

Role of the Paralegal in Compliance and Corporate Governance

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I. INTRODUCTION

Depending on the law firm, a very experienced legal assistant is frequently promoted into the position of a paralegal, based upon the number of years of experience in a specialized field. There are recognized paralegal and legal assistant diploma or certificate programs coupled with practical experience and mentoring by a lawyer that can lead to an individual being designated as a paralegal in a law office.

Currently, there is no accredited process, nor governing body for becoming a paralegal in Alberta. However, depending on whether a person meets the membership requirements they may be entitled to apply for a designation of “APP”, granted to members in good standing, by a non-profit society called the Alberta Association of Professional Paralegals (“AAPP”).

“The objectives and goals of the AAPP are to provide and maintain an organization for Paralegals; to promote professional unity and mutual assistance amongst Paralegals; and to promote ongoing educational opportunities. The mission is to become recognized for the work that Paralegals do and the knowledge that they have.”¹

This paper is written from the context of a paralegal trained and working within a law firm.

II. ROLE AND DUTIES

Once an individual has achieved a designation of paralegal, bestowed upon them by the lawyer or law firm where they are employed, there is an expectation that this individual has attained a certain knowledge base, professionalism and confidence that represents the lawyer or law firm appropriately. The level of trust and scope of that paralegal’s duties

¹ Excerpt taken from the About Us page of the Alberta Association of Professional Paralegals webpage at www.alberta-paralegal.com

will typically be determined on a lawyer-by-lawyer, law firm by law firm, file-by-file basis.

A paralegal is one of the many valuable support staff within a law firm who assist a lawyer or group of lawyers on a variety of legal transactions. Generally they are specialized in a particular area and they have the skill-set to begin and complete routine tasks with minimal supervision. Some key examples of the required skill-set of paralegals include:

- Professional attitude and takes pride in their work;
- High level of integrity and ethics;
- Logical and critical thinker;
- Organized;
- Detail oriented;
- Efficient time manager;
- Good people skills;
- Team player;
- Knowledgeable in their field;
- Willingness to learn, improve and accept feedback;
- Resourceful;
- Can do personality;
- Independent; and
- Self-motivated and keen initiative.

As a paralegal continues in their career these skills become fine-tuned and add a valuable element to the output and interactions that person has internally and externally.

Depending on the needs of the lawyer a paralegal is working for, the black and white of their duties may include:

- Opening files, client identification and verification when applicable;