
Top 10 Tips for Surviving as a Locum

Here are our ten top tips for surviving work as a locum – tips for locums and for law firms.

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1. **Locums - make sure you turn up.**

Always useful. If you don't turn up, you may be surprised when your law firm decides not to offer you any more assignments and in fact may even choose to ignore you.

2. **Locums - when you turn up, make sure you are smartly dressed.**

Turning up to work wearing a pair of jeans and trainers can be beneficial if you are planning to work for Google, but in a law firms these items of clothing are only seen on partners at weekends, and even then only when they are mucking out their horses or wandering around Legoland

3. **Locums - be nice to the secretaries and support staff (TOP TIP).**

This is our top tip. Think about it. When you leave the firm after completing your assignment and your next firm requests a reference, who will the partners ask for feedback? The lawyer you have covered for or their secretary who you have worked with?

Most secretaries are very nice to locums and appreciate the difficult position they are in - parachuting into a firm and trying to assimilate to local working practices etc.. etc..

Others will hate you more than they hate their own bosses. Not only do they fail to get a relaxing two week break whilst their normal boss is on holiday, they get pestered by you asking where the stationery cupboard is. There is nothing to do but remain professional, polite and calm, even if someone is fairly hostile back again. Professional locums who work in firms all year round seem to handle this kind of atmosphere extremely well and almost let it wash over them. After all, you won't be there in two weeks!

Do not view the secretaries as being inferior. Big mistake. They are not - the secretaries hold the key to your future work as a locum. See above re references...

4. **Locums - try to work hard.**

May seem obvious but some locums appear to believe they are there simply to fight any fires that crop up. Most firms do not want a locum to do this. They want the locum to work as if the normal fee earner was there. The normal fee earner will not sit back in

his/her chair and wait for work to cross their desk. They will be proactive and ask about if there is anything they can do.

5. Locums - do not fail to complete the assignment.

Similarly applies to locums who accept assignments they are not experienced enough to handle. Rarely happens, but just occasionally it does. See 'don't fail to turn up' above for your future work prospects.

6. Law Firms - do not expect miracles.

I get the impression that some partners at law firms put the locum lawyer on a target at the end of the range and attempt to shoot them down. Locums generally are either semi-retired lawyers looking to generate a bit of income, professionals who spend 9 out of 12 months in the year locuming and 3 months skiing or sunbathing (i.e. lifestyle choice), or unemployed lawyers who cannot find permanent work. You are not going to get the perfect lawyer to cover your vacancy - i.e. you will not find a mirror image of yourself!

7. Law Firms - pay the locum.

It always helps if you pay the locum on time, not 6 weeks later. Can be a trifle annoying for the locum to have to break into their overdraft!

8. Law Firms - avoid cancelling the assignment with 24 hours' notice and then reposting a few days later.

This can lead to a lack of any applicants. You will get a bad reputation and potentially struggle to recruit in future.

9. Locums - don't use the opportunity to sell your services to other law firms.

It is generally considered poor practice bordering on a breach of various data laws to advertise your wares as a locum to lots of different law firms whilst working on an assignment for another one.

10. Locums - be nice to real estate agents and other introducers.

Your client law firm is very dependent on real estate agents and other referrers of work. If you do not remain on good terms with these people, however horrible they are, they will not refer work through to your client law firm. This will almost definitely result in a poor reference, which will almost inevitably result in you not getting a lot of work.