Best Alternative Careers for Paralegals: What Other Jobs Can Paralegals Do?

**Summary:** This article details the various careers outside of the legal profession that are within the reach of a paralegal.

As you begin your **career as a paralegal**, you will probably not be interested in seeing how your training can prepare you for jobs and careers outside the legal field. Sometime later, however, you might find such information useful. It is very helpful therefore, to consider these options as your career progresses, even from the beginning. For you will realize that your education and training as a paralegal may well serve as a stepping stone to other areas that may be of interest to you.

Many of you may have trained in other fields before becoming a paralegal. As a matter of fact, one of the problems many people face as they begin this new career is how to explain what might be a radical career change to a potential employer. If you can learn how to build on your skills developed in another field and relate these skills to your paralegal training, then you will benefit from the broad range of your talents and experiences, rather than be at a disadvantage.

Eventually, you may find that you can use this combination of skills and training if you wish to move on to another field. Consider the following examples:

1. Depending upon your specific interests and talents, you can make **many moves within the paralegal profession**, as well as outside of it.
2. Management skills could enable you to become a **paralegal coordinator**, one who trains and supervises other paralegals within an organization. The best route to this position is to demonstrate your capabilities, and you can do this only within the organization itself.
3. Office management is another area in which you can use your management supervisory skills, if you have them. This could be within a legal firm, or once you have gained experience, you may find that many offices need good management, outside as well as inside the legal profession.
4. Administration within a legal firm is also based on strong skills in working with personnel of many
departments. An administrative director of a law firm is usually responsible for every nonlegal aspect of the firm’s operation, including accounting, personnel, and purchasing. Remember that such a position is not a paralegal position, although your paralegal background will be helpful. It is a step onto a different career track, however.

This person usually reports to a senior officer. It is a highly responsible and demanding position. The combination of paralegal skills and other administrative skills could lead to a rewarding and challenging position.

Within large and small, nonprofit and corporate environments, paralegals have many opportunities open to them. Even if you decide that you do not wish to pursue any of these options at this stage of your career, knowing about them will help you to focus on where you might want to be five or ten years in the future. By thinking of your long-term goals, you can develop skills along the way that will enable you to achieve your goals.

Here are some opportunities you might want to consider:

**Banking specialist:**

In addition to work as a paralegal in a bank, other opportunities exist, particularly with the new and changing regulations for foreign as well as domestic banking. If you are interested in working in this environment, your best path would be to begin working as a paralegal to discover options that exist and develop a network to help you find out about openings as they occur.

Other careers involving money and banking include importing and exporting and stock brokerage. These fields may require additional credentials or particular qualifications.

**Computer center specialist or manager:**

Computer literacy training, in addition to specialized or generalist paralegal training, could make you a suitable candidate for a position as a computer center manager. While duties may vary, they would include working with information systems, electronic data banks, and word processing. In today’s job market, you will need computer skills to work as a paralegal. This could be a very satisfying career alternative for anyone interested in working in the computer field.

**Corporate specialist:**

Review the paralegal specialties listed in the first chapter of this book to give you some idea of particular specialties. Developing experience or expertise in those areas will prepare you for many types of work within a corporation. Some of these areas include working in the patent or trademark division or employee benefits office.

**Educator:**

Teacher, program administrator, consultant, education coordinator for continuing legal education are examples of areas open to paralegals in the field of education. Check with local universities, colleges, and community colleges for requirements. Many schools are interested in hiring part-time faculty to teach an occasional course. This could be an opportunity for you to see if you would like to work in the academic world.
Government specialist:

Many paralegals are interested in government regulatory issues; politics or working in a political environment can always be explored; lobbying is a career for which paralegals could be well suited. In addition, civil service opportunities are available. Check your local government offices along with times and dates of civil service examinations.

Journalist:

Research and writing in the legal field is a career open to those who have demonstrated their writing skills and expertise in a field or specialty. While many may wish to pursue this goal on a freelance basis, there are companies which hire paralegals and then use their writing talents predominantly.

Law librarian:

Law firms usually hire law librarians to handle their periodical collections, as well as law books and manuals. Although many of these law positions are filled by those with library training, frequently a paralegal with a good academic background can be trained to fill this position.

Medical specialist:

With changing policies regarding health care in this country, many career options exist in this field for paralegals. Within hospital settings or insurance agencies (even nonmedical insurance firms), your paralegal training will prepare you to take on additional responsibilities if you have the other personal and professional qualifications.

While each of these fields might require additional training (not necessarily a degree, but some specialized training that could be gained on the job), they should be considered, particularly if they seem to tie in with your interests, talents, and goals.

You may, of course, plan to go on to law school, but the point of this discussion is to emphasize that becoming a paralegal can lead you to job opportunities in many different fields that are directly related or indirectly related to the legal field.

Real estate specialist:

You may develop a paralegal specialty in this area and work with an attorney in various aspects when you realize that you enjoy the real estate field and all of its possibilities. As a result, you may think of real estate sales or management, including title and mortgage company positions. Your paralegal training will be an additional asset.
Social service agent:

This area is extremely appropriate for anyone interested in the social welfare system, the criminal justice system, or immigration services, just to name a few. Many positions offered are not listed as paralegal positions, but a review of the job description and responsibilities reveals that employees are essentially doing paralegal work, in addition to other duties. For example, a position within a social service organization that assists immigrants may be listed as “Immigrant Grant Specialist.” That person may serve as an advocate for immigrants in court and may have great deal of interaction with clients but, for the most part, the skills required for this position are basically those required to be a paralegal. Many social service agencies have such positions. It is important, therefore, to read the job description and qualifications necessary, if you are interested in moving into this field.

Salesperson:

Those interested in combining interpersonal skills and paralegal training with a personal need to receive the rewards of their individual efforts, may consider sales, specifically for all materials and equipment used by attorneys.

Additional educational training might be necessary should you wish to be come an expert in the field. That may not always be the case, however. For example, you may not be certain where your true interests and talents lie, so until you know this, going ahead with additional education or training may not be the answer. Being a paralegal will give you a good idea of what it would be like to remain in the legal field should you decide you want to become a lawyer. But even if you do not wish to do so, think of your para legal training as a background for developing other interests you have. It’s also important to realize that being a paralegal could easily be a stepping stone to other careers that are not as rigorous or demanding as that of a paralegal—or perhaps even more so, but in a different way. There may be other areas in which you could expand your talents and professional options.

In considering your professional development as a paralegal or in other fields, review the list of resources in Appendix A of this book, talk to people who have used their paralegal background and try to determine which areas or professions hold a particular appeal for you. Learn to ask questions and look for opportunities as you make your plans.

Suggestions for Planning Your Future as a Paralegal

1. Develop special interests and expertise in the area of law that appeals to you.
2. Continue your professional education. Become involved with your local paralegal association.
   Attend professional workshops and programs that will help you develop your skills and inform you about options.
3. Develop your networking affiliations. Let people know of your interests and ambitions. Don’t forget to thank them when they have helped you in any way.
4. Look for ways to become the best at what you do and gain visibility for your work.
5. Remember that you should at least perform the job for which you are hired. If you become bored or burned out, it could be that you have not planned to take the next step. Always keep in mind that you do have options. Discover them.
6. Update your resume periodically. Be prepared to submit a copy to someone who could be interested in what you have done.
7. Learn to build on your past experiences and integrate them into the job you are doing that relates to a position you would like to have.
8. Take the time and effort to develop strong communication skills: interpersonal, written, and verbal.
9. Find ways to use these skills so that you are recognized not only for what you do, but for what you are capable of doing.
10. Learn to set standards of excellence for yourself in your job without being a fanatic perfectionist or judging the work of others. Know the job for which you are responsible, and do it to the best of your ability.
11. Develop a self-analytical approach to your job and yourself. In planning your future, determine what is important to you as a professional, learn to examine your options carefully, and learn what steps
you will need to take for you to achieve your goals.

See following articles for more information:

- Paralegal: Stepping Stone to Other Careers
- Career Alternatives for Paralegals