From Paralegal to Educator: Insights from Those Who Made the Transition

Many paralegals have considered making the transition from paralegal to paralegal educator. The Professional Development Committee (PDC) reached out to several paralegal educator superstars who started as paralegals for their experiences and their insights about paralegal education.

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What first prompted you to consider moving from practicing as a paralegal into paralegal education? Was there a particular experience in practice that made you realize you wanted to teach future paralegals?

Cathy: I had started working at Faulkner part-time while still working for the law firm. I did some substituting for professors and tutored students. I also worked with student events and encouraged students to take advantage of local paralegal meetings and CLEs. When the opportunity presented itself to work at Faulkner full-time, I really hadn't thought about leaving the firm. It was just a God thing that the opportunity presented itself. After much debate with myself, I decided the best future for me was with the University. I wanted to continue building relationships with students as I had done during the part-time period. I also wanted to continue to grow our paralegal department.

Darleen: I was asked by a friend from church to teach a paralegal class one semester—bankruptcy. I knew nothing about it and had never worked in it, but it sounded fun. After the first night of teaching, I knew that's what I wanted to do.

Linda: I've always loved being a paralegal, but over the years I discovered that I equally loved sharing what I'd learned with other paralegals. I was constantly looking for ways to

work smarter, become more efficient, and solve problems, and I genuinely enjoyed sharing those tips, tricks, and time-saving techniques with others. Whether it was introducing a better way to organize a case file, creating a workflow that saved hours of work, or showing someone a shortcut they had never considered, I found a lot of satisfaction in helping other legal professionals succeed. Eventually, I realized I wanted to make an even bigger impact by teaching future paralegals before they ever stepped into a law office. My goal has never been just to teach legal concepts. It's to help students become confident, efficient, and well-prepared professionals who are ready to thrive from day one.

Kristine: I never really set out thinking, "I'm going to become a professor someday." Honestly, I still laugh a little every time my students call me "Professor." I usually look over my shoulder to see who they're talking to. For me, teaching happened because I couldn't stop mentoring. Throughout my career, I found myself training new paralegals (and attorneys), speaking at conferences, serving in professional associations, and answering questions from students and colleagues. I realized that one of my favorite parts of being a paralegal wasn't just doing the work. It was helping someone else realize they were capable of doing the work. I wanted students to enter the profession with confidence, curiosity, and realistic expectations, not just textbook knowledge.

Deana: I was serving on the paralegal advisory committee at my local community college when the program director decided to begin team teaching the substantive law courses. He asked me to team teach Tort Law with him. He provided the legal theory, and I taught the practical skills paralegals need when working on a tort claim or defense. Later, a graduate appeared before a magistrate to "get more information" for a "client" in a probate matter—unwittingly stepping into the unauthorized practice of law. That moment made it clear: our program desperately needed a stand-alone ethics course, and I realized how much I wanted to help bridge the gap between classroom theory and real-world legal practice.

What aspects of paralegal practice did you most want to bring with you into the classroom?

Cathy: I wanted students to know that the job, while it did have its baseline responsibilities, was one that you could create and mold into what you wanted. My attorneys were always willing to let me take on more responsibilities and to grow my position into something I truly enjoyed doing. I still want students to know that by doing their best, they can not only grow the position into something more than a job but also into a career where they are the best and their attorney is the best. I still try to prepare them for the pressure and fast pace of a firm.

Darleen: I want students to understand what a day in a law firm is really like, not what they may see on TV. I want them to know the good, the bad, and the ugly of the legal field.

Linda: Real-world practical skills. Students don't just need to know what the rules say. They need to understand how those rules are applied in an actual law office. More importantly, they need to understand that no paralegal knows everything, and no one expects them to. What makes an exceptional paralegal is being curious, tenacious, and resourceful, and knowing where to find reliable answers when they don't know something. I wanted to bring the organizational, professional, critical-thinking, communication, technology, and problem-solving skills that practicing paralegals use every single day into the classroom. My goal is to help students become confident lifelong learners who know how to research, ask questions, and figure things out because that's exactly what successful paralegals do throughout their careers.

Kristine: The human side. Legal work is never just about documents and deadlines. It's about trust, relationships, judgment, communication, and problem-solving. I also wanted students to understand that organization isn't just a personality trait. It's a professional skill. The ability to anticipate needs, communicate effectively, stay calm under pressure, and adapt to constant change is what makes exceptional paralegals.

Deana: I try to focus on the practical, hands-on skills paralegals use every day. When I started my career, I understood legal concepts, but I did not yet know how to draft a complaint or manage the practical steps of a case. I want program graduates to leave with the confidence and skills to contribute in the workplace with little to no on-the-job training.

Which skills from your work as a paralegal have proven most valuable in your role as an educator?

Cathy: Being organized (in my own fashion!) to make sure materials are covered, and also having personal communication skills. Not every student is going to learn the same way, just like sometimes we have to communicate with our clients in different ways. You have to know your students to bring out the best in them.

Darleen: I teach 16 different classes each year, so organization and calendaring are very important in teaching. Being able to pull information together to present a picture (as you would in trial prep) is important.

Linda: Communication, organization, and the ability to break complicated topics into manageable pieces have been invaluable. As a litigation paralegal, I was constantly juggling deadlines, explaining procedures, coordinating with attorneys, and managing complex cases. Those same skills translate directly into teaching. They help me present difficult legal concepts in a way that's practical, understandable, and relevant.

Kristine: Probably curiosity. The law changes. Technology and clients change constantly. Being comfortable saying, "I don't know…let's find out together," has served me well both

as a paralegal and as an educator. The other skill is translating complexity into something approachable. Paralegals do that every day with attorneys, clients, vendors, and courts. Teaching is really an extension of that.

Deana: The most valuable skills have been managing time and deadlines, working with difficult personalities, prioritizing multiple projects at once, and explaining complex legal concepts in a way that a layperson can understand.

In what ways did your experience working with attorneys, clients, courts, or administrative agencies help prepare you to teach?

Cathy: There is a lot of administrative work. It is not all about the classroom. Attendance, syllabi, tweaking the curriculum, technology, and sometimes discipline issues are a huge part of teaching. Deadlines are huge not just for students to turn in their assignments, but also for getting courses ready, grades in, and reports done for reporting purposes.

Darleen: Because of my experience working with legal professionals, I can help students understand the importance of maintaining positive professional relationships with court and administrative agency personnel. These people can be invaluable assets, especially when you're not quite sure what to do. Having personal experience can provide stories of both positive and negative events to give students a better understanding of what may happen.

Linda: Working with so many different personalities taught me that every person learns differently. Attorneys have different expectations, clients have different communication styles, and every court operates a little differently. That experience reminds me that there isn't just one right way to teach a concept. Good teaching requires flexibility, patience, and understanding where someone is starting from.

Kristine: It gave me stories. Students remember stories far longer than they remember PowerPoint slides. Every filing gone wrong, every difficult client conversation, every deadline that almost went sideways, and every successful collaboration becomes a teaching opportunity. Those experiences help students understand not only what to do, but why it matters. My students also enjoy a good "Ripped from the Headlines" class discussion.

Deana: Working directly with attorneys, clients, courts, and agencies gave me a realistic understanding of how legal work actually happens. I learned how to tailor communication to different audiences, manage expectations, adhere strictly to court rules, and stay calm under pressure. These real-world experiences allow me to give students practical context alongside legal theory, helping them understand not just what a paralegal does, but why professionalism matters.

How do you incorporate your own legal practice experience into the curriculum?

Cathy: We talk a lot about evaluating a project before starting it to make certain that we are using our time wisely. I stress the importance of being proficient in technical areas to make certain we are being efficient and effective. We also go over drafting, when to use or not use AI, file organization, and trial prep.

Darleen: By giving specific examples of things that happened in cases (of course without revealing client confidences). I share practices I put in place to help with my everyday tasks.

Linda: Almost every lesson includes stories from actual practice. I use real examples, anonymized situations, common mistakes I've seen and made over nearly three decades, and practical tips that students simply won't find in a textbook. I want students to leave class thinking, "I can picture myself handling that situation."

Kristine: Constantly. Almost every class includes real examples from practice. We analyze actual court rules, use legal technology, discuss current events affecting the profession, and work through practical scenarios. I want students to leave class feeling like they already have one foot in the profession.

Deana: I weave my practice experience into the curriculum through real-world case scenarios and practical “war stories.” Over 15 years in practice provided a wealth of situations to draw from. Sharing these moments helps students see how substantive concepts, office dynamics, legal ethics, strict deadlines, and client communication intersect in real life.

What types of real-world assignments or simulations do you find most effective in preparing students for paralegal work?

Cathy: We draft pleadings, work with billing programs, and handle calendaring. We create a law firm from scratch and do resumes, mock interviews, and elevator pitches to make sure students find jobs when they complete the program. One of the students’ favorite courses is our mock trial course, where they take a case through trial.

Darleen: Drafting legal documents is a very effective way of showing students what they may be doing in a real law firm. In Family Law, we draft divorce documents. In Wills & Estates, we draft a will and then the probate documents for the person after death. In Civil Litigation, we take a case from the initial situation, investigation, and discovery to trial prep, trial, and appeal. This gives students knowledge of required procedures, in addition to working with actual documents. It also gives them practice in formatting documents.

Linda: I love assignments that mirror the work students will actually perform. Drafting correspondence, organizing case files, preparing discovery responses, creating litigation calendars, conducting legal research, preparing trial binders, reviewing documents, and even learning how to create meaningful billing entries all help students build confidence and practical skills. I often hear new paralegals say that they went to school, but when they started their first job, they felt like they were starting from scratch. I want the opposite experience for my students. My goal is for them to walk into their first paralegal position feeling familiar with the types of responsibilities they'll be given and confident that they have a solid foundation to build on.

Kristine: Anything that mirrors what they'll actually do on Monday morning. Court scavenger hunts. Networking interviews with practicing paralegals. Drafting research memos. Using practice management software. Researching local court rules. Creating case timelines. Managing deadlines. Students often tell me these assignments were initially intimidating but later became the experiences they talked about most in interviews.

Deana: I have students work on a fictional case in my substantive classes. The fact scenario should be interesting, relevant, and flexible enough to allow for twists or unexpected information. Students practice gathering and organizing information, interviewing, writing motions, preparing exhibits, and assisting at trial with voir dire, jury instructions, and opening and closing presentations. For students who are not able to participate in a live placement for their internship, I create a virtual internship where they practice civil litigation, family law, contracts, and criminal defense.

What do you believe students most need to understand about the realities of working in a law firm, corporate legal department, government office, or nonprofit setting?

Cathy: Students need to understand that sometimes our life is not our own! Last-minute things happen, and our lives are put on hold momentarily to get the job done. But I want students to learn that the job does not diminish the importance of building a Christ-centered life and of family. I try to help them cultivate an understanding that there should be a balance.

Darleen: They need to understand what will be expected of them in different employment environments. They need to understand billable hour requirements and what to look for when offered a position. They need to understand the different types of clients in each setting and the emotional toll different types of law will have on a legal professional.

Linda: Technical knowledge is important, but professionalism is what helps people succeed. Being dependable, communicating effectively, managing priorities, protecting confidentiality, adapting to change, and maintaining a positive attitude are just as

important as knowing the law. Employers can teach procedures. It's much harder to teach professionalism.

Kristine: Technical skills will get you hired. Human skills will build your career. These are what I refer to as power skills. Employers can teach procedures and software. It's much harder to teach professionalism, emotional intelligence, adaptability, initiative, and genuine curiosity. Relationships matter. Reputation matters. Integrity always matters.

Deana: Students must realize that legal work is rarely like what they see on television. Trials can be tedious and high-stress, evidence doesn't magically appear, and clients aren't always happy with the outcome—even when you do an outstanding job. Attorneys, clients, and colleagues can be challenging, which is why developing assertiveness, resilience, strict ethics, and professionalism is essential.

How do you teach students to manage pressure, meet deadlines, and maintain attention to detail in legal practice?

Cathy: Every course has a writing assignment that is a major portion of their grade. Attention to detail, proofreading, and accuracy are important and are a huge part of the grade. We talk about the stress of balancing the pressures of deadlines and assignments and how to manage multiple attorneys at the same time.

Darleen: By keeping on top of the calendar, knowing deadlines, having checklists for various tasks, and making sure they keep class deadlines.

Linda: I try to create realistic expectations while providing a supportive learning environment. We talk about time management, prioritization, calendaring systems, checklists, quality control, and developing habits that reduce errors. I also remind students that even experienced professionals continue learning throughout their careers. The goal isn't perfection. The goal is building systems that help you consistently produce high-quality work.

Kristine: I try to model it. I set expectations, hold students accountable, and explain why deadlines exist in legal practice. Missing a classroom assignment has consequences. Missing a court deadline has much bigger consequences. I also remind students that perfection isn't the goal. Continuous improvement is.

Deana: I teach pressure, deadlines, and attention to detail by making them part of the work from the beginning. Students need to learn that legal work often involves competing priorities, incomplete information, and consequences for missed deadlines or careless mistakes. I use assignments with due dates, detailed instructions, revisions, and realistic

expectations so students can practice managing their time, checking their work, and communicating early when they have a problem.

What was the most challenging part of transitioning from practicing as a paralegal to teaching paralegal students?

Cathy: I think the biggest difference is that you do not have the attorney to run things by and to take the ultimate responsibility when things go south! The classroom and out-of-class project monitoring are left to me as the professor to make sure students move along in the course.

Darleen: It was easy for me. Once I started teaching, that's all I wanted to do.

Linda: Ironically, slowing down. After years in litigation, many tasks became second nature. Teaching requires you to step back, identify every step in the process, and explain it clearly to someone seeing it for the first time. It challenged me to think differently about the work I had been doing almost instinctively for years.

Kristine: Learning that knowing something and teaching something are two completely different skills. Being able to perform a task doesn't automatically mean you know how to explain it in a way that's meaningful for someone who's never seen it before. That has made me a better teacher and, interestingly, an even better paralegal.

Deana: Because my undergraduate degree was in secondary education, the instructional transition was smooth. The harder adjustment was realizing that even adult learners naturally seek the path of least resistance. I also had to learn to maintain firm professional boundaries when students wanted to share (or overshare) personal legal struggles. I often have to remind myself that my role is to be their instructor, not their attorney or therapist.

Were there any assumptions you had about teaching that changed once you entered the classroom?

Cathy: Again, I thought it was more about what was happening in the classroom, being prepared for class, and grading assignments, but there is so much more administrative work, and sometimes you just aren't prepared for some of the issues that your students are going through outside of the classroom. I think to be effective, I have to lead them both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. If a student is worried about a sick parent or grandparents, they aren't focusing on class. I need to help them find a way to do both.

Darleen: I realized that many different types of people can make good legal professionals. Everyone doesn't have to take the four-year degree path. People from all types of backgrounds can successfully transition into a position that can be perfect for them.

Linda: Absolutely. I initially thought teaching was mostly about sharing knowledge. I quickly learned it's more about helping students build confidence. Sometimes students don't need another explanation. They need encouragement, reassurance, and someone who believes they can succeed. That has become one of my favorite parts of teaching.

Kristine: Absolutely. I thought teaching was mostly delivering information. Now I realize teaching is really about creating confidence. Students rarely remember every lecture. They remember how you made them believe they belonged in the profession.

Deana: I initially assumed adult learners would be naturally independent, but I quickly learned that teaching adults still requires immense structure, clarity, and repetition. Many students still need explicit guidance on reading carefully, following multi-step instructions, and connecting classroom tasks to professional standards. Teaching isn't just delivering content—it's actively helping students build career-sustaining habits.

How did you develop your teaching style, especially if your prior experience was primarily in practice rather than education?

Cathy: I think students just want to know how to do the job successfully. Being yourself and getting to know students on a personal level helps me understand how to reach students and motivate them to be the best they can be. Also, being honest with them about the good and bad of being a paralegal helps me convey the lesson for the day.

Darleen: I've always found it easy to speak in public. I found it better to just be myself, not try to be perfect, share mistakes, and help students realize that a certain level of professionalism is expected by showing them that professionalism in the classroom.

Linda: My teaching style developed naturally by combining my legal experience with continuous learning about education. I've taught in higher education for several years now, and I'm always looking for ways to improve. I focus on making classes practical, conversational, engaging, and approachable. I want students to feel comfortable asking questions because that's exactly what they'll need to do throughout their careers.

Kristine: By borrowing from every great teacher, mentor, attorney, and paralegal I've ever worked with and adding a healthy amount of trial and error. I also ask students for feedback and actually use it. If something isn't working, I change it. Continuous improvement shouldn't stop after graduation.

Deana: My teaching style centers on candidly sharing what I've learned from my time in practice. I don't claim to know everything. If I don't have an answer, I readily admit it, research it, and bring it back to the class. I also recognize that many students are balancing coursework with jobs, parenting, and family responsibilities. I strive to be empathetic and

supportive while maintaining firm professional standards. Deadlines, accuracy, and clear communication matter deeply in the legal field. I model that balance by being flexible where appropriate, while instilling the accountability, preparation, and rigor required in practice.

What challenges do you face in preparing students who may have very different levels of legal knowledge, work experience, or professional confidence?

Cathy: I assume we all start off knowing little about the court system. The basic terminology and foundational structure of the court system are huge. I tell students it's like building a house, and if the foundation is faulty, it will collapse. If all my students have a good grasp of the basics, then the rest they can learn.

Darleen: Soft skills are hard to teach. When a student hasn't worked a professional job, they don't fully understand how to address attorneys or clients, especially if those clients are corporate executives.

Linda: Every classroom is unique. Some students have worked in law offices for years, while others have never stepped inside one. Some are recent high school graduates, while others are changing careers after decades in another profession. I try to meet students where they are, provide multiple ways to learn, and create an environment where everyone feels comfortable participating regardless of their background.

Kristine: Meeting students where they are while helping them all move forward together. Some students have decades of professional experience but little legal knowledge. Others know legal terminology but have never worked in an office. My goal isn't for everyone to start at the same place. It's for everyone to leave stronger than when they arrived.

Deana: The primary challenge is meeting students where they are without lowering professional standards. Some enter with legal experience and high confidence, while others are learning legal terminology, workplace norms, and academic writing all at once. I aim to provide enough structure and constructive feedback for beginners to thrive, while challenging experienced students to refine their legal judgment, advanced writing, and professionalism.

What resources, mentors, or experiences helped you grow into the educator role?

Cathy: Going to conferences and talking with other paralegals has been a huge help. When I started teaching full-time, I had the prior director and a full-time professor that I could ask questions and run ideas by. Surprisingly, my prior students are some of my biggest go-to advisors today. They are great about giving me ideas and advice when I ask for help. Even one of my past attorneys came to work with me and is now the president of our university.

Darleen: I was fortunate to teach with the director of the paralegal program for several years before she left and I took over. So she gave me many resources for the various classes we offer. And of course, my experience while working as a paralegal helped me in preparing students for what is to come.

Linda: I've been fortunate to learn from many outstanding attorneys, experienced paralegals, fellow educators, professional associations, and even my students. One person who had a particularly significant impact on my career was Jeffrey Shapiro, the managing partner I worked with for nearly five years at Arnstein & Lehr, now Saul Ewing Arnstein & Lehr. As his trial paralegal, I learned invaluable lessons about professionalism, preparation, attention to detail, strategic thinking, and what it truly means to be an indispensable member of the legal team. Those lessons have stayed with me throughout my career, and I'm proud to pass them on to my students. Professional organizations like NALA have also played an important role in my development by providing continuing education, leadership opportunities, and a network of talented legal professionals who are passionate about advancing our profession. Even today, every class I teach and every student I meet continues to help me grow as an educator.

Kristine: I've been incredibly fortunate to learn from generous educators, colleagues, professional associations like NALA, AAfPE, and local paralegal associations, along with fellow faculty members who were willing to share ideas. I've also learned a tremendous amount from my students. They constantly remind me to stay curious, adaptable, and open to new ways of learning.

Deana: The program director who initially hired me was definitely one of my most important mentors. His advice and experience were invaluable, especially when I had a challenging student or a situation I had not handled before. I also relied heavily on my professional network from NALA for perspective, resources, and encouragement.

What advice would you give to paralegals who are considering a move into education?

Cathy: Be prepared for the time commitment. It is not just the 50 or 75 minutes that you teach twice a week. Students are looking for role models and people they can count on to talk to about not just school but work, family, and their futures. Be prepared to invest both your time and interest in your students.

Darleen: Know the profession and what is expected of paralegals and legal assistants. Care about the students coming through your classroom, and help them transition if they're coming from a nonprofessional career. Know you will still have deadlines to juggle (school calendars). Know your students will have outside lives they are living while they are

going through your program. Give some lenience when possible, while having students realize the importance of their classwork.

Linda: Don't underestimate the value of your experience. Students want to learn from someone who has actually done the work. If you enjoy sharing knowledge, explaining concepts, and helping others grow professionally, education can be an incredibly rewarding career path. Start building your teaching experience by presenting CLE programs, mentoring new paralegals, writing articles, or serving as a guest speaker. Just as importantly, invest in your professional network. My first opportunity to teach at the college level came through a personal connection. Because people in my network knew my interests and my experience, they thought of me when an opportunity became available. Don't be afraid to let others know you're interested in teaching. Stay involved in professional associations, attend conferences, volunteer for speaking opportunities, and build relationships with educators and program directors. You never know which conversation or connection may open the door to your first teaching opportunity.

Kristine: Don't wait until you think you're an expert. Start mentoring. Present at your local association. Write articles. Volunteer. Guest lecture. Teaching often begins long before you're standing in front of a classroom.

Deana: Don't wait until you feel like you know everything to consider teaching—because that day will never come. Great educators aren't people with all the answers. They are lifelong learners who freely share what they know and stay honest about what they don't. If you're interested, take the initiative: offer to guest speak, join an advisory committee, assist with a practical skills assignment, or co-teach a course. If you never ask, the answer is automatically no. Programs need your practical experience, and taking that first step can open unexpected doors.

What should practicing paralegals know before pursuing teaching opportunities?

Cathy: You need at least a degree higher than the level you want to teach. As an adjunct, you are likely to teach after hours or online. Online is often more time-consuming than on-ground courses. And again, it is a huge time commitment.

Darleen: It's important to know what is expected of paralegals and legal assistants (mainly by personal experience) before you can teach others what to expect and do. Know that you will come across many different types of people with many different learning styles, and it will be your job to prepare them all for successful careers.

Linda: Teaching involves much more than standing in front of a classroom. There's curriculum development, grading, student support, staying current on changes in the law,

and continually improving your instructional methods. It's a significant commitment, but it's also incredibly rewarding when you see students achieve their goals.

Kristine: Students don't need perfection. They need authenticity. They appreciate hearing about your successes, but they often learn even more from your mistakes and what those experiences taught you.

Deana: Qualification requirements vary widely by institution. Community colleges often value deep subject-matter expertise and practice experience in lieu of an advanced degree, whereas state and private universities typically require a master's or law degree. Serving as a guest speaker or joining an advisory board is an ideal way to get your foot in the door and gauge institutional expectations.

How can paralegals begin developing the skills or qualifications needed to become effective educators?

Cathy: Attend as many conferences as you can and be active in paralegal organizations. Complete at least your master's degree. The NALA certification also helps. Also be computer savvy. Try to know at least as much as your students when it comes to computers! You have to remain current on law and technology.

Darleen: Know what a paralegal does and what is expected in real-life situations. Get speaking experience as you can. Volunteer to speak at association meetings, conferences, and CLE opportunities. Touch base with local or online colleges. Know the requirements for being an instructor there. If you don't meet the requirements, start working on completing them. You don't want the perfect job to come along, only to realize you don't have the degree or certification they require. Meet college legal instructors and offer to be a guest speaker. Offer to work with legal clubs.

Linda: Continue learning. Earn advanced credentials, stay active in professional associations, attend CLE programs, present educational sessions, write articles, and volunteer for leadership opportunities. Strong communication skills and a willingness to keep learning are just as important as academic credentials.

Kristine: Become lifelong learners. Read widely. Attend CLEs. Join professional associations. Speak. Write. Stay curious about technology and the changing legal profession. Teaching is simply another form of leadership.

Deana: If you have not done so already, earn or finish your degree. Graduating from an ABA-approved program can carry a great deal of weight, and becoming certified or earning an ACP® can also boost your credibility and credentials.

What personal qualities make a practicing paralegal well suited for teaching?

Cathy: I think we are used to dealing with a lot of different personalities, and that helps tremendously in teaching. Being organized and able to think outside the box helps. Our ability to keep things confidential helps us. Students want to know that they can trust you and talk with you. Trust is a big plus.

Darleen: Outgoing, easy to get along with, good at public speaking, caring, empathetic but firm, with an overall professional persona.

Linda: Curiosity, patience, organization, professionalism, adaptability, strong communication skills, and a genuine desire to help others succeed. Great paralegals are lifelong learners, and I think the best educators are too.

Kristine: Curiosity. Patience. Empathy. Communication. Organization. Adaptability. And perhaps most importantly, generosity. The best educators genuinely want someone else to succeed.

Deana: A practicing paralegal who is patient, organized, flexible, and willing to keep learning is well suited for teaching. If you can work with attorneys, clients, courts, and deadlines, you already understand how to explain information clearly, manage competing demands, and stay professional under pressure. Those same qualities translate well to the classroom.

What do you find most rewarding about helping students prepare for careers in the legal profession?

Cathy: I love seeing my students succeed. I love seeing them working through to determine what path they want to take. I love that they trust me enough to talk about anything and that they stop by often just to visit.

Darleen: Seeing the end result when they successfully transition into a career in the legal field. As they go through our program, I can see changes in them as they grow both in legal knowledge and in professionalism. Many of my students come from nonprofessional jobs, and seeing them successfully transition gives me a great sense of pride. I keep an email database of all graduates in order to send job openings and other information, and I love hearing from them as to where they end up.

Linda: Watching students discover confidence they didn't know they had. Nothing compares to hearing that a student landed their first paralegal position, earned a promotion, passed a certification exam, or simply realized they're capable of accomplishing more than they imagined. Knowing I've played even a small role in someone's career journey is incredibly rewarding.

Kristine: Watching them realize they're capable of far more than they believed. Nothing compares to hearing from a former student who landed their first job, passed a certification exam, spoke at a conference, or simply found confidence they didn't know they had. Those moments never get old.

Deana: Watching students graduate is deeply fulfilling. It's especially powerful to watch a student who was balancing parenthood, financial hardship, or a dead-end job gain the skills and confidence needed to build a stable career. Knowing that paralegal education can unlock financial security, professional purpose, and a better quality of life makes every effort worthwhile. I also love when alumni stay in touch to share their career achievements and continue using me as a sounding board.

Looking back, is there anything you wish you had known before making the transition from practice to education?

Cathy: I think I really wasn't prepared for the time commitment of the classroom and that I would miss going to court, but the trade-off of watching your students graduate and having them hunt you down after the ceremony for a picture is worth it all!

Darleen: The qualifications required to be a college instructor. I had a BS degree in paralegal studies, my NALA certification, and several years of teaching experience when a full-time position came open. I assumed I would get it since I had successfully integrated myself into the college. What I didn't know was that it was a state requirement to have a master's degree. None of the other qualifications mattered since I didn't meet that requirement. So I entered a master's program and continued adjunct teaching. It took 17 years for another local full-time position to open! A hard and long lesson to learn.

Kristine: That teaching would give me just as much as I hoped to give my students. I thought I was sharing 20+ years of experience. Instead, my students continue to challenge my thinking, introduce me to new perspectives, and remind me why I fell in love with this profession in the first place. Education isn't a departure from being a paralegal. For me, it's one of the most meaningful ways to serve the profession I love.

Deana: I wish I had realized sooner just how much of teaching is mentorship and holistic student development, rather than simply delivering legal content. Students often need support in building self-confidence, adopting professional communication habits, and believing in their ability to succeed in the legal field. That aspect of the work can be demanding, but it is undoubtedly the most meaningful part of the job.