



Agony Attorney

AGONY ATTORNEY IS HERE TO HELP WITH ANY QUESTIONS YOU HAVE REGARDING YOUR PRACTICE OF LAW. SO ASK AWAY.

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■ How do I ask for flexible work arrangements?

To answer this question, we spoke to a few lawyers who are on flexible work arrangements, from working part-time to working from home for part of the week, to ask how they made it happen. First of all, it helps to have some standing in your organisation in general and with your immediate supervisor in particular. If you are valued, they will be more willing to accommodate you. It can also be a good idea to scope out the way your organisation operates to see if others are doing the flexible work arrangement that you are thinking of, although even if nobody else is there is no reason necessarily that you can't be the first. Having a justification – like having young children – can help. From there, you need to make a case that what you are proposing will actually work. For example, think about how contactable you will be outside the office, and whether you will be able to offer any flexibility, for example, changing the regular day that you take off or work from home if circumstances require it. Finally, it can be good to actually prove that the arrangement will work on a one-off or ad-hoc basis before you try to lock it in as a regular thing. Always think about what you are asking for from the perspective of your boss to reality-test it.

■ Is it OK to ask for help with my law studies?

Whether you are in your first or final year, a law degree can be quite daunting and it is normal to feel overwhelmed. Asking for help is one of the most proactive ways

to overcome this feeling, and there are a number of different people who can help you.

First, it is OK to ask your peers for help. You may even find that they share your concerns. You can form a study group with them which will give you an opportunity to ask questions throughout the semester and find out what questions others have.

It is also OK to ask for help from previous students. They will be able to give you advice about the best way to approach the unit. Their assistance is invaluable as, not too long ago, they were in your position.

Additionally, you can seek assistance from lecturers and tutors. Most are more than happy to answer questions via email or for you to make an appointment to discuss your problem in person.

Once you do ask for help, the negative feelings you have will hopefully diminish and you will have a more enjoyable university experience.

■ I'm not receiving enough delegated work to enable me to make my annual fee budget. What should I do?

This is an issue that is generally more applicable to larger law firms with multiple partners or multiple practice groups, however the same principles can apply at smaller firms too.

First, this is not an uncommon problem for young lawyers – practice groups can sometimes go through cyclical periods of being quiet and being hectic. This can

depend on a huge multiple of variables, including how the economic climate, or the time of year is affecting your clients.

If you feel as though you're not going to be able to hit the targets that have been set for you (and meeting billable targets is an important factor for you and the seniors who assess you), the best thing you can do is be proactive about it, and be seen to be proactive so that your assessors know that you're not just sitting on your hands.

Speak about the issue to your direct supervisor or the practitioners who are responsible for delegating you work – they can provide you with additional guidance about where and how to get extra work in your firm. You can send out an email to your practice group or a series of practitioners noting you have capacity. Speaking to people in person also helps keep you in the forefront of their minds.

You can also talk to practitioners in other practice groups in your firm to see if they have work available for you and if they have the capacity to train or supervise you if required.

If these options are not available, speak to your supervisors about how you can do other things that add value, such as business development, additional research or preparing articles or presentations. ■

If you have any questions you want to ask Agony Attorney, send them to younglaw@liv.asn.au. Your identity will remain anonymous.