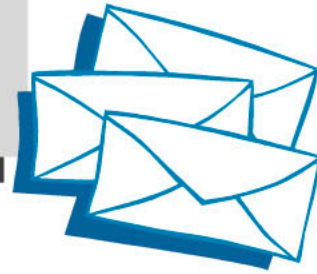

Ask Linda



Dear Linda:

I am looking for a new position in the legal assistant field. Is there a way to narrow my prospects and at the same time determine what the firms and corporations are looking for?

You are on the right track! It is a waste of your time to apply to organizations that have no intentions of employing a person with your background and skills. The question is, how do you get this information?

One of the best ways to determine what companies or firms you would like to work for is to employ my favorite technique, the Information Interview. An Information Interview is a direct way to obtain hiring and utilization criteria from the most reliable source – the organization itself. The object is to talk to people who do exactly what you want to do, or who hire people to do what you want to do.

This technique is particularly helpful in the legal assistant profession, where utilization and qualifications vary from one firm to the next. It also does the inevitable task of widening your network, which is one of the reasons I find it to be an extraordinary tool.

People are generally excited about sharing their success with others. They are glad to spend twenty minutes talking about what they do and how they got where they are. It is this peer-to-peer contact that will help you harvest a list of places you are qualified to approach, and to isolate the specific skills that will help you sell yourself to those companies.

Before you start, make a list of questions so you can prepare the interviewee for the meeting. Most importantly you will want to find out how they use their legal assistants and what their hiring requirements are. The reason? Because you are considering new or first time employment in the legal assistant field and you are doing some market research to further define what you would like to do, and where you would like to do it.

Some sample questions might include:

- ☒ Does your firm use paralegals?
- ☒ How many paralegals are on staff?
- ☒ What specialties do your paralegals work in and what exactly do they do?
- ☒ How do you train your paralegals?
- ☒ Have you ever advanced any of your paralegals to other positions in the organization? Which positions? Is this a common practice?
- ☒ What are your educational requirements?
- ☒ How much experience is required?
- ☒ Who does the interviewing and hiring?
- ☒ What kind of compensation package is offered, including base salary, bonus, overtime and benefits?

Make sure you ask every person you speak to if they can refer you to someone else who might be able to help you. Of course, send a thank you letter to every person you talk to.

If at first glance it looks like a place you might like to work, it is completely reasonable to indicate your interest in the organization. Simply mention that you have a copy of your resume with you and offer to leave it in the event they would like to consider you for future opportunities.

While you are on this venture, realize that you are distinguishing yourself as a professional with gumption, tenacity and intrigue. Remember – no guts, no glory and good luck!

Linda S. Jevahirian is a Legal Assistant and Founder and President of Legal Search & Management, Inc. She is also the past Editor-in-Chief of *The Michigan Legal Assistant*, and a published author and speaker. *Ask Linda* is a regular column featuring information about the legal assistant profession. Questions can be submitted directly to Linda at lindajev@aol.com.

