



Key Note



Volume 111

Northeast Texas Association of Paralegals, Inc.
An Affiliate of the National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc.
Editor, Mona Hart Tucker, ACP

March 2014

President's Message

As a paralegal, I consider myself a prime task juggler, but add a paralegal association, a husband, kids & grandkids, aging parents, four shih tzus and a German shepherd, a somewhat active social life, and the many other things going on that pop up in all of our everyday lives into the mix . . . and, well, let's just say this paralegal has been frequenting (more than usual) the train station, desperately grasping her one way ticket to Crazy Town.



I've read tons of self-help articles promising eager and definitive assistance to my task-juggling dilemmas, hoping they would provide me with a glint of hope in organizing my busy lifestyle. But no - quite the opposite, my paralegal friends. I desperately scan article after article proclaiming guaranteed solutions that would seamlessly integrate into my busy lifestyle, but frankly, I found myself shaking my head in utter disbelief. I swear, a majority of the suggestions were plucked from a superior, fantasy work environment, where Starbucks coffee is always hot and ready upon arrival, and copy jobs mysteriously land on your desk by morning.

All we really want are tried and true tips that are reality approved! So, just for your amusement, here are a few of the "self-help" task-juggling myths I found, paired with Paralegal tested, reality approved truths that will shed some certainty on your day.

Myth #1: Never Check E-Mail in the Morning. This is by far one of the biggest myths, especially, in the Land of Law, where Paralegals rule the office, and attorneys conquer the courtroom.

Truth: So let's rephrase that, "Never check *personal email* in the morning." There is a huge difference. Nod with me people, and agree that paralegals must check work email in the morning. Period. There is simply no way of averting this task. Although, personal emails can wait. Wait! What?! Yes, in a virtual world where "Nomophobia" (the fear of being without a cell phone) is an actual anxiety condition, this will be difficult. Calm down. Breathe. I am not suggesting turning off your cell phone entirely. Just for one morning, don't check your personal email (which is probably full of Facebook updates, LinkedIn messages, and Groupon alerts), and you will be more productive.

Myth #2: Always Take a Lunch Break. Wow. In what Legal Universe does this really happen? Please, take me to your leader!

Truth: Paralegals - Raise your hand if you actually take a break - not at your desk and not while working. *This* is a paralegal's reality. Yes, countless professionals outside the Legal Universe leisurely take lunch breaks outside the workplace. On the other hand, paralegals choose to take a lunch break altogether differently. First of all, paralegals are hard-wired to multi-task automatically. Second, not all paralegals are provided with a staff of filing clerks or assistants to complete mundane responsibilities. Paralegals who rule the office not only take a lunch break, but we simultaneously respond to emails, revise pleadings, or research case law. Yes, this is a break. And you know what? Paralegals love it. We strive for mastering seamless multi-tasking. This is how we survive in the Legal Universe. This is how we lead into the next myth . . .

Myth #3: Leave Work on Time. Ha! Right, and don't work weekends.

Truth: Attorneys are notoriously famous for plopping a last minute project on a paralegal's

desk at 4:45 p.m. on a Friday and requesting immediate action. Again, *this* is a paralegal's reality. Although, truth be told, and we would never admit it aloud, but paralegals love the challenge of successfully conquering a project in a short amount of time. Seriously, we do. Plus, savvy paralegals are keenly aware of their attorney's proverbial pulse on looming deadlines or problematic cases, therefore we are always prepared to stay late. We typically have a back-up plan for our back-up plan, and paralegals never count on leaving work on time. Instead, we remain consistent in our work product output and steadfast in our endeavor to rule the office so that Esquires can continually conquer the courtroom.

In short, yes, paralegals are an extraordinary subclass of legal professionals. We do not fit the standardized mold carved out in self-help articles for everyday working professionals. Although, this does not mean that the Legal Universe is exempt from needing a little support, or perhaps some truthful insight into the paralegal lifestyle.

So, I challenge you, the dedicated members of the paralegal profession. Break the myth of the common working class cliché and share your own paralegal-tested, reality-approved tips, tricks, and experiences – your tips might just help me and others in our profession to work less than the normal 60-hour work week!

Sandi Clarke, CP
NTAP President, 2014



2014 Executive Committee

President – Sandi Clarke, CP
1st Vice President – Andrea Brunson, CP
2nd Vice President – Nadriette Hardeman, CP
Secretary – Cindy VanBlaricom
Treasurer – Shannon Bjork
NALA Liaison – Javan Johnson, ACP, TBLS-BCP

2014 Committee Chairs

Parliamentarian – Javan Johnson, ACP, TBLS-BCP
Auditor – Andrea Brunson, CP
PR/Historian – Patricia Aguillar
Key Note Editor – Mona H. Tucker, ACP



Congratulations!

Pam Matthews and Dudley Taylor were married Dec. 27 in Destin, Florida. Congratulations to the happy couple!



And the Winners are . . .

Discovery Resources brought a silver 1-oz Canadian maple leaf coin, and Sunbelt Reporting brought two kalanchoe plants and Visa cards as door prizes for NTAP's February membership meeting. Randa McCarty and Ken Smith won the plants/cards, and Mona Tucker won the coin. Congratulations, winners!



Gregg County eFiling Update

The Board of Judges of Gregg County, Texas previously established April 1, 2014 as the date

for mandatory eFiling in Gregg County, Texas for all cases filed and to be filed through the District Clerk's Office. As a result of problems with obtaining approval from the Texas Supreme Court for permitting an early mandatory eFiling date in Gregg County, as well as changes being required by the Texas Supreme Court for all Counties establishing sites for electronic filings, **the Order setting April 1, 2014 for Mandatory eFiling in Gregg County has been suspended.**

At this time, permissive eFiling continues to be available through the District Clerk's Office, and the Board of Judges encourages the Bar to take advantage of this opportunity to submit filings electronically in order to become familiarized with the process. The changes being required by the Texas Supreme Court for all Counties establishing sites for electronic filings are designed to standardize the appearance of the sites for electronic filing throughout the State. As a result, this will require a "retooling" of the site already established by Gregg County (and the remaining counties in Texas), and will require suspending permissive eFiling in the near future for approximately one to two months while the changes are made to the site.

Once a determination is made, the Board of Judges will immediately notify the Bar when permissive eFiling will be suspended. Additionally, the Board of Judges will not seek to set a new date for mandatory eFiling in Gregg County until changes to the eFiling site are completed.

Judge Bill Stoudt, County Judge
Judge Alfonso Charles, 124th District Court
Judge David Brabham, 188th District Court
Judge Tim Womack, 307th District Court
Judge Becky Simpson, County Court at Law 1
Judge Vincent Dulweber, County Court at Law 2



Northeast Texas Association of Paralegals, Inc.
Minutes of the Membership Meeting
February 19, 2014

The monthly membership meeting of the Northeast Texas Association of Paralegals was held at the Summit Club on Wednesday, February 19, 2014.

Members in attendance were: Shannon Bjork, Pat

Aguilar, Andrea Brunson, Javan Johnson, Nadriette Hardeman, Crystal Roberts, Devon Whatley, Elisha Calhoun, Diane Smith, Mona Tucker, Sandi Clarke, Ken Smith, and Cindy VanBlaricom.

Members pending approval in attendance were: Jamie Heiermann, Randa McCarty, Gloria Gibbons, Deb Carney, Kristen McPherson, and Stacey Bunt.

Attending guests were: Georgina Neuse, Estrella Guzman, and Zach Austin.

President Sandi Clarke welcomed members and guests to NTAP's membership meeting and called the meeting to order.

Sandi Clarke announced that Devon Whatley has agreed to accept the position as our webmaster.

Reports:

Secretary - The Minutes from the January 2014 Membership Meeting were printed in the Key Note. Cindy VanBlaricom made a motion to approve the Minutes. Javan Johnson seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved as printed.

Treasurer - Shannon Bjork presented the Treasurer's Report. Shannon Bjork made a motion to approve the Treasurers Report. Nadriette Hardeman seconded the motion and the Treasurer's Report was approved pending audit.

1st VP/Education - Andrea Brunson presented the speaker line-up for 2014:

March: Randy Akin's topic will be "Mediation and Dispute Resolution."

April: Michael Smith's topic will be "Paperless Law Office."

May: Jonathan Wharton. His topic is unknown at this time.

June: Ralph Pelaia will speak on "The Do's and Don'ts of Setting up a Personal Injury Case."

July: The Honorable Tim Womack will speak on "Legal Professionalism."

August: Sara Jenkins with Citrix ShareFile will be an interactive virtual speaker. Ms. Jenkins' topic will be "File Transfer and Managing Case Documents in a Secure Manner."

September: Javan Johnson's topic will be

“Ethics.”

October: Tom Mighell, Attorney, Senior Consultant, and author of “iPad in 1 Hour for Lawyers,” “iPad in 1 Hour for Litigators,” and “iPad Apps in 1 Hour for Lawyers.” Mr. Mighell’s topic will be “iPad for Legal Professionals.”

November: Kelly Heitkamp will be updating us on “Animal Rights and Welfare.”

Starting March 2014 the price for lunch will increase to \$12.00. Lunch will be an optional choice, so please respond on your e-vite whether or not you plan to have lunch.

2nd Membership - Nadriette Hardeman presented the new members for approval: Gloria Gibbons, Jaime Heiermann, Randa McCarty, Debra Carney, Stacey Bunt, and Kristen McPherson. Nadriette Hardeman made a motion to approve the new members. Elisha Calhoon seconded the motion.

Sunbelt Reporting & Litigation Services and Discovery Resources provided door prizes for our meeting. The winners were: Randa McCarty, Ken Smith, and Mona Tucker.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Cindy VanBlaricom
NTAP Secretary



Pro Bono Opportunity for Texas Paralegals

Volunteer as a Live Help Navigator

Low income Texans need your help! Live Help is a free service of Texas Law Help. Texas Law Help is a program of the Texas Legal Services Center (LSC) and is funded by a grant from the State Bar's Texas Access to Justice Foundation. Volunteer as a Live Help Navigator at www.TexasLawHelp.org.

For additional pro bono opportunities, you may also sign up at Texas Lawyers Help via their website at <http://www.texaslawyershelp.org/>. Texas Lawyers Help is a website for pro bono lawyers and legal services staff. The website contains password-protected resources to help attorneys provide free legal services to low

income Texans. Free membership to TexasLawHelp.org is available to staff of Texas-based programs funded by LSC or the Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation, and Texas attorneys and paralegals who are interested in volunteering with a Texas pro bono program.

Benefits to Volunteers

Depending upon performance, letters of recommendation and a positive reference will be available to the volunteer. **Volunteering will also count towards paralegals’ and attorneys’ pro bono hours.**

How to Get Started Volunteering!

Call [512-477-6000](tel:512-477-6000) [Extension 109](tel:512-477-6000) or send an e-mail to TexasLawHelpVols@tlsc.org indicating you would like to volunteer. TexasLawHelp seeks help from paralegals and attorneys to offer the best possible assistance to as many Texans as possible. We welcome any and all qualified volunteers. Please consider volunteering today!



9 Practices of Proactive Paralegals

By Vicki Voisin, ACP

There are two undeniable truths about a career as a legal professional: (1) your work is deadline-driven and detail-oriented; and (2) your career success is solely your responsibility.

Recognizing this, what can you do reduce the stress of all the deadlines and details and, at the same time, take control of your career? The answer: *become a proactive paralegal.*

When you are proactive, you engage in continual long-range planning by focusing future activities, projects and events and then anticipating needs, potential problems and possible outcomes. The result: you reach your goals, you avoid more work down the road, and you avoid disasters.

Proactive people are always looking ahead and asking, “What can I do NOW to make my life/job easier next (you insert the time frame).” This includes planning for the future and implementing strategies to make both your personal and professional life easier.

Here are 9 practices to follow to be a proactive paralegal:

1. Planning is crucial. Hold planning sessions with yourself to set specific targets for your future. Put your goals in writing, along with deadline dates, and schedule time in your planner to actually work on them. When you do this, you create your own future rather than allowing unplanned events to dictate your future.

2. Utilize your planner. Make use of your planner to record future events and scheduled activities. It doesn't matter if you use an electronic planner or a paper planner. What is important is that you use it. When you can look at future events, you can anticipate possible problems and act before they occur. Just looking at an event, such as a meeting, in writing sets your mind thinking about things you will need for that meeting.

3. Focus on problem solving. Instead of bumbling along putting out fires, anticipate problems you might have and plan steps you can take now to prevent them from developing. Recognize that it's never too early to plan and planning too late results in crises and time critical situations.

4. Evaluate procedures and processes. Use checklists and processes for all recurring events or activities, such as preparing for trial, handling a real estate transaction, planning a meeting, or going on an interview. Update checklists frequently, adding anything that was missed and considering what works and what does not work. Make notes for improvements and incorporate them.

5. Automate routine tasks. Use templates or standard action plans to save time when you work on routine tasks. Include the delegation of tasks to those best suited to do them. Do not try to do everything yourself or, instead of being a proactive paralegal, you will be a burned-out paralegal.

6. Anticipate needs. Is any of your workload heavier at certain times of the day, week, month or quarter? What can you prepare in advance to lighten the workload during those times? For instance, if a trial is scheduled in 90 days, what steps need to be taken to be prepared? Plan when you will take those steps.

7. Watch industry trends. Take charge of your

career by observing new developments. For instance, if the work in your area of specialization is dwindling, plan how you will move to a specialty area that is in demand. If your firm appears to be downsizing, how can you be prepared so you land on your feet? Be sure to keep your resume updated and your options open. Take charge. Do not wait for someone else to make decisions for you.

8. Network, network, network! A support network is one of the most important career success tools you can have. While you should always concentrate on networking events, there are other avenues for making new contacts: utilize social media sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter; go out of your way to meet people at non-work, such as a United Way meeting or a church social.

9. Work on your attitude. Attitude should be your weapon of choice in the battle to be proactive. Having the right attitude means you never resent the work you must do ahead of time to be successful in the future. Instead, you are always looking for ways to make your future easier and better.

Your challenge: Become a proactive paralegal by adopting these 9 practices. You will not only avert future disasters, but you will have a positive influence on your future - perhaps even the future itself.

Vicki Voisin, "The Paralegal Mentor", 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, organizational tips, ethics issues, and other areas of continuing education to help paralegals and others reach their full potential. She is the co-author of *The Professional Paralegal: A Guide to Finding a Job and Career Success*. Vicki publishes *Paralegal Strategies*, a weekly e-newsletter for paralegals, and hosts *The Paralegal Voice*, a monthly podcast produced by Legal Talk Network.



Beware of that Calendar

This warning appeared in Law360:

A recent decision blocking AT&T Inc. from contesting a \$40 million patent verdict against it

because its 18 lawyers from Sidley Austin LLP and Davis Cedillo & Mendoza Inc. missed the appeal deadline serves as a powerful warning that firms need a thorough and reliable system for monitoring case developments to reduce the risk of making a multimillion-dollar mistake, lawyers say.



Speaker Lineup

Andrea Brunson, our Education Chair, has provided the following schedule. Please make an effort to attend our meetings and hear these excellent speakers:

March 19 - G.R. "Randy" Akin, "Mediation and Dispute Resolution"

April 16 - Michael C. Smith, Siebman Burg Phillips & Smith, "Paperless Law Office"

May 21 - Jonathan Wharton, Law Office of Snow E Bush, Jr., topic to be determined

June 18 - Ralph Pelaia, Pelaia Law Center, "Do's and Don'ts of Setting up a Personal Injury Case"

July 16 - Hon. Tim Womack, District Judge, Gregg County 307th Judicial District, "Legal Professionalism"

Aug. 20 - Sara Jenkins (interactive virtual speaker), Associate Director with Citrix ShareFile for Legal, "File Transfer; Managing Case Documents in a Secure Manner"

Sept 17 - Javan Johnson, ACP, TBLS-BCP, "Civil Trial Law"

Oct 15 - Tom Mighell (interactive virtual speaker) Attorney and Senior Consultant, best-selling author of "iPad in 1 Hour for Lawyers", "iPad in 1 Hour for Litigators", and iPad Apps in 1 Hour for Lawyers", speaking on "iPad for Legal Professionals"

Nov. 19 - Kelly Heitkamp, Law Office of Kelly M. Heitkamp, "Legislative Updates: Animal Rights and Welfare"



March Meeting

The membership meeting will be at noon on

March 19 at the Summit Club, 3700 Judson Road in Longview.

Attorney G.R. "Randy" Akin will speak on "Mediation and Dispute Resolution." Please make every effort to attend.

The lunch price is \$12 (includes tax and gratuity), and soup may be added for an extra \$5. Your choices include:

Hamburger: 8 oz. Black Angus, grilled and served with lettuce, tomato, caramelized onions, and cheese; French fries or fruit;

OR

Fish and Chips: Crispy tempura battered, served with French fries and coleslaw.

RSVP's must be received by Friday, March 14. No exceptions! Please respond to the e-vite you received, or RSVP directly to Andrea Brunson at andreab@nixlawfirm.com.

If an emergency occurs, please let Andrea know of your cancellation 24 hours in advance. Please note that, if you RSVP and don't show, or cancel last-minute, you will be responsible for reimbursing NTAP for your meal.



**Now We're
Cookin'**



Texas Style Potatoes

Karen Odstrcil
Ogallala, Nebraska

- 1 bag of frozen hash browns
- ¼ cup melted butter
- ¼ cup chopped onions OR 1/3 cup chopped green onions
- 1 pint sour cream
- 1-1/2 to 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 2 Tbsp. dill weed
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- ½ can water and ½ can milk

Blend melted butter, soup, water/milk mixture, sour cream, onions, cheese, and dill weed. Stir in

thawed hash brown potatoes. Place in large casserole dish sprayed with Pam. Mix 2 cups corn flakes crushed and ¼ cup melted butter – mix and sprinkle over top of potato mixture. (I have used Italian-flavor panko crumbs, instead of the corn flakes.) Place in refrigerator overnight. Bake 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until bubbly.



Thought for the Day

So, partners, what if we spend the money for annual CLE's and the paralegals leave us? Well, to that I say, what if we don't invest in our paralegals' education and they stay?

Christine G. Pittman
Office Manager & Paralegal

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Paralegal CLE by NALA is now available for your iPad! Through this app, you may register or access previously purchased NALA Campus Self-Study programs and Advanced Paralegal Certification courses. Today, there are 32 self-study courses, web based programs offered by NALA. These include:

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CLE Calendar

For additional information about CLE across the State see the SBOT - PD web site at www.txpd.org. Also, don't forget that the PD and NALA both offer on-line CLE.

(Online) Texas Bar CLE *free* online seminars. TexasBarCLE offers a complimentary half hour of participatory MCLE credit. You will find a new topic available every other month. The current topic is "eFiling in Texas Overview" (online class/mp3). www.texasbarcle.com.

(Online) NALA Campus *Live!* has many topics to choose from, and the Texas Board of Legal Specialization has approved certain courses for certification and re-certification. The Spring Program is now in session. More information is available at www.nala.org.

(Tulsa) Technology in the Law Office, April 26, 2014, 8:30 A.M. - 3:30 P.M. Featuring Matt Cornick, who presented the same topic at the NALA annual conference in Portland. The course provides 5.75 hours CLE, including one hour of ethics. Registration is \$75, and includes your materials, breakfast, lunch, and a snack. The Hyatt is offering a block of rooms at the special rate of \$95. Contact Michelle Maxwell for more information: michelle-maxwell@utulsa.edu, or (918) 596-2788.

Articles published herein do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Northeast Texas Association of Paralegals.
Calendar listings and seminars should not be considered as endorsement of any such program or seminar.

NTAP EMPLOYMENT REFERRALS

One of the benefits of your membership is NTAP's employment referral service. We receive calls from firms offering employment opportunities. If you are seeking a position or considering a change, we encourage you to use NTAP's employment referral service. If your firm is searching for qualified paralegals, ask your attorney or firm administrator to let us know about current openings.

If you are interested in being listed with the service, send a current resume and contact information to:

Andrea Brunson, CP
AndreaB@NixLawFirm.com
NTAP, P.O. Box 2284, Longview, Texas 75601