

Preface

Introduction

For some time now, the paralegal field has been growing rapidly and that trend is continuing, with the Department of Labor predicting that the profession is expected to grow much faster than the average for all occupations through 2016. Moreover, the value of paralegals to the legal profession is recognized by law firms, government agencies, the American Bar Association, and in numerous court decisions.

With that growth and recognition come additional responsibilities. Today's paralegals are expected to perform a wide variety of tasks and be ready to hit the ground running the instant they start work. Yet there is a significant gap between what is learned in the classroom and the way that knowledge is applied in the real world. Internships help “bridge the gap” and prepare students for their professional careers as paralegals.

Another transition occurs when students leave their internships behind and begin their jobs. The transition between internships and job hunting is a natural one because many of the same tasks and documents are needed. For example, you will need a résumé for both an internship and a job. Similarly, you will need to send cover letters and thank you letters for both internships and jobs. This text combines practical information with a variety of sample writings that pertain to both paralegal internships and job hunting.

The text is divided into three parts. Part I begins with an overview of paralegal internships and discusses the internship experience. Part II covers finding the right job, from revising your internship résumé for permanent employment through interviewing and negotiating a salary for your first job. Part III discusses the workplace, covering what paralegals do in “real life”; the various types of law practice, law firm, and other work environments; career strategies; techniques for success in the workplace; and alternative career paths for those with paralegal training and work experience.

Each chapter and section builds on the previous one. For example, once you understand how to prepare an effective résumé for your internship experience, you will be ready to modify that résumé for permanent employment. Similarly, once you read the information about the law firm environment in Chapter 7, you will understand how to keep your job and advance in your career, both of which are discussed in Chapter 8. The text concludes with pragmatic information on quitting your job, getting your next job, and strategies for success in the workplace.

A Real-World Approach

The book provides pragmatic and realistic information covering situations that occur in the real world of internships and law offices. For example, the following topics are covered:

- How to conduct a self-assessment before your internship experience
- How to make the most of your internship
- What to do if you're either underutilized or overworked during your internship
- How to handle sensitive topics, such as employment gaps in your resume
- Preparing for interviews
- Advocating for yourself in salary negotiations and annual salary reviews
- How and when to quit your job
- Strategies to improve job performance

Features of the Text

The text includes a number of features to enhance your internship experience and to improve your chances of finding suitable permanent employment. Chapters include the following features, as applicable:

- **Chapter Overview.** This chapter-opening section provides a brief introduction to the material to be covered in the chapter.
- **Chapter Summary.** This section, near the end of each chapter, provides a review of the material covered in the chapter and will help you refresh your recollection of the chapter before class.
- **NetWorks.** This list and description of Internet Web sites that provide information relevant to each chapter is included near the end of each chapter.
- **Case Illustration.** Some chapters in Part II and all chapters in Part III include a brief review of a case that illustrates one of the topics discussed in the chapter.
- **Key Terms.** The key terms and words introduced in each chapter appear with brief definitions as margin terms throughout each chapter and then in list form near the end of the chapter. The Key Terms are also collected together in the Glossary at the end of the book.

- **Bits and Bytes.** Chapters include some trivia or “fun” facts that relate to the topics discussed in the chapter.
- **Discussion Questions.** Questions are provided at the end of each chapter to enhance learning and illustrate some of the principles discussed in the chapter.
- **WebWork.** This is the very last section of each chapter and requires readers to access relevant Web sites to obtain information related to the topics discussed in the chapter. Students should use a general Internet search engine, such as Google (www.google.com), and type key words or terms into the search box to be directed to the pertinent site.
- **Figures, Charts, Tips, and Alerts.** Most chapters include useful figures and charts, as well as Practice Tips and Ethics Alerts, to illustrate the topics discussed in the chapter.

Although every effort has been made to refer to useful Web sites, those sites can change both their content and addresses without notice. References to Web sites are not endorsements of those sites.

Final Thoughts

Paralegals play a critical role in helping clients. Be excited about the challenges and opportunities that your internship and permanent employment will provide. Commit yourself to excellence both as an intern and as a practicing paralegal. You will be rewarded not only monetarily but also by knowing that you have performed your job to the best of your abilities.

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