Douglas-Carson Legal Professionals

T H E   T I C K L E R

January-February 2026

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Hello, everyone! Where has the time gone? It's almost the end of the year and we are in the swing of the Holiday Season.

We had our annual Holiday Party the first week of December with 12 people in attendance. The food was wonderful and we all had a great time catching up. Everyone participated in the gift exchange in which your gift could be stolen by someone else and then you were able to choose another one. Almost everyone had a least one gift stolen from them but it was all in fun.

Our next meeting is scheduled via Zoom at noon on January 7, 2026. Mary Baldechhi, Emeritus PP, PLS will give a presentation on Substantive Law. Bruce Hahn, Assistant Bar Counsel, State Bar of Nevada, will be the speaker for our March 4, 2026 meeting. Mr. Hahn will give a presentation on Ethics. I hope you will be able to join us for both meetings.

I hope you all have a happy and safe holiday season and a Happy New Year.

Sharon Coates, PP, CLP
President

DCLP LIVE !!-- No Reservation Needed

Via Zoom - Wednesday, January 7, 2026 at 12 p.m.
Meeting ID: 922 280 3023. Passcode: 412889
No charge for non-members

ALL ATTENDEES ARE ELIGIBLE FOR THE GIFT CARD DRAWING AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE MEETING

Congratulations to Susan Happe, our November winner!

LETTER
FROM
THE
EDITOR

Dear Readers,

In 2025, Microsoft announced that their desktop software **Publisher** would no longer be supported in 2026. As someone who has been using Publisher since 1991, the thought of no longer having access to a program I knew inside and out was daunting.

With approval of DCLP's board, I began the search for a program that would meet our current and future needs without a wholesale change in appearance and decided on Canva beginning with this issue.

We endeavored to keep the overall look with only slight modifications. While our graphics capabilities have increased, there are some limitations to text formatting which we will endeavor to overcome.

In 2020, we introduced a Cognitive Development section to the Tickler and we are expanding that section in 2026 to include Lateral Thinking, an important and necessary skill for any legal support professional.

As you have been reading in The Tickler and seeing/hearing in the news, reliance on AI for finding relevant caselaw to support positions has come under scrutiny. More and more firms and in-house legal departments are using AI to improve workflow and reduce legal costs, but with that are challenges.

It is important for legal support professionals to stay on top of developments and learn to use AI. As a result, the Professional Development section of The Tickler will be exploring ChatGPT in each issue in 2026 to bolster your knowledge and familiarity with this important tool.

Change is an inevitable part of our careers. From manual typewriters to IBM Selectrics to MTST, Wang, Word Perfect, Word and beyond, DCLP and NALS have led the way and will continue to do so.

Dee Beardsley, Emeritus PP, PLS
Editor

Douglas-Carson Legal Professionals

Presents

CERTIFICATION REVIEW
Part 3 of 4
Substantive Law

with

Mary Baldecchi, Emeritus PP, PLS

The areas of Substantive Law that Mary will cover during this session are:

- Administrative Law
- Business Organizations and Contracts
- Civil Procedure and Litigation
- Criminal Law
- Family Law
- Real Property
- Torts
- Wills, Trusts, and Estates
- Other Areas of Law

SUBSTANTIVE LAW:

- **is that branch of the law which deals with certain provisions related to our rights, duties, and liabilities.**

- **is derived from Common law, statutory law, the Constitution and from principles found in judicial decisions following judicial precedents to cases with similar merits and circumstances.**

How Does ChatGPT Work?

ChatGPT and AI are everywhere now both at home and at work. In 2026, we will delve into just what it is, how it works, and how we can master it.

You've likely been using ChatGPT without even knowing it. Every time you ask Google a question, AI is likely providing the response you need or at the very least directing you to a source of information.

When you receive answers to your questions, it is easy to believe that computers have learned to think as humans do. This is not the case, however.

ChatGPT isn't able to understand the way humans do. It doesn't possess awareness or knowledge in the traditional sense. Instead, it processes vast amounts of data to generate responses based on patterns, making it highly effective at tasks, but without truly "knowing" anything.

This doesn't make what it does any less impressive, but if you can grasp how it works then you can begin to understand its strengths and weaknesses.

So, what happens when you ask ChatGPT to do something? First, ChatGPT is trained on multiple millions of pages of text: books, websites, newspapers, and more.

Having consumed all that written data, the AI is able to spot patterns. For example, when you see the words "we wish you a merry Christmas and a...", you instinctively know that the next three words are likely to be "happy New Year." ChatGPT does likewise only on a much larger scale.

So when you type in a prompt such as "explain the benefits of cod liver oil," the chatbot looks at what you've entered and then bases its response on what it has learned from the gazillion pages it's consumed during training. It isn't just copying and pasting the information from other sources, it's formatting fresh output based on the norms of the English language and the knowledge it's gleaned from the training data.

Nowadays, ChatGPT can do much more than provide straight text answers. It can draw graphs, provide data in spreadsheet form, or deliver summaries of long documents that you've uploaded to the service you are using (note, some features are for paying subscribers only).

For example, if you upload a spreadsheet listing all of your company's sales for the last year and ask AI to workout which products were most popular on different days of the week, it will most certainly do it. But it really doesn't know what days of the week are, or what a screwdriver is--not in the same way a human staff person would. It performs such a task by making locial predictions based on what it's seen before. In other words, the AI is incredibly powerful and far more efficient at completeting certain tasks than a human. But it has less raw intelligence than a flea.

The AI technology being used by ChatGPT is being constantly refined and each iteration uses an ever-increasing set of training data to deliver more accurate results in less time than ever before.

The source for this article is Anthem Tech Guides.

Training Data

The exact text sources that ChatGPT is trained on is a closely guarded secret, but you can visit the OpenAI website and see a list of books that were used to train the AI.

OpenAI has revealed that its Language Learning Model (LLM) has been trained from a variety of sources which include:

- Books
- Academic papers
- Newspapers and magazines
- Websites, such as Wikipedia
- Online forums, such as Reddit
- Computer code reposititories

In some instances, these training texts are licensed from their publishers. In others, the data is gathered from the public internet.

LLMs are voracious readers so the more they absorb, the better they become. OpenAI is regularly striking new licensing deals to ensure it has fresh training texts to feed its next-gen GPTs.

The latest core model series for ChatGPT is GPT-5.2 released in December 2025, offering faster, more reliable, and structured interactions with instant and thinking versions for different needs, plus specialized versions like GPT-5.2 Pro for complex tasks. These models integrate current web data and advanced capabilities like multimodal understanding (text, images) and deeper intergrations with platforms like Microsoft SharePoint/OneDrive, extending its knowledge base beyond static training sets.

OpenAI says the GPT-5.2 Family builds on previous versions with enhanced reliability, speed, and reasoning, available in Instant (fast, every day use), and Thinking (complex tasks) modes.

Newer models can process and generate text, images, and potentially audio/video, making them more versatile.

Everyday AI Podcast says that ChatGPT accesses up-to-date information via web browsing and integrates with enterprise tools (SharePoint, OneDrive) for deep, real-time knowledge.

NEXT ISSUE (MARCH-APRIL 2026)

We'll look at the strengths and weaknesses of ChatGPT.

Lexicon

Words or phrases that have been recently added to the Cambridge Dictionary (CD), Oxford English Dictionary (OED), Dictionary.com (D), which relies on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary as a source, or Miriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (MW).

67, int: "A nonsensical expression connected to a song and a basketball player." (MW)

41, int.: "A nonsense expression used by teens." (MW)

agentic, adj: "Able to accomplish results with autonomy, used especially in referenced to artificial intelligence." (MW)

ate (and left no crumbs), v.: "If it is said that someone ate and left no crumbs, they have performed or done something perfectly or impressively, whether that be singing, dancing, or dressing fashionably and looking good. etc. In other words, they've done something flawlessly, as well as it could possibly be done.

bet, int.: "It can express enthusiastic affirmation, agreement, or approval, similar to 'For sure!' or it can accept a challenge similar to 'Try me!'.

burnt toast theory, n.: "The idea that a minor inconvenience, like burning your toast in the morning, might actually be preventing something worse happening later in the day." (CD)

d**elulu,** adj.: "Believing things that are not real or true, usually because you choose to." (CD)

naked quitting, n.: "Leaving a job without having another job to go to." (CD)

sigma, n.: "A person who is coolly self-assured, independent, and driven." (MW)

s**kibidi,** n.: "A word that can have different meanings such as 'cool' or 'bad' or can be used with no real meaning as a joke." (CD)

touch grass, v.: "To participate in normal activities in the real world, especially as opposed to online experiences and interactions." (D)

Tradwife, n.:" Short for traditional wife--a married woman, especially one who posts on social media, who stays at home cooking, cleaning, etc. and has children that she takes care of." (CD)

Out-of-the-Box Thinking

Legal support professionals are often called upon to come up with solutions to problems that elude others. One way to think "out of the box" is to skip convention and think laterally instead of vertically.

What is lateral thinking?

It is a creative method of problem-solving. Instead of evaluating the problem in a linear way, you come at it from unique angles to make the less-obvious connection. This doesn't mean your thinking is completely random--you're making creative connections based on the facts.

The father of lateral thinking, Maltese physician, psychologist and inventor Edward de Bono, believed this method would help people explore more possibilities for outcomes rather than simply accepting things they way way they expected them to be. This would ultimately make them more critical thinkers and better problem solvers.

What is the difference between lateral thinking and vertical thinking?

When you engage in vertical thinking, you are using conventional logic to go straight for the "right" answer. With lateral thinking, you approach the problem from alternative angles, coming up with a solution that is more complex and less straightforward. There are a few ways to come up with a "correct answer--and, as noted earlier, there might even be more than one plausible answer. These solutions are more about creativity than correctness.

Lateral-thinking puzzles.

When you are working on a lateral-thinking puzzle, look at the scenario presented and try to find context clues. Sometimes, the most correct answer is actually the most obvious, which is why you don't land there immediately. At other times, the correct answer is really hard to find because you have to create the rest of the scenario yourself and fill in the blanks.
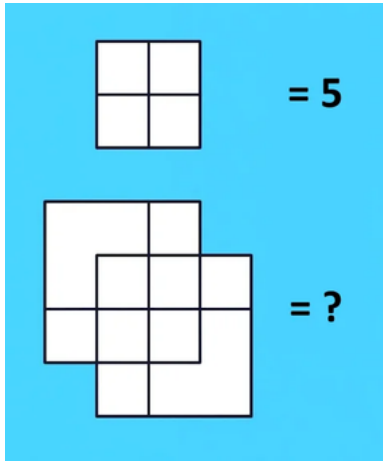
The text in red above is from an article in Readers Digest on lateral thinking. The puzzles on page 9 of The Tickler are a mix of classic setups and new challenges that will demonstrate how lateral thinking works. See how many you can get right.

January 2026 Substantive Law Word Puzzle
Circle the words from the list below. Words may appear forwards, backwards, diagonally or upside down.

Answer the riddle..

= 5

= ?

The answer appears elsewhere in this issue.

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V O A P N E L J Q K M F S G B D L
F A M I L Y L A W J E S T A T E S
L H D Z A L S H N R B A H X W Z A
C C T E I X S S R I L B G F C Y S
L I T N C H U Y E T M F I W O T C
W G C I I I B X Q N C I R Q N R O
R U V N D N S S O E I I R E S E N
L I I G U F T I K C N S D C T P T
L C I V J S A H O L K E U U I O R
E S V R U E N S T N C V P B T R A
S Z L R J S T X T E S A S M U P C
E U T L T E I V R S U C O B T L T
I A G R I T V P V L L T R E I A S
T K O L O W E B P V R R K J O E A
U T S T A T U T O R Y Q V G N R F
D Z D A D M I N I S T R A T I V E
L I A B I L I T I E S C Q I T C Y
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STATUTORY	FAMILYLAW	ESTATES
RIGHTS	CIVIL	TORTS
LIABILITIES	DUTIES	BUSINESS
CRIMINAL	CONSTITUTION	ADMINISTRATIVE
REALPROPERTY	SUBSTANTIVE	PRECEDENTS
TRUSTS	RIGHTS	DECISIONS
WILLS	CONTRACTS	JUDICIAL

November 2025 Solution

Lateral Thinking

These lateral thinking puzzles and riddles need solving.

1. A man who lives in a 30-story building decides to jump out of his window. He survives the fall with no injuries. How did that happen?

2. A man is condemned to death. He has to choose from three rooms to accept his punishment. The first room has a firing squad with guns loaded. The second room has a blazing fire. The third room is full of tigers that haven't eaten for six months. Which room should he choose?

3. A man pushes his car until he reaches a hotel. When he arrives, he realizes he is bankrupt. What happened?

4. A woman books a flight to London in the morning, makes reservations in New York for lunch and buys *Cirque de Soleil* tickets in Las Vegas for an 8 p.m. show--all for the same day. How will she make it to each of these places in time?

5. A man is driving down the highway at 65 miles per hour in a 65 mph zone. He passes three cars going 60 miles per hour, then gets pulled over by a police officer and is given a ticket. Why?

6. A family has a chicken coop for their 12 chickens. One night, a tornado rips through the neighborhood and sadly kills all but eight of the chickens. How many chickens did the family have the next morning?

7. The person who makes it sells. The. person who buys it never uses it. The person who uses it never knows they're using it. What is it?

8. What can fill a room but take up no space?

9. Which building in New York has the most stories?

10. How many times can you subtract 10 from 100?

Lateral Thinking Answers

1--He may live in a 30-story building, but he jumped from a first floor window.

2--His choice should be the room full of tigers. If the tigers had not eaten for six months, they would be dead.

3--He's playing Monopoly and his piece is a car. He lands on a space with a hotel and doesn't have the money to pay the fee.

4--She won't. She's a travel agent booking reservations for three different clients.

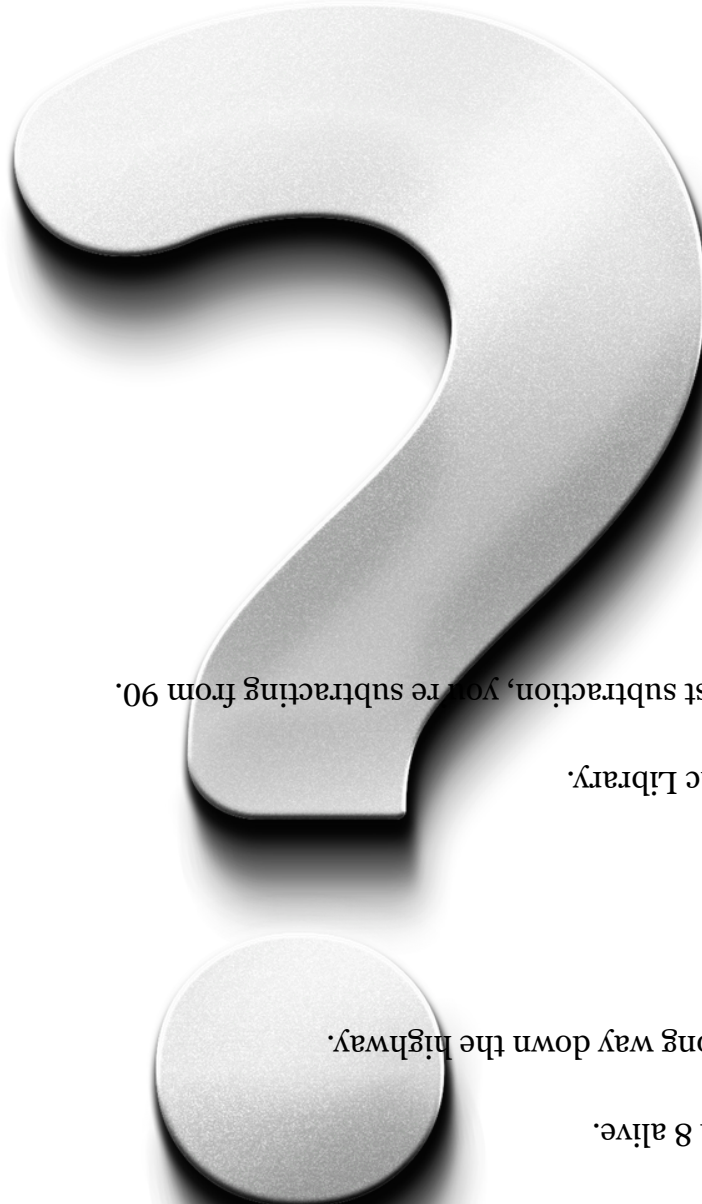5--Still 12: 4 dead and 8 alive.

6--He's driving the wrong way down the highway.

7--A coffin.

8--Light.

9--The New York Public Library.

10--Once. After the first subtraction, you're subtracting from 90.

NALS Certification Update

NALS is pleased to announce an important change to our ALP credential. Beginning January 1, 2026, the **Accredited Legal Professional (ALP) certification will transition to the Certified Legal Support Professional (LSP).**

The ALP has served as a trusted entry-level credential for those starting their careers in legal support. As the legal support profession evolves, NALS is rebranding this certification title to better reflect the skills, competencies and professionalism the credential represents. The new LSP name offers clearer recognition across law firms, legal departments and the broader legal community.

Current ALP holders may continue using the ALP designation if they choose. All new credentials and recertifications issued on or after January 1, 2026, will carry the LSP title.

NALS will begin updating its website and digital materials in the coming weeks, so LSP references will appear ahead of the official transition.

To learn more about NALS certifications and upcoming updates, visit our website at NALS.org.

NALS 2026 National Legal Education Conference!

Get ready to learn and network at the 2026 National Legal Education Conference taking place October 5-7, 2026, at the Hilton Jacksonville at Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida.

Join legal support professionals from across the country for three days of high-quality education, inspiring speakers and the invaluable networking opportunities.

Exhibitor and sponsorship opportunities will open in January and registration will open in May.

The answer to the box riddle is13

INDUSTRY NEWS

The Future of Litigation is Being Built In-house

Litigation isn't going away, but who leads, drafts, and drives it is rapidly changing. Empirical research shows corporate legal departments have steadily expanded litigation management functions over the past decade.

For decades, litigation lived squarely in the law firm domain. Corporate legal departments played a responsive role: approving strategies, reviewing documents, and paying hourly rates. But through conversations with dozens of in-house legal leaders, legal operations professionals, and litigation specialists, a new reality is emerging; one in which in-house counsel increasingly owns the first draft, systemizes their litigation approah, and reshapes how outside counsel fits into the picture.

AI, analytics, exemplar libraries, playbooks, and modular document builders are not simply tools. They are catalysts for a structural shift. Litigation is becoming modular, data-informed, and orchestrated by in-house teams who increasingly want more than cost control. They want consistency, clarity, and leverage. This piece outlines five major trends from our qualitative research, predictions on their impact to the practice of law, and research questions that are worth considering to further understand these trends.

Trend 1: Litigation is Becoming Modular

Legal departments want to build repeatable workflows based on matter type, jurisdiction, and risk level. Drafting protocols, legal notices, and clause preferences aren't bespoke every time. They follow patterns.

As legal teams mature, they're breaking litigation into modular building blocks:

- Jurisdiction-specific clauses
- Matter-type templates
- Review triggers and audit checkpoints

Trend 2: The First Draft Moves In-House

One of the clearest signs of change is the shift in who drafts first.

AI tools now support in-house teams in generating rough but usable drafts of key litigation documents: ESI protocols, response letters, and even negotiation guidelines. This isn't about replacing outside counsel; it's about coming to the table prepared.

The strategic advantage of the first draft is clear:

- It sets the framing and tone
- It speeds up turnaround
- It shifts control form reactive to proactive

The first draft becomes a strategic asset. In-house counsel will increasingly expect to draft internally and send it to outside counsel for refinement rather than creation.

Trend 3: Playbooks are Becoming Agentic Operating Systems

What used to live in a PDF is now evolving into a dynamic, sometimes, autonomous, logic layer. Legal departments are moving beyond codifying preferences, operationalizing them through systems increasingly augmented by agentic AI. These tools can execute negotiation protuols, recommend fallback positions, and manage clause libraries with minimal human prompting. What began in legal operations is now extending to litigation management, including data breach response protocols and dispute workflows.

In other words, in-house legal departments are systemizing negotiation decisions. Rather than giving outside counsel vague "guidance" they're providing playbooks with clause-level preferences, fallback positions, and jurisdictional logic. But more than static documents, playbooks are evolving into interactive tools. Linked to clause libraries, integrated into contract tools, and embedded into workflows, internally codified preferred standards, powered by emerging technologies like generative AI, drive efficiency and onsistency in litigation drafting.

Trend 4: Flat Fees and Tiered Litigation Pricing Are Coming.

The billable hour is under pressure, and it's not just about cost.

Legal leaders want predictability and accountability. However, they also want pricing to reflect the extent of automation and standardization they've invested in internally. Economic studies have tracked the pressures on billable hour models in litigation.

AI tools now help in-house teams significantly reduce drafting time. One employment counsel reported that an AI-assisted EEOC response went from 5 hours to under 1 hour. Why pay for a full day when the work is done in minutes?

Instead, legal departments are experimenting with tiered litigation packages:

- Tier 1: Standardized matters (template-driven)
- Tier 2: Mid-complexity cases (templated + advisory)
- Tier 3: Strategic matters (custom + premium pricing)

It is predicted that law firm pricing will bifurcate. Low-complexity litigation will be flat-fee and tool-driven, while strategic litigation will command a premium but only when it adds clear value.

INDUSTRY NEWS (Cont'd)

Trend 5: Outside Counsel Will be Measured by Tech Fluency

Legal teams are developing new scorecards for law firms with "tech fluency" emerging as a core category.

Firms are being evaluated on how well they:

- Use client-provided templates and clause libraries
- Follow decision playbooks
- Provide structured feedback rather than tracked-changes chaos
- Recommend AI-driven workflows
- Integrate with client systems (not just email)

One legal operations head said, "If a firm can't use our playbook or insists on their own formatting chaos, we'll stop working with them. There's too much at stake."

READ THE FULL ARTICLE (WITH CITATIONS) ONLINE IN THE NALS LEGAL NEWSBRIEF.

DCLP NETWORKING LUNCH

Our monthly networking lunch will be held on January 21, 2026 at Eve's Eatery located at 402 N. Carson Street in Carson City at 12 noon. Guests are welcome. RSVP to **marnelson03@gmail.com** so we make sure we have a big enough table.

The NALS Legal Brief is a biweekly newsletter that delivers to you the trends, updates, and news from around the legal industry that is necessary to help you succeed in your career. Along with some association news, the NALS Legal Brief will give you a rundown of the current state of the legal support world by giving you a list of relevant industry-focused articles to educate and inform you.

View past publications of the NALS Legal News Brief

NALS Foundation

Events + Fundraisers

- **NALS National Conference Events**
- **Foundation Grants**

Quick Links

- **Ways to Give**
- **Donor Recognition**
- **Sweepstakes Item Donation**

Building Your Career & Future

The NALS Foundation was established in 1989 and is dedicated to ensuring a rewarding future for you and all legal support professionals. It is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational foundation working hand in hand with the National Association for Legal Support Professionals to enhance educational opportunities. Since its inception, the NALS Foundation has awarded grants and contributions of over $200,000 for the benefit of chapters and states.

Purpose

The NALS Foundation strives to ensure top-notch legal services are the norm. It funds quality education programs for legal professionals working with attorneys and the public to enhance their skills and provide them with the latest information on their profession. The NALS Foundation also keeps the good of the legal profession in the public eye, emphasizing a positive image of the profession and the importance of qualified, competent legal professionals.

The NALS Foundation is governed by a volunteer board of trustees. The board has designated the following as funding priorities:

- Educational/Research Opportunities
- Grants Keynote Speakers/Workshops
- Recognition

Please direct any questions you may have to the NALS Foundation Chair at foundation@nals.org.

Get Involved

Serving on the NALS Foundation Board of Trustees is a simple, fun, and rewarding way to give back to the legal support profession. **Click here** and select NALS Foundation Board of Trustees on your volunteer interest form. Contact any current Trustee if you'd like to discuss the possibilities!

NALS Foundation Board of Trustees

- Tina Hurley, PP, PLS (chair)
- Kathy Hilgendorf (secretary/treasurer)
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- Stephanie Johnson
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- Judy D. Whigham, PP, PLS

Wishing you all the best!

January 15 – Sharon Coates, PP, CLP

February 6 – Dee Beardsley, Emeritus PP, PLS

February 9 – Jill Nelson

{ Three simple rules in life }

1. If you do not GO after what you want, you'll never have it.

2. If you do not ASK, the answer will always be NO.

3. If you do not step forward, you'll always be in the same place.

May your birthday be the start of a year filled with new opportunities, accomplishments, and endless joy.
Happy Birthday!

NALS Code of Ethics & Professional Responsibility

Members of NALS are bound by the objectives of this association and the standards of conduct required of the legal profession. Every member shall:

- Encourage respect for the law and administration of justice

- Observe rules governing privileged communications and confidential information

- Promote and exemplify high standards of loyalty, cooperation, and courtesy

- Perform all duties of the profession with integrity and competence

- Pursue a high order of professional attainment

Integrity and high standards of conduct are fundamental to the success of our professional association. This Code is promulgated by NALS and accepted by its members to accomplish these ends.

Canon 1. Members of this association shall maintain a high degree of competency and integrity through continuing education to better assist the legal profession in fulfilling its duty to provide quality legal services to the public.

Canon 2. Members of this association shall maintain a high standard of ethical conduct and shall contribute to the integrity of the association and the legal profession.

Canon 3. Members of this association shall avoid a conflict of interest pertaining to a client matter.

Canon 4. Members of this association shall preserve and protect confidences andprivileged communications of a client.

Canon 5. Members of this association shall exercise care in using independent professional judgment and in dtermining the extent to which a client mayh be assisted without the presence of a lawyer and shall not act in matters involving professional legal judgment.

Canon 6. Members of this association shall not solicit legal business on behalf of a lawyer.

Canon 7. Members of this association, unless permitted by law, shall not perform legal functions except under the direct supervision of a lawyer and shall not advertise or contract with members of the general public for the performance of paralegal functions.

Canon 8. Members of this association, unless permitted by law, shall not perform any of the duties restricted to lawyers or do things which lawyers themselves may not do and shall assist in preventing the unauthorized practice of law.

Canon 9. Members of this association not licensed to practice law shall not engage in the practice of law as defined by statutes or court decisions.

Canon 10. Members of this association shall do all other things incidental, necessary, or expedient to enhance professional responsibility and participation in the administration of justice and public service in cooperation with the legal profession.