

# Top lawyers assist colleagues piecemeal

BY DARYL-LYNN CARLSON  
For Law Times

Stephen Taran is offering lawyers of all walks a better life. That's no marketing line, pithy pitch, or promise of files of grandeur. It is, rather, exactly what his support service for lawyers, Taran Virtual Associates Inc., can achieve for both his lawyer clients, along with the counsel who work within his network.

Taran Virtual Associates, or TVA, enables lawyers of any size practice to outsource legal work to his network of 50 qualified lawyers who've chosen to work part-time.

His rate undercuts any in-house lawyer, including associates, starting at just \$60 per hour for research or the subjective coding of documents for court.

In a promotional spreadsheet, he has calculated that it's possible for a typical, sole practitioner who charges \$250 per hour but uses outsourcing for such tasks as out-of-town appearances, lower-yield cases, legal research, and matters not fully billable, to earn \$50,000 more per year, yet work 180 hours less.

"It's about taking work off the desk that wasn't making money and replacing it with full billable work," says Taran, which not only enables the lawyer to focus on billable hours but also to "spend time with family, on business development, reading articles . . . just freeing up valuable time."

Launched 10 years ago, TVA is becoming increasingly entrenched in the fabric of legal practice in Ontario.

Initially the bulk of Taran's clients were sole practitioners, but he says more large firms are recognizing the benefits of saving time and affecting cost savings for clients by outsourcing certain tasks to his network.

Taran, a lawyer and business graduate, notes, "One of the issues that lawyers face is that they have to write off some of their time. That's been less pervasive in larger firms because what they can do is delegate an inefficient task to associates. But small firms that don't have the depth or breadth of associates, or sole practitioners, have to do the research themselves or make the out-of-town appearances."

The lawyers in Taran's network will travel to a practitioner's office to meet with a client or travel to attend court when required.

The Law Society of Upper Canada, he affirms, provides that a lawyer can gross up the fees charged by TVA as long as the client consents. Most often they do because TVA's rates are much lower than if sole practitioners or even associates were to do the work.

"At the end of the day, it makes the lawyer a lot more profitable and makes the practice of law a lot more enjoyable because they can do the work that they want to do and outsource the kinds of tasks they don't want to do," he says.



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Larger firms use TVA to ensure quality work for associates, he says. Firms can unload tasks that don't enhance their associates' development and instead focus on projects that provide more job satisfaction, which can ultimately increase retention.

Corporate counsel are frequent clients at Taran, delegating anything from transactional work, incorporations, searches, and opinions to litigation support.

The roster of lawyers within Taran's network runs the gamut of expertise and experience. He has LLMs, practitioners versed in appellant court, and lawyers who got their start at major firms but who opted to exchange the treadmill toward partnership to raise a

family while still keeping active in law.

Their call years range from 1968 to 2002, illustrating an inter-generational desire for a work-life balance.

"There was a stigma 10 years ago when I first started this that any contract lawyer would have to be subpar, and now that's so not the case," says Taran. "There are a lot of super-talented people who have just chosen a quality of life."

All files that come in from lawyer clients are first delegated to a Taran project manager, who selects the appropriate network lawyer according to expertise, and also reviews the resulting work before releasing it to the client.

That provides Taran with means to screen those lawyers who don't perform exemplary work. "That's the other advantage, as all my lawyers are independent contractors, they know if they don't do a great job, there will be no more work."

Lawyer Dermot Nolan of Nolan Law Offices in Hamilton has used Taran's services for litigation support work.

Nolan's firm is comprised of three partners and three associates.

"I think particularly for medium and small law firms, it's a very useful resource because it allows you to have the benefits of top notch lawyers as part of your firm and as part of the development of the product you provide to your clients without all of the costs and complications of expanding your

own personnel," Nolan says. "It's another weapon in our arsenal."

He says Taran's team has assisted him with "anything from researching procedural litigation issues to substantive legal principles, assistance in the development of factums for arguing appeals, drafting pleadings.

"They're particularly helpful when there's a legal issue that normally would require hours of research online or at a law library to ensure you have a complete understanding of the state of the law with respect to that issue on an up-to-date basis," Nolan says.

I've found them to be very thorough and reliable and reasonable.

It's not an either-or situation. They provide me with the raw materials that I can then use in developing and finalizing my arguments or court materials or submissions.

Rebecca Jaremko Bromwich works with TVA as a virtual associate. A mother of two young children, Jaremko Bromwich, a Queen's University grad, joined TVA in 2003 following her call to the bar and a brief stint with a London-area firm.

She's now living in Cincinnati, Ohio, after her husband was reassigned with his work. She says TVA has enabled her to keep up on law while out of the country and raising her family. "Working as a virtual associate allows me to continue my Canadian law practice, but do all the other things I want to do with my life." 