

## “In the Pursuit of Excellence: Have You Stepped Up Your Game?”

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I am a huge advocate for continuing education. I believe all of us should maintain a high level of academic acumen, regardless of experience, industry, specialty and goals. Our personal mission statement (and all of us should have one) should include an item about pursuing excellence, raising our standards and mastering each step in our professional and personal journeys. A person with a mission statement may ask himself: Who am I? Am I where I want to be –personally *and* professionally? What are my goals? How will I get there? What obstacles do I have to overcome to get there? Think about it. In pursuing excellence, you have to.

Keep in mind though that excellence is not perfection. Perfection is defined as something without flaw. None of us will ever obtain that status no matter how hard we try. Excellence however, is defined as brilliance, quality, distinction and merit. Yes, I like the sound of that.

A person pursuing excellence is always thinking, always moving and always changing. Why? Because any kind of success requires it. If we have decided to just get a paycheck, it doesn't really matter. Does it? However, if we have decided to make a difference in our lives, our profession, our community or even our family, we must consciously decide to step out of our comfort zone and reach for what some may think of as unreachable.

What does this mean for the paralegal? Glad you asked. As someone who has seen the profession grow from the 1980s to now, I can tell you that a paralegal is a dynamic individual who can stand the test of time. We are trained to think, analyze, write, investigate, orate, research and debate. Our skills allow us to cross industries, run companies, become entrepreneurs, write books, teach, mentor...the list goes on and on. A paralegal who has mastered excellence can do anything. Underappreciated? Sometimes. Underestimated? Definitely. Underpaid? Uh, yeah.

The great thing is that we are the blood that flows through the veins of the legal industry. Our skills help settle and win cases because we make the attorneys look good. That's brilliance. Most times we are the lifeline between the client and the attorney. Sometimes, we are the first voice the client hears and the one who holds their hand during the scary parts. That's quality. We may be the first one in the office and the last one to leave at night. That's merit. You know us by the piles of paper on our desk, the files stacked in our cubicles, the rubber bands around our wrists and the lunch hour gone by as we work at our desk. That's distinction.

For those future paralegals out there that have made the great decision to join us, think clearly about the path you are on and how you plan to get there. Are you pursuing excellence or a paycheck? If your main goal is to earn an income, you'll do just fine. No worries. However, if you have it in your mind to be the absolute best paralegal the Delaware Valley has ever seen; lay the foundation for excellence now. Right now.

As I looked over the Joan Weldon Memorial Scholarship applications recently, I was amazed at the varying levels of backgrounds, hopes and dreams. Listen closely. I was disappointed. Not

in the backgrounds, hopes and dreams – they were great! I was saddened by the applicants' college level writing skills. A few stood out as noteworthy but others were painful to read and simply embarrassing. Sorry, but true. I often wondered if these individuals really had a clear grasp of the industry they were about to step into. It wasn't clear from the written expression of their hopes and dreams. In fact, the same word kept reverberating in my mind. Yes, you guessed it – excellence! Where was it?

In today's economy and in the current climate of the industry, each of us has to pursue excellence so our light shines brighter than the thousands of others out there reading the same want ads and responding to the same job postings. It isn't enough anymore to talk a good game. We must be able to express ourselves in a manner that truly communicates who we are and the excellence we exude before we walk through the door.

I encourage you to re-examine the messages you send and the paperwork you shuffle. Is it a message from someone pursuing excellence or someone just getting through the next assignment? Are you communicating brilliance? Quality? Distinction? Merit?

Pursuing excellence takes work, commitment and intestinal fortitude. It is an ongoing process for the rest of your life. Consider taking continuing education classes to polish your skills or, you may want to network with professionals who challenge you to grow beyond your present limitations and expectations.

In fact, think about writing a personal mission statement that outlines your goals, dreams and desires. What is it that makes you get up in the morning? What makes you work hard, study and press forward no matter what? What motivates you? These are your core values. At the end of the day, what do you want to be known for? Actually write it out on paper. Read it out loud to yourself. Refer to it periodically. You may want to make revisions to it as your goals, dreams and desires change. One thing is certain - In the pursuit of excellence, we must step up our game and consciously decide to be the absolute best at whatever we choose to be.

Still thinking? Good.

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