

## CLOSE-UP ON:

### Paralegal

■ **Job description:** Assist attorneys on all legal matters, conduct research, organize documents to be presented as evidence, draft subpoenas, interview witnesses, prepare pleas.

■ **Salary:** \$20,000 to \$25,000 for entry-level employees; upward of \$40,000 after about seven years

■ **Education:** College degree, plus a certificate from a two-semester lawyer's assistant program

■ **Skills:** To manage mountains of paperwork, you must be highly analytical, organized, detail-oriented, computer literate (WordPerfect, Lotus 1-2-3, QuattroPro), flexible, and have an affinity for working in groups.

■ **Perks:** Law remains a male-dominated field, so you'll meet *lots* of smart, eligible men and attend fancy office parties. Plus, you'll get a realistic view of the legal profession, important if you aspire to be a lawyer yourself. "Before spending sixty thousand dollars on law school, you should know what you're getting into," says Marie, thirty-one, a Federal prosecutor in Los Angeles and former paralegal. "People watched *L.A. Law* and thought the profession was glamorous. Paralegals know it means spending long hours on work that's often grueling and boring."

■ **Hours:** A forty-hour week is standard; litigation paralegals may log fifty hours or more the week before a case goes to trial.

■ **Wardrobe:** Conservative suits, skirts and blazers, tailored dresses. "If you dress like an attorney," says Jackie, twenty-three, a Chicago paralegal, "clients take you more seriously."

## Q. "What was the biggest blunder of your career?"

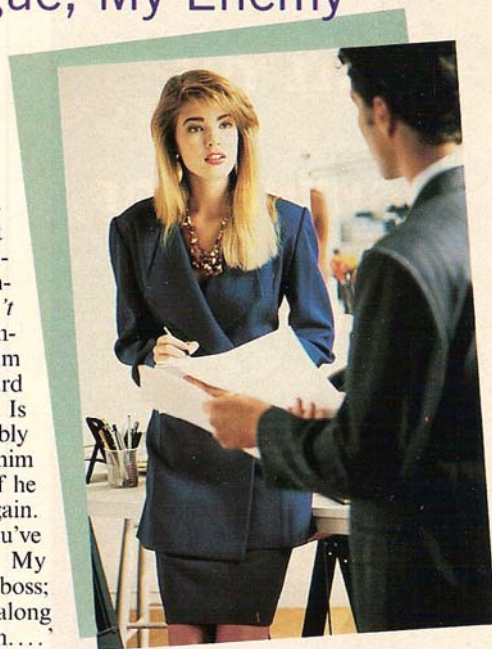
**A.** Cindy Melk, thirty-three, founder of H<sub>2</sub>O Plus (a chain of skin- and body-care boutiques with \$50 million in annual sales!): "My first two years in business, our best-selling products were exercise-related—muscle soaks, foot rubs, stress relievers. The logical next step was to expand into bodywear, so we introduced leotards, biker shorts, and sweat suits in black and neon. Well, the entire line *flopped*. We couldn't give the clothes away! It was a very bad investment and a humbling experience. But that doesn't prevent me from taking other risks. You never know whether a decision will be a mistake until it *is* a mistake. It might turn out to be a *great* idea!"

## My Colleague, My Enemy

The office barracuda has been stealing your ideas and telling coworkers you come in late, leave early, are incompetent. How to handle?

"If you're being sabotaged, you must confront the enemy calmly and directly," advises Debra Benton, author of *Lions Don't Need to Roar*. "Being combative will only make him defensive. Say, 'I've heard you've been criticizing me. Is this true?' He'll probably deny it, but you're giving him the opportunity to *stop*. If he persists, approach him again. This time, say, 'I *know* you've been badmouthing me. My next step is to go to the boss; you're welcome to come along and explain *your* position....' He'll refuse—and back off."

His accusations have turned peers against you? "Try not to be intimidated," stresses Benton. "Simply go out of your way to be helpful and friendly to these people." If you fear the malicious rumors have reached your boss, request that clients and vendors write her letters praising your work.




## Team Sports

Recently, 57 percent of executives surveyed by Accountemps, an international temporary-staffing service, reported that having "poor team-player skills" is the easiest way to kill a career. The reason: Companies are increasingly relying on collaboration, not hierarchies. "To say someone isn't a good team player," says Andrew J. DuBrin, author of *The Breakthrough Team Player: Becoming the M.V.P. on Your Workplace Team*, "is almost like saying she's dishonest."

To play fair, accept responsibility for problems, share compliments with teammates, support decisions you're not wild about, offer constructive criticism, be optimistic in tough situations. DuBrin adds that it's possible to cooperate *and* stand out: "If the team implements one of your suggestions, document it in a memo to your boss. Yes, teamwork is critical, but you still have to look out for number one."

## Six Signs Your Career Is Stalled

Suspect your star is fading? Dee Soder, an executive adviser in New York City, identifies telltale symptoms—and solutions:

1. Boss ignores your calls, memos, E-mail. Schedule an appointment through her secretary. Make it a positive meeting—try discussing strategies for generating new business—instead of a gripe session.
2. Job has become routine. Volunteer for challenging projects.
3. You've been stripped of duties. Tell your boss you *understand* the business reasons for your loss of responsibility; then suggest new tasks that will fulfill you and benefit the company.
4. You're really negative. Vacations are great attitude adjusters, so take time off. If all you can think about is how much you *dread* going back to work, it's time to update your résumé.
5. You're out of the conversation loop. Increase your visibility (and credibility) by initiating discussions of industry news and controversies.
6. Someone else got the promotion you deserved. Take a critical look at your performance, attitude, image. 



## Close-up On:

### MEETING PLANNERS

**Job description:** Coordinate conferences, conventions, incentive trips, trade shows; select locations (cities, hotels), hire speakers, organize exhibitors. Employers include corporations, professional associations, nonprofit groups, travel companies.

**Salary:** About \$25,000 per year for entry-level jobs; upward of \$50,000 with five years' experience

**Education:** Bachelor's degree; for upper-level positions, certification from the Convention Liaison Council is preferred.

**Skills:** Communication, negotiation, affinity for details, creative problem solving, knowledge of food and entertainment

**Perks:** Domestic and international travel, lots of frequent-flier miles

**Hours:** Fifty hours per week, seventy to eighty during an event. "You're on duty around the clock," says Dawn Penfold, a recruiter in the industry. "If a problem comes up at two A.M., it's yours to solve."

**Wardrobe:** Business suits, impeccable accessories, comfortable shoes

## Give Yourself a Promotion

You're terrific at what you do, but is competence enough to bring a raise? Land plum projects? "Absolutely not," says Pat Heim, author of *Smashing the Glass Ceiling: Tactics for Women Who Want to Win in Business*. "You shouldn't just sit at your desk hoping to be recognized and rewarded. To increase your chances of advancing, try to network—and self-promote—within the company." How? Trumpet your accomplishments to decision makers. When standing in the cafeteria line behind your boss's boss, chat about a project that you've completed under budget. At the company picnic, introduce yourself to the



CEO; tell him you've enjoyed working on a special task force. Sit beside a department head at the next staff meeting; mention your role in landing new clients. "Men have been bringing the conversation around to their successes for ages," notes Heim, "and women must do the same. It may feel pushy, but be your own PR director!"

## Q What was your most embarrassing experience at work?

**A** Traci Jordan, thirty-seven, partner of Motown Café, a theme-restaurant chain based in New York City: "In 1994, as vice president of music and talent at MTV, I had to make sure the recording stars had everything they needed during afternoon rehearsals for the MTV Video Music Awards. My plan was to run home afterward and change into a black sequined pantsuit, but I didn't have time. So I spent the evening in a New York Rangers jersey, leggings, Nikes, and a baseball cap. My colleagues were wearing fancy gowns and tuxedos. I laughed to keep from crying, especially when Janet Jackson asked, 'Why are you dressed like that?' At least my feet didn't hurt!"



## Having a Spring Fling? Shhhhh!

Wary of rampant charges of sexual harassment, some companies now discourage relationships between employees. Yet for many women, the office remains a prime place to meet men. That's why, if you're dating a colleague, discretion is essential. Don't arrive in the A.M. or leave in the P.M. with your beau, and avoid lingering too long with him over lunch. Most important, says Adele Scheele, author of *Career Strategies for the Working Woman*, never discuss a romance with coworkers; you don't want details to reach the boss or personal information to "remain lit up in neon in everyone's mind long after you've broken up!"

(Top) PETER CORREZZITON STONE IMAGES; (bottom) DAVID CHAMBERSTON STONE IMAGES

## Hot Jobs in the Next Millennium

Faster than you can rattle off your E-mail address, new career opportunities are sprouting along the information superhighway. "Employers are asking me to recommend qualified candidates before I even have them in the door," says David Porush, professor of cyberculture at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, in Troy, New York, and head of a team offering a new degree program in Electronic Media, Arts, and Communication. Graduates will be poised for success in these positions:

- Net ad person. Creates commercial advertising.
- Webmaster. Designs and edits home pages on the World Wide Web.
- Infostylist. Advises corporations about on-line marketing strategies.
- Datacop. Maintains system security.
- Websurfer. Corporate fact finder who acts as a reference librarian on the Web.
- Game designer. Creates interactive, product-linked games.

