attorneys that work in a "downsizing market while trying to decrease their overhead and maintain, or increase, the value of their billable dollars." The firm was founded by Pamela J. Starr, who continues to serve as its C.E.O. With more than 25 years of paralegal experience to guide her, Ms. Starr launched STARRParalegals to provide attorneys and law firms from coast to coast with virtual paralegal services in Bankruptcy & Creditors' Rights, Commercial Transactions and UCC.

An active member of the Georgia Association of Paralegals, the National Federation of Paralegal Associations, the American Bar Association, the Association of Bankruptcy Judicial Assistants, the Commercial Law League of America and the National Association of Freelance Legal Professionals, Pamela is a frequent featured speaker and is published in the *National Paralegal Reporter* and *Sixty-Six Tips from Your Virtual Paralegal Success Team*. We spoke with Pamela about running a business with your name on the door,

the advantages of virtual paralegal outsourcing and what paralegals really think about lawyers.

BP: Your corporate bio cites many years of experience as a paralegal with law firms. Which firms did you work for before founding STARRParalegals, and what did your experience there teach you?

PS: I started out as a paralegal in Houston in 1983, just as the economy tanked. Like most newly-graduated paralegals, I took temporary and contract assignments—general litigation, oil & gas, intellectual property, Title VII—to build my skills and my resume. Ultimately, I was hired by United Savings of Texas to work in their newly-created bankruptcy department. During my career, I have worked at Weyer Kaplan Pulaski & Zuber; Thomas & Kehlhof, P.C. and the Resolution Trust Corporation. In 1994, I moved to Atlanta and had the privilege of working at McCalla Raymer Padrick Cobb Nichols & Clark and, most recently, at Miller & Martin PLLC.

Each experience taught me how to effectively handle change and gave me the chance to become skilled in new areas of law. I also learned to stretch myself beyond what was my previous comfort zone and established and maintained lasting relationships with some of the finest attorneys in the country.

BP: Paul M. Buxbaum, Chairman and C.E.O. of Buxbaum Group recently told *Bankruptcy Professional* "It's difficult when you run a business with your name on the door. You think very

carefully about opportunities, and I've turned down a lot of them over the years." What are the advantages and disadvantages you see in running a business with your name on the door?

PS: Thanks to my parents, I have a memorable last name. It was once suggested that I consider using a generic business name, but given that I had already built a solid reputation as a "Starr," it made more sense to utilize that name recognition. I take great pride in my work and I believe that having my name attached to my business makes me more accountable not only to my clients, but to myself.

BP: What makes your services valuable for law firms, and what advantage does STARRParalegals offer its clients?

PS: Accessibility and no overhead—our clients know that we do not limit our work day to traditional office hours. We are available almost anytime we are needed. By working with STARRParalegals, our clients are able to realize a greater return on investment on the pass through cost for our services. In a traditional firm, billable rates include overhead costs—parking, insurance, benefits, et cetera—thereby decreasing the actual profit margin. Our clients realize higher revenues because they can mark up and pass our fee through to their clients.

Now that the federal court system has adopted the CM/ECF system, court dockets and files can be reviewed online and pleadings can be filed remotely. STARRParalegals has utilized this technology to provide our clients with a cost effective and environmentally friendly alternative to the standard office paradigm.

BP: Does the current economic situation increase the demand for virtual paralegal outsourcing?

PS: *Absolutely!* In a downsizing market, attorneys and law firms are looking for ways to decrease their overhead while increasing the value of their billable dollars. Virtual paralegal outsourcing gives them the opportunity to work directly with certified paralegals, who are highly experienced in specialized areas of law, on a transactional basis, without having to hire full time staff.

The legal industry has finally begun to embrace technology and is becoming less office-centric: Lawyers and staff are no longer bound by brick and mortar but rather are electronically tethered to their jobs. As I mentioned before, the federal courts have transitioned to electronic filing, which has allowed for the development of services that allow attorneys to maintain their image of professionalism, as well as their bottom line, by outsourcing paralegal duties.

BP: How do you make life easier for your attorney/law firm clients?

PS: There are several things that we do that make our clients' jobs easier. Just like "traditional" paralegals, we allow attorneys to spend more time actually practicing law. One of our clients has referred to us as "e-filing Jedi" and "his virtual secret weapon." Another client has said that STARRParalegals are "detail oriented paralegals who bring energy and intelligence to the workplace. They provide a reliable work product at a cost affordable to the clients."

BP: What's the most frequent complaint you hear from attorneys? How about from the paralegals working with these attorneys?

PS: This question would be easier for a paralegal in an office or law firm to answer; I can only respond in my capacity as the owner of STARRParalegals. The complaints and needs of attorneys in traditional practice are somewhat different than those of our clients.

Most of our clients are solos or in small practice; they may have come from larger firms with support staff or they may have been working alone or with a secretary and have, quite simply, become overwhelmed. In many cases, they are frustrated by the process of electronic filing required by the bankruptcy and district courts; most just want to get back to the business of practicing law. Anyone in the industry will agree that there are some tasks better handled by a paralegal and billed at a lower rate so attorneys can make better use of their time.

I think Baruch Cohen says it best: "I STRONGLY recommend using Pamela Starr as your virtual paralegal to help get your documents e-

filed with the courts. I'm in Los Angeles, and she's in Atlanta, and she's as accessible and helpful to me as if her desk was five feet from mine. All I have to do is email her the pleading that I need e-filed and she takes care of the ECF filings and lets me practice law. She's professional, accessible, fast and extremely competent. I have met several attorneys who are not set up with ECF and I proudly recommended Pamela to each one. If they are smart, they will retain her exceptional services."

BP: Did you ever consider becoming a lawyer yourself? Why or why not?

PS: Yes, it was originally part of the plan. As a high school senior, I was invited by the Marine Corps to apply to Officer Candidate School and was seriously contemplating JAG as my ultimate goal. Ultimately, I yielded to peer/parental pressure to pursue a more traditional career path. As a college student, I was on track to go to law school, but life had different plans for me and I altered my strategy. I decided that I would become a certified paralegal, work for five years or so and then apply to law school; however, after working in law firms I realized that I wanted a more flexible lifestyle.

Now that I have been on my own for awhile, I realize that I really love what I do. However, I recently decided that it is time for me to continue my education and have just been accepted into a graduate program where I will earn my Master of Science of Law in International Tax and Financial Services/Bankruptcy & Restructuring.

BP: In addition to your 1983 certification as a paralegal, you also earned credentials as a Certified Bankruptcy Assistant in 2006. What does that certification add to your professional capability?

PS: Being certified keeps me on task and makes me more accountable to myself, my clients and my peers. Until our industry is regulated, we have to rely on the various professional organizations to set and control the standards of our practice. I think it speaks volumes to the professionalism of any paralegal that pursues and maintains certification.

BP: Can you name some of your current clients and/or Chapter 11 proceedings?

PS: Our clients, including Baruch C. Cohen, Esq., based in Los Angeles and William J. (Bill) Wall, in the "OC" are lawyers and law firms that represent creditors. I wish I could tell you about the proceedings in which we are involved, but I am sure you understand that we need to maintain a certain level of confidentiality on behalf of our clients' clients and to avoid perceived conflicts of interest. Although, I can share that while at Miller & Martin, our team represented a group of retired airline pilots in the Delta bankruptcy and a major bank in the Pike Nursery case.

BP: How competitive are client solicitation and pricing in your industry, and what differentiates STARRParalegals from its competitors?

PS: As with any industry, there is competition for clients. We have a very specific niche of clients and it appears that I am something of a pioneer in this industry. Pricing is always an issue; our fees are definitely not the lowest. Our clients pay a premium for our experience, expertise and availability. At this time, STARRParalegals is only one of a handful of companies providing virtual paralegal services in creditors' rights; most virtual bankruptcy paralegals support the debtors' side in bankruptcy.

BP: What's your elevator speech to win over new attorney clients that have never before used outsourced paralegal services?

PS: I'm Pamela Starr, owner & paralegal extraordinaire of STARRParalegals—virtual paralegals supporting attorneys that specialize in bankruptcy and creditors' rights by providing all the experience and expertise you would expect from a full time employee, without the overhead. Our goal is to make your billable hour worth every penny.

BP: What other business opportunities do you see in STARRParalegals' future?

PS: I recently launched a "blawg," Sessions with a Starr, where I plan to open discussions related to working virtually and transitioning from brick and mortar to the "cloud." I also plan to create a mentoring program and increase my availability for speaking engagements.

BP: How important are personal relationships in your business?

PS: Personal relationships are absolutely essential in any business, perhaps more so when working virtually. Since I no longer work in an office, I am a step removed from much of the interpersonal interactions of the “real world.” In order to build my business, and stay connected, I attend networking events and professional conferences to build solid relationships. My personal

relationships have helped me to weave a net of connections that has led to the steady stream of business with which STARRParalegals has been blessed.

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