GUERRILLA TACTICS FOR THE PARALEGAL JOB SEARCH

ANIETA MCCracken, CP

A friend recently said, "I filled out an application, turned it into the hiring manager and then worked for that company for 30 years." Unfortunately, those days are gone. Now new graduates and unemployed professionals need to be proactive and create their own opportunities. Today is the day for guerilla tactics. Below are a few tips, both conventional and unconventional, for landing your next job.

Prepare Your Tool Kit

Showcase projects in a portfolio. Compile a portfolio that showcases your work, awards and achievements. Include published articles, writing projects, certificates, awards, presentations and samples of past work product. Place your portfolio, along with a pen, notepad, letter of reference, business cards and calendar in a professional briefcase to take to interviews and networking meetings.

Create business cards. Design a business card that includes a tag highlighting your field of interest or specialty and a professional e-mail address. Vista Print (www.vistaprint.com) is an economical business card source that offers several designs.

Develop flyers. If you have recently led presentations, workshops or training sessions, develop flyers listing the major points you presented and participants' positive comments. The flyers demonstrate your writing and verbal communication skills and might open doors to more speaking opportunities.

Develop Your Pitch. Summarize the skills outlined in your resume and cover letter into a 30-second elevator pitch. Use the pitch when phoning contacts or potential employers or meeting someone who can get your resume into a hiring manager's hands. Tailor the pitch to the target's needs and outline ways you can meet those needs; don't focus on yourself.

Promote Yourself

Create a custom phone message. Use the outgoing announcement on your cell phone to your advantage. Lose the music or the kids' voices in the background. "Thank you for calling Susan Jones; please leave a message at the tone" is good but adding a short form of your elevator speech is better: "Thank you for calling Susan Jones, a NALA certified paralegal with expertise in elder and family law." Do the same on your land line if you're the only one using that line.

Create a Web page. Design a professional Web page and include, at a minimum, your resume, work samples, published works, references/testimonials and contact information. A number of sites such as WordPress, Weebly and Go Daddy offer free and low-cost Web pages.

Start a blog. Writing a blog can build your brand and open doors to new opportunities and contacts. You can create your blog with a number of free sites including bloger.com, wordpress.com and livjournal.com. Be sure to optimize your blog for the search engines and choose tags that will link your blog to potential employers.

Create a professional Facebook page. Turn your Facebook profile into a resume and ask respected co-workers, employers and friends to be a friend. Note achievements, recent continuing education credits and completed projects when updating your status.

Get published. Offer to write a feature story on a desired employer or company. You could pitch the story to your local bar journal, newspaper or business magazine. Or, publish articles on your area of legal expertise in your local paralegal association's newsletter or the national paralegal magazines. Be sure to include your published articles in your portfolio and on your Web page.

Create a promotional video. Create a PowerPoint presentation that includes your 30-second pitch and showcases your skills. To promote your skills, list three bullets that demonstrate your ability to perform that skill along with a photo that illustrates the skill. Produce a video of your presentation and post it on YouTube. Link the video to your Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter pages as well as your blog and Web page. Show the video during networking meetings. A PowerPoint presentation not only highlights your skills in a unique manner, it also demonstrates your ability to use the software, a valuable skill in a wired courtroom.

Network

Network with LinkedIn. Search by state, company and name. If you find you have something in common with another person, introduce yourself, make the connection and ask to join their network. Use status updates to showcase achievements, awards and career search progress. Ask for recommendations from those in your network. LinkedIn is "a little different from searching your job search sites like CareerBuilder.com," said Stephanie Bell, career placement director for National College’s Harrisonburg, Virginia, campus. "Making connections on LinkedIn can lead to job opportunities that you may have never heard of otherwise. I have known quite a few people on LinkedIn where the position found them instead of vice versa.'"

Join Twitter. Use Twitter to network and learn of job opportunities. "Many employers and recruiters now announce job openings on Twitter before they appear anywhere else," said Pamela Skillings, career coach and founder of Big Interview. You can also search for jobs using TwitJobSearch.com and sign up for free feeds on the latest job-related tweets using TweetMyJobs.com. Follow experts in your industry or establish yourself as an expert by tweeting on legal issues. Just make sure your Twitter profile will impress hiring managers.

Enlist the help of colleagues. Create a list of firms and companies for whom you'd like to work and e-mail everyone on your contact list to determine if they know anyone at those organizations. If they do, ask them to make a referral. Also ask them to forward your e-mail to ten of their contacts. (This tip is not for the presently employed; word may get back to your employer).

Hang out where employers hang out. A little sleuthing will help you find the suits that hire. In my area that's the restaurant nearest the courthouse. Ask members of the local paralegal association where their employers go for coffee. On these jaunts always carry your tool kit with you.
Promote Yourself

Expand your search beyond law firms. Statistics show that only about 61 percent of paralegals are employed in law firms. Expand your search to include corporate legal departments, non-profits, legal aid providers, hospitals, title companies, real estate agencies, government agencies and the local courthouse. You might also target banks, apartment leasing offices and mediation services.

Use the Internet to research companies, firms and other employers. Don't waste too much time on online applications where, due to large volumes of applicants, you are unlikely to receive a response. Spend the majority of your online time networking and researching. Visit Lawyers.com, FindLaw.com, Martindale.com and YellowPages.com to find potential employers in your area, then plug in your area of interest and desired location. The Texas Bar Association's site (www.texasbar.com) also tracks jobs all over the country. Scroll down to the career center at the bottom of the page and sign up for job alerts.

Look for contacts in the traditional ways as well. Check out local and state bar associations to find attorneys in your area. Visit area firms and ask the human relations department or hiring manager for information about positions in your area. Ask how you might become a more competitive job seeker and inquire about the specific skills they seek. Then follow through and follow up.

Go the Extra Mile

Be Proactive. Follow the news in local newspapers, trade publications and bar journals. Set up Google Alerts on each of your target companies and firms. Promotions, retirements, relocations and expansions all suggest a need for paralegals. Follow up, congratulate the firm or attorney, and offer your services.

Attend public court hearings and trials. After the hearing or trial, complement the attorney and ask for referrals to their firm or similar firms.

Distribute informational booklets. Create a booklet explaining how to properly format legal documents for the courts in your area and distribute them at paralegal association meetings or your local courthouse. Or, write an article describing the benefits of an elder law attorney and distribute it at a senior citizen's center. Consider other topics within your ability and experience that will promote your skills. Be creative but take care to avoid giving legal advice.

Get Organized

Keep track of contacts. Use a spreadsheet to record the contact information, job title and employer of each person in your network. Include a column for the date of the most recent contact, type of contact, results of the contact and position sought, plus a column for notes and needed follow up. For easy reference, highlight the contents appropriately; red for contacts that provided no assistance, green for contacts who interviewed you and yellow for those with whom you need to follow up.

Calendar job-hunting details. Use your calendar as a reminder to visit contacts regularly and to follow up on every lead, about every six months minimum. Use the find function on your spreadsheet to ensure that your follow up visit is timely. Telephone con-

tact is good; e-mail is weak.

Create a job-hunting expense journal. Log all expenses relating to your job hunt in a job-hunting journal. Qualified expenses include agency fees, resume preparation, phone calls, meals, lodging and travel expenses, including airfare and some automobile expenses. Keep receipts of all job hunting expenses, log them in your day planner and record the expenses in a spreadsheet. When tax time comes it will be easy to total all applicable expenses. (Note that if you are a recent graduate looking for your first job or are transferring into a new trade or business, job-hunting expenses are disallowed.)

Celebrate goals. Finally, take time to celebrate goals accomplished. Reward yourself or engage in something fun each time you complete a task or reach a goal.

Anita McCracken is a NALA certified paralegal with a bachelor's of science degree in paralegal studies from Kaplan University. She is an adjunct professor and chair in the paralegal department of National College in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and is a freelance writer.

www.laweralegal.today.com January/March 2011