



The University of Texas at San Antonio Department of English
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MEMO

Date: 13 February 2020
To: Crystal Colombini, Ph.D., Assistant Professor for the Department of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio
From: Madison Black, Senior, Multidisciplinary Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio
Subject: State of Profession: Paralegal

Introduction

The purpose of this memo is to define the paralegal career by means of required skills, education, and training necessary for success within the legal sector. Identifying trends of growth within fiscal and professional parameters will further provide an effective map that allows one to navigate the employment market and interpret the established state of the profession.

Skills and Qualifications

The traditional definition, as well as connotation, of the paralegal defines the professional as one employed within a private or corporate law firm or government office. The paralegal assists the lawyer with investigative and clerical work that consists largely of effective written and verbal communication. The work of the paralegal will be utilized by the overseeing lawyer and is essential to the case and needs of the client and/or lawyer. In addition to effective communication, the skills listed below are critical to success in employment (*O*NET Online, 2019*):

- Attention to detail
- Use of analytical software and various computer programs including LexisNexis Courtlink Strategic Profiles, litigation support software, document management software, and all Microsoft Office applications
- Research and organizational skills
- Ability to meet strict deadlines

Trends in the Ideal Applicant

In addition to the listed skills above, an associate degree, at minimum, is required. However, applicants with bachelor's degrees, paralegal certificates, and completion of certain examinations are more successful applicants. A survey conducted by Robert Half Legal revealed that 42% of the lawyers interviewed required applicants possess a bachelor's degree, and 46% required a certificate of completion from an ABA-approved paralegal education program. This supports another study that discovered a 6% increase in paralegal applicants with certificates since 2016,

that further validates the progression in required education (Survey: One in Five, 2017). Evolution of the profession from inferiority to one of great promise and esteem may also be contributed to the opportunity for the paralegal professional to specialize in law practice areas such as corporate law, litigation, and real estate law. The earlier referenced Robert Half Legal survey disclosed that 66% of the surveyed lawyers said that knowledge of a specific practice area makes paralegals more marketable (Infographic, 2016).

Growth and Stability

The paralegal employment market and demand for paralegal professionals is expected to grow much faster than average at a 12% increase from 2018 to 2028, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). The short-term projection provided by Projections Central observes a 14.6% increase from 2016 to 2026, and a 4.8% increase in employment for 2018 through 2020 occurring just in the state of Texas (Projections Central, 2019). Several factors make the paralegal profession a desirable and competitive occupation. The average growth of lawyers to 2028 is at 8%, compared to the paralegal career, which supports the driving force that is the legal specialization and precedent. Currently, litigation provides the most job openings, and may even be subcategorized to expand employment opportunities. The adaptability and skill set of the paralegal is crucial to promotion opportunities and appropriate compensation. The median national wage for paralegals is \$50,940 annually. Texas paralegals had a median wage slightly higher than this at \$52,220 annually in 2018 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019).

Conclusion

The evolution of the paralegal vocation warrants a current state of the profession that exposes the modernity and increasing value of the paralegal in today's legal, government, and private sectors. Carl Morrison from "The Paralegal Voice" stated "we're in exciting times for our industry because there's so much on the horizon. And law is changing - the law itself does not change, but the industry and how law is provided and serviced is evolving" (Morrison, Carl, 2019). The future paralegal must be adaptable and expect worthy recognition within the job market, all of which may be observed through increases in pay, variation within employment, and the opportunity to ascend into higher roles.

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MEMO

Date: 13 February 2020
To: Crystal Colombini, Ph.D., Assistant Professor for the Department of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio
From: Madison Black, Senior, Multidisciplinary Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio
Subject: Writing within the Paralegal Profession

Introduction

The purpose of this memo is to determine the significance of written communication within the paralegal profession and the fundamental role performance writing fulfills to achieve success in the office and in the courtroom. Paralegals assist lawyers with the writing, drafting, organizing, and compiling of various legal documents that may be read by the opposing lawyer, overseeing judge, or client. In order to accomplish target objectives, such as winning a big case, the art of legal writing and jargon should be consistently perfected in technique while employed as a paralegal to ensure successful and ethical writing.

Legal Writing

As with any form of communication, whether written or verbal, establishing a consistent and effective rhetoric style in a profession or occupation is crucial to career advancement and job performance. Thus, a paralegal must be aware of their rhetorical situation, which involves taking into account three elements: the occasion also known as the “need”, the audience, and lastly the constraints that may hinder the progression of your communication (Staggers, 2015). At first notion, legal writing may be perceived as very procedural, but equally important is the ability to write so that the convincing argument may present itself through the legal analysis or evidence described. The occasion, audience, and constraints prove equally varying in complexity and challenging within legal writing for a multitude of reasons; each composed document must be tailored to address the need or occasion, assiduous in communicating to the audience, and fluid enough to retract, redirect, or refute any constraints. These cited factors may be witnessed in any combination, with each feature compounding with the next.

Successful Legal Writing

Paralegals and the paralegal profession have experienced pronounced momentum that further propels the career to a more substantive position within the field of law. Although the law itself does not experience change, the practice and career of law warrants evolution of litigation techniques, including the style and method of one’s legal writing. This creates an opportunity to

keep pace with competitors and distinguish oneself from the rest through the attraction of high profile clientele and gain of exposure through the success of newsworthy cases. Despite the common misconception of only experienced professionals making up the audience, occasions arise when paralegal professionals are tasked with communicating to non-legal professionals, citizens, or clients. In this rhetoric occasion, the paralegal must take into consideration its audience to succinctly communicate in an approachable, but most importantly comprehensible, fashion. David Howard Spratt, professor of legal rhetoric at American University Washington College of Law referenced a common goal: that is to “impress clients with the ability to get a favorable result instead of using big words” (American Bar Association). In continuance with developing legal rhetoric, Wayne Schiess explains that legal professionals must be conscious of the passive voice in writing—and how the active voice is more concise and effective in both clarity and attraction of the desirable emotions from the reader (Schiess). Writing as a paralegal also entails adjusting writing style, tonnage, and technique to the supervising lawyer or team of lawyers overseeing the drafts. These situations compel the paralegal to write successfully, ethically, and legally, all while considering both the audience and the overseer and ensuring that the rhetoric appeals to both.

Ethical Legal Writing

Successful legal writing as a paralegal means ethical legal writing. Wayne Schiess, a Juris Doctor and Professor of Law at the University of Texas at Austin, revealed in his work “Ethical Legal Writing” Steven Stark’s first four rules of professionalism in legal writing:

- 1) Never lie, under any circumstance
- 2) Don’t use euphemisms to disguise the truth
- 3) If it is not required, hedging is a form of dishonesty
- 4) Avoid the use of hyperbole to distort the truth of your assertions

Schiess goes on to say that “in everything you write, be honest about the facts... because omitting relevant facts will hurt you almost as much as misstating them” (Schiess, 2002). The paralegal does not experience the immediate pressures and possible consequences of such dishonesty as fervently as the lawyer, however the paralegal must still be overtly conscious of both verbal and written communications and the legalities prevailing. The paralegal remains unequivocally responsible for violations regarding their work, and as such, ethical legal writing predominates the profession and provides the foundation for successful legal writing.

Conclusion

Writing encapsulates the paralegal profession as it is the sole foundation for a multitude of duties that must be performed by the paralegal. The efficacy and proficiency of the paralegal’s professional writing skills must be developed from the beginning of the career so that a stable footing will increase chances of major advancement throughout the vocation. Many individuals, including the antecedent law, supervising lawyer, paying client, and court judge depend on the ethical and successful writings of the paralegal.

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From: Madison Black, Senior, Multidisciplinary Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio
Subject: Personal SWOT Analysis

Introduction

This memo provides a graphical representation of a completed personal SWOT analysis that integrates with my professional and career goals as a future paralegal. A comprehensive investigation of my SWOT analysis will deepen my understanding of my potential to succeed as a paralegal through sufficient evaluation of my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats while relying on genuine self-introspection. Methodical construction of the graphic allows me to identify my current position in the profession, what I may reasonably expect my next steps to be, and what is requisite to ensure that the proper sequence of events occur so as to ensure the success of my future professional endeavors.

Experience

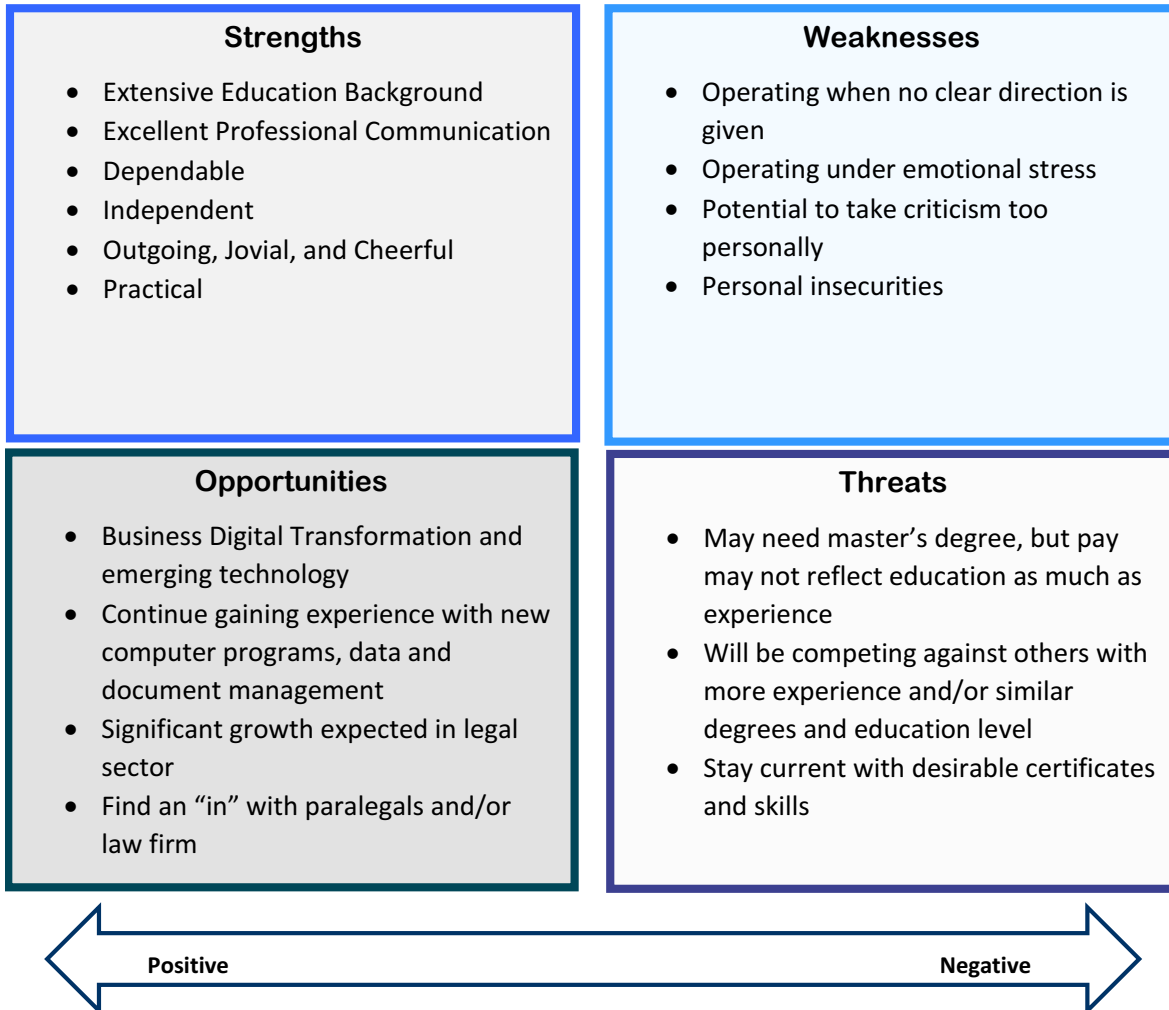
To date, I have completed over 90 hours of science and laboratory coursework. However, my change in major to study the disciplines of History and English required completion of more advanced classes that involve proficient reading, writing, and research skills. The progression of the paralegal profession garnered the attention of individuals with a more diverse and extensive educational background, such as a bachelor's degree, as opposed to the still existing prerequisite of paralegals only possessing an associate degree and occasionally additional certifications. The completion of my degree with Magna Cum Laude honors, along with varied knowledge that spans across many subjects and skillsets, will further benefit my desire to one day supervise others as a senior paralegal at a corporate or private law firm.

Interests and Personality

What largely attracts me to the paralegal profession is my ability to organize information effectively, and to dissect information into a succinct, communicative document that effectively represents the issues and priorities within the text. I have a great interest in investigative work that I will use to my advantage while employed in the paralegal career. As a current student and future professional, I am able to observe others critically while also performing well under the direction and administration of authoritative figures and supervisors. My readiness to accept and

utilize applicable criticism reinforces my suitability to supervise and manage other individuals within the profession. My commitment to completing tasks beyond the standard set before me, my attention to detail, capacity to adapt to my surroundings, willingness to improve, and independence enables me to excel in the paralegal vocation.

Personal SWOT Analysis



Conclusion

The SWOT analysis functions as a basis for personal reflection of one’s characteristics, personality, current position, and hindrances to overcome that all propel one forward in a career through awareness, development, and preparation of the professional. My personal SWOT analysis increased my confidence of my own success in the legal sector as a paralegal through proper scrutiny of my talents and contingencies. Although I process criticism respectfully, I am still insecure of my intelligence and fearful of my competitors. It is my intent to uncover more of my true passions through my work as a paralegal to prove myself capable to climb the corporate ladder whilst preserving my integrity and heart.

References

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From: Madison Black, Senior, Multidisciplinary Studies, University of Texas at San Antonio
Subject: Professional Identity as a Paralegal

Introduction

This purpose of this memo is to construct a clear and compelling professional identity statement that is indicative of my career aspirations, talents, character, and individuality that perpetuates my unique work style and unceasing work ethic. The development of my professional identity within the paralegal vocation will support future employers in their endeavors to hire a variety of experts who fulfill company mission statements by accomplishing duties whilst benefitting the workplace environment, committing to individual success, and inspiring new team members to meet the established standard of performance.

Professional Identity in Law

Crafting a professional identity within the legal sector is necessary to attract desirable candidates with regards to both employees and clientele. The paralegal profession may be more limiting in breadth of self-individualization, but nonetheless essential to attracting the ideal employer and securing premier employment in a productive workplace. My professional identity statement will need to be revealing of my capacity as a professional, but personal enough so that prospective employers will take into consideration my qualities that would benefit any professional environment.

Establishing a Professional Identity

To successfully distinguish myself through the composition of my professional identity, I must take into consideration my strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Prior to methodical inquiry of my SWOT analysis, I have set forth these target objectives to strengthen my professional identity plan:

- a) Continue developing professional communication skills
- b) Improve project management, design, and planning
- c) Remain current with emerging technology and computer programs in the field
- d) Stay up-to-date with salary, education, and specialization trends
- e) Scout applicable experience with reputable attorneys, lawyers, or corporations

As a practicing paralegal, one of my priorities will be to professionally complement my employing corporation or lawyer so that I am perceived as competent and dependable to clients and other supervisors. As a result of my confidence, proficiency, and independence, I expect to be highly respected within my profession.

Professional Identity Plan

I edit, plan, compose, and research legal documents to lighten the load and drive cases forward for professionals in law.

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