

# Valet in Auro: Appreciating the Value of Legal Assistants, Paralegals, and Clerks

**The State Bar of Wisconsin has designated February as Paralegal Month. Paralegals, legal assistants, office managers, and others who hold dozens of similar positions in law firms are a cherished resource that help make our legal system function.**

Looking back on my career, I have learned more about the nuts-and-bolts of practicing law from people who aren't lawyers than I have from other attorneys. When I was fresh out of law school, brimming with legal principles and ready to spot any issue that came my way, one of the first tasks given to me was to write a research memo for a senior partner. The research and analysis came easily enough from my educational training, but when it came time to begin typing my memorandum, I froze. What exactly did the senior partner want? Did he want two pages or 50? Should I write in flowing prose, or did he prefer English clipped to the point of almost being ungrammatical? Did he want bullet points or paragraphs? How much discussion of case law would he want? What should the heading and format of the memo look like?

For answers to these questions, I consulted the partner's legal assistant, who was an absolute font of information. I quickly learned that for anything I did not know how to do, she was the first, middle, and last person I should consult. What is the proper form for a third-party subpoena in Kansas? Does the check for witness travel need to be included with the subpoena? What definitions and instructions should I use? She had all the answers. And as I began to trust her more, the value she provided increased.

So too with my paralegals. Originally, I thought my firm had dumped me into the litigation ocean without a life jacket. Then I realized that my legal assistants and paralegals were my life jacket. Want to know even the most obscure detail of a file? Ask a paralegal. Want to make sure everything in a deed is perfect? Ask a paralegal. Want confirmation that you've correctly captured all the details from hundreds of pages of invoices in a complaint you're going to file in

10 minutes? Go back in time two days ... and ask a paralegal. (Speaking of which, the State Bar of Wisconsin Certified Paralegal Program confers a designation that recognizes the most highly qualified paralegals. People who meet the program requirements may claim that designation, to the benefit of the certified paralegals and the firms that employ them.)

A good paralegal might tell me that just because Google says "valet in auro" is Latin for "worth their weight in gold," it doesn't make it so, and the phrase I am looking for is: Haec merx pondere suo in auro constat. Quality legal assistants, paralegals, office managers, librarians, clerks, court reporters, IT professionals, accountants and those who hold dozens of similar positions are a cherished resource without which our legal system would not function. When you have a good one, never let them go. **WL**



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## State Bar of Wisconsin Paralegal Certification Program

Paralegals are dedicated professionals who devote time and effort to advance access to justice. Lawyers know and appreciate the value that well-trained paralegals provide to their clients and practice. Celebrate the paralegals in your office during February and throughout the year!



**CERTIFIED  
PARALEGAL™**

For information about the State Bar's Paralegal Certification Program, contact Dan Sitzler, [dsitzler@wisbar.org](mailto:dsitzler@wisbar.org), (608) 333-9494 ext. 6154, or visit [www.wisbar.org/](http://www.wisbar.org/) Paralegal. **WL**