

Chapter 3: Entering the Field

Chapter Outline:

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§ 3.1 LOOKING FOR A JOB: TRADITIONAL SOURCES

When looking for a job as a paralegal, one should not overlook traditional employment opportunities. However, it is a mistake to view these sources as the only places to look for employment. Traditional sources include:

Newspapers Obvious, but still required. The biggest limitation is that the vast majority of paralegal positions are never advertised.

College Placement Services

Use these if they are available to you. Check bulletin boards at the placement center and any law school libraries.

Bar Associations Local and state bar associations often provide job referral services.

Employment Agencies

Temporary employment services will place you with a number of employers, increasing your chances of impressing a law firm.

§ 3.2 LOOKING FOR A JOB: NETWORKING

Networking can be of great use for the serious job hunter. You should participate in any groups or activities that may help you meet other paralegals and law firm staff. A high percentage of positions are filled by word-of-mouth. The following are some suggestions for networking:

- other students in your course
- legal secretary associations
- paralegal associations
- activities sponsored by the bar association

§ 3.3 LOOKING FOR A JOB: TELEPHONE SYSTEM

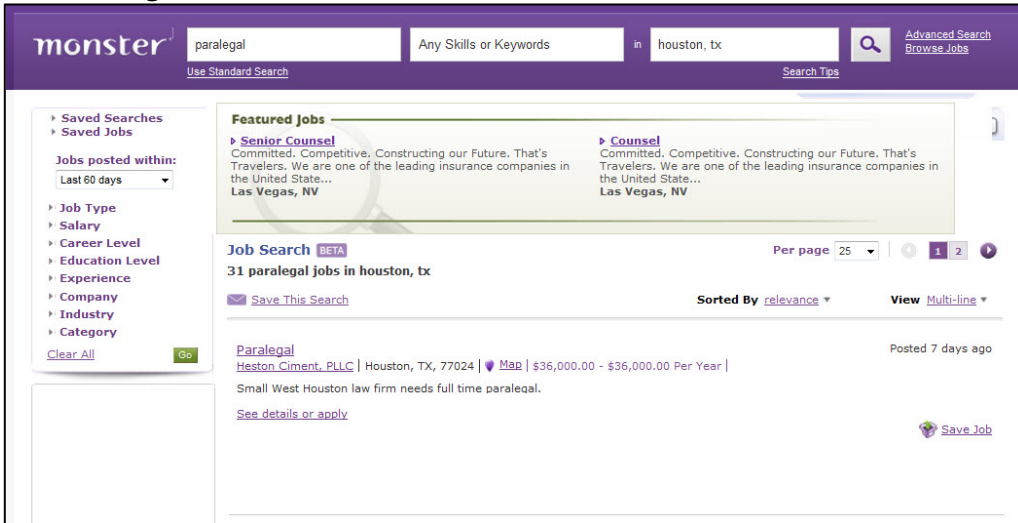
If used correctly, the phonebook can be an excellent tool. Make as many copies of the work sheet on the following page as needed and follow these instructions:

- Set a goal to make a specific number of calls each day (usually five to ten).
- Use a work sheet to keep track of the calls you make.
- Start alphabetically and work your way through the attorney listings in the Yellow Pages or on the Web site *www.martindale.com*. (A directory of attorneys by city, county, and state.)
- Ask for the manager or the person responsible for hiring.
- If the conversation goes well and a position is open, ask for an interview.
- When you have gone through all the listings, start again! Timing is everything. You never know when you might contact a firm at the right time.
- The second time you call, ask specifically for the individual in charge of hiring (whose name you obtained the first time you called).

§ 3.4 LOOKING FOR A JOB: THE INTERNET

Searching for a paralegal position online can be both rewarding and frustrating. Frustrating because it is impersonal and feels distant. Rewarding because, if the job-seeker utilizes multiple tools and sites, the chances of finding employment are definitely improved. First, the job-seeker should realize there are two kinds of online employment websites: *job posting sites* and *job search engines*.

Job Posting Sites



A job posting site actually hosts listings of employment opportunities. They make money through advertising, charging employers to post openings, charging employers to post “premium” openings (that get posted at the top of a search page), or, on rare occasions, charging job-seekers to post resumes. The sites listed here are some of the better known and most effective job sites. If you utilize a job search engine, do not be surprised if you end up in one of the job sites.

There are other job posting sites available that are not as well known, and therefore should be considered since not as many job-seekers use them. These include online versions of newspapers or news sites, government sites, and large corporation sites. Many online newspapers post jobs from their classified ads online as well. In fact, many charge less for online-only posting of job listings. This means that there are typically more job postings online

A Few Job Posting Sites

- www.monster.com
- www.careerbuilder.com
- www.getparalegaljobs.com
- www.jobsearch.money.cnn.com
- www.usajobs.gov
- www.craigslist.com

than in print within the same newspaper. As an example, on a week that the *Las Vegas Review Journal* posted five paralegal or paralegal-related positions, that newspaper's online job seek tool listed over twenty.

A Few Job Search Engines

www.bestjobsusa.com

www.jobvertise.com

www.indeed.com

www.simplyhired.com

www.resumark.com

www.juju.com

www.jobspider.com

www.bilingualcareer.com

www.careercast.com

www.jobalot.com

www.jobcentral.com

Job Search Engines

Job Search Engines do not really search for jobs. Instead, they scour the Internet for job postings listed on job sites. Since the search engines vary in the scripts they use and priorities of their search engines, the results from engine to engine can vary. However, do not be frustrated if most of the results from different sites appear to be the same. Even two or three unique search results may give you an edge.

Remember, job search engines will usually post results from several job posting sites so don't be confused when the result takes you to a different website.

Using the Search Forms

When using job sites, start broad listing only the term "paralegal" or "legal assistant" and entering a location. Most sites also allow for advanced searches, which can help to focus your search. However, this can also eliminate some potential search results. For instance, if the job-seeker only looks for paralegal jobs under the area of "legal" or "law," paralegal positions that were posted under the "government" or "corporation" categories will likely not be listed in the results. So again, start broad, then narrow your search as needed.

The screenshot shows a job search interface with the following elements:

- Keyword:** A text input field containing "paralegal".
- Search Jobs:** A button to execute the search.
- Show All Jobs:** A link to view all results.
- Advanced Search:** A link to expand search options.
- RSS Feed:** An RSS icon and a link to subscribe to updates.
- Country:** A dropdown menu set to "United States".
- State:** A dropdown menu set to "Colorado".
- City:** A text input field containing "Denver".
- Zip:** An empty text input field.
- Distance:** A dropdown menu set to "25 miles (40 km)".
- Industry:** A dropdown menu set to "All".
- Occupation:** A dropdown menu set to "Attorney / Paralegal".
- Company:** An empty text input field.
- Job Type:** A dropdown menu set to "All".
- Min. salary:** Two input fields, one for the amount and one for the unit, set to "hour".
- Sort By:** A dropdown menu set to "Distance".

Using the Search Results

Depending on the site, search results are either listed by order of relevance or by the date the job was posted. Many sites will post “premium” job postings (where the employer has paid an additional fee) at the top without regard to relevance.

Once you locate a job in which you have an interest there are various ways to proceed. You may be asked to register with the site. This is typically free, but it does mean that you may receive emails from that site as well as other sites with which your email is shared. Thus it is recommended that you set up a free email account just for job search communications. It’s easy to set up a new free email account with *yahoo.com*, *gmail.com*, or other online services. Remember, though, not to use cute, suggestive, or otherwise unprofessional email addresses, such as *greeneyedgirl@yahoo.com*. Once registered the site will either provide you with a form to fill out or the ability to upload and send your resume to the potential employer.

Some sites do not require registration and take the searcher directly to either information about the employer, an email link to the employer, or to a form.

It is very important to remember that your first contact with the potential employer is the most critical. Thus, if the form asks you to type the content of the resume within the text box, or if it provides you with the opportunity to write a digital cover letter, take that communication seriously. Don’t assume that you can just send a “cleaned-up” version later. Be motivated when creating your first contact. Be positive and, most importantly, don’t just fill out a form in haste.

§ 3.5 RÉSUMÉ PREPARATION

The goal of a résumé is not to get a job, but to get an interview (see *Example § 3.8(a)* following Section 3.8). There are three fundamental rules for résumé preparation:

1. *Keep it simple and honest*
2. *Use only one page*
3. *Use action verbs*

1. *Keep it simple and honest.*

The average attorney gives only 15 seconds of attention to each résumé. A properly prepared résumé will enable your reader to focus effectively, almost effortlessly, on the information that most interests her or him. Be completely honest about your history. Firms check references more thoroughly these days. In the past few years, many attorneys, university football coaches, college presidents, and CEOs have been caught lying about their pasts, sometimes about the most trivial matters. Set the ethical standard very high for yourself. Never embellish.

2. *Keep it to one page*

A one-page résumé used to be a joke. Now it is the standard. Some attorneys will just throw away résumés that are longer. The days are gone when a firm hired the person without an interview, simply because someone was impressed by a résumé. Some hints to help keep your résumé to a single page:

- Include only the last ten years of your work history
- Eliminate unnecessary information, such as “debate club president”
- Eliminate “References available upon request.” They know!
- Use smaller margins
- Prepare an expanded résumé to take with you to the interview

3. *Use action verbs*

Use terms that emphasize performance, skills and efficiency. Here are some examples:

<i>generated</i>	<i>implemented</i>	<i>improved</i>
<i>influenced</i>	<i>interpreted</i>	<i>maintained</i>
<i>managed</i>	<i>mastered</i>	<i>motivated</i>
<i>organized</i>	<i>participated</i>	<i>performed</i>
<i>planned</i>	<i>proposed</i>	<i>provided</i>
<i>recommended</i>	<i>reorganized</i>	<i>reviewed</i>
<i>revised</i>	<i>simplified</i>	<i>streamlined</i>
<i>structured</i>	<i>supervised</i>	<i>supported</i>
<i>synthesized</i>	<i>trained</i>	<i>undertook</i>

§ 3.6 THE COVER LETTER

Your cover letter should be one or two short paragraphs. Research the firm to which you are applying in the *Martindale-Hubbell Law Directory*. Find out what areas of law it practices. Mention in your cover letter that you are looking for a position in a firm involved in one of those areas of law. If you discover you have the same alma mater as the interviewer, use this information in your letter. "Since graduating from South Eastern North Dakota State College, I have been working as ... " (See Example § 3.6)

Example § 3.6 | The Cover Letter

Pamela Legalskills

777 E. 1st St., Apt. 111
Career City, CA 56119
(555) 555-1234

January 4, 2006
Human Resources
Pete's Law Firm
555 Fremont St.
Career City, CA 56197

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am very pleased to hear of the paralegal position available within your company. I have enclosed my résumé for your review. It outlines how my experience would prove beneficial to your company.

I am accustomed to a fast-paced environment where deadlines are a priority, and handling multiple jobs simultaneously is a requirement. I enjoy a challenge and work hard to attain my goals. Constant communication with all levels of employees has strengthened my interpersonal skills.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time if you are interested in interviewing me. My phone number is (555) 555-1234.

Sincerely,

Pamela Legalskills

§ 3.7 THE JOB INTERVIEW

Dress appropriately. You want to look professional. Arrive ten minutes early. Do not chat with the receptionist, unless not doing so would appear snobbish. The attorney needs to view you as a professional, not a staff member. During the interview, relax. Just getting the interview is an accomplishment. Learn from this experience. Try to determine what the attorney is looking for, so that you can better position yourself for future interviews.

Take writing samples with you to the interview. The trial brief or interoffice memorandum you will create for assignments in this book will make the kind of professional impression you seek (Do not take a graded paper. You may be proud of the A, but this is not school). Another trend in interviewing is to ask the applicant to perform some task, such as drafting a legal document or researching an issue in the law library. Looking up a court rule is also a common request, so make sure you are familiar with the process of researching within the *Rules of Court*. The assignments in these books should prepare you for any task you might be asked to perform in the course of an interview.

Most applicants are not turned away because they lack skills or experience. Positions are filled because the applicant made a positive personal impression on the interviewer. The impression may have been one of confidence or competence. It may have been one of professionalism. The applicant may simply have come across as a likeable person. The attorney is going to have to spend more waking hours with the paralegal than with his or her spouse and children! Be pleasant. Smile! Don't be afraid to laugh (especially if the lawyer makes a joke). The interview is more about personal interaction than anything else.

§ 3.8 THE FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Thank the firm for the interview. Even if you do not get the job, send a short note saying how much you learned from the interview experience. Doing so will keep you in the firm's mind. Send the letter about a week after the interview. (See *Example § 3.8(b)*.)

Example § 3.8(a) | The Résumé

<p>Pamela Legalskills 777 E. 1st St., Apt. 111 Career City, CA 56119 (555) 555-1234</p>	
OBJECTIVE	Obtain a paralegal position with the opportunity for professional growth based on performance.
WORK EXPERIENCE	
Jan. 1990 to Jan. 1993	AAA Insurance Company, Denver, CO <u>Manager of Wrongly-Denied Claims</u> In charge of ensuring that no claim that could possibly be denied somehow was approved. Enforced company policies which have never been seen in writing. Communicated verbal instructions to investigators and claims adjusters.
Jan. 1993 to Jan. 2000	Just Say No Insurance to Underwriters, Las Vegas, NV <u>Assistant to Personnel Manager</u> Hired individuals on the basis of their ability to say certain things with a straight face. Terminated the employment of individuals who knowingly approved a claim. Created and coordinated an innovative program designed to make company employees feel involved with company policy while, in fact, they had no input whatsoever.
Jan. 2000 to Present	Nevada Insurance Commission, Las Vegas, NV <u>Consumer Relations</u> Responsible to make sure that no consumer unduly annoyed or pressured any law-abiding insurance company. Coordinated job placement for government employees desiring employment in the private sector.
EDUCATION AND TRAINING	
Jan. 1998	University of Psychic California Berkeley, CA Politically Correct Science In addition to general studies, specific courses included sensitivity training, eco-terrorist weekend retreats, and medical training in treating a bleeding heart.
Dec. 2011	University of Online Paralegal Studies Internet, USA Certificate in Paralegal Studies Studied all aspects of paralegalism, including ethical considerations, legal research, legal writing, citation form, interviewing, law office investigation, pleading preparation, coordination of discovery, basics of arbitration, form preparation, and other skills relevant to the paralegal field.

Example § 3.8(b) | The Follow-up Letter

Pamela Legalskills

777 E. 1st St., Apt. 111
Career City, CA 56119
(555) 555-1234

January 20, 2006

Pete Duncan
Pete's Law Firm
555 Fremont St.
Career City, CA 56197
RE: Job Interview

Dear Mr. Duncan:

I would like to extend my sincere thanks for your kind help and encouragement in my job search and for the interview that you granted to me. If I can be of any assistance to you in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I can honestly say that I benefited greatly from our meeting. Whether you choose to hire me for this position or not, I appreciate your consideration.

Again, many thanks and best wishes.

Sincerely,

Pamela Legalskills

CHAPTER 3 WRAP-UP

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW...

After reading this chapter you should know the following:

- Traditional sources for job hunting
- Networking ideas
- Telephone system of job hunting
- Online job hunting techniques

ASSIGNMENTS

There are no assignments for this chapter.