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**Market Yourself As A Paralegal**

**By Kevin Erickson**

What does it mean to make yourself marketable or sellable? Does it require that you quit your job, completely change careers or go back to school. Perhaps, but for this article it simply means making the most of your skills and abilities and continually looking for ways to improve.

Whether you just graduated or you've been a paralegal for many years, learning to market yourself is an essential skill in maximizing your potential. Both financially and in the opportunities that come your way.

If you are a seasoned paralegal you may want to sharpen your management skills, make the most of your client interviews or change your area of law. The most convenient and least expensive way to start your research is to go online. Reading articles on career and paralegal websites, like Total Paralegal is a great way to get ideas.

As you get into your online research you'll find a multitude of resources. You will also realize that there are many others searching for the same information and the same answers as you.

If you realize through your research that you may need or want to take a class or two to strengthen your skill-set to better position yourself for advancement but you simply don't have the time to travel to a physical classroom. No problem, because in today's online world, taking an online course is not only practical but very smart.

The internet is also a great place to find other ways of getting to where you want to be, such as seminars and discussions for today's paralegal professional.

Take baby steps while you're working the daily grind. If you try to do too much you run the risk of driving yourself into the ground. And remember, it's imperative that you are proactive in reconstructing your assignments and informing your supervisors of your interests, skills and extra effort. Let's face it, our supervisors are involved with their own deadlines, their own court appearances and their own business worries. As a result, they don't always notice extra effort because they've come to expect it. On the other hand, they always seem to notice our less than perfect work. Don't fret, stop mumbling under

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your breath, complaining to your family and co-workers, simply let your boss know about your extra effort. In other words, "toot your own horn".

If you are a recent graduate marketing yourself means making the most of your school experience. Use your professors, counselors and fellow paralegals to create an effective job search. Keep in touch with everyone because you never know if you'll be working with or for them sometime down the road.

Inform everyone you know that you are actively seeking a "full-time paralegal position in a large firm in... the city of your choice" or a "part-time paralegal position in a small firm close to home."

Whatever your situation, utilizing your personal contacts will make your search less stressful, time consuming and much more rewarding... as in a better, higher paying position. You may feel that you are at a disadvantage trying to qualify for many legal positions, but many employers would rather train someone to do it their way than re-train someone who does things their way.

I admire and encourage those of you seeking "second-careers" or for those of you who simply want to acquire new skills by going back to school. I went back to school, paid for it out of my own pocket and attended night classes. I can honestly say that I was a better student the second time around than when I was fresh out of high school.

"Older" employees bring a lifetime of experience, expertise and skills to any position and are a good role models for younger employees. Studies have shown that mature workers have lower job turnover, better overall attendance and fewer on the job accidents than do younger workers! Studies have also found that the ability to learn remains constant throughout most of our lives.

Regardless of your current situation. You CAN make it happen... where there's a will there's a way and there's always room for challenges and the accompanying mental and spiritual growth that will inevitably occur when you stick your neck out and go for it.

Kevin Erickson is a contributing writer for:

<http://www.totalparalegal.com>

,

<http://10.century21rx.com>

and

<http://www.eyeonnursing.com>

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**Paralegals – Top Organizations You Need To Know**

### By Scott Knutson

The career field of paralegals began developing in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s as lawyers began hiring the assistants to help them with paper work, case investigation and general duties. As more attorneys began hiring legal assistance, the American Bar Association formed the Standing Committee on Legal Assistance to help set the standard in the paralegal – attorney relationship, employment guidelines and other duties associated with the paralegal, or legal assistant. That committee was formed in the late 1960s and today is made up of both attorneys and professional paralegals. The American Bar Association offers a certification program to institutions that give courses in paralegal instruction which gives the bar association the opportunity to set standards in the education of legal assistants.

There are several major national professional organizations for paralegals in the United States, in addition to their representation in the American Bar Association. Some of those organizations have helped form the career field of the paralegal, or legal assistant.

Two professional organizations, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) and the National Federation of Paralegal Associations (NFPA), together represent more than 30,000 paralegals across the U.S. The organizations, while both working to serve the paralegal profession, have been competitive while determining the language that helps shape the profession. The NFPA prefers usage of the word paralegal while NALA prefers the term legal assistant.

The American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE) is an organization of institutions and teachers of paralegal education programs. The organization strives for consistent paralegal education standards.

A new organization for paralegals began in 2003 and quickly began setting standards in the legal assistant field. The American Alliance of Paralegals serves individuals. Members in the American Alliance of Paralegals are required to meet certain educational or work experience guidelines in order to be a voting member. The organization was the first national organization for paralegals to become involved in setting minimum educational standards and guidelines.

If you are a paralegal hoping to gain membership in a national professional organization, do some research to see what type of associations are typical to your area. The national organizations will likely have state and regional groups meeting in your area, or a nearby area. Talk to other paralegals in your area to see if they have professional membership in one of these organizations. Ask about benefits and professional development training the organizations offer.

If you are just entering a career as a paralegal or just beginning training for such a career, see if a professional membership can help you in your career plans. Perhaps an organization that offers various networking or job notice work boards would be of benefit to someone seeking to enter the field. Membership could be like having an insider pulling for you. Also, if you are a student planning to enter the paralegal field, a national organization might be able to hook you up with scholarship or other financial award information to help you complete your training. Contact all the paralegal organizations you can find to see if they have special information that might help you along your path to your legal career.

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Scott Knutson is an entrepreneur and writer. For more of his articles visit:

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