



Douglas Rice: Paralegal, Pacific Crest Legal Solutions, LLC, Salem, OR

[Charisse Dengler]

Currently living and working just outside of Salem, OR, for Pacific Crest Legal Solutions, LLC, Douglas Rice said it is the variety that he enjoys most about his job.

Pacific Crest Legal Solutions, LLC, is an attorney litigation support service that provides law firms with services such as research, pleading and correspondence, discovery, and exhibit and trial preparation, Rice said.

In addition, the firm has recently expanded by opening an office in Idaho, and though both offices continue to specialize in attorney litigation support, the firm has branched out into bundled services and lower-cost document-preparation services, as well.

"Being a part of a firm that caters to different law fields gives us a new palette of things to try," Rice said. "In the morning I could be working on an eviction from government-subsidized housing and in the afternoon, helping an attorney prepare for a bankruptcy appeal panel case."

However, it is that same variety that makes Rice's job difficult at times.

"In our firm, we cater to several different firms and clients. Each one likes things done a certain way, and it is difficult to conform to all of those little things from one client to the next," he said.

Another thing Rice enjoys about his current position is the firm's concept of teamwork.

"While we all seem to have our strengths and preferences in the law, we are always helping each other out, which gives us all a broad exposure into different areas that you don't get in the law firm environment," he said.

And having a broad exposure in the area of law is something Rice believes in. In fact, his advice to future paralegals is to learn as much as possible in all areas.

"Take the opportunity to investigate as much as you can," he said. "School is the time to get exposure to things that you like and things that you don't. Try and do as much and learn as much as you can. You never know when that class on some subject that you could care less about today will help you out five years from now."

Rice, who has been a paralegal since 2001, said if he was forced to do it all over again, he would learn more about the subjects he was not extremely interested in just to get the exposure and to lessen the amount of on-the-job learning that is required.

He credits his education in giving him an understanding of the legal system and feels that school was "a good overview of how things work, what can and cannot happen, terminology, etc.," but said the majority of his experience has come from working.

"In school, you write papers based on theory. When you hit your job, you are writing documents that mean the difference to someone or something's legal rights. If you make a mistake there, it takes a lot to unwind it," he said. "A case you cite one day could be old law the next. These are all of the things that you learn on the job, and they are things that can't be taught in a classroom."

"This is where the proverbial rubber meets the road," he said.

Rice started out at a firm that represented landlords in landlord-tenant issues, and though he is still involved in landlord-tenant issues, his current work includes bankruptcy, as well.

"Bankruptcy is a new arena for me. I have only been involved in that arena about eight months now, so luckily I wasn't too jaded in the 'old ways' when the new bankruptcy laws came into effect last December," he said.

Rice says the firm he was previously working for "had a tough time expanding on the potential of their paralegals and assistants."

"They were there for research, and [the firm] readily dismissed everything else they could do. I wanted to expand my experiences. I came across the Oregon Office Manager, and next thing I knew, I was offered the opportunity to come on board [with Pacific Crest Legal Solutions, LLC]," he said.

Rice enjoys being involved in trials from start to finish and knowing that his part in the process directly helped the client.

"Often as a paralegal, we do research and invest time and consideration in the drafting of our pleadings, and we never see the end result. Sure, we read it and hear the attorneys tell us, but often we aren't there in the courtroom to see the eyes of the person that we helped," he said.

Some of the emotional highlights of his career are the times when he has been there to "receive that 'thank you' handshake and



to know that [his] effort as part of the team solved the client's legal problem."

"I am still enjoying exploring the different options that are available to paralegals," he said.

Rice feels that the paralegal profession has grown in the fact that current-day paralegals are trusted with more tasks and are more involved in trials, and he compares this growth to the growth that has taken place in the attorney profession.

"If you look back 200 or so years ago, when our country was in its infancy, attorneys were considered almost second-class citizens. Lawyers of the time, like John Adams, worked hard riding court circuits to eek out meager wages. Over the years, the profession has built up a more prestigious nature," he said.

Rice believes paralegals have evolved from mere secretaries to employees who handle the bulk of research and document drafting, and he credits this evolution to the emergence of paralegal associations.

Much like bar associations, paralegal associations have begun to assert themselves in many jurisdictions nationwide, letting the world know that they represent professionals who have the capability to do more than get copy and transcribe documents, he said.

Rice feels this is important for the individual because "being recognized as a professional carries with it many benefits: recognition, better wages and benefits, better assignments, and a whole host of other things associated with the prestige of having a professional career rather than just a 'menial job.'"

Rice first became interested in the field of law after participating in mock trial in high school. He said he joined the paralegal profession as a stepping stone to becoming an attorney, and even though he has not ruled that out, he is enjoying his position as a paralegal for now.