



PERSPECTIVE

Volume 33, Issue 4

Fall 2015

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By: Jennifer Smith, ACP

I hope everyone enjoyed their summer and took time to get away from the hubbub and relax. It is hard to believe that another year is coming to a close. It seems like the older I get the faster the years go by. I am afraid to blink for fear that the holiday season will be here.

I wanted to introduce myself to those of you who do not know me. I have been at the law firm Einhorn, Harris, Ascher, Barbarito, & Frost, P.C. since April of 2005, working in the Family Law department. Since the onset of my career in the legal field I have worked in Family Law so I guess you could say that is my specialty. I also obtained my Advanced Certified Paralegal designation from NALA in June 2015. I became a member of the Executive Board in 2010 as a Trustee-At-Large and assumed the office of President of the Paralegal Association of New Jersey this past June. So, enough about me, let's get on to the good stuff.

We are gearing up for the October 23, 2015 NJ Paralegal Convention. We hope to see everyone there. We have a full day planned with educational seminars, networking, a vendor hall and more. Don't miss out! For more information please log onto

www.njparalegalconvention.com

Save the date for our next dinner meeting on November 17, 2015 at the Birchwood Manor in Whippany. I am trying something new with dinner meetings this year. I would like to gather at 6 p.m., for those that are able, to network and get to know one another. If you are not able to make it at 6 p.m. that is not a problem, we will see you at the regular meeting time of 6:30 p.m. This is something new that I thought I would try and I would like to hear everyone's feedback relative to this idea.

I am also looking for more people to become involved in the Association. For those that indicated they were interested in helping out with a particular committee, an email was sent this summer touching base to see if you remained interested. For those that responded I created an email google group. These email groups seem to be struggling a little to get conversations and ideas flowing. If you are in any of these email google groups please feel free to communicate and email with each other. The more ideas we have the more the Association can grow. If you are not in an email google group and would like to be added, please contact me. I am happy to add anyone that is interested.

I look forward to meeting and networking with everyone. See you at the Convention!

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National Association of Legal Assistants Affiliate



NALA News

by Christine Principe, CP

2015 ANNUAL CONVENTION, INSTITUTES, AND EXHIBITION

Association business was conducted at NALA's annual convention in July with the election of the board, including, among others, President, Kelly A. LaGrave, ACP, and Region I (of which PANJ is included) Director, Elisse Stern, ACP from New York, New York.

The budget for 2015-16 fiscal year was also adopted which included maintaining the \$80 CLE gift certificate for all new and renewing active members. What a great way to complete CLE credit!

Additionally, revenues increased by two percent expenses were up ten percent, largely due to staffing changes and the expenses associated with NALA's recent move to new offices. The Board remains conservative, but optimistic for 2015-16. A full copy of the annual report can be located at NALA's website nala.org.

SAVE THE DATE

The date of the 2016 Annual Convention, Institutes, and Exhibition is July 13-15, in Las Vegas, Nevada. Make your plans now to attend!

DID YOU KNOW?

NALA's Certified Paralegal Program was granted accreditation by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) after having established compliance with the NCCA Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs. NCCA is the accrediting body of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence. The NCCA standards ensure certification programs adhere to modern standards of practice for the certification industry. The NALA Certified Paralegal program is among more than 120 organizations which include over 270 certification programs that have received and maintained NCCA accreditation.



Pick Your Window of Opportunity

NALA's Certified Paralegal examination has been the definitive professional certification standard for 35 years, and with new computer-based testing procedures, paralegals now can choose the time and date of their examination of month-long "Testing Windows." During these windows, the proctored exam may be available each working day throughout the month.

September 1-30

Application deadline: August 1
Late application deadline: August 10
(\$25 late fee)

January 1-31

Application deadline: December 1
Late application deadline: December 10
(\$25 late fee)

May 1-31

Application deadline: April 1
Late application deadline: April 10
(\$25 late fee)

It's the same rigorous examination—no change in structure or subjects, and essay questions remain a part of the exam. Eligibility requirements and examination application fees are unchanged.

The exam is offered at more than 260 computer-based PSI Test Centers designated by the PSI Testing Center Network in locations throughout the nation. Schools not already PSI Test Centers may apply to NALA to become an authorized testing center for the Certified Paralegal Exam. Employers may also become testing centers for their paralegal staffs.

Visit the NALA Website for additional information.



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STATE OF NEW JERSEY
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Proclamation

WHEREAS, the State of New Jersey recognizes the many contributions of paralegals to the legal profession in the Garden State; and

WHEREAS, it is known that paralegals possess important legal skills and perform substantive legal tasks; and

WHEREAS, paralegals provide critical legal services to large and small companies, individuals and public entities throughout New Jersey;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, CHRIS CHRISTIE, Governor of the State of New Jersey, do hereby proclaim:

OCTOBER 23, 2015
AS
PARALEGAL DAY

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GIVEN, under my hand and the Great Seal of the State of New Jersey, this fifteenth day of July in the year two thousand fifteen, the two hundred fortieth year of the Independence of the United States.

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Collection sites in Metuchen(*), Perth Amboy, Trenton, Newark, Passaic, Brooklyn, Queens, New York City & Long Island

SAVE THE DATE!

***NOVEMBER 2015 GENERAL
MEMBERSHIP MEETING***

DATE: November 17, 2015

***PLACE: Birchwood Manor,
Whippany, NJ***



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2015 - 2016 TERM



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Paralegal/Legal Assistant/Legal Secretary – Do You Know Your Value?

By: Mary Ann Thompson

The legal field is broad and getting broader every day. There are solo practices, small firms, large firms, in-house counsel within many corporations as well as legal positions in the corporate world that require attorneys and support staff. Jobs seem readily available but there is also a considerable pool of candidates willing to fill them, resulting in a fiercely competitive job market for paralegals. Unfortunately, however, paralegals have been finding frustration in the hiring process or when being considered for promotions. There is a distinction in job titles/descriptions that is often not being made when employers are making hiring decisions and candidates are looking for a job. That distinction - an employer's expectation in terms of skills and qualifications required for the paralegal and precisely what the candidates' qualifications are in relation to that position - can cause a very stressful work environment for both employer and employee if not addressed. Often, paralegals that have spent time and money on either a paralegal certificate or degree from an accredited program find themselves doing much more administrative work than they expected and can become frustrated and unhappy in their jobs but that may not have to be the case.

Attorneys, especially in solo practices or small firms, rely heavily on their support staff. Consequently, paralegals in this legal setting are required to wear many hats and are responsible for answering phones, calendaring, billing, payroll and sending out legal correspondence, communicating with clients, attorneys and courts. If they are lucky, they may be given the opportunity to do some research and some writing. It is understood that these administrative duties are critical to the practice of law and, by no means should be diminished. However, paralegals with a certification or a degree (or paralegals with several years of experience) that have been educated to do more substantive work such as research, writing, client interaction, working on interrogatories and assisting the attorneys in trial preparation can be discouraged when they are required to do the administrative work. This frustrating situation leads paralegals to question their role: are they an administrative assistant, legal secretary, legal assistant or paralegal? Faced with this dilemma, the next logical step for a paralegal would be to look for a position in a mid-sized, larger firm or corporation where there may be less administrative responsibilities and more substantive work available but those positions often require the paralegal to have solid experience dealing with the legal process as a whole and that is where the administrative experience can be truly beneficial. An additional problem for paralegals is that when these larger firms or corporations want to hire for more substantive positions, they may look to recent law school graduates because there is a surplus of them as the market is saturated, they don't expect crazy high paying salaries as they are happy to be employed and, perceivably, they don't need as much training so they are being hired to do the work that a paralegal was once hired to do in years past.

So what is a paralegal who has the education and/or several years of experience to do? If you are a recent graduate; you may have to take your lumps and start in a smaller firm and learn the administrative side of the field. Paralegals are often schooled on the bigger principals of the law but the reality is that part of their job requires them to know the legal system and how it works. Knowing the administrative end of the field can be invaluable knowledge as it gives paralegals a much better understanding of the legal process. So, it may be beneficial to toss your ego aside in order to gain an understanding of the process and, in turn, that knowledge will help you to be confident in the next position you hold. For paralegals with several years of experience, you can think of an administrative position as a means to an end and use it to learn as much as possible and add value in order to move forward in your career. If you are working at a small firm, you can use your administrative position as a way to grow your value so that you become indispensable; creating your own niche which you can use to your advantage as you add that value to the firm. You also have an opportunity to educate your attorney as to the substantive duties and responsibilities you can assume. You can show your attorney the cost effectiveness of employing your legal skills as the attorney can charge the client for your billable hours. Additionally, the client wins as well as the billable hours for the paralegal are much less than for the attorney.

If your wish is to work in a mid or large size firm or corporation, then you may want to focus on one area of law (e.g. intellectual property, labor and employment law, family law) and look to see if that firm has a training program in that area. Again you may want to toss your ego aside and find an entry level position but, certainly, express during the interview that your desire is to move forward in the company and that you looking to further training in the area of law that interests you.

Admittedly, the above tactics may seem like common sense; however, when in the hunt for a job or while working in a situation that did not turn out as expected, you may want take a very close look at where you are in your career and what your value is at that moment. Knowing your value together with your experience and education can be used to get the position that you truly desire for yourself. It will enable you to be more selective when looking for a job or making a career move.

Another way to gauge your value is to use job search engines or job postings. They can be useful in determining what the responsibilities, skills and education that are required for the positions that you want to apply for or the promotions you may be seeking. Look closely at the posting and be sure that your skills, education and experience are a similar match to the jobs you are seeking. In doing so, you can put yourself in a strong position when going into the interview and, consequently, you will feel more confident. While on the interview, you can ascertain if what you are looking to do will be a match for the position that the firm is looking to fill. Be sure to openly discuss your skill set and also inquire about the tasks that they will have you be doing. If they want you to do more administrative responsibilities and you are more qualified then have that discussion. If you are at the next phase in which you are looking to move forward in your career, be sure that an employer will take value in the experience that you can bring to the table and that they are interested in supporting you in order to mutually benefit both you and the firm or corporation.

Having an understanding of your value (and the confidence to back it up) can help you bridge the gap of being a legal administrative assistant to being what one might consider a true paralegal (which clearly needs defining) and put you on the path to moving forward in your career. You must advocate for yourself and communicate that value and desire to your employer or potential employer. Perhaps, the next mission for paralegals as a whole should be to bring awareness to our employers that there seems to be a gap between what they think that they need in terms of support staff and what is actually happening in the field. It may be a good time for paralegals to start shining a light on the issue in order to create a more harmonious work place for everyone.

Mary Ann Thompson earned a Bachelor's Degree in Hotel Restaurant Management from Johnson and Wales University and an Associates Degree in Paralegal Studies from Raritan Valley Community College. She has worked in Human Resources and has been working as a paralegal since 2003. She has worked in the areas of Employment Law, Criminal Law and Litigation. She is currently employed at Lawrence Y. Bitterman, Attorney at Law in Clinton, New Jersey.



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