

151 Tips for Your Career Success:

*The Paralegal Mentor's
Sure-Fire Strategies to
Move Your Career in the
Right Direction...**FORWARD!***

Presented by Vicki Voisin, ACP



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The Paralegal Mentor
strategies for paralegals seeking excellence

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Dedicated to all Legal Professionals who are committed
to moving their careers in the right direction!

Moving your career forward takes consistent planning and action.

These tips are designed to help you do that. Some you are doing already, some you are not...but they all work.

A successful career isn't like pizza, no one's going to knock on your door and deliver it! The key is to slowly and systematically use these tips to focus on your career...and you'll get results.

Start Today! As always, I'm dedicated to your success!



- Define your ideal career; be very specific.
- Determine what separates you from other paralegals.
- Create a concise one-page resume (whether you're job hunting or not).
- Always add extra value to your work.
- Cluster your email and answer it all at one time; follow the same procedure for returning telephone calls.
- Embrace technology to make your job easier and increase your productivity.
- Remember that the same ethics rules that apply to attorneys also apply to all legal support staff.
- Find a career coach who understands what you do and will help you plan your career strategies.
- Become the go-to expert in at least one area at your firm – examples: e-discovery, litigation software.
- When you learn something new, share it with your supervising attorney and, if appropriate, your co-workers.
- Remember: you will do your best work when you focus and take your time; this may not always be possible but, when you can, take a deep breath and really focus on what you are doing.
- Make a list of paralegals you'd like to get to know better. How can you make that happen?
- Always make clients feel special.
- Set up your office for efficiency; have all the supplies you need to get your work done.
- Believe in yourself – write down why you're really good at your work.
- On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you with your job *right now*? What would make it a 10? How can you get there?
- Get on boards, get involved, be visible; don't forget the advisory boards for paralegal/legal studies programs at colleges and universities.
- Remember that you may actually get less done when you multi-task.
- Assess your unique skills and strengths.
- Walk your walk and talk your talk...always.
- Remember that if a privileged document or information is revealed to a third party, the privilege may be waived.
- Always be truthful; honesty is the foundation of our society and the legal profession.
- Surround yourself with supporters; do not spend time with anyone who does not support your goals and believe in you.
- Learn to prioritize: What has to be done? What can wait?
- Always protect the client's confidences and secrets.
- Revisit your resume on a regularly scheduled basis to keep it up to date.
- Celebrate your successes – never take them for granted.
- Teach paralegal classes...you'll never regret it and you'll be surprised how much *you* learn!

Climbing to the top demands strength,
whether it is to the top of Mt. Everest
or to top of your career.
~Abdul Kalam

- Ask for feedback and ideas from a trusted mentor.
- Run for office. If you lose, the world won't end...run again!
- Give yourself an annual review – how are you doing with your career goals?
- Always project a professional image ... and remember that 'casual' Friday has its limitations.
- Set up a LinkedIn profile so you will have a personal resume on line and make connections. (www.linkedin.com).
- Serve as the newsletters editor for your professional association.
- Check the *Paralegal Mentor Blog* often (<http://paralegalmentorblog.com>) for the latest in news and trends, as well as original articles that will help you with your work.
- Certification is important to career advancement and to your self-image; don't hesitate to take a certification examination.
- Fake it 'til you make it – don't let perfectionism stop you.
- You always have time for something important just so long as you let go of the unimportant.
- Continually check in with yourself – are you where you want to be?
- Sometimes it's not WHAT you know but WHO you know...which is why networking is so critical to career success.
- FOCUS: a strong focus now creates a different future later.
- Attend your local paralegal group's meetings on a regular basis and get involved.
- Remember that many jobs are found by word-of-mouth; you have to be continually networking to get this information and so people will think of you when there is a job opening.
- Ask members of your current association what other associations they belong to and, if appropriate, join them.
- Ask members of your association what professional journals they read.
- Ask other paralegals what blogs they follow.
- Create a vision for your career that really pulls you forward.
- Everyone is a leader at some level; hone your leadership skills by watching others lead.
- It's the client's cash...never yours.
- Learn to prioritize. Knowing the difference between "do now" and "do later" will help you prioritize
- Learn to recognize the difference between what *needs* to be done and what *has* to be done.
- Sending the client an email? Be sure the client is OK with that and will be the one receiving the message so that the privilege is not waived.

If the career you have chosen has some unexpected inconvenience, console yourself by reflecting that no career is without them.
~Jane Fonda

Desire! That's the one secret of every man's career. Not education. Not being born with hidden talents. Desire.
~Bobby Unser

- Remember that your work must be supervised by a licensed attorney and the attorney must review the final work product before it leaves the office.
- Using the cell phone? Always be sure you are talking out of earshot of others.
- When you take your laptop out of the office, take extra caution so that it is not stolen; never leave it unattended.
- Learn to say 'No' to stay out of overwhelm.
- Set up 3 short term goals per month and plan how you will reach them in 30 days.
- Create a list of your credibility factors – you have many.
- Someday is not a day of the week – never wait until 'someday' to tackle your goals.
- If you're looking for a new challenge, change specialty areas.
- Increase your networking confidence by doing it more often.
- Create regular systems/routines for tasks you repeat often.

- Keep a file of commonly used procedures to save time when you have to do something you haven't done in a while.
- Schedule important tasks in your daily planner – then keep the appointment.
- Sending email? Watch “reply to all” – it can come back to bite you
- When speaking, be passionate...you'll forget to be nervous. If possible, join Toastmasters to hone your speaking skills and give you more confidence.
- Use your outgoing voicemail message to gather enough information that you can be prepared when call back – this will save lots of time.
- When someone stops by your office *always* ask, “What can I do for you?”
- When someone stops by your office *never* ask, “How are you?” unless you want to hear about their latest surgery.
- Don't keep candy in your office – it invites interruptions.
- When you're interrupted, ask the person how much time they'll need and hold them to it. Remember, there is no such thing as a “quick” question.
- Listen to *The Paralegal Voice* on Legal Talk Network (<http://legaltalknetwork.com>) to keep up with the latest trends in the industry.
- Deal with procrastination now, not later.
- Ask! Ask! Ask!
- Be authentic in everything you do.
- Choose being organized over being neat – neat piles of papers and files does not mean you're organized.
- Open your mail as soon as you get it. As you open each piece, decide: Do now? Do later? Delegate? Discard?
- Get rid of any equipment that doesn't work (i.e. that stapler that jams all the time).
- Write 5 articles in your area of expertise.
- Know your firm's billing practices so your time entries become routine.
- Don't succumb to the ‘put it here for now’ syndrome.
- Ask: what is the worst thing that can happen if I don't have this paper? You can probably easily find it on the Internet if you need it again. If you can, toss!
- Become an instant decision maker in everything you do and you'll get more done.
- Learn to delegate...do *only* the things *only* you can do.
- Chunk like tasks together and do them at the same time.
- Know when your energy is at its peak (morning, afternoon, middle of the night) and use that time to do your most difficult work.
- Join the *Paralegal Mentor Inner Circle* (<http://paralegalmentor.com/innercircle.html>) – *Paralegal Mentor Mastermind Calls*, as well as discounts on The Paralegal Mentor's courses and products. you'll automatically receive recordings of *Paralegal Mentor Mastermind Calls*, as well as discounts on The Paralegal Mentor's courses and products.
- When dealing with clutter: sort, toss, assign a home to everything (i.e. keep like things together), restrict items to their home, take control – and remember it's best not to bring clutter into your office in the first place

Don't ever let economics alone
determine your career or how you
spend the majority of your time.
~ Dennis Watley

- Attend Paralegal Mentor Mastermind Calls every month (or listen to the recording). To register:
(<http://paralegalmentor.com/mastermind-calls.html>)
- Be sure to fulfill your continuing education requirements; plan for the deadline and schedule courses so you're not scrambling at the last minute.
- Review Rule 5.3 of the ABA Model Rules re: an attorney's responsibility for nonlawyer employees.
- If your Aunt Pearl asks you to prepare a 'simple will' for her, DON'T!
- If you have a conflict with a case, tell your supervising attorney immediately.
- If you can't meet a deadline, let your supervising attorney know well ahead of time.
- Do not notarize or witness documents unless you actually see them signed.
- It is ethical for you to write and sign letters on behalf of the firm so long as the letter does not contain legal advice.
- Minimize distractions and interruptions to get more done.
- Don't interrupt yourself: have the equipment, supplies and information to do your work.
- Never be afraid to ask questions. If something is done and you don't know why, question it. The more you ask, the more you learn and the better you become at your job.
- Take responsibility for your attitude.
- Toot your own horn – often.
- Don't drift to email land; instead, set a time limit and stick to it
- Think you're getting nothing done? Make a list of everything you *have* done. You'll be surprised – and pleased
- Get a Year-at-a-Glance Calendar (mine comes from Staples) and plan your year – especially your vacations.
- If you make a mistake, admit it and then fix it.
- Mitigate stress in healthy ways.
- Time is your most precious asset – don't waste a minute.
- Do not allow your career to define your life.
- Participate in the *Paralegal Mentor's professional profile* – the Thirteen questions are fun to answer and fun to read.
- Your name can be on the firm's letterhead so long as your paralegal status is clear; same for business cards.
- Always have business cards with you and be sure to bring a large supply to conventions – you'll want them for networking and for vendor drawings.
- Speaking of conventions...just because something is free doesn't mean you have to take it; bring back only items that are useful – the others will just become clutter in your office (this goes for those tiny bottles of shampoo in hotel bathrooms, too).
- Save computer games and Facebook for after work.
- Your reputation is of ultimate importance – never tarnish it with immoral or unethical behavior.
- Ask for what you want...don't expect anyone to read your mind.
- Consider all parts of your life when you consider changes in your career (work/life balance, salary, career progression, benefits, etc.).

Don't confuse having a
Career with having a life.
~Hillary Clinton

- Review your state's Guidelines for Utilization of Paralegal Services. If you're in California, review Section 6450 of the Business & Professions Code.
- Watch fax numbers carefully so documents do not go to the wrong person.
- If you receive a document in error, tell your supervising attorney immediately.
- Look for new challenges – you are responsible for your career success.
- Don't waste your employer's time by playing computer games; there's never nothing to do.
- Take positive action instead of wasting your time worrying.
- Never wait for something to be perfect. (Hint: it never will be!)
- Stop comparing yourself to others.

- Check out the *Resource Page at the Paralegal Mentor web site* (<http://paralegalmentor.com>) for excellent continuing legal education opportunities.
- List three things you enjoy about your job. How can you make those even better?
- List three things that annoy you in your job. How can you reduce the effect they have on you?
- What can you do to future-proof your career? What skills will you need to do your job in the future?
- Have a professional photograph taken NOW. You will need one to attach to any articles you write, as well as for social media sites.
- Listen to your co-workers, your boss, and your peers; learn from their experience and knowledge.
- Do you want to learn something new but feel stuck in our job? Ask for extra responsibilities or to work on a new project.
- Your calendar is your best friend. Use it to keep yourself on track.
- To make a favorable first impression be sure you make eye contact, have a firm handshake, and smile!
- To learn from others, observe their skills, talents and abilities.
- The first step in career planning is to ask yourself what you really want to do in life.
- If you want to make a change, prepare a list of the skills you need to get there.

A career is wonderful, but you can't
curl up with it on a cold night
~Marilyn Monroe

- Ask for assignments/projects that move you in the direction you want your career to go.
- Invest in additional training or coaching that will give you the ability to be even better at what you do.
- Hard work and diligence are the key components of a great career.
- Never post anything on a social networking site that you would not want your boss to read. This includes pictures that would give your mother a heart attack.
- Always be punctual.
- Volunteer to do pro bono work (under the supervision of an attorney) so that you gain valuable experience (this looks great on your resume) and you increase your network of professional contacts.
- Grab opportunities – if they're important, you'll find the time.
- Take the initiative to do your best and leave a favorable impression on everyone.
- Commit to life-long learning.

Do you know '*what*' you want to do but not "*how*" to plan and take action?

Contact Vicki at Vicki@paralegalmentor.com to schedule a career strategy session to design your career plan and the steps to take to move your career in the right direction – *forward!*

Vicki Voisin, ACP, “The Paralegal Mentor,” is a nationally recognized author and speaker who delivers simple strategies for paralegals and other professionals to create success and satisfaction by setting goals and determining the direction they will take their careers.



Vicki spotlights resources, ethics issues, organizational tips, and other areas of continuing education to help paralegals and others reach their full potential.

She publishes **Paralegal Strategies**, a weekly ezine for paralegals and other professionals who want to create lasting success in their personal and professional lives. Additional information is available at www.paralegalmentor.com.

She also co-hosts a monthly podcast produced by Legal Talk Network featuring guest experts who discuss issues of interest to the legal profession. For information or to register, go to www.paralegalmentor.com/mastermind-calls.html.

After spending more than twenty years in the paralegal field, Vicki launched her *Paralegal Mentor Program* so she could share her knowledge and experience with other paralegals.

Vicki speaks on issues of interest to the legal profession and is the creator and presenter of **EthicsBasics®**, a unique and enormously popular program designed to raise awareness of ethical concerns by legal professionals.

Utilizing the **EthicsBasics** format, Vicki has made numerous presentations throughout the United States, addressing paralegals and other members of the legal staff, in both law firms and corporations. She is also a frequent speaker at meetings of professional associations; these presentations have been approved for Attorney MCLE.

Vicki has authored articles of interest to attorneys and paralegals in publications on the state and national level, including the *Michigan Bar Journal*, *Michigan Lawyers Weekly*, *The Michigan Paralegal*, *Legal Assistant Today*, LAAM's *Newsbrief*, and *The Career Chronicle* and *Facts & Findings* published by NALA. Many of those articles have been re-printed nationwide.

Vicki is an active member of the Legal Assistants Section of the State Bar of Michigan, having served as Chair in 2005-06. In 2000, she received the *Mentor's Award* from the Section and she was named *Legal Assistant of the Year* by LAAM, an award that was named in her honor. In 2003, NALA recognized her leadership in the development of the paralegal profession with the presentation of its President's Award.

She is a past president of the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) and until recently served on NALA's Advanced Certification Board. Vicki presents **Basic Ethics I and II**, **Advanced Ethics**, **Ethics & Technology**, and **Time Organization Techniques** on NALA Campus *LIVE!*

Questions may be directed to Vicki@paralegalmentor.com. Visit her blog at www.paralegalmentor.blogspot.com where she addresses matters of interest to legal professionals. Subscribe to her weekly ezine titled **Paralegal Strategies** at www.paralegalmentor.com.

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