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5 Tips for Avoiding Burnout

Harnessing AI for Efficiency in Personal Injury Research

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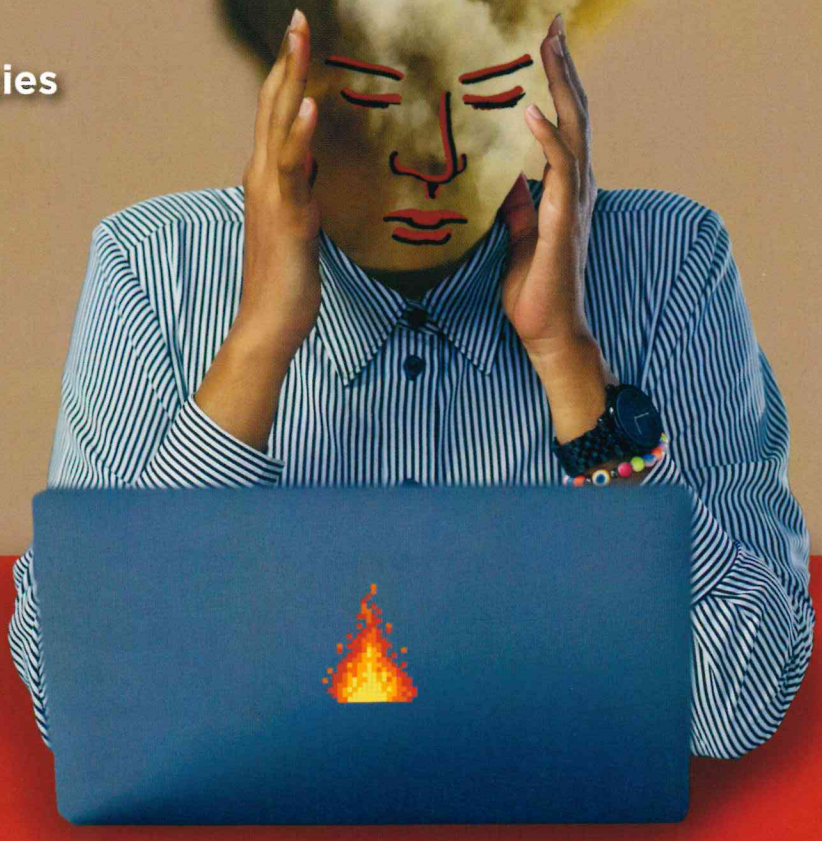

2021 APEX AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE

NALA THE PARALEGAL ASSOCIATION

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EDITION

5 Tips for Avoiding Burnout

Written by Lauren D. Wright, ACP

We have all heard of that great paralegal who seems to be at the top of their game—supporting complex cases, mentoring other paralegals, active in local and national paralegal organizations—yet makes a sudden career swerve away from paralegal work. Why would someone leave the career that they built so carefully, seemingly at the peak of their job trajectory and earning potential? As someone who made such a swerve once told me, they just felt burned out.

It is not hard to understand how a paralegal could reach the point of burnout. Between long hours, unpredictable trial schedules, demanding clients, tough cases, technology that puts you on a never-ending learning curve, constant deadlines, and email/phone systems that make you far too available, it is a lot.

A great paralegal career is built through years of job experience, and we need to be able to navigate stressful times at every stage, which is easier said than done. Here are five tips to help you maintain your motivation, even when you are stressed.

1. Seek one-on-one mentorship. When building your career, seek the counsel of more experienced paralegals. It is humbling to ask others for advice or help, but it is critical to accept that you have a lot to learn. Finding a mentor, someone who has your back and is willing to show you the ropes, is invaluable. My greatest mentor is now retired after a long and

successful paralegal career, but her support in those early days, when I did not even know how to e-file a pleading, was a gift that kept me going during tough times. When I think of everyone who helped me early in my paralegal career, the list is long. Reflecting on those generous people fills me with rejuvenating gratitude. Are you asking for help when you need it?

2. Build a paralegal network you can count on. While my paralegal education and on-the-job learning experiences have enhanced my skill set, I still reach out to my network of paralegals when I truly cannot figure something out. My group is made up of former coworkers and members of online paralegal forums. Find your people, ask questions, and contribute your knowledge. It will help you bolster your confidence and expand your expertise.

3. Never stop learning. Through NALA's Certified Paralegal and Advanced Certified Paralegal Programs, I have rediscovered my joy for the challenges of learning. I have been able to brush up on my test-taking skills, which had gone rusty since my college years, and it has been reinvigorating to work hard to better myself. My kids watched me prepare for tests, and I enjoyed demonstrating the study skills I want them to gain. Regardless of what was going on at my job at the time, obtaining my certifications made me feel like I was moving forward and in control of my career path.

4. Write it down. It is easy to lose track of how much you have done and lose sight of your goals. Try keeping a handwritten journal to record what you are doing and write down your goals. In the day-to-day grind, it may not seem like much, but when you read it back, you might be surprised at what you have accomplished. You are more likely to reach goals you write down, even if you are not sure you can. It is not magic. When you commit your thoughts to paper, you take them (and yourself) more seriously.

5. Remember your "why." I work as a litigation paralegal on complex product liability cases resulting in serious injury or death. Clients may feel that few people have seen the depth of their pain or loss, but paralegals have often encountered it through the evidence we collect, categorize, and produce in discovery. A paralegal witnesses the smallest details of a client's case. The record of someone's worst day will stay with me for years. A client at trial once hugged me when I told him how many times I had thought of the real person behind the file on my laptop. My quiet, behind-the-scenes work is important to real people. That is my why. What is yours?

Maybe you are a real estate paralegal who helps people complete paperwork to acquire their first home, a family law paralegal who helps people navigate divorce and child custody issues, or a personal injury paralegal who helps people manage the aftermath of auto accidents. Regardless of your specialty, the paralegal work you do has a greater purpose than helping your firm or making money. When we remember that, it helps us stay on fire to keep going without burning out.

Lauren D. Wright, ACP, is a litigation paralegal with the Atlanta-based firm, Cannella Snyder LLC. She has built a career specializing in supporting complex product liability and personal injury cases from discovery through trial. She is a graduate of Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, and received her paralegal certificate from Volunteer State College in Gallatin, Tennessee. She is a member of the Georgia Trial Lawyers Association (Paralegal Division) and Attorneys Information Exchange Group (AIEG).

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