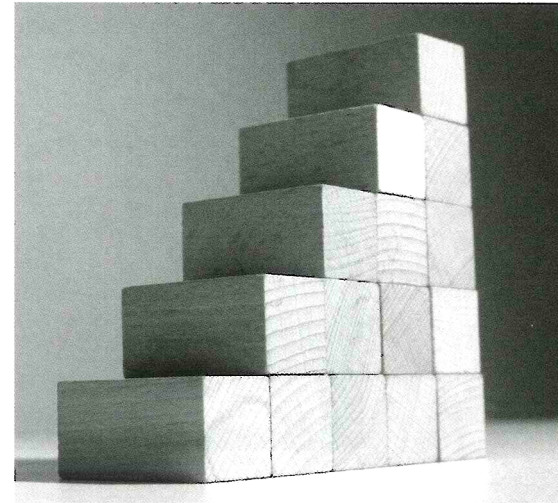




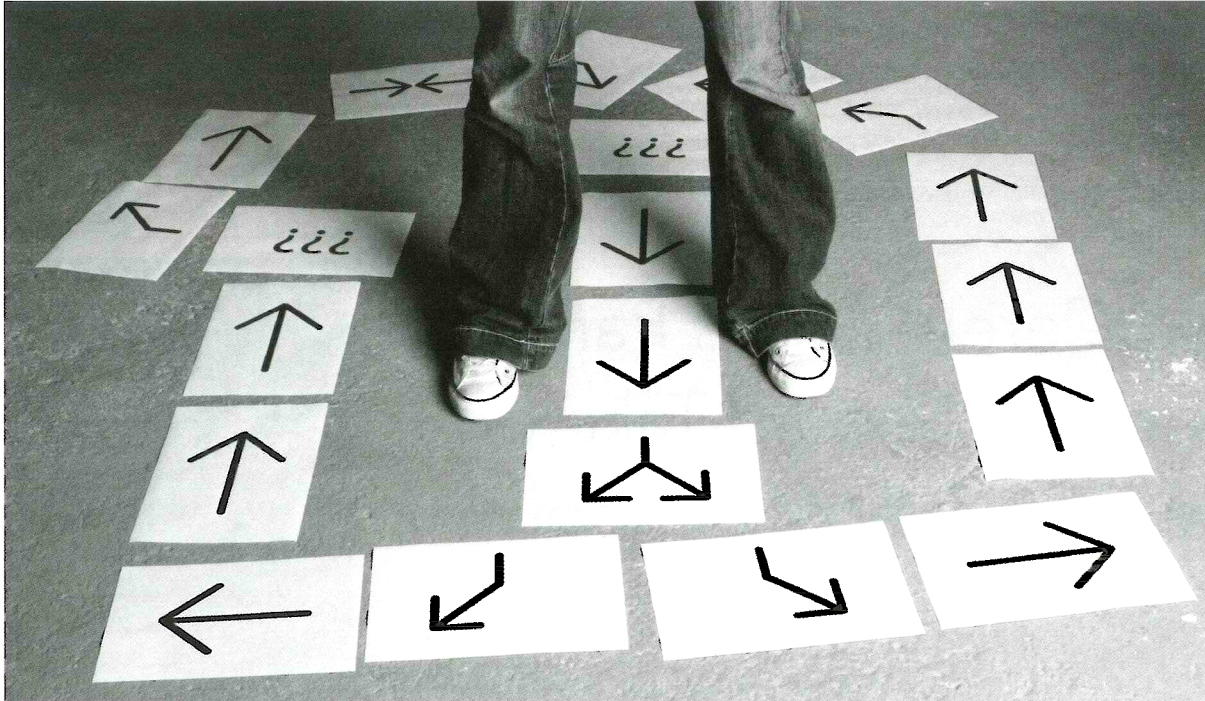
Five Career Steps Paralegal Students Should Take on the First Day of School



If I could only give one piece of advice to brand new paralegal students on their first day of school, it would be to start preparing for their job search now—and not wait until graduation. Now is the time to start gaining the real-world experience most legal employers want—and to start building that crucial professional network. Here are five steps new paralegal students can take on their first day of school to greatly enhance their chances of becoming employed in the legal field once they graduate.

1. **Search for Entry Level Jobs or Internships**
No experience is the biggest hurdle that new graduates face when they enter today's extremely competitive job market. It is very important for students to form a plan to gain hands-on work experience before they graduate, especially in programs which do not require internships to graduate. Getting a foot in the door of a law office, even as a receptionist, file clerk, office assistant, word processor or runner, full or part-time, temporary or permanent, is the best way to acquire valuable practical skills, build their resumes, and develop their professional networks. If students cannot locate entry-level employment, they should try to obtain internships, even if they are not a program requirement, in exchange for letters of reference. Area legal non-profit organizations often welcome paralegal student volunteers.

2. **Be Active in a Paralegal Association**
Membership in a local and/or state paralegal association offers paralegal students so many opportunities to meet and network with working paralegals that it should be a program requirement. Most associations offer deeply discounted membership rates to students. Not only should they plan to regularly attend meetings, but they should offer to work on at least one committee or volunteer project. Active participation in a paralegal association is one of the best ways for students to raise their profiles in the legal community and may lead to internships, jobs, and professional references. Many associations also offer student scholarships.
3. **Attend Continuing Legal Education Sessions at Student Rates:**
Many CLE providers offer students deeply discounted tuition rates in the range of \$25 - \$50 for full-day events. Students will learn the latest practice and technology skills from specialists in these areas, in addition to receiving invaluable course materials, resources, and forms. If their resumes are light on experience, they can list recent CLEs in the education section and can discuss what they learned with prospective employers during interviews. CLEs also offer networking opportunities, students should make an effort to talk to other attendees between sessions and during lunch. Talking to speakers after their sessions, even if it is just to say how much they enjoyed the presentations, can expand their professional networks.



4. Use LinkedIn: LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com) is a free professional social networking site that many employers use to vet prospective employees. It is also an excellent source of networking for legal professionals. If new students do not already have a LinkedIn profile, they should set one up immediately. They should view their profiles as virtual resumes and update them as they progress through the program. Students need a professional online presence, and LinkedIn is an essential way to create one. They should add association memberships, work and educational experiences, and, most important, professional contacts, as they gain them. LinkedIn allows users to provide written recommendations, a great way for students to get references from internships and volunteer work. Students can also join LinkedIn Groups especially for legal professionals and participate in group discussion forums, another way to meet working legal professionals. This is a good time for students to review their personal profiles at other sites like Facebook and MySpace, and remove online content which might adversely affect their future employment prospects.

5 Read Professional Blogs Legal blogs or “blawgs” are one of the best ways to stay up-to-date with current legal news, practice skills, and technology. Not only are there several very helpful paralegals and paralegal instructors blogging today, including Vicki Voisin, *The Paralegal Mentor* www.paralegalmentorblog.com and attorney Robert Mongue, *The Empowered Paralegal* (www

theempoweredparalegal.com), but there are thousands of attorneys blogging and sharing their expertise. Students should set up an RSS (“really simple syndication”) feed reader, such as the easy and popular Google Reader, and subscribe to at least a half dozen blawgs and legal news feeds that may be helpful to their career development. With an RSS reader, they will receive all posts from their subscriptions in chronological order and can catch up on their blog-reading at their convenience.

Whether they are in a two-year or four-year paralegal program, new students can take steps from the very beginning to prepare them for that first exciting full-time paralegal job. Building a professional network they can use upon graduation and throughout their careers, as well as gaining hands-on experience, will be the most rewarding homework they have ever done. ■

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