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## 2005 SALARY SURVEY

Welcome to our highly anticipated first edition for 2006! This year we had a tremendous response to the annual salary survey; 136 regular members and 46 student members responded, representing over half of our current membership!

The trends towards increased salary continued this year. The majority of the respondents work in the litigation area, however representation in the areas of corporate and securities continues to grow. There is an increasing number of members who reported receiving such benefits as a health club membership or parking. The progress in our profession is reflected annually in this salary survey. Thank you for the fantastic response and we look forward to improving the results next year!

In addition to the salary survey, we bring you two great articles, reprinted with the kind permission of *Legal Assistant Today*. The first article will provide a refresher on communication skills, while the second article shows you ways to ensure that you find a job which will maximize your paralegal skills instead of focusing on secretarial duties.

A new committee consisting of paralegals from across the country has been struck, the Paralegal Alliance Task Force. The Task Force's mandate is discussed on pages 8 and 9.

Lastly, keep your eyes on your in-tray for further information regarding the April AGM and the Spring Dinner to be held in May.

Enjoy. We hope you will find something within these pages to enlighten and educate.

*Christine Uhrmann, Editor*

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2005/06

John Kim—President  
 Phone: 604.661.7541  
 email: John@pmaclaw.com

Christine Uhrmann—Secretary/Newsletter Editor  
 Phone: 604.891.7745  
 email: cru@cwilson.com

Jerena Tobiasen—Director  
 Phone: 604.331.8306  
 email: jtobiasen@kmslawyers.com

Esther Van Leening—Director/Kelowna  
 Phone: 1-250-860.9997  
 email: paralegal@uniserve.net

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 email: levenson@harpergrey.com

Capilano College Student Representatives  
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 email: pterlecki@telus.net

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 email: jrbains@farris.com

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 email: spb@cwilson.com

Andrea MacDonald—Director/Newsletter Committee  
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 email: am@svslawyers.com

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 Email: janet.crnkovic@icbc.com

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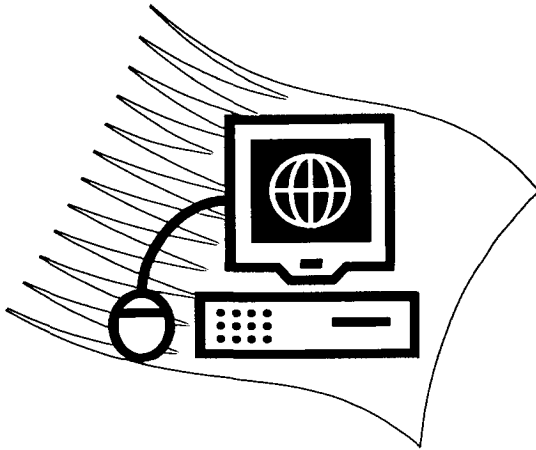
The BCPA would like to welcome each of the new members and all of our renewing members,  
 your support is greatly appreciated.  
 We look forward to meeting you in the future.

### NOTICE

The opinions expressed in the *Paralegal Press* are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the BC Paralegal Association (BCPA). BCPA cannot assume liability for errors or omissions.

If you are interested in re-printing any of the articles in this newsletter please contact Christine Uhrmann or Andrea MacDonald.

## WEBSITE UPDATE



The BCPA website will begin some reconstruction in the next few months, in order to bring you more current information and greater contact with the Board and your colleagues. If you have any specific comments regarding the website development, please send them to anyone of the directors at [info@bcparalegalassociation.com](mailto:info@bcparalegalassociation.com).

*BCPA Board of Directors*

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### BCPA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

APRIL 12, 2006

People's Law School

### CELEBRATING PARALEGALISM TOGETHER

Mark your calendars for May 17, 2006  
The BCPA will be hosting a Spring time celebration!!

Cocktails, wonderful food, laughter, and  
a focus on the progress of Paralegalism in  
British Columbia.

Watch your mail, full details will be coming soon.



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***LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY***  
***Skills that can make or break your career***

By: Elizabeth A. Gillis

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When you think about it, our duties as paralegals are all about communication. We impart information to clients, lawyers and staff by telephone conference, voice messages, e-mails, one-on-one meetings, group discussions, seminar delivery and through written documents such as memorandum and letters. The more effectively you make a point or present an idea, the greater the level of acceptance by the listener. Although every paralegal understands this concept, not everyone is conscious of it every time communication is initiated. So whether you are a rookie fresh out of paralegal school or a manager with a dozen years of experience, brushing up on the main principles for effective verbal and written communication will keep you at the top of your game.

### **Stating Your Case**

Many types of verbal communication are important in our work environment, such as speaking to inform or persuade people, leading a discussion, making a presentation and interviewing a job applicant. I shall limit my comments to three skills you can develop to help effectively present ideas or share knowledge. These tips are sound for speaking to both individuals and a group.

First, know what you are going to say. In any business situation in which you are speaking to an individual or a group, you must know what you want to communicate. This involves not just having knowledge about the topic with the facts and figures to support it, but also organizing your thoughts so you present the material in a logical and well thought-out manner. If possible, I practice an important conversation before hand. For example, I might need to call a client or a lawyer for a decision on what to do. Often, I will rehearse what I want to say in my mind or out loud if no one is nearby. Then, when I speak to the person, I know exactly what I need to tell the person so he or she can make the decision I need. Busy professionals don't have time to listen to you waffling. You need to speak clearly and concisely to effectively deliver information.

The second important principle is learning to communicate assertively. This will give you the confidence to believe that people really do want to hear what you have to say. Your goal is to engage your audience. You can do this through non-verbal cues, such as body language and emotions, which some experts say can have more influence than spoken words.

Exhibit an assertive manner, communicate concern and strength, remain relaxed and state honestly what you think about the topic. If you take yoga, you know the Mountain Pose in which you stand relaxed but erect. I have found that adopting this pose when I talk to someone who might make me nervous – such as during a visit to a senior partner's office – keeps me quiet inside and promoting confidence. Other body language to remember includes keeping eye contact ( but not staring) and smiling if it's appropriate. This will help relax you and the person or people you are communicating with.

Being assertive also requires you acknowledge the person with whom you are having a conversation. For example, you should check with your listener that your point has been understood. This is a useful skill when imparting important or extensive information. You might say to the person, "Have I explained my point clearly? Do you understand what I mean?" Then listen attentively to his or her response. This demonstrates respect for your listener's position and ideas and sets the tone for him or her to treat you the same way.

Finally, how you deliver your message is important. In Peter Urs Bender's ([www.peterursbender.com](http://www.peterursbender.com)) book "Secrets of Powerful Presentations" (The Achievement Group, Toronto, 1991), he suggests not talking down to your audience by using words that are too sophisticated or come across as arrogant in your knowledge of your subject. In other words, be careful not to lecture. Bender stresses the important of using language your audience will understand. He said the most powerful words to use in communication are short ones. Also, along with the words you use, consider your tone, which might vary depending on whom you talk to and the subject. For example, if you talk to a client about his or her file, you will want to appear professional, knowledgeable and friendly; whereas if you discipline a staff member, your tone might be more serious and formal.

**Power of the Written Word.** The results of badly written communication is lost time and money because of confusion about the presented information. While many of the tips for verbal communication apply to written communication, the difference is that you don't have the advantage of seeing your audience react and getting immediate feedback. Therefore, your written words must convey everything you want to say clearly and concisely the first time. Effective writing can be divided into four parts: planning what you will write, writing the document, formatting the document, and editing and proof-reading.

**Planning the Document.** When I start writing, I think about the document's purpose. If I send documents to a client to get a signature, the client needs to know what the document is, who must sign it, what actions to take such as dating it or filling in information, and how and to whom to return the document. Another example is writing a memorandum to a lawyer outlining certain information. I consider how much knowledge on the subject the lawyer will already have. I don't want to waste his or her time reading information he or she already knows.

I also consider how my reader will use the information. It might be for a lawyer's meeting with a client, or the lawyer might forward the memorandum to the client, in which case I make sure the tone is professional and the language is understandable to the client. I also consider how the information will affect the reader.

For example, if a client has forgotten to sign a document, instead of saying "You failed to execute the document so it is impossible to file it," you might say, "Unfortunately, I have to return one of the documents to you, and as soon as you sign it, we will file the document." Finally, I do my reading, gather my facts and logically organize the information into a sequential manner.

**Writing the Document.** Once you know what you are going to say and what your reader expects from the document, you can start to write it. Your document must be grammatically correct and follow the principles of good composition:

- Use the active voice versus the passive voice;
- Avoid legalese; and
- Use clear and concise language instead of flowery, vague language.

Another important consideration for when you write is the tone of your document. I have found that in an effort to be precise, many paralegals can come across as terse in their writing. Instead, try to keep a friendly tone and keep the words positive instead of negative.

Finally, consider that the available time for a busy professional to read a letter or memorandum might only be a few minutes. If your document is lengthy, it's useful to summarize at the beginning of the document, setting out what the document is about and the result you have achieved.

For example, when I write a memorandum reporting on a minute book review, the first paragraph of the report is a summary of what I have reviewed, the reason for the review and result of the review. Then, I go into more detail to give the background information.

**Formatting.** When you communicate verbally, you think about your body language, voice, facial expression and so forth. Similarly, when you write a document, you should think about the way it looks. Jane Griesdorf of the Writing Consultants in Toronto ([www.writingconsultants.com](http://www.writingconsultants.com)) calls this "eye candy," and in her workshops for lawyers and paralegals, she lists the following as part of what a reader wants:

- Readable fonts such as Arial and Times New Roman;
- 12 point font;
- Tabulated lists;
- Good margins;
- Frequent paragraph breaks;
- Scannable headings as a document "road map."

**Editing and Proofreading.** You can write the clearest, most concise document, but if you have typographical errors in it, lawyers will lose trust in the work you do for them. Accuracy is critical, and good proofreading skills are essential. I train our paralegals to read complete documents three times.

The first read through is for content, to check that all information and facts are accurate and presented logically. The second read is for grammar, sentence construction, typing errors and misspellings. At this stage it's important not to rely on the word processor's spell check feature because it can miss an incorrectly spelled word and will not notice if you use "two" instead of "too." For example, check that all tenses are active and not passive, and look for any words that can be trimmed. Also, make sure sentences are short and simple. The third and final read is to double check formatting. It's important to aim for consistency. For example, make sure the numbering or bullet style is the same throughout.

When I proofread, I place a ruler under the line I read to spot errors more easily. Another trick is to read from right to left. Finally, try setting aside the document for a time. A fresh look can help.

### **Strengthening Your Communication Skills**

Although we speak and write everyday, that doesn't mean we have developed effectively skills. Effective communication develops through constant practice and training, but the results are well worth the time and effort. Many organizations – such as Toastmasters International ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)), the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers ([www.canadianspeakers.org](http://www.canadianspeakers.org)) or the U.S. National Speakers Association ([www.nsaspeaker.org](http://www.nsaspeaker.org)) - provide opportunities to learn techniques that can improve presentation skills. Other organizations, including colleges, offer programs in communications both written and verbal.

Whether you are a first year legal assistant or a 10 year veteran, honing your communication skills will help strengthen your persuasiveness and enhance your career.

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## **REINFORCING PARALEGALISM IN CANADA: THE PARALEGAL ALLIANCE TASK FORCE**

By Jerena Tobiasen

In the spring of 2005, the Canadian Association of Paralegals (CAP) heard a proposal by Jerena Tobiasen that a task force be struck to investigate the status of paralegalism across Canada. The same proposal was also presented to the BC Paralegal Association. Both associations recognized the value of Canadian paralegals working together and encouraged Ms. Tobiasen to establish the task force.

In August 2005, the first meeting of the Paralegal Alliance Task Force ("PATF") took place by conference call. Paralegals representing seven of Canada's 13 jurisdictions joined in the telephone call. From the exchange of information during that conference and subsequent conferences and correspondence, PATF crafted its mandate, which is to be submitted to each existing paralegal association for endorsement. The mandate reads as follows:

### **MANDATE OF THE PARALEGAL ALLIANCE TASK FORCE**

"The Paralegal Alliance Task Force ("PATF") is an independent volunteer committee of paralegals, some of whom are directors of the Canadian Association of Paralegals (CAP) ("CAP") and others of whom are directors of provincial paralegal associations, all of whom work under the supervision of lawyers.

PATF will investigate the conditions of paralegalism within Canada and recommend ways in which to improve those conditions. Initial interests include unification of supervised paralegals throughout Canada, standardizing the education and practice of paralegals, establishing a solid foundation for paralegal networking within Canada, and promoting public awareness of paralegalism across Canada.

Any recommendations made by PATF will be submitted to CAP's board and the board of every other participating paralegal association (the "Interested Parties").

From time to time PATF will submit to the Interested Parties recommendations, proposals and suggestions, and invite the Interested Parties to respond. PATF has the right to establish and alter its agenda at its option, and will not be unduly influenced by any of the Interested Parties.

Although any initial, reasonably incurred expenses of PATF will be born by CAP, participating paralegal associations will be informed and may, in future, participate in the ongoing cost of supporting PATF.

PATF acknowledges the practice of independent paralegals in certain Canadian provinces. While the practice of independent paralegalism within Canada is not within the scope of PATF's mandate, PATF will monitor the status of independent paralegalism."

In addition to the mandate, PATF prioritized the first tasks it would address. Those tasks, in order of priority are:

1. Present the PATF mandate to the board of each pre-existing paralegal association for endorsement.
2. Consider the relationship of various pre-existing paralegal associations, including CAP; discuss ways to improve the relationship; consider proposals for change where required.
3. Consider effective ways of communicating amongst paralegal associations.
4. Consider areas where paralegalism can be standardized, including education, certification, and employment standards.



PATF Members are:

Member	Jurisdiction	Member	Jurisdiction
Jerena Tobiasen, <i>Chair</i>	British Columbia	Janice Anderson	Manitoba
Samantha Kuypers	British Columbia	Madeleine Gauthier	Ontario
Christine Uhrmann	British Columbia	Mindy Dodds	Ontario
Lynda McNie	Alberta	Patricia Tunstall	Quebec
Roger O'Donnell	Alberta	Bradley Moss	Newfoundland
Robyn Taylor	Saskatchewan		

PATF members have resolved to meet every two months to discuss the progress of their various tasks. The next meeting is scheduled for March 7<sup>th</sup>. For that meeting, PATF members have been charged with completing the first task. PATF will keep paralegals apprised of their work and findings by occasional publication of articles or reports.

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## 2005 BCPA SALARY SURVEY

For its 2005 Salary Survey, the Association had 136 completed surveys returned from its Members. As was done last year, the BCPA included the Student Members in its survey results. A total of 45 Student Members also responded.

However, due to the fact that the information on the surveys could not be standardized between the Regular and Student Members, for the purposes of analyzing the survey data, the survey results have been kept separate.

### **Paralegal Statistics**

As numerous variables impact upon the salaries earned by our respondents - for example, geographic region - rather than providing one dimensional salary averages, this year all information pertaining to salary has been listed in the tables following this written analysis. These tables are broken down first by area of law practiced and second by years of experience.

### **Employment as a Paralegal**

This year, of our 136 respondents, all but 3.68% were employed as paralegals. Of the paralegals:

- 87.5% worked in law firms;
- 5.88% worked in corporations;
- 1.47% worked for government agencies;
- less than 1% worked for law societies;

the remainder of our respondents had "other" employers, including bank law, public & private companies, and disability rights advocacies.

### **Circumstances of Employment**

In 2005, 85.03% of our respondents worked on a full-time basis; 8.82% worked on a part-time basis; 3.68% worked on contract; 1.47% identified themselves as being self employed and less than 1% responded that the conditions of their employment were "other".

The following figures are average results from all respondents:

Ave. Hourly Billing Rate:	\$100.95
Ave. # of Sick Days:	8.41
Ave. Vacation in Days:	18.72
Ave. # Hrs Worked/Week:	35.5
Ave. Annual Target:	1,260
Ave. Salary Increase:	4.69%

71% of our respondents are required to bill hours; however, only 27.2% of all respondents had an annual billing target. The median billing target was again 1,200 this year, with the low being 1,000 and the high being 1,500 per year.

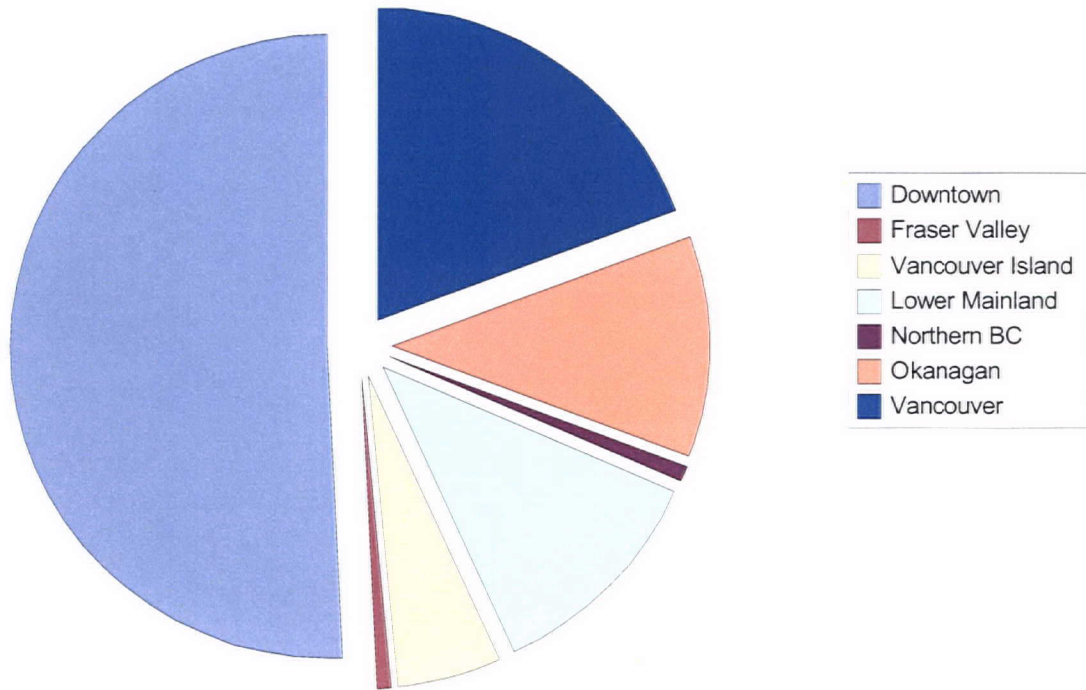
49% of our respondent are paid overtime, while 51% are not.

62% of our respondents feel that they are fairly compensated, while 38% of our respondents feel they do not receive fair compensation for the work they do.

72.5% of our respondents receive an annual performance review.

As in the past years, the majority of the respondents are employed in the downtown Vancouver core. The following diagram shows a breakdown of our respondents by geographic region:

### Paralegal Regional Demographics



Highest Level of Legal Education:

Legal Assistant Certificate	46%
Legal Assistant Diploma	39%
Legal Secretarial	5%

*The remainder of respondents having either no formal legal training, or did not indicate.*

Highest Level of Education Generally:

High School	2.94%
Some Post Secondary	73.53%
Bachelor Degree	7.35%
Masters Degree +	less than 1%

*The remainder not replying.*

Secretarial Support:

Personal Secretary	4%
Shared Secretary	34%
Word Processing	7%
No Secretarial Support	43%

*The remainder not replying.*