

Certification

Take the Next Step

Do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803–1882

I was recently invited to attend a presentation at a local middle school where a group of attorneys were encouraging students to stay in school and go on to college, and then take the next step and apply for law school. This is strong advice for pre-teens and teenagers, whose most ardent planning is usually aimed at acquiring new designer sneakers, but it is good advice and the gist applies to everyone.

Most of you may be thinking that you've "already done the school thing. I have my degree and a great job, what more is there?" Well, that's the grownup equivalent of aspiring to a new pair of sneakers. I challenge you to consider the gratification derived from taking your career a step further by conquering NALA's CLA/CP examination or ACP courses.

We work in a field that constantly presents opportunities for learning, and we must keep up with the changing laws that affect the ways we conduct business. We are tasked to learn new ways to store the documents we use on a daily basis, and we have to learn new ways to request the important documents needed to build our cases. We are required to learn new software applications that we are told will help to make our jobs easier.

In turbulent economic times, certification provides more relevance than ever. You cannot insulate yourself from major economic trends, but you can leverage your education with certification. This demonstrates that you have taken prudent steps to keep your skills

current and make yourself a valuable employee to your current employer and/or prospective employers. Where two otherwise equal candidates are competing for the same job, one applicant's certification could prove the deciding factor.

With so many other factors out of your control, certification presents at least one variable you can control. The advantage that

certification has over other CLE is that it is graded, judged, and certified to confirm that you have met stringent standards of professional knowledge. This difference is not lost on prospective employers.

Seeking NALA certification is a huge commitment of time and mental effort, but the results more than compensate the endeavor. You not only enjoy the rewards of increased knowledge, but you gain a sharper professional perspective on the paralegal profession that comes with documented expertise.

While I cannot guarantee that becoming certified will make you another Erin Brockovich, I am convinced that it will tell employers and their

clients that you are vested in your chosen career path. So I challenge you to look beyond your *status quo*. Evaluate where you are in your career and then take the next step.

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She is currently Treasurer and has held a number of other leadership positions with the Alabama Association of Paralegals, Inc. She is a frequent seminar instructor and an instructor for the Jefferson State Community College paralegal program in Birmingham, AL. She earned her associates degree in Paralegal Studies from Virginia College at Birmingham and has a BS in Criminal Justice from Virginia College at Birmingham. She recently earned her JD degree from Miles Law School, Fairfield, AL.

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