

Tools of the Trade

“Top 10 Tips for Recession-Proofing Your Paralegal Career”

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Paralegals are not immune from the effects of an economic downturn. Here are some tips that may help you recession-proof your career:

- 1. Build a Contingency Plan.**
Don't be surprised by a sudden layoff. Keep your eyes and ears open and your resume current. Be familiar with the allied fields in which your paralegal skills are in demand. Explore alternative employment options (e.g.: state/federal jobs, independent contractor and/or temporary positions.)
- 2. Focus on Quantity and Quality.**
Stay motivated. Keep your focus on high output and quality work.
- 3. Be Flexible and Diversify.**
Be willing to work fewer hours; or if fewer staff members are available, be willing to work longer hours and/or travel to satellite offices (if necessary). In a downturn, bankruptcies, foreclosures, and employment litigation cases increase - offer to learn these practice areas. If you are experienced, be willing to mentor others.
- 4. Stay Ahead of the Competition.**
Examine your core competencies and compare yourself with others in the field. Are you performing at your experience level? Do you have above average technology skills? What distinguishes you from others of similar education and experience? Do you have a degree? Are you a certified paralegal?
- 5. Be Manageable.**
A positive attitude sets you apart. Maintain or improve your people skills; communicate effectively and professionally. Be a team player.
- 6. Create Name Recognition.**
Use your skills to help community programs and charities or serve as an officer of your state/national paralegal organization. Create a bright spot on your resume.
- 7. Don't Price Yourself Out of the Market.**
To avoid layoff, be willing to accept a pay reduction. If laid off, be willing to accept a lower paying position with future potential.
- 8. Manage Your Online/Offline Identities.**
You can be certain that employers (or recruiters) will find your blog and/or personal pages on networking sites. If typing your name in a browser results in multiple links to words and/or pictures of you engaged in less than professional behavior, your job could be at risk. Employers are especially sensitive to employees who attract the wrong kind of attention or who expose the firm to liability.
- 9. Make a Commitment to Education and Training.**
In any economy, the most valuable paralegals are those who have highly developed critical thinking, quantitative, and written and oral communication skills. Demonstrate your commitment to improving yourself and your profession by making a lifelong commitment to continuing education. If you can't immediately enroll in a degree program, take a few courses that will increase your skill set.
- 10. Maintain Your Credentials and Professional Memberships.**
Join your state and national paralegal organizations and maintain your network of contacts. They may help you find work if the unexpected happens.

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