

LEAP: A Primer to National Leadership
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“Leadership is influence.” This is one of the many inspirational quotes from John C. Maxwell. Leadership is not about popularity or being able to deliver an inspirational speech. It is not about education or charity. Leadership is about the desire to serve others. It is about unquestionable integrity, character, and inclusive vision. It is about bringing people together to work towards a common goal. True leadership is not about celebrating your own achievements, but rather placing your concentration on helping others to achieve. Leadership is not limited to your professional life, and although I’d like to talk specifically about LEAP today, it should be noted that the benefits of the LEAP program extend beyond service to NALA and NePA. The leadership qualities you will develop through the LEAP program will help you cultivate other areas in your life you can improve upon and share with others, such as professional or personal group membership, church, social groups, and even in your own personal life, including being a strong leader for your family and friends.

Before I talk specifically about the LEAP program, I’d like to talk about the lessons we can learn about leadership. The Lessons of Geese teach us five principles which can be used in our personal and business lives to help us foster and encourage a level of passion and energy in ourselves and others. I’d like to address these lessons as they affect our own membership in the association.

Lesson #1: The Importance of Achieving Goals: As each goose flaps its wings, it creates an Uplift for the birds that follow. By flying in a “V” formation, the whole flock adds 71% extra to the flying range. When we have a sense of community and focus, we create trust and can help each other to achieve our goals. Active participation in our committees, luncheons, seminars, and various association projects will help build our association.

Lesson #2: The Importance of Team Work: When a goose falls out of formation, it suddenly feels the drag and resistance of flying alone. It quickly moves back to take advantage of the lifting power of the birds in front. If we had as much sense as geese, we would stay in formation with those headed where we want to go. We are willing to accept their help and give our help to others. As association members, we should help and support each other. The lesson of team work also speaks to the importance of having different leaders for different projects. Our association becomes stronger by having new members on the Board of Directors and in various committees. It is just as important to let other lead as it is to be the leader. We have both silent leaders and vocal leaders in this association, and it is filled with strong, talented leaders whose skills complement each other.

Lesson #3 – The Importance of Sharing: When a goose tires of flying up front it drops back into formation and another goose flies to the point position. It pays to take turns doing the hard tasks. We should respect and protect each other’s unique arrangement of skills, capabilities,

talents and resources. This lesson speaks to committee membership, service on the Board of Directors, recruitment, volunteer charity and community involvement, and our student mentoring programs. The more members who are actively involved in these projects, the stronger the association will become.

Lesson #4 – The Importance of Empathy and Understanding: When a goose gets sick, two geese will drop out of formation and follow it down to the ground to help and protect it. If we have as much sense as geese we will stand by each other in difficult times, as well as when we are strong. This lesson speaks to our various volunteer charity projects such as Relay for Life and volunteer contributions made to various charities at our monthly luncheons. It also speaks to supporting other members when you know they need it or supporting community involvement and projects. If another member needs a job and we know of openings, we should advise them of these opportunities. If a member needs career advice or personal assistance, we as members, are here to assist. If a member is sick or going through a hard time, we will do what we can to support them. It makes our association stronger to be involved with each other on both a professional and personal level, providing strength and understanding for each other.

Lesson #5 – The Importance of Encouragement: Geese flying in formation “HONK” to encourage those up front to keep up with their speed. We need to make sure our honking is encouraging. In groups and teams where there is encouragement, production is much greater. Individual empowerment results from quality honking. Our association gains strength from the encouragement of other members, whether it be professional encouragement or personal encouragement. We are there for each other. We are not merely association acquaintances, but professional and personal friends.

Each of these lessons is reinforced as you take a closer look at leadership, which, of course, is the purpose and challenge of NALA’s LEAP program. The National Association of Legal Assistants has always promoted and encouraged active state and national leadership as a career tool for its members. In 2008, NALA introduced a new pilot program called LEAP, an acronym meaning “Leadership Enhancement and Preparation”, designed to build upon the experience and leadership abilities of those interested in serving in national leadership positions. The basic concept of the class is designed to build upon the leadership qualities discussed and highlighted in the book, “The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader” by John C. Maxwell, as well as utilization of the experience and knowledge of the current NALA leadership.

As part of the 2009 class of LEAP, I had the opportunity learn about new concepts and challenges associated with national leadership, while building upon the current experience I have gained while serving on the Nebraska Paralegal Association Board of Directors. One of the biggest and certainly most important lessons I learned during the LEAP program was how much of leadership is service: service to your association and service to others. Being a true leader, whether a silent leader or a vocal leader, means putting your personal issues aside, contributing to the goals of the association as a whole, and maintaining focus on being a generous leader and

giving back more than you take. There were many different lessons in LEAP about leadership qualities, but my favorite quality was the lesson of passion. It really is true that you can never lead something you do not care passionately about. You cannot start a fire in an organization unless one is first burning in you. It is that passion that will ignite in others and keep the fire burning in this association. It is the fire in the strong leaders of this association and my passion for the paralegal profession that ignited the desire in me to apply for and complete the LEAP program and to apply the lessons learned in my service to the members of the association. The passion is about service to the membership and providing what the membership as a whole needs. Passion is contagious. Schedule your time with others who will infect you with passion and then share that passion with others.

Although involvement with LEAP is a true honor, it is also a big responsibility. The LEAP program is designed to not only build upon your leadership attributes, but also to teach and prepare NALA's future leaders about the structure and organization of NALA, including the wonderful staff at NALA headquarters, the Board of Directors, committee structure, products and services, and the functions of the NALA Certifying Boards.

LEAP is focused on the team prospect and NALA is able to evaluate the service future of LEAP participants through the training provided, inclusive but not limited to the discussions held via web conference on a monthly basis. This 12-month program also includes teamwork outside of the web lectures, and teaches cooperation and hard work, with the opportunity to lead your group through specific tasks.

Participation in LEAP was extremely fulfilling for me and I would encourage other members of our state association to get involved. Each year, NALA's Professional Development Committee chooses 12-15 paralegals to participate in the program from applications submitted. The program begins at that year's NALA Convention in July and ends at the next NALA Convention the following July. The first thing that is done is an organization meeting at the Annual Convention, where you are issued your copy of the John C. Maxwell book I mentioned earlier and assigned to a team of two to four people from across the country. This book is used as the LEAP textbook. The web-conferences begin after the NALA Convention and are held on a monthly basis on a variety of NALA topics. Assignments are given to the teams, which require outside work, such as the development of powerpoint presentations and/or speaking on behalf of the group. At each web-conference, a different member of your team will serve as the team leader. The team leader organizes and facilitates completion of that month's team project. The entire group works on the project, however, the team leader takes the point and works with the other team members to accomplish the assigned tasks and is ultimately responsible for ensuring the completion of the project on a timely basis. It is by the process of having a different leader for each project that LEAP participants learn the importance of both leading and following.

Specific LEAP objectives include topics that cultivate the understanding of how NALA functions, including the Board of Directors, NALA headquarters, committee structure of NALA,

responsibilities and roles of the NALA Certifying Boards, and the various products and services of NALA. LEAP also addresses the various ethical considerations which may confront board members and teaches you skills to utilize in order to recognize and assess situations where ethical guidelines must be followed. Focus is placed on how the structure of NALA, the boards, members and volunteer leaders work together to further the mission of NALA. Most of all participation in LEAP focuses on building upon the leadership abilities of LEAP participants.

The final web-conference is held in April, at which time the individual teams begin to work on their final presentations to be made to the membership of NALA at the Annual Convention in July. Topics for your final presentation are chosen from options assigned by the Chair of the Professional Development Committee, who oversees the LEAP program. Each of the final presentations is approximately 12-15 minutes long. My group's presentation was based on the history of the paralegal profession, NALA's role in the leadership of the paralegal profession, and how NALA continues to be a leader in the profession. Subsequent to our final presentation, one of our group members, Lydia Brackett, Florida Registered Paralegal and Advanced Certified Paralegal, from Florida, and I were asked to write an article for Facts and Findings based upon that presentation. Members of the first year's programs were also active on committees this year where they placed the lessons they learned into practice for the benefit of NALA. There is no limit to the opportunities that participation in LEAP can present for you, both personally and professionally.

Participation in LEAP has enhanced my career and personal development, as has my service to the Nebraska Paralegal Association and my anticipated future service to NALA. The prerequisites for the class include active membership in NALA, attainment of the CLA/CP credential, and mandatory attendance at the annual NALA conventions for the year before your class participation and the year after class participation. If you are interested in learning more about the program or would like to apply for next year's class, please visit www.nala.org. I would also be happy to answer any questions regarding NALA, LEAP, or other NePA association projects. Over the past several years, I have had many career opportunities come my way through NePA and NALA, and the friends and opportunities I have gained through these wonderful associations have been both professionally and personally rewarding. I would strongly encourage the awesome number of strong paralegal leaders we have in our membership to become more involved. Grab each and every opportunity that comes your way and embrace it. Thank you for allowing me to share my experiences with you. Remember the Lessons of the Geese and to HONK your encouragement to other members of the association as we work towards our common goals in building our careers, the Nebraska Paralegal Association, NALA, and the paralegal profession. Thank you.