



**MASS TORT  
ACADEMY**

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As a mass tort paralegal, you have a lot to manage. You support the work of attorneys, opposing counsel, judges, clients, and vendors, all while maintaining your own responsibilities to help push cases toward a resolution. In addition, you are also a supervisor or manager, responsible for monitoring and motivating other legal team members. Many mass tort law firms use non-attorney managers to free up associate time so lawyers can focus on substantive legal matters. In addition, non-attorney management makes good business sense for the law firm since it creates career opportunities for lawyers and non-lawyers alike. However, managing your own workload and other employees in the day-to-day performance of their jobs is no easy task. It requires some essential skills to ensure law firm goals are met and subordinates are productive, engaged, and motivated.

Below are the skills most in demand among mass tort paralegal managers:

## **1. Organization**

According to [Career Trend](#), employees with better organizational skills are more productive on the job, make better impressions on bosses and receive more promotions than those who demonstrate sloppy, inefficient work habits. While it's highly unlikely you were promoted without displaying excellent organizational skills, managing other employees requires a higher level of organization, including good time management, so you can be available for your employees and provide them with meaningful interaction and feedback.

**Here are some tips to get and stay organized:**

- Focus on short-term and long-term goals daily
- Make lists and review your daily priorities at the start of each workday
- Schedule quiet time during the day to accomplish tasks that need extra concentration
- Use your calendars and planners
- Reduce clutter in your workspace. Your subordinates will feel more comfortable approaching you for advice and assistance.
- If you are managing remote employees, make yourself available via chats and messenger services

## **2. Communication**

The [dictionary defines communication](#) as the "act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviors to express or exchange information or to express ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc. to someone else." In the workplace, communication is the glue that keeps everyone on the same page and allows employees to share creative ideas and solve problems. Breakdowns in communication create feelings of distrust and frustration, which can lead to explosive fallout including resignations, terminations, and team turmoil.

**Here are ways to ensure effective two-way communication:**

- Communicate face-to-face whenever possible
- Reduce conflict by listening and paying attention to employees
- Ask questions to show you were listening and then confirm your understanding

- Handle conflicts between co-workers with an open mind and do not take sides
- Refrain from engaging in gossip to maintain your own credibility
- Keep relationships with employees friendly and professional

### **3. Team Building**

Strong teams don't just happen. Rather, they are built through team-building activities that bring employees together. Team building improves productivity, encourages collaboration, and builds trust among employees and management.

Employees also get to learn about each other outside of work tasks. Their past employment, hobbies and interests, and non-work-related skills can also be a source of pride and appreciation. Whether your employees are full time, part-time, on-site, or remote – technology can help keep everyone connected. Carefully curated events and activities will keep your team members engaged and motivated.

#### **Here are some top-notch team-building techniques:**

- Acknowledge employee work anniversaries and birthdays
- Have a "Show and Tell"
- Play team games like "Whodunit" and "Two Truths and a Lie"
- Host a "Lunch and Learn"
- Organize offsite activities such as Escape Rooms and Cooking Classes
- Start a company book club
- Host a volunteer day at a local food bank or [Dress for Success chapter](#)

### **4. Dealing with Change**

Economist and philosopher Edmund Burke once wrote: "We must all obey the great law of change. It's the most powerful law of nature." As a leader at a law firm, you will inevitably deal with change.

Change may result from business decisions, personnel disruptions, court rulings, client terminations, or other factors. Most employees will look to you and the management team for [how to deal with these changes](#). Your behavior can and will set the tone.

Leaders must first deal with change personally before they can help others remain positive. Before you can be the rock your subordinates look to, you must develop the skills necessary to deal with change yourself. The most important thing to remember is that when changes occur, don't shy away or act like they didn't happen. Face change head-on and try to make the best of the situation.

### **Here are some tips to help employees process changes:**

- Analyze or “get under” the change before you react to it
- Establish a change timeline
  - Before the change – ask questions to determine employee readiness
  - During the change – when in meetings, emphasize what has already been accomplished and cross off to-do's
  - After the change – reinforce the goal(s) of the change and assess whether the transformation has been successful. Determine if further action needs to be taken.
- Identify and mitigate risks
- Listen to employees' concerns but reiterate that the change will occur, and you are here for support

## **5. Saying No**

Saying “No” is a management skill. Most new managers spend a great deal of time trying to navigate the emotional relationship between themselves and their subordinates. Inevitably, a time will come when emotions must be put aside for the sake of the business.

Good leaders know that prioritization is the key to success in the fast-moving legal world, and sometimes this means some requests cannot be approved, at least at this time. Learning how to say “No” is just as

important as knowing when to say “No” and this is where your own reaction to being told “No” will come into play.

### **Here are some tips on how leaders should say No:**

- Listen to an idea or presentation all the way through – do not interrupt to say “No.”
- Ask questions to show you are giving the employee your full attention and get them to reveal as much about their idea as possible. Asking questions can help the employee flesh out their idea in a way they hadn’t before.
- Give at least one reason why you are saying “No” so the employee understands the “No” but also feels confident in asking for something else in the future
- Be clear – saying No is not saying “maybe” or “we’ll see”
- End by complimenting the employee for coming to you with an idea

## **6. Teaching and Mentoring**

Law firms need employees to learn their jobs quickly, achieve results with as few errors as possible, and improve their skills so they can gain promotions and advance in their careers. To achieve these goals, managers are usually tasked with training, coaching, and mentoring subordinates.

Wearing multiple hats can create challenges, particularly when you haven’t been properly trained on how to fulfill these roles for your employees. Managers must make decisions so coaching an employee to self-discovery may come in conflict with your need to get things done. Likewise, training an employee on day-to-day tasks may require you to evaluate how you perform those same tasks and whether you are being efficient. Subordinates tend to feel more inhibited with a manager versus trusting a true mentor. Yet despite these conflicts, it is possible to properly manage, train, and mentor with clear expectations and boundaries.

### **Here are some tips on how to teach and mentor while managing:**

- Encourage cross-department mentorship within your firm
- Run meetings that involve getting input from other employees
- Become comfortable with presentation methods and technology such as Webinar platforms, and PowerPoint.
- Delegate your coverage in case you must be absent to train or coach subordinates
- [Work on your facilitation skills](#)

## **7. Using Common Sense**

A little common sense goes a long way in management. There are basic precepts that managers can rely on to ensure you are playing fair and balancing the needs of your subordinates with your need to get your own work accomplished. Additionally, using common sense allows you to draw from your full life's experiences and not just your work experience.

The adage "treat people how you want to be treated" applies to all aspects of life but especially the workplace. Most employees just want to be treated fairly and with decency and respect. While it is important to have expectations for all workers, what keeps them motivated and productive is the ability to use their natural skills, talents, and abilities to benefit the organization and earn a paycheck.

### **Here are some tips on how to use common sense as a manager:**

- Always keep an open mind
- Develop strategies for different situations – if the only tool you have is a hammer, everything will look like a nail
- Try to steer clear of organizational politics by putting the company mission, vision, and goals front and center
- When the heat is turned up, turn down your own temperature
- Recognize good work as often as poor work
- Never take yourself too seriously

Managing or leading a team is not for the faint of heart. Management requires a positive attitude and the ability to juggle competing priorities. If you focus on key skills and take the time to develop these skills, then you can be the leader your team desires. When your subordinates feel

like they can trust your decision-making abilities, confide in you, and work with you to meet goals, they are much less likely to quit or become poor performers.

**DISCLAIMER:** The Mass Tort Institute has adopted the American Bar Association's definition of a paralegal or legal assistant as "...a person qualified by education, training or work experience who is employed by a lawyer, law office, corporation, governmental agency or other entity who performs specifically delegated substantive legal work for which a lawyer is responsible." A paralegal is not an attorney and the roles of each must not be confused. Therefore, legal advice or representation in court cannot be provided, nor can assistance be given by a paralegal to help make a legal decision. MTI's Paralegal Practice Tips or any other content on this website should not be construed as the giving of legal advice.