

WOULD I MAKE A GOOD PARALEGAL?
THE TWELVE TOP TRAITS A PARALEGAL NEEDS

Paralegals work in a wide variety of legal areas so the skills that they need vary from job to job; for example, some of the skills that a real estate paralegal needs are different from the skills that a litigation paralegal needs. But there are a lot of skills and personality traits that are valued in all paralegals.

Think about whether you have these personality traits and abilities:

1. Ability to work with people

Are you the type of person who can maintain a calm attitude in the face of another person's anxiety? Can you keep a smile on your face and a tone of judgment out of your voice?

Most paralegals work with a lot of different people in doing their jobs: lawyers, clients, judges, court clerks, government officials, surveyors, etc. Very often these people are under stress, especially clients who may be worried about a stressful situation such as being arrested or buying an expensive home.

2. Ability to pay attention to detail

Are you the kind of person who considers life from every angle? Do you look both ways when crossing a one-way street? Do you double check to make sure your spelling is correct even after you have used spell-check? Paralegals often have to look at both sides of an issue to find the right answer for the lawyer and the client. If you consider, "What if..." when faced with a problem, you might make a good paralegal.

3. Ability to work under pressure and meet deadlines

Do you miss deadlines when you are doing your school work? Do you always have an excuse when you come home late after curfew?

Paralegals have to deal with lots of deadlines. And missing a deadline could result in a malpractice lawsuit for a lawyer. If you have a laid-back attitude and assume your work "will get done when I get around to it" being a paralegal is probably not a good fit for you. Paralegals need to meet deadlines and need to stay calm while they do so.

4. Ability to keep client information confidential

Are you the one that everyone comes to when they want to hear the latest gossip? Do you like to be the one who knows everything about everyone and share that information with whoever will listen?

If you are, you need to think about becoming a gossip columnist on an entertainment channel, not a paralegal. Paralegals need to be able to keep other people's secrets. Confidentiality is critical.

5. Ability to act honestly

Are you able to put other people's interests ahead of your own? Can you be selfless instead of selfish? If you can, then you might make a good paralegal. Paralegals must act with integrity and honesty. Clients have to be able to trust you with their deepest secrets and know that you will not use their information for your own advantage. Paralegals cannot profit by acting in conflict to their clients' interests.

6. Ability to stay organized

Does your bedroom have clothes all over the floor? Are you constantly searching through your book bag to find your homework assignment? If this sounds like you, you may have to work on developing your organizational skills before you can work as a paralegal. The ability to organize is a skill that you can practice and improve. But if you don't want to learn that skill, you will not make a good paralegal.

7. Ability to Multi-task

Can you talk on the phone and exercise on a treadmill at the same time? Do you like to knit while you watch television? If you can multi-task, you will make a good paralegal. Paralegals need the ability to handle many different tasks during the day; they may get interrupted by the phone ringing; they need to be able to set their own priorities. But please, even though you can multi-task....don't text and drive at the same time!

8. Ability to work as part of a team

Have you ever been part of a sports team? Or walked as part of a team to raise money for charity? Can you work on group projects in school, even if you don't necessarily like all the people you are working with?

Paralegals never really work alone. They work as part of a legal team led by a lawyer. You may not ever be best friends with everyone on your team, but a good paralegal will be able to develop good teamwork strategies to get results.

9. Ability to take on responsibility

Are you the one people turn to when they want someone to lead a group? Do you sometimes do more on a community project just because it interests you? If your professor needs someone in class to take on a special job, do you volunteer to help?

Paralegals need to be able to assume responsibility for their own work. Paralegals should ask for help when they need it, but they are able to work independently most of the time. If you are willing to "go the extra distance" and "give 110%" being a paralegal may be a good fit for you.

10. Ability to persevere when you run into road blocks

Do you stick with a problem until it is solved, even when it takes longer than expected? Do you like to solve puzzles and figure things out?

If you have the ability to see a problem through, then you would probably make a good paralegal. Paralegals don't leave projects lying unfinished on their desks; they stick with it until the problem is solved even if that means working longer hours than usual.

11. Ability to speak and write clearly

If you is, like, somebody who, like, nevuh no-way nuh-uh likes to talk to peepul, and who, like, always sorta kinda forgets to write down phone messages for the Fam....then think about whether you need to improve your English language skills before starting paralegal courses. Paralegals need to care about good grammar, good spelling, and good English language skills. You can learn these skills if you don't have them. But you won't make a good paralegal without them.

12. Ability to keep learning

Do you like to learn new things? Do you like to read? Do you like to think about how things can be done better? If you do, then being a paralegal may be the right choice for you. The law is always changing and a good paralegal knows that learning is a life-long pursuit. If you are willing to continue learning for the rest of your life, you will make a good paralegal. And your job will never become boring!