

Tools of the Trade

“Top 10 Tips for the Collection Paralegal”

guest author: *Melissa Hickerson Taylor*

1. **Set a System That Works for You and Your Firm.**

It is important to have a system in place that will keep you on task with your collection cases and works for you and your attorney. You may want to have a checklist that is inserted in every collection file so that you can check things off as they are done so anyone, especially your attorney, can pick up the file and see exactly where you are and what's been done.

2. **Get Organized.**

If both you and your file are organized, you will be able to easily find the documents you are looking for throughout the collection process.

3. **Set Up “Forms”/Templates to Use.**

You can set up a template for just about everything you do with collections; including, but not limited to, the Demand Letter, Mechanic's Liens, Complaints, Judgment Documents, and Writs of Executions. This will save you time so all you will have to do is fill in the blanks.

4. **Have an Efficient Docketing/Calendaring System.**

It is important to stay on task in a collection case. If you miss a deadline, the case may be dismissed, or if not yet filed, the statute of limitations may run out. Having a good docketing system will help to keep you on track.

5. **Be Sure to Check Bankruptcy Records Prior to the Start of a Case.**

If someone has filed bankruptcy, they may be protected from further collection. If they are protected, it will both save you time, and your client money, by knowing this in the beginning. You may need to file a Proof of Claim if they have filed bankruptcy and there is a deadline for filing claims (which also makes it important to check bankruptcy status at the beginning of a case).

6. **Stay Familiar With the Collection Laws and Fair Trade Practices Act.**

The rules may change from time to time, so it is important to stay up to date on the rules and procedures.

7. **Become Familiar With Each County and Where to Find Asset/Property Information.**

Know where to find asset information such as personal property, real estate, etc. Each county often has a database set up that may be helpful and often allows you to run multiple searches (such as addresses, assets, criminal records, D&B Records, etc.) on an individual and/or business. An example of a web database is www accurint.com.

8. **Know What Remedies Are Available to Your Client.**

If you know what remedies are available to collect on a debt, it will help you to handle a matter from the start. Knowing which remedies are available for specific situations will allow you to draft the documents your attorney needs prior to giving him/her the file to them for review.

9. **Keep Good Contacts With Process Servers and Private Investigators.**

This is good to do in any type of practice. There will be times that you need to have something served very quickly and keeping a good relationship with your servers will make it easier when you need something done in a hurry.

10. **If You Are Working Multiple Collection Accounts for a Client, Keep a Good Status Update on Each File.**

Create a “Case Status Report” summarizing all cases for an individual client so that you are prepared when that client requests a status update or meeting. When working on multiple cases, it can be time consuming to have to update all these at one time, so keep your “Case Status Report” updated as you go. This will help to cut down time it take to prepare a status update at your client's request.

Melissa Hickerson Taylor is a paralegal for the law firm of Bruner, Powell, Robbins, Wall & Mullins, LLC where she specializes in construction litigation and has two years experience practicing in insurance defense. Ms. Hickerson Taylor assists attorneys from start to finish on cases involving collections and litigation.