

Lee Turner

Lee Turner died on December 12, 2002.

Maybe you never heard of Lee Turner, but in 1970, when he took the podium in New York City, his talk electrified the 500 or so lawyers attending a national conference on law office management.

Lee had an insurance defense practice in a two-lawyer firm in Great Bend, Kansas. What was so remarkable to the audience was Lee's description of how he was able to utilize the talents of 28 (!) non-lawyer assistants, what they did, and how they were so productive and profitable to his firm. In less than an hour, Lee Turner had introduced lawyers to the concept of delegation of legal tasks to well trained non-legal personnel. Some left the program saying, "...it might work in Kansas, but it wouldn't work in my city." Others saw the potential and began taking hesitant steps to try to implement the concept in their own offices.

It was not long before paralegal courses and schools sprang up all over the country. Bar associations formed committees and debated the ethical considerations, what these new workers would be called, whether they would type, and whether they would lunch with the secretaries or with the lawyers. Lee headed several special ABA committees that helped to develop and expand the concept of legal assistants and to inform lawyers of their potential.

Today, legal assistants are everywhere and are helping lawyers in ways that could not have been contemplated in 1970. Most of us could not imagine trying to practice without them. What is most remarkable is that an entire career path can be traced to a single lawyer - Lee Turner.

And so, whether you are a legal assistant or have been privileged to work with one, take a moment to pause and to give thanks to the legacy of Lee Turner.

. . . James E. Brill