

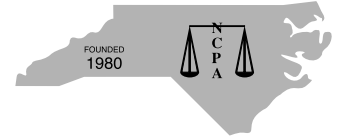


Winter 2014

North Carolina Paralegal Association, Inc.

# Forum

*noun* [C]; *för-əm*  
an occasion or a place for talking about a matter of public interest



# NCPA

# WANTED

***“WANTED: Paralegal,  
No Experience Necessary.  
A Professional Reality Check.”***



The NCPA is an  
Affiliate Member  
of the  
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## IN THIS ISSUE...

- WANTED: Paralegal, No Experience Necessary
- Would You Hire You? Part II - Tips for Interviewing
- Changing Your Specialty



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Opinions expressed in articles and features herein are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of NCPA. The Editor strongly encourages the submission of materials for publication. The Editor reserves the right to edit material and accept or reject materials submitted.



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*Moving?* Be sure to let us know!

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## President's Message

Patricia F. Clapper, ACP, NCCP



NCPA recently held its Fall Board meeting and some exciting things are being planned for the Annual Seminar next year. Be sure to mark your calendars for March 20-22, 2014. Our seminar committee has already started looking for speakers and topics and I am sure this will be an educational but fun time at the beach.

At our meeting, we also held our Long Range Planning meeting to talk about ideas for the future of NCPA. Do you have ideas about where you would like to see NCPA in the next 5 years? Do you have ideas about thing you would like to see NCPA offer to its members? If so, please contact any Board member with your ideas.

NCPA also held its Review Course in September. We wish the best of luck to those that took the exam, as you read this you are probably waiting on your test results. We encourage you to let us know how the Review Course helped you (or didn't help you) in preparing for and taking the exam.

Remember, my email is always open for questions, comments and suggestions from members. NCPA is an organization run by its members, for its members, so please let me hear from you if you have questions or concerns.

Always end the day with a positive thought. No matter how hard things were, tomorrow is a fresh opportunity to make it better.  
- Author unknown

*Patricia F. Clapper, ACP, NCCP*

President

## Chairman's Message

Karen F. England, NCCP



As I write this, the leaves are furiously falling off the trees and the temperatures are falling each day leading us into the winter season. I can hardly believe that next month is Christmas! Where has the time gone this year?

But as winter approaches and we look to a new year, we should be excited about what will be happening in NCPA in the coming months. Our seminar team is busily planning for what I know will be an awesome Annual Meeting and Seminar March 20-22, 2014 once again at the beautiful Holiday Inn Resort Wrightsville Beach. Mark your calendars now to attend!

I want to encourage each of you to familiarize yourselves with the Contact Center and the ListSers on our website as the primary way we correspond in a group fashion with our fellow members. If you have not joined your district's ListServ please do so today. It is an easy way to keep in contact with each other so that you are using the most up-to-date contact information. If anyone has problems using either the ListSers or the Contact Center, please do not hesitate to contact Patti Clapper, Jamie Coll or myself.

Another date for everyone to put on their calendars is July 22-25, 2014 for NALA's convention in Charleston, South Carolina – right here in our back yard! Planning has already begun, and it will be a week filled with great educational opportunities, awesome networking, meeting new friends and connecting with old friends from all around the country and lots of good 'ole southern fun. If you have never attended a NALA convention you will be in for a treat.

Have a great Holiday Season  
and See you at the Beach in March!

*Karen F. England, NCCP*

Karen F. England, NCCP  
Chairman of the Board



## Report of the First Vice President and Education Committee

Diane L. Tally, NCCP

NCPA's 6th Annual Review Course was held on September 14, 2013 at UNC Charlotte Center City Campus. MANY THANKS to Stephanie Elliott, NCCP, Beverly Moore, NCCP, Heather Padgett, NCCP, Crystal Robinson, NCCP, and Alicia Mercer, ACP for all their time and hard work in organizing the Review Course.

NCPA will be offering a FREE one hour ethics video replay in December. The exact date has not been chosen yet but registration information will be on our website soon. If you are renewing your NCCP in January and need your one hour of ethics, you will want to register early. The goal is to do an entire replay in February 2014.

NCPA's Student Essay Scholarship is in full swing. The contest

is open to any student in one of the NC State Bar accredited programs. More information can be found on our website. Deadline to submit is Jan 1.

Annual Co-Chairs, Michele Bryant, CLA, NCCP and Crystal Robinson, NCCP are getting into high gear planning for the upcoming 33rd Annual Meeting & Seminar to be held March 20-22, 2014, at the Holiday Inn Resort Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina. Keep looking at our website for more information to follow. We are looking forward to seeing everyone!

*Diane L. Tally, NCCP*

Diane L. Tally, NCCP  
2013-2014 NCPA First Vice-President



Welcome to the winter issue of the Forum. Whether you're a paralegal student or a paralegal pioneer, we hope you're able to glean a nugget or two from this issue. We had hoped to have the winter Forum to you

sooner, but you know the saying, "the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." That was certainly the case with this issue.

### Editor's Court

Lakisha A. Chichester,  
ACP, NCCP

There is no way we could put the Forum together without a coordinated effort from members who volunteer to create, collect and organize content. This time around though, job changes and work responsibilities almost derailed the issue. It took an especially tenacious effort to get us to the finish line. Thanks to everyone who pitched in to make it happen!

Also, thanks to everyone who reported the flawed headline in the fall issue. Like you, we want the Forum to be as accurate and as error free as possible. As a result, the Publications committee will be doing a much-needed assessment of the Forum, after which we plan to bring you bigger and better things for 2014.

Finally, if by the time you read this, you're craving longer and warmer days, I encourage you to start planning your trip to NCPA's 34th Annual Meeting and Seminar in Wrightsville Beach in March 2014 and to NALA's 39th Annual Convention in Charleston, SC in July 2014. We'll be packing our bags before you know it!

If you have any questions or comments, please contact the editorial team at [ncpaforum@gmail.com](mailto:ncpaforum@gmail.com).

Enjoy the issue!

*Lakisha A. Chichester*  
Senior Editor, NCPA FORUM

## Second Vice President's Report Membership

Shelby G. Tyson, NCCP

The current membership breakdown as of December 4, 2013 is as follows:

General members:	238
Associate members:	41
Student members:	137
Sustaining Members:	11
Affiliate members:	3
Educational Program members:	2
Total	432

NCPA is proud to recognize the following Sustaining members:

Case-Closed Investigations, CaseWorks Inc., Chapel Hill Court Reporting, Chaplin & Associates, Inc. CourtLogic, Incorporating Services, Ltd., Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Co., Legal Media Experts, LLC, National Digital Forensics, Inc., Ruffin Consulting, Inc. and Triad Land Surveying, P.C.



NCPA would also like to recognize our Affiliate and Educational Program members:

Alamance County Paralegal Association, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, Carteret Community College Paralegal Technology Program, Cumberland County Paralegal Association and Guilford Paralegal Association.

Feel free to contact me at any time if you have questions about membership in NCPA.

*Shelby G. Tyson, NCCP*

Shelby G. Tyson, NCCP  
Second Vice President, Membership Chair

## Patron/Sustaining Membership Chair Report Membership

Melissa Stockley Jones, ACP, NCCP

We had good showing of support from our Sustaining Members at NCPA's Annual Seminar in April. Our Exhibitors had a lot of good information to share with our attendees about the services they offer, as well as table prizes and door prizes. Our Sustaining Members play an important role in making our seminars so successful.

As of November 1, 2013, we have nine (9) **GOLD** Sustaining Members, including:

CourtLogic;  
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Lawyers Mutual Liability Insurance Co.;  
Ruffin Consulting, Inc.;  
Case-Closed, Investigations;

Incorporating Services, LTD; and  
Chapel Hill Reporting, LLC;

We have two (2) **BRONZE** Sustaining Members, including:  
Legal Media Experts, LLC; and  
Triad Land Surveying, P.C.

Please make sure to thank our Sustaining Members throughout the year by referring business to them every chance you get!

Respectfully submitted,

*Melissa Stockley Jones, ACP, NCCP*

Melissa Stockley Jones, ACP, NCCP  
Patron/Sustaining Membership Chair

# AMICUS

## THE *Director's Chair*

NCPA's Directors are elected by the general membership. A District Director must have been a general member for a year and reside or work within the district represented. As a Director, you serve on the Board of Directors for NCPA. Your responsibilities include attending scheduled quarterly Board meetings to offer input and vote on policies and procedures; coordinating meetings or a mini-seminar within your District; submitting information about your District for the AMICUS and FORUM; and generally being a liaison between the members of your District and NCPA.

If you are interested in serving as a Director, please email Karen F. England, NCCP, Chairman of the Board, at [kengland@wehwlaw.com](mailto:kengland@wehwlaw.com).

### ***DISTRICT I REPORT***

District I has 18 members. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact Heather Padgett, District Director - [heather.padgett@wilmingtonnc.gov](mailto:heather.padgett@wilmingtonnc.gov)

### ***DISTRICT II REPORT***

District I has 18 members. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact Heather Padgett, District Director - [heather.padgett@wilmingtonnc.gov](mailto:heather.padgett@wilmingtonnc.gov)

### ***DISTRICT III REPORT***

District III has 56 members. On August 18, 2013, members from District III helped serve dinner at the Salvation Army. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact Dawn Quist, District Director - [dquist@wilsonreiveslaw.com](mailto:dquist@wilsonreiveslaw.com)

### ***DISTRICT IV REPORT***

District IV has 79 members. District IV and VI are planning a joint meet and greet after the holidays. Our hope is to have a human resources person speak on interviewing skills and resume writing sometime in January or February. For more information, please contact Karen England, District Director - [kengland@wehwlaw.com](mailto:kengland@wehwlaw.com)

### ***DISTRICT V REPORT***

District V has 69 members. District VI members participated in the Walk Now for Autism event held on September 28, 2013. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact Alicia Mercer, District Director - [alicia.mercer@gmail.com](mailto:alicia.mercer@gmail.com)

### ***DISTRICT VI REPORT***

District VI has 42 members. District IV and VI are planning a joint meet and greet after the holidays. Our hope is to have a human resources person speak on interviewing skills and resume writing sometime in January or February. For more information, please contact, Toni Morgan, District Director - [tonimorgan@thefreshmarket.com](mailto:tonimorgan@thefreshmarket.com)

### ***DISTRICT VII REPORT***

District VII has 14 members. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact our At Large Director, Stephanie Elliott - [selliott@gastonlegal.com](mailto:selliott@gastonlegal.com)

### ***DISTRICT VIII REPORT***

District VIII has 7 members. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact our At Large Director, Stephanie Elliott - [selliott@gastonlegal.com](mailto:selliott@gastonlegal.com)

### ***DISTRICT IX REPORT***

District IX has 18 members. Catawba Valley Paralegal Association has established the Lynn Price Memorial Scholarship. Lynn was a founding member of CVPA who lost her battle with cancer earlier this year. Members interested in getting together for a meet and greet in January or February, please contact Beverly Moore, District Director - [bev@tissuelaw.com](mailto:bev@tissuelaw.com)

### ***Affiliations Director***

Affiliations Director – Correspondence has been sent to several local paralegal associations in North Carolina which are not currently NCPA affiliates. Anyone interested in your local associations becoming an NCPA affiliate, please contact Elizabeth Vance – [evance@wehwlaw.com](mailto:evance@wehwlaw.com)

### ***Chairman of the Board***

It is my desire to see our districts become more involved in holding meet & greets several times during the year. NCPA has several videos from our past review courses which are approved for CPE credit that can be used for a meet & greets or lunch & learns. Any director who is interested in using the videos, please contact Karen England at [kengland@wehwlaw.com](mailto:kengland@wehwlaw.com)



# **WANTED**

## ***"WANTED: Paralegal, No Experience Necessary. A Professional Reality Check."***

By: Karen George, FRP



No, this isn't a real job posting, but don't you wish it was? There's a reason you don't see this kind of ad for a paralegal. For all of you new paralegals out there of all ages, I'm going to attempt to explain the one thing you should probably know and that is why. I write this for those of you who graduated from high school and attended a paralegal program and also, for the career changers among us, who wish to enter the legal realm as a second or third career in life. This one's for you. We'll consider it a "friendly" professional reality check from me to you.

A paralegal is a professional position. By becoming a paralegal, you have stepped away from the subordinate positions in the work world and stepped into a new realm on the employment list. You are a professional and that means there's a new and harder set of rules in the "game of employment" for both sides: the employee and the employer.

As a newly minted paralegal, you come to the interview table with certain expectations: an office, a better salary, some autonomy, to be treated with a little more respect in the office and in society, in your new capacity as a paralegal. Perhaps, you even expect to have your own assistant. Whatever your expectations, you have them because you are A PARALEGAL. You now hold a certificate or a degree, you have studied long and hard, and incurred loans to become and be able to call yourself A PARALEGAL.

The employer seeking a paralegal has certain expectations as well: that the paralegal dress in a professional manner, conduct himself professionally, not have to be micromanaged, and to not be directed in an assignment the same way his legal assistant or receptionist or file clerk is directed. The attorney

expects the paralegal to come to have those abilities and knowledge that are instantaneously helpful to the attorney. In sum, he is seeking a partner, not exactly an equal partner, but a partner in the representation of the client.

Certainly a certain amount of office specific training is expected: how their computer system is set up, how they use certain programs which you are expected to already be experienced in using (part of the pre-employment process), how they handle certain elements of their practice but , essentially, that you can walk in and start working from the moment you enter the firm. After all, you have been provided an office, a better salary, some autonomy, you are treated and regarded differently, you may even have your own assistant.

So, all of the above having been laid out for you — you are a new paralegal. You hold in your hand your paralegal certificate, your Associate's degree or Bachelor's degree and you can't understand why, "Oh why" you can't get a job. You wonder why every single paralegal position you come across on planet earth requires, requests, and demands at least two years of paralegal experience. You wonder: "Did I make the wrong decision?", "Why is it so hard?", "Where can I get the experience?", "I have been unemployed for \_\_ years because no one will hire me without experience." The list of frustrations and questions is endless. I, and other paralegals, try to answer these questions the best way we know how: we offer suggestions for internships (which are few and far between), tell you to volunteer, join paralegal groups/associations, get involved, get your face and name out in the legal community, any way you can (except as a newspaper headline!)

continued on next page



## **"WANTED: Paralegal, ..." - continued**

The bottom line is this: by becoming a paralegal you have stepped out of the regular job market. You are no longer looking for the "regular job" you may have previously held. You are now a professional and the playing field is different. You bring not only your education to the application table, but you must also bring proof that you can fill a very important role in the firm from the moment you enter it – and for the most important person in the office — the attorney. A paralegal is not hired to be "taught" how to be a paralegal. A paralegal is hired to fill a position that is intricate to the process. The position requires critical thinking based on experience, which is knowledge.

You work under the attorney and all of your work must be overseen by the attorney, but gone is the step-by-step-by-step instruction for each assignment. The professional realm demands more. Many of the things you will do as a paralegal aren't even "assigned" by the attorney, but instead fall on your desk in the form of a pleading or letter and you must simply pick it up and know what must be done with it, i.e., draft a response and hand it to the attorney for review and finalizing...and usually without a prefabricated "form" to work from. You must be able to review files and make sure things are moving along as they should be or recognize and do what needs to be done so that it does move along as it should.

The attorney isn't going to tell you "all the time" what needs to be done – that's why he hires a paralegal who knows what to do, what should be done and most importantly, how it should be done – and then gets it done. You must know how to talk to clients, opposing counsel, opposing paralegals, witnesses, interview potential new clients to bring needed information to the attorney.

You must think for yourself, for the attorney and on behalf of the client's matter. You must make suggestions and keep abreast of new case law to make the correct move and right suggestions when the need arises. You must not only know the ethics of being a paralegal, but keep an eye open for attorney ethics as well, so he doesn't step over the ethical line inadvertently. You guide the attorney based on your knowledge. You must be current on all court rules and let

the attorney know of any changes, so there are no issues with your filings. You must keep your own paralegal education up-to-date by attending CLE's (continuing legal education) and being a part of your professional associations. You must know all that is happening outside your immediate office that could help or hurt your office. You are the alter ego, an extension, if you will, of the legal team that is the attorney and the fight for the client's cause. Much is expected.

Therefore, based on all of the above, it is clear – or should be – why finding a paralegal position is more complicated, more time consuming, more demanding, and has higher expectations than any of the other "jobs" you have held or sought in the past. Is it a great field to work in? Yes. Absolutely. Can it be more difficult to find your way into than a "normal" job? Yes. Absolutely.

---

**The bottom  
line is this:  
by becoming a  
paralegal you  
have stepped out  
of the regular  
job market.**

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How does all of this help you, as the new paralegal? It explains why the employer is looking for at least 2 years' experience and why it is so hard for you to get your foot (or even a toe) in the door. But what can you do about it? As I have said many, many times on the various paralegal forums to many, many other paralegals who asked these same questions – this is my advice:

1. Take any position you can in order to get your foot (or even a toe) into a law office. Don't necessarily look for a paralegal position. Look for a file clerk, runner, receptionist and junior legal assistant position.
2. Get inside a law firm and observe, read the letters, peruse the files, listen to what is happening around the office, listen to the attorneys and paralegals, offer to drag the files to the court for a trial, take the documents to the printer for trial exhibits, drive witnesses to deposition and trial, to a hearing, make the coffee and make the copies (all the time reading what you are copying) and learning why so many copies are needed and who they are being given to.
3. Ask questions of everyone. I can tell you that your new best friend is the legal assistant. The legal assistant knows all the details, the courts, the judicial assistants, the bailiffs, the judges and how they like things, knows what is happening on a case, why that many copies needs to be made, why a

## "WANTED: Paralegal, ..." - continued

check must accompany that paper, why that is important and about a trillion other details that you will need to know.

4. Always, always, always dress professionally and conduct yourself professionally. Don't be a snob, but know that where you are today is the training you must go through for your future as A PARALEGAL and you will need all of those people you are working alongside today.

All of these things will give you the knowledge, the understanding and the EXPERIENCE you will need 2 years down the road to say – "Yes, I have 2 years' experience in a law office: I have attended depositions, I have helped at trial, I am familiar with how many copies are needed for filing "x," I know how to have trial exhibits made, I am familiar with this court, this judge, this JA, this bailiff, how this judge wants this or that or doesn't want it, I have been in that courtroom and how it must be set up for trial, where the plugs are, where the plaintiff sits and the defense sits, where the witnesses sit outside the courtroom waiting to be called, what it is like to attend a deposition, examination under oath, where the papers are filed and how to pull a court file, how to research a file, how papers must be filed..." Am I making my point?

With two years' experience you aren't going to get the senior paralegal position. You will probably get a junior paralegal position or a legal assistant/paralegal position — the best position you could actually hope for, as this will give you the absolute best training and opportunity to transition to a senior paralegal position in the future.

Is it fair to get all the education, incur the education loans and hold a paper that identifies you as A PARALEGAL and have to settle for another, lesser position? Is it fair to expect an employer to hire A PARALEGAL who doesn't really know what the position entails and has to be trained on each step to be taken? Would it be fair to get the job and not be able to do the job and have endless nights of cold sweats and fear that tomorrow you will arrive at the office only to be fired because you couldn't do the job?

Being a paralegal is a professional position, and one that doesn't likely match up with your pre-conceived notion of what "a job" was to you in the past. You have stepped out of the "job" market and you have stepped into the market of seeking "a professional position" and legal career. Just as attorneys do summer internships and doctors do internships

before they become attorneys and doctors, you too must go through an internship because you are now among the professionals.

Welcome paralegals, one and all, to the Profession of Paralegalism.

Karen R. George, Florida Registered Paralegal lives in Miami, Florida. Karen is employed by the firm of Cole Scott & Kissane as a construction litigation paralegal. Karen's experience in the legal field goes back to 1976 and as a paralegal to 1993.

Karen has experience in personal injury, toxic tort litigation, airplane litigation, product liability in the areas of motor vehicle and wheel/tire litigation, medical malpractice among others predominantly on the defense side.

Karen has held the Florida Registered Paralegal designation since March 2008.

Karen has given webinars for NBI on Pre-Litigation Procedures for paralegals. Karen has written numerous articles which have been published in The Daily Business Review, DCBA The Bulletin, contributed to an article on paralegal for Trials and Tribulations; and collaborated on NFPA's first ethics opinion for 2012. Karen actively submits articles for various blogs on LinkedIn.

Karen is a Miami Native and speaks English and Spanish fluently.

This article was reprinted with permission from Jamie Collins, Founder and Owner of The Paralegal Society™ ([www.paralegalsociety.wordpress.com](http://www.paralegalsociety.wordpress.com)), a forum created to educate, motivate and inspire paralegals.

The article was original posted on October 16, 2011.

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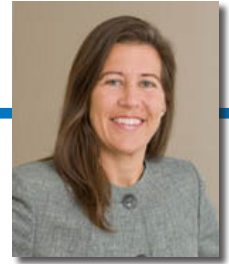
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# "WOULD YOU HIRE YOU?"

## ***PART II: TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING***

By: Karen Sargent, PHR



The interview process is often considered one of the most loathed, gut-wrenching experiences; a necessary evil if you will. However, it's truly your opportunity to shine, show your intelligence and personality. Here are some tips to quell your fears and ace the interview process to obtain the position you want.

**First Impressions:** The phrase "dress for success" has never gone out of style. Wear a business suit to each and every interview to create an unforgettable, professional first impression. Arriving 10-15 minutes early to an interview is standard. Ideally candidates will pre-visit the location and know all parking accommodations, commute times, etc. It is highly recommended to leave your cellphone in the car to avoid any possibility of an unwanted personal call or text message during an interview.

**Be Prepared:** Being a professional means being prepared and staying one step ahead is always a well desired trait in a law firm.

a) Bring extra copies of your resume and references. It's always helpful for the interviewer(s) to have a copy of your resume readily available.

b) Be prepared to talk. I usually expect the 90/10 rule. The employer really should only need to pose the questions and leave the rest of the talking to the candidate. The candidate should speak for 90% of the time during the interview to allow the employer as much opportunity as possible to assess the candidate's skills and experience.

Select approximately ten events, such as: successfully solved problems, favorable outcomes, resolved or avoided conflict, memorable or noteworthy acts, goals achieved, proudest professional accomplishments, and other accolades.

Commit these achievements to memory and make sure you convey each during the interview. It's imperative that you communicate the circumstances surrounding these events and explain why they stand out as exemplary and extraordinary.

c) Obtain a copy of the official job description. The job description defines the responsibilities of the position and includes the knowledge, skills, abilities, and other assets required to perform the job (commonly referred to as

KSAO's). A well written job description will allow you the opportunity to analyze the specific functions of the job and glean the most important skills. This provides a significant advantage for you in preparing for the interview process. In doing so, you can focus interview responses on those areas of your experience that correlate with the most important skills, thus making you an excellent candidate for the position. Asking for the job description also imparts a level of initiative and keen interest.

d) Participate in formal mock interviews.

Practice, Practice, Practice. Ask your friends and family to pose interview questions and allow them to give feedback on your responses. There are numerous books and websites on great interview questions. Give one a quick read to expose you to additional possible interview questions (and answers). The more experience you have interviewing the better prepared and more confident you will become.

e) Research the employer's website. Employers expect you to do your homework. Candidates should research and know the history of the Firm, its culture, practice areas, attorneys, benefits and when possible the biographies of the individuals that will be interviewing.

continued on next page

## "Would You Hire You?" - continued

f) Ask the employer questions. Employment is a reciprocal relationship. Candidates should express what they are looking for in an employer and associated expectations. Whether it's training, advancement opportunities, or challenging and stimulating work that you seek in an employer, it's important for candidates to take the opportunity at the end of the interview and ask 3 or 4 insightful questions (that couldn't be answered from your research) to determine whether the Firm is a good fit.

**Types of Interview Techniques:** There are three standard interview techniques: Traditional, Behavioral, and Situational. When possible, it is best to try and answer interview questions with concrete examples of how you've handled similar situations in the past. Candidates need to be prepared to answer questions from all three forms.

**Traditional Interviewing** poses the simplest, most straight forward questions which are designed to evaluate past work experience and credentials. Such questions include: What are the reasons you left a previous place of employment? What are your three greatest attributes? What areas do you need improvement? What are your current career goals? Where do you want to be professionally in 5 years? Why should I hire you?

**Behavioral Interviewing** consists of questions related to how you reacted to a past situation, i.e. "what did you do." The premise is that your past performance will be an indicator of your future performance.

**Situational Interviewing** consists of questions regarding how you will react in a future or hypothetical situation, i.e. "what would you do."

Both Behavioral and Situational Interview questions tend to probe deeper into specific work situations or particular skill sets needed for the job to help evaluate whether a candidate has a competency or behavior for successful performance. Since these questions tend to be open ended, feel free to ask

for some time to think about the question. In fact, employers want to know your thought and decision making process and see how well you maintain your poise in unexpected circumstances.

**Be Yourself:** Most importantly be yourself and show your personality during the interview. Attorneys desire to have both a personal and professional relationship with their staff. During the interview process they seek to find someone who will not only do a great job but someone they will enjoy working with for many years to come. Your nonverbal communication during an interview is critical. Make good eye contact throughout the interview and despite your nerves, remember to smile. It may sound odd, but the power and psychology of a happy, smiling person goes a long way towards creating positive energy for establishing a future working relationship.

**Write a Thank You Note:** Lastly, mail a handwritten thank you note to the attention of those who performed the interview as soon as you get home. Promptness is key. If you want to be memorable this is a simple, but extremely effective tool.

I hope these tips help you achieve a more effective and enjoyable interview experience. Best of luck!



Karen Sargent is an office manager with the firm Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard LLP in Raleigh, North Carolina. She is the current President of the Raleigh/Durham Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators and is an active member of the National Chapter of the Association of Legal Administrators (ALA) and the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM). As Office Administrator, Karen Sargent is responsible for the overall operations of the firm's Raleigh office, which comprises 30 attorneys. Her responsibilities include recruiting, onboarding and evaluations of all non-attorney staff; human resources; benefit administration; financial management; and facilities planning.



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# Changing Your Specialty: *I Did and You Can Too!*

By: Charity Inglis, CLA, NCCP



The legal profession is a vast field, filled with possibilities for choosing a specialty uniquely suited to your interests. Paralegals can work in many different settings, including government offices, law firms, and corporate legal departments. While these are the most common places to find a paralegal, there are many other organizations that employ paralegals.

Depending on where you work, you might specialize in litigation, corporate law, intellectual property, family law, or even personal injury. Paralegals might even change specialties throughout their careers. Some law firms allow for this possibility and provide training for those interested in making a transition. For example, at a large law firm that I previously worked for, I started out in the corporate law department. After a few months, I was moved to the patent department, which was growing, and where training for potential patent prosecution paralegal was available.

In the early days of my career, I dabbled in personal injury, corporate law, and intellectual property before finally finding my calling in civil litigation. After more than seven years in the civil litigation area and working only in law firms, I was approached by a corporation to fill their need for a labor & employment paralegal to oversee any non-intellectual property litigation. The corporation has its own legal department where the majority of its work is intellectual property. At first, I thought the job was not a good fit for me. I was not an employment paralegal, and I did not see employment cases until they had already made their way through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and had wound up in a North Carolina federal court. Fortunately, my previous patent experience, which stood out to my potential employer, along with several years of civil litigation experience meant I could possibly assist in patent litigation matters.

After two full days of interviews at Cree, Inc. a market-leading innovator of lighting products, LED components and semiconductor products for power and radio frequency (RF) applications, I was offered a paralegal position to assist the employment and non-patent litigation counsel. I would support employment and benefits counsel in managing

litigation and transactional matters including document drafting and review, database and file management, and case investigation, research and preparation. A large part of my job is to collaborate with the Human Resources department to investigate administrative charges and prepare the company's written position statements and responses to requests for information. I had never done this in any of my previous positions.

Working for a public company as an in-house paralegal has been a huge change for me and my family. While working in civil litigation, I used to love working crazy hours, preparing for trials, getting plenty of overtime and feeling I was depended on by the attorneys with whom I worked with. However, come to find out that specialty area was just not meeting the needs of my family.

So, if you find yourself looking to change your specialty, here are some recommendations that I have for you:

- Prepare a list of the skills you will need for your desired specialty.

- Look for opportunities with your current employer.

- Attend continuing education opportunities related to your desired specialty.

- Network! You might hear of opportunities outside of your current employer.

- Research potential employers.

Say YES to new tasks! Sometimes work might have slowed in your department, while paralegals in other departments are busy and looking for anyone to help. If you offer to help, you could learn new skills and possibly see a light into a new specialty area.

Get additional certifications. There are so many advanced and specialty certification courses offered through NALA and other organizations that you can attend online.

continued on next page

## Changing Your Specialty - continued

Keeping yourself positioned to make a change is key. The main question I kept asking myself was, "where do I want to be in my career in five or ten years?" Whatever you decide in your paralegal career path, I wish you the best.

A goal without a plan is just a wish." ~ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry.

Charity Inglis is an in-house paralegal with Cree, Inc. in Durham, North Carolina. She has served as the Articles/Association News Editor of the North Carolina Paralegal Association's FORUM publication and is an active member of the North Carolina Paralegal Association (NCPA), North Carolina Bar Association's Paralegal Division, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) and the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM). As an in-house paralegal with Cree, Inc., Charity Inglis provides paralegal assistance to employment and benefits counsel in managing litigation caseloads and transactional matters and is responsible for managing files for all employment, benefits and litigation (non-IP) matters.

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If you are interested in either being a Mentor or Mentee, please contact the Mentoring Program Chair Kaye Summers at [kaye@pwkl.com](mailto:kaye@pwkl.com) or 919-682-9691.

Your mentor/mentee relationship will contribute to the success and retention of new paralegals and the learning of the profession!

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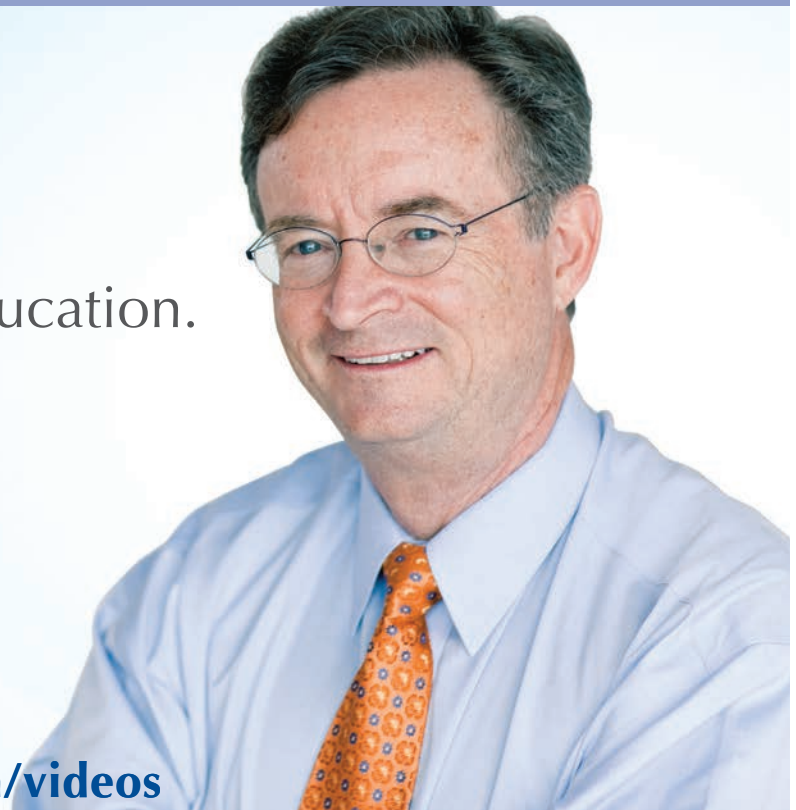




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