UT's *LEGAL & PARALEGAL STUDIES* INTERNSHIP

Introduction

As a representative of The University of Toledo and the Legal & Paralegal Studies Program, you stand not only for yourself, but also for UT and the Legal & Paralegal Studies Program as a whole. Your behavior, attitude and work ethic continue to set the tone for the internship program. If you are mature, poised, courteous, and respectful of your coworkers, your internship placement will extend this invitation to other paralegal interns who will follow in your footsteps. Likewise, if you are rude, insolent or inconsiderate to your internship supervisor's needs or the needs of their clients, you may be out of a "job" shortly, you may jeopardize your degree completion, and you may ruin the chances of other students to intern at this placement in the future. The following information is provided to give you information that will assist you in preparing for a wonderful, rewarding internship experience.

Etiquette in the Workplace

Although many people consider their technical skills and intelligence to be their most important job qualifications, many employers consider *the ability to get along well with colleagues and clients even more important*. In the workplace, being well mannered means one thing above all else: respecting others and treating them with courtesy – no matter what!

In the workplace, manners are addressed in many different ways. You should do the following:

- Respect the company's culture. Take note of your supervisor and other employees and emulate their behavior.

- Respect rank and treat it appropriately. Most companies have a hierarchy. Learn what it is and what each level requires from you.

- Respect the privacy of others and be courteous to them.

- Respect others' views and avoid disagreements. When they do arise, handle them gracefully. People's religious, political, moral, and lifestyle opinions differ. Acknowledge that and refrain from imposing yours on them.

Developing Relationships Quickly

You can do many things in a working environment to irritate other people, just as you can do many things to make yourself a prized worker who is an integral member of a team. Your goal in the internship should be to make the internship supervisor think they can't do without you!
You can quickly, very quickly, get a reputation on the job as someone who is a hard worker, takes directions well, is a team player, etc. One of the keys to workplace etiquette is to pay enough attention to others to be able to modify your behavior to accommodate them. In other words, people have different personality types; the more observant you are and the quicker you identify that, the easier it will be for you to communicate with those individuals.

Here are some tips to master:

- Learn the names of all people you will interact with on a daily basis. Unless you are told otherwise, address everyone by Mr. Mrs. (married) Miss (unmarried) Ms. (don't know). As far as your name goes, let the staff know how you prefer to be addressed. Be sure everyone knows

the correct pronunciation of your name. If someone mispronounces your name, politely correct them, then move on.

- Law firms sometimes have lengthy names. Learn it and the proper pronunciation of each partner.

- Every law office and legal department has a hierarchy. Learn it. Learn the name of your internship supervisor's boss, etc.

- Develop a good rapport with your internship supervisor. This is the person from whom you can learn about your career field, and the person who will assess your work and recommend your grade. Ask questions, especially when you do not understand or are unsure about your instructions.

- Taking criticism is a necessary part of working. Get used to it. Being criticized is difficult. When someone is criticizing you, follow the four cardinal rules and always take criticism:

    - **Professionally**. Avoid excuses or blaming others. Apologize and assure the person the mistake won't happen again.

    - **Politely**. Listen to the criticism with an open mind. Don't become defensive. Assume that the person doesn't mean to insult you when she gives criticism. Clarify to close the conversation so that you are clear on how to correct the mistake.

    - **Positively**. Assume that the internship supervisor has something helpful to say. Listen. Try to understand the issue and her frustration. Ask for clarification. Ask for assistance if you need help to fix the problem.

    - **Appropriately**. If the criticism is unfair or misplaced, say so. *Do so in private with the internship supervisor and be polite*. You might win the battle, but you'll lose the war if you lose your temper. If you have made a mistake or acted inappropriately for something, you'll have to take the heat. But, on the other hand, you are not responsible for accepting other people's mistakes or their poor work performance. You are responsible for you.

Setting Your Internship Schedule

Once you've been given your internship placement, you will be expected to contact your internship supervisor with a phone call to arrange your internship schedule. Your internship supervisor will be expecting to hear from you. When you are given the internship placement name and phone number - *write it down*.

The schedule you arrange with the internship placement MUST be complied with. So, before going to meet the internship supervisor, look at your current school and work and personal schedule. That way, when you go on your internship interview, you can tell the internship supervisor the exact days and times that you can complete your internship work experience. **Remember, once you have set your schedule, you are expected to comply with that schedule!** You can set your schedule in any way that is satisfactory to you and to the internship supervisor. However, if you set up your hours for Mondays and Wednesdays – you cannot later change them to Tuesdays and Thursdays. If you say you will work from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., you are expected to be at your desk at 9:00 a.m. – not driving around looking for a parking place.

Please review the following tips before you make your initial contact with your internship supervisor.

- Prepare for the call before you make it. Know the reason for the call. Have relevant data in front of you. Be prepared to take notes.

- Introduce yourself immediately when you connect with the intended person or with voice mail. Be prepared to go through a secretary to get to your internship supervisor. Be extremely polite and leave a clear message of when and where you can be reached.

- Once you connect with the proper person, reiterate why you're calling – to set up a time to meet to discuss/begin your internship. Make sure that you are dressed appropriately when you go in for your interview (this means a suit! as discussed in the internship class). You don't want to show up the first day starting off on the wrong foot.

- When your conversation is finished, repeat back any relevant information like dates, times, addresses for clarification. End the conversation with a comment like, 'thank you for your time today…I'm looking forward to beginning my internship with you Mr. Jones.'

- If you need to leave a voice mail message, it should be to the point. Leave your name, affiliation, date and time of your call. Be sure to leave a number and extension where you can be reached and a time of day that is best to call to reach you. No one likes playing phone tag. Don't try to have the conversation you would have had if the person would have been there. Leave pertinent information relevant to a follow-up call only.

- If you have left a message for the internship supervisor to return, make sure that you are at the return phone number so that they can reach you.

- Make sure that your voice mail message is appropriate and professional. Eliminate any jokes, music, religious messages and the like. You should just have a professional message such as "You have reached 419-530-3378. I'm sorry but I can't take your phone call right now. Please leave a message and I will return your phone call as soon as possible."

Phone Etiquette

In addition to using the telephone to contact your internship supervisor, some interns will be using the telephone a great deal during their internships. One way to learn how an individual law office handles phone calls is to closely observe others in the office. Here are some other general tips:

- Exercise patience on the phone and let people finish their sentences.
- Keep your voice upbeat – try smiling while you're talking – it works!
- Focus on listening
- Speak clearly so as not to be misunderstood
- Stop whatever else you are doing when you're on a business call – don't eat, watch TV, yell at your dog, shuffle papers, word process, etc.
- Never sneeze, belch, blow your nose, or chew gum.
- Imagine that the person you're speaking to is right there in front of you and act accordingly.

Professional Dress for the Law Office

Every profession has its “uniform”. The legal profession has one – a professional business suit. Each and every intern is expected to comply with this dress code. (Refer to the required reading for more on this professional business attire.)

Some general rules to apply:

- Always wear appropriate dress shoes. But, for women, you may want to put a pair of flats in your briefcase in case you should be asked to run something over to the court.

- Keep jewelry to a minimum.

- Avoid heavy colognes or fragrances of any kind (this includes scented hairsprays and lotions). Many people are allergic to fragrance. If they can’t stand to be around the fragrance you are wearing – you won’t get a good experience and certainly won’t get a job in that law firm.

- Keep make-up simple and hair styles subtle.

- Never wear sunglasses inside the work environment.

- Tattoos and piercings shouldn’t be visible during the business day.

Ethical Dilemmas at Work

Legal Ethics is an area which you will learn a great deal during the class portion of the internship. This section is not about *legal* ethics – but, rather about *work ethic.*

You are completing your internship work experience so as to learn more about this career field. The key word here is **work**. In return, you receive valuable experience, you make important connections in your career field, and you receive course credits in the bargain. he attorney is giving you this opportunity, both as a service to you and your education, and as a way of receiving additional assistance in her office.

While you’re at work, your time should be spent doing what you are expected to do. You should never straighten out your private life or do personal business while your are at work. Turn off your cell phone – forget about checking and answering personal e-mails while on your internship.

Some internship placements may give you access to Lexis, Casemaker, and other legal research services. Remember that these services are only for use on the law firm’s work. They are not to be used on class work and the like! You will be billed for any personal on-line research that you do. In addition, these services are extremely expensive. Before completing any research assignments, make absolutely sure that your attorney has given you the go-ahead to use one of these on-line services! And, once you have the go-ahead to use the service, double check how much the attorney has budgeted for this on-line research so that you don’t go over that amount.

Another basic principle involves company loyalty. The expectation is that you are now an employee, although unpaid, and you owe the law firm and your internship supervisor your professional loyalty. In your internship you will almost certainly learn things that, if disclosed, would damage clients or the law firm. All interns will sign a confidentiality oath as a part of the internship work experience. Remember that this is a contract and you could be sued for breaching that contract. Also, remember that loyalty is a valued commodity in the business world. Many employers list it as the single most important virtue

that an employee can have. Being disloyal the law firm or its representatives is unethical and can ruin your career.

While, in the internship class, we will discuss more about the ethics of law office confidentiality you should know some basics. If, for example, you see client records or financial statements, you are expected **not** to disclose this confidential knowledge to anyone at anytime. Doing so could jeopardize the attorney-client privilege or the law firm's reputation. This also applies to personal information you might inadvertently gain about a fellow employee. For example, if you overhear information or if someone directly tells you something, it is understood that you do not gossip about this or tell this to another individual. It is best to steer clear of "office gossip" whenever possible. Considering you will be the 'new guy on the block' and probably the youngest member of the legal team, you will need to be overly cautious about participating in something which might be troublesome for you later.

Here are some additional guidelines to follow in the work place:

- Be sure to know which documents you may be asked to handle are confidential, unless common sense tells you otherwise. A client's records are always confidential.

- Are you given the authority to open packages mailed to 'the office"? If they say "personal" or "confidential" can you, as a representative of your internship supervisor, open them?

- When in the law office, speak softly. Clients should not overhear discussions about or with other clients.

- Do not allow clients to read your computer screen – keep confidential documents face down at your desk when meeting with clients.

- Do not tell your friends or family what happens in the law office. This information could jeopardize clients or the law firm in some way. Friends and family may inadvertently repeat it to someone who makes a connection to you or your internship supervisor.

- Don't divulge personal information about yourself to people at work. What you tell today can come back to haunt you tomorrow.

TRIED AND TRUE COMMUNICATION TIPS

Make sure the tone of your conversation is positive. The person who goes from place to place complaining and putting down other people won't go far. Enter into a conversation wholeheartedly and listen to what is being said. Contribute when you have something valuable or relevant to say; otherwise, don't.

Make good eye contact when you talk to others. Remember to include everyone in a group of people. This lets others see that you are open and friendly. Eye contact also shows interest in what others are saying. It also makes it easier for others to respond. People who look down, away, or up when talking to another person are seen as shifty, or rude, or not really interested in the other person.

Be sure that your verbal and nonverbal messages do not conflict. You can show your interest or attentiveness by your body language as well as eye contact. Do not slump in your chair or slouch if someone is instructing you or giving you direction. Don't fidget. Watch the face of the speaker, and give nonverbal cues that you understand.

Ask questions of others and really pay attention to their answers. Questions that are not too personal are a great way to get to know your internship supervisor. They also show that you are interested in him/her. Ask questions about the job, the education required etc. It's considered impolite to ask someone how much money they make. But, you could ask what the current starting salary is for a paralegal, such as yourself, in a beginning position.

Do not swear or tell off-color jokes. Avoid questions about religion, sexual preference, or politics. Don't bring sexual topics into your conversation and steer clear of those who do. Don't use slang or phrases, which among students may be acceptable. For example, don't say things like "that's gay." That could be offensive to someone in the work place.

Pay attention. As Maya Angelou, the well known poet and author says, "be in the moment; be present." Think before you speak and act. Think about what you're about to say and do and the ramifications it will have on others. A real sign of maturity is the individual who thinks about how his behavior will affect those around him rather than just himself. Be responsible for you.

Don't interrupt others who are speaking. Don't whisper to another person when others are nearby. It sends a message that you are talking about others impolitely. Don't walk away from a conversation unless you're sure it's over. Don't start doing something else while someone is talking to you. When you're leaving for the day, be sure your internship supervisor knows. Be sure you come to closure before you go.

Pay attention to the body language of others. For instance, if you are in someone's office and she stands or walks toward the door, that is a signal that you are dismissed.

Show that you're a team player. Use *we* when referring to work done by your team. Acknowledge others' contributions, no matter how small, by using *we* instead of *I*.

Sexuality at the Workplace

A clear difference exists between flirting, romance and sexual harassment. Flirting is sometimes annoying, romances are generally forbidden by company policy, and sexual harassment is illegal. The underlying dilemma here is to know what constitutes sexual harassment. Although many companies have seminars for their employees on sexual harassment, it is always wise to know the law. Here is the definition of sexual harassment derived from Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

"Sexual harassment occurs whenever: an insinuated promise of a job or a promotion is made in return for sexual favors, or demotion or firing occurs for refusing to comply with a request for sex; or, a hostile* work environment is created; or, an explicit requirement exists that you engage in certain behavior in order to keep or get a job; or, employment decisions are premised on your response to another's behavior; or, someone else's behavior creates a hostile* or abusive work environment that changes the conditions of your job."

*A hostile work environment does not need to be aggressive or violent to fit the definition. Recent legal cases have found that unwanted touching, unwanted flirting, nude pictures of men or women, lewd body gestures and comments, and some comments about appearance and dress all rise to the level of a hostile work environment, and therefore qualify as instances of sexual harassment.

Here are some guidelines for you to follow during your internship:

- Conduct yourself professionally at all times. If you treat others courteously and professionally, chances are you'll be treated with the same respect.

- Take care with your wardrobe, especially if you are a woman. Some types of clothes send unwanted sexual messages to others. Excessive make-up, plunging necklines, super short skirts are not permitted in the internship. But, in addition, they send a message, which you do not intend.

- Don't discuss your current romance at work. Conversation like this only leads to unacceptable topics which may become offensive to you later. In addition, remember that you are there to *work*, and not to discuss personal matters.

WORKS CITED

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