

ROANOKE VALLEY  
PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION



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### Top Stories:

- Out of Site, Out of Mind?
- Top 10 Rookie Mistakes a New Paralegals Make

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## Out of Site, Out of Mind?

- Do the piles of paper and stacks of files on your desk seem to multiply and take on a life of their own?
- Are you afraid to put anything away because you might forget about it?
- When you open your mail, do you think, "I'll just put it here for now"?
- Does the 'put it here for now' pile keep growing?

If you answered 'Yes' to any of the above, you are delaying making decisions. This delay results in increased clutter on your desk. The clutter leads to overwhelm. Overwhelm leads to decreased productivity. You can see that this all leads to nothing good.

There are only three decisions you have to make:

**Decision No. 1:** What to do with your mail. When your mail comes in, go over it by your trash can and take one of the following actions:

- Toss it. If you don't need it, throw it in the trash (which may include shredding or recycling). The more you throw away, the less you've got to take care of. You win!
- Delegate It. If someone else can do it, pass it on.
- Do It Now. If this is something that can be done in two minutes or less, do it NOW. This may mean actually doing the task or scheduling the task in your planner or putting it on your 'to do' list.
- Do It Later. If this is something that you will need later, can't take care of right now, or it will take you a while to finish it, move on to Decision No. 2.
- Keep It Forever. If this is something you need to hang on to, move on to Decision No. 3

**Decision No. 2:** When do you need to see it again? When you'll need to refer to the paper in the future (such as an invitation or a map) or you need to remember to take action on a specific date, you'll need a tickler file. This is what you do:

Gather these supplies:

1. A drawer or a box that will accommodate hanging files\* 43 hanging file folders
2. 43 hanging file folder tabs, 31 of one color and 12 of another color
3. Your favorite pen or Sharpie

Take these steps:

1. Write the twelve months on 12 tabs of one color; insert them down the left side of 12 hanging folders.\* Write the numbers 1-31 on the 31 tabs of the other color; insert them in the remaining 31 hanging folders, staggering them in positions other than the left so you'll be able to see them at a glance.
2. Put the folders in your drawer or box:
  - Whatever month you're beginning with (as I write, this is February), put that month tab in the front of the drawer with the numbered folders for the rest of the month behind it (ie 27 through 31, even though February does not have 31 days).
  - Behind those is the folder for the next month (March) followed by the files numbered 1-26.
  - Behind that are the folders for the remainder of the year.
  - File your papers according to when you will need them, allowing time to finish the project. For instance, if your deadline is March 25th and you think the job will take two days, put the paper in the March 23rd folder. If you just need to remember to do something in June, drop it in the June file.
  - Begin every day with the folder of the day and then move it. When you're through with a day, move it to the back of the next month.
  - Near the end of each month, go through the papers that have been dropped in the next month's folder and put them in the appropriate date. Again, allow for time to finish your project.

**Decision No. 3:** If you need to keep it forever, file it. Here are some hints for your filing

1. Do you really need to keep it forever? Organizing experts say that you refer to only 20% of what you file. The remaining 80% is unnecessary and never looked at again. Don't fill your filing cabinets with that 80%....this includes multiple copies of the same document.
2. Don't over stuff the file drawers. Keep two inches of empty space in each drawer so that you can get files in and out without landing in the emergency room.
3. Use an Incline desktop sorter: If you have stacks of files on your desk that can't be put away because you're working on them, put them in an incline desktop sorter. They're available at any office supplier. This will keep the files visible and easy to find. You'll also be less likely to lose them or forget them.

**Your challenge:** Resolve to make a decision about every piece of paper when it comes into your office. Do not 'put it here for now.' Making decisions will lead to huge benefits. When you walk into an office that is free of clutter...when you no longer waste time looking for papers and files...when you no longer miss deadlines...you will feel less stressed and you will get more work done in less time. Take the time you save for continuing education, a vacation, or to just chill out. You'll be a better paralegal in the long run.

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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 publishes a bi-weekly ezine titled Strategies for Paralegals Seeking Excellence. More information is available at <http://www.paralegalmentor.com/>.

# UPCOMING EVENTS



## September Member Meeting

**When:** Thursday, September 13, 2018

**Time:** 12:00 pm

**Where:** Billy's Restaurant

**What:** Join us as Gentry Locke's Managing Partner, Monica Monday, teaches us about the ever elusive Appellate Law.

Monica frequently lectures and writes on appellate issues. She currently serves as Chair of the Fourth Circuit Rules Advisory Committee, a Vice-chair of The Virginia Bar Association's Appellate Practice Section Council, and as Chair of the Appellate Practice Committee of the Virginia State Bar Litigation Section.

[Click here to reserve your spot and for more information.](#)

## VAPA 11th Biennial Conference

**When:** Friday October 5, 2018

**Where:** Fredericksburg, VA

**What:** A day full of CLE credits, learning, networking and reception at the end of the day.

Visit our website [www.rvpa.org](http://www.rvpa.org) or VAPA's website [www.virginiaparalegalalliance.org](http://www.virginiaparalegalalliance.org) for more information and to register for the event. Registration deadline is September 26, 2018.



  
**KEEP  
CALM  
AND LET THE  
PARALEGAL  
HANDLE IT**



### October Member Meeting

**When:** October 11, 2018  
**Time:** 12:00 pm  
**Where:** Billy's Restaurant  
**What:** Nanda Davis, Esq. always knew the courtroom was where she wanted to spend her career. Her clients appreciate her empathy and commitment as she helps them make the best decision for them and their family, as well as her willingness to go to trial to achieve the best result for her clients.

[Click here to reserve your spot and for more information.](#)



### November Member Meeting

**When:** November 8, 2018  
**Time:** 12:00 pm  
**Where:** Billy's Restaurant  
**What:** Lauren Ellerman, Esq. & Lauren Davis, Esq. each focus on Medical Malpractice, Nursing Home Abuse, and Personal Injury. They represent victims and their families in complex Wrongful Death, Medical Malpractice and personal injury cases.

[Click here to reserve your spot and for more information.](#)

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### Buffalo Wild Wings Social

**When:** Wednesday, September 19, 2018  
**Time:** 5:30 pm  
**Where:** Buffalo Wild Wings - Valley View  
**What:** We are having an after work get together! Join us to unwind, have a drink, get some grub, network and raise some funds. Don't worry, we aren't asking you to give money, just come out and spend money on a snack or dinner.

All are welcome! Bring a friend, bring the office, or bring out the family.

[Click here for tickets to the event.](#)



### Painting the Nite

**When:** Tuesday October 16, 2018  
**Time:** 7:00 pm  
**Where:** Jersey Lily's - Salem  
**What:** Come out to join us for dinner and conversation before we begin to paint. Local artist, Kara Maloney, will lead us all in fun and the creation of our own masterpieces. All are welcome so bring out the family and kids to paint their art to hang on the wall.

[Click here for tickets to the event.](#)







## Top 10 Rookie Mistakes New Paralegals Make

It's too much to expect that anyone stepping into a brand new position will do a letter-perfect job on day one.. but nothing builds dumb confidence quite like a college degree and zero experience!

As a brand new paralegal, fresh out of school, you'll feel like you're ready to take on the world. Then you'll humiliate yourself with a stupid mistake. The kind that makes you cringe and want to crawl under a rock every time you think about it for years to come.

It's inevitable. And just as inevitably, you're going to beat yourself up about it. The key is to get out ahead of these things and spare yourself the embarrassment – and the self-flagellation that follows.

Even experienced paralegals make mistakes, and god knows you'll see lawyers themselves make plenty of them. But there are certain mistakes brand-new paralegals seem to be famous for making. Be Warned ...

### Giving Legal Advice

Every new paralegal runs afoul of this mistake at some point despite having repeatedly been hammered in school that the unauthorized practice of law is strictly prohibited and sometimes rises to the level of a criminal offense.

It's an easy mistake to make. Sometimes it's just to friends and family, eager to draw on your freshly minted expertise in the field for some free consultations. Sometimes, and much worse, it's helpful advice to a client who seems worried and needs reassurance. But it can come back to bite you and it's best to put a lot of room between yourself and legal advice or anything like it until you have a few years under your belt and know where the fine lines are drawn.

### Misfiling Documents

You're told all through your training that details matter, that being detail-oriented is the most important part of being a paralegal, that it's your responsibility to get every little thing correct in everything you do. But it doesn't really sink in until the first time you slide a folder into the wrong file and come up missing crucial documents at a critical moment. There's not a lot you can do about this except double down on your attention so you don't have to learn the hard way.

### Mishandling Potential Clients

Lawyers and experienced paralegals know that the key to a successful law practice is in picking winning cases. It's not your skill, it's not the lawyer's skill, it's not crucial sleuthing out on the streets... it's picking clients and cases that can prevail in court.

But new paralegals have seen too many TV shows and haven't yet become hard-boiled professionals who can see through a sob story and tell when a client is lying. At first,

you'll probably do poorly at filtering out the bad risks. This is another area where experience becomes your best friend—but you can be sure your employer will be happy to help until then.

### **Missing A Deadline**

Missed deadlines are unfortunately all too common in American jurisprudence. Even in the most serious of cases, capital crimes where defendants face the death penalty, the New York Times found 80 cases where legal teams failed to file crucial documents in their client's defense on time.

There are no statistics kept in the wider world of law, but you'll see plenty of missed deadlines in your own career... and you'll probably be individually responsible for a few of them yourself. It's a terrible feeling and one you'll want to avoid as much as possible.

### **Violating Confidentiality**

Some of the things that come across your desk will be so outrageous, so hilarious, or so interesting that you'll just have to tell someone. But that someone had better not be anyone outside the office, because if it is, you'll have violated one of the most sacrosanct strictures of legal practice... client confidentiality. It's no easy task to keep your lips sealed at happy hour with friends and family but it's a habit you'll have to get into if you hope to have a long legal career, because violations can be serious and could result in you being the one on the receiving end of the criminal justice system.

### **Failure to Disclose a Relationship or Other Conflicts of Interest**

Outsiders are always surprised how seriously ethical conflicts are taken within the legal community. You're primed through popular culture to be used to lawyers and law firm staff sleeping with clients, gossiping with other firms, or otherwise behaving in a cavalier manner about conflicts of interest. But when you become a practicing paralegal, you'll need to learn to take it seriously, because everyone around you will. If conflicts of interest emerge, you need to be forthright and frank about communicating them, even if they are uncomfortable to share.

### **Not Tracking Your Time Closely**

Law firms live and die by billing. Although trends are changing, that's still primarily hourly billing, in increments of one-tenth of an hour... every six minutes on the clock needs to be accounted for and accurately attributed to the relevant case or client. Just keeping track of all those time segments is a lot of work, and there's a lot of pressure to drive up the time spent to increase billable hours. You'll be in a lot of hot water if you can't attribute your time to individual cases, no matter how hectic your day has been.

### **Not Knowing Court Rules**

It's not intuitive that different courts have different rules and standards for esoteric legal matters like document formatting and filing, but they do... and a failure to learn and apply those rules has brought the axe down on many a new paralegal. If you don't know the rules for your jurisdiction, you had better at least know how to look them up... and not be afraid to do so when you have a question.

### **Calendaring Errors**

Although missing a deadline is among the worst offenses a paralegal can commit, there are whole other categories of calendaring mistakes that new paralegals routinely make. From scheduling new client appointments while the attorney is supposed to be in court to mistaking calendar days for business days in docketing matters, the calendar is a minefield for new paralegals – and only experience will help see you through safely.

### **Being Overly Dependent on Your Attorney**

Reacting to many of these other possible mistakes can create a new one that paralegals sometimes make... becoming overly dependent on the attorney to answer hard questions or avoid obstacles. But paralegals are there expressly so attorneys won't have to do all this detail work. If you're not serving as a resource for your attorney instead of bogging them down, you're not doing the job you were hired to do.

To See Original Blog click [here](#).

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Dance like no one is watching;  
email like it may one day be read  
aloud in a deposition.

## SERVICE SPOTLIGHT



### West End Center School Supply Drive

We thank you for your donations of school supplies for West End Center. Donations were delivered to the center August 10, 2018.



### Feeding America Café to Grow Foodie Truck

We had fun joining Feeding America and their Café to Grow truck as they traveled around Roanoke this summer providing meals to families in need.



### Breakfast, Books & Barristers

Join us this fall and winter for breakfast and building libraries in kids homes.

A partnership between Turn the Page, Roanoke City Schools, Roanoke Bar Association & RVPA to feed breakfast and provide books to families and kids in the area. Volunteers are needed on Saturdays 9:30 am to 11:30 am. All ages are welcome to volunteer!

[Click here for more information and to sign-up to help out.](#)

STAY CONNECTED

