



## Top Twenty Beliefs Guaranteed to Stall Your Career

by Chere B. Estrin, Ph.D.

It's just plain and simple. There's no magic about it. I didn't make these up and I have no doubt that someone who feels stuck in their career has at least one of these beliefs hanging around.

The mind is so powerful that what you tell yourself, even if it is just a feeling and not vocalized can either hinder or support your success. No one reaches the top levels by accident. I don't care how many times you've told yourself that successful people were just "in the right place at the right time." There's no such thing. People who were lucky made their own luck. People who were in the right place at the right time simply took advantage of their situation – for the good.

In the award-winning movie, *Million Dollar Baby*, there was a sign that showed up in scene after scene. You couldn't help but notice it. For some reason, it resonated with me. "Winners...what losers...." I realized that this adage applied to every profession and that applicable quotes to live by were comforting, supportive and eye opening. Words are very powerful, so much so that what you tell yourself, even in jest, becomes your truth.

Let's examine what I think are the top 20 beliefs that can stall your career:

### **Number 1**

You're afraid to leave the office even for a day. You can't learn about anything new in the field because you are tied to the office 24/7.

### **Number 2**

The way your job is, is the way it's *supposed* to be. You're not supposed to ask for more.

But something tells you that if you were to look back on past assignments you've had over the past year or so, you might find out you've had different cases but same type of assignments. In fact, you've completed the same basic assignment on 12 different cases. You haven't a clue as to how to get assignments that are more sophisticated.

### **Number 3**

Go to a seminar??? You must be crazy.

First of all, the firm won't pay for it. You're certainly not going to reach into your own pocket. You have that Kate Spade bag to buy. Second of all, it's the firm's responsibility, not yours, to provide training. Never mind that California paralegals are required to have continuing legal education.

But a nagging thought keeps entering your head...just how long will a firm pay a senior paralegal to do entry-level work?

### **Number 4**

You think you need to leave the paralegal field to live your dream. Doesn't *everyone* perform routine and repetitious work in this job?

### **Number 5**

You are convinced there is no upward movement in the paralegal field. In fact, once you reach "senior paralegal," you will have capped out. Unless, of course, you want to be an attorney, and we all know where *that* will lead.

### **Number 6**

You don't think you have a career dream. Some people keep their career dream locked up inside and never see it, or don't allow themselves to find it. You think you're one of them.

### **Number 7**

You are afraid of failure, rejection, or being seen as someone who is different if you follow the career path you really want. We are all afraid of something.

But you allow your fears to keep you from getting what you want in your career. In fact, truth be known, you're paralyzed.

### **Number 8**

You don't believe you can make enough money living your career dreams. Never mind that this is the biggest obstacle that keeps people doing work that they don't find appealing or exciting. You say, "The work is not *that* bad," or you're "getting paid a lot," more than you could make being in a job you love.

### **Number 9**

You think that you are destined to live a less than fulfilling career, and as a result, you do not take action towards achieving your career dreams. In fact, if asked, you're not really sure what that action might entail.

### **Number 10**

You don't think you have the time to get the training you need. Somehow, other people learn about new court rules, e-discovery, and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, but you just don't have the time. You are so caught up in the rush of today's world; you don't think you have time to add one more thing to do in your career.

### **Number 11**

You still believe that if you work hard, someone is sure to notice. No sense tooting your own horn. In fact, that's bragging and nice girls and boys do not do that sort of thing. I know that for a fact. My mother told me. Over and over and over.

### **Number 12**

You don't think you deserve to be happy in your career because so many people are unhappy in theirs.

### **Number 13**

You are not ready. It requires a significant investment in yourself to get your career turned around, and sometimes we are not ready. You're not willing to look at what's holding you back and reach for the stars. Frankly, it's just too esoteric.

### **Number 14**

You remember what it's like to feel confident but you haven't felt that way in quite some time. You tell yourself it goes with the territory.

### **Number 15**

You hear rumors that your colleagues got bigger raises than you did. You're certain that's because your department always receives the least amount of increases. Besides, experienced people can't expect big raises these days.

### **Number 16**

There is a constant chatter in your head that's always telling you what you CAN'T do. You chalk that up to being around negative people.

### **Number 17**

You're bored, but that's not your fault.

### **Number 18**

The words like joy, happiness, motivation, and success are part of someone else's life.

### **Number 19**

Someone else, not you, gets interesting, exciting assignments. You're certain it's the attorneys you've been assigned to. They just "don't get it" when it comes to paralegals.

### **Number 20**

You're stuck and you know it.

The truth is you are not battling your circumstances; you are battling your excuses, beliefs, and reasons why you cannot have what you really want in your career. You have done such a great job convincing yourself that your career wishes will not be granted, or the next level cannot be obtained, that this has become your reality. You need to tell yourself another story.

If any of the “20 beliefs” look even remotely familiar, you need to reshape your thinking. Do so and your perspective and your career options can be unlimited. But don’t expect to do this alone. No one can.

If you are tired of listening to your excuses, and are ready to have a career you love, it is time to say “YES” to your career success. Go out there and do what you need to do to have the success you deserve.

Law firms do not pay paralegals for what they DON’T know. They pay them for what they *do* know. But in law, that information can get old very quickly. Once the firm discovers your level of expertise, it automatically expects you to keep refilling and renewing the information. Firms constantly look for paralegals to have new and fresh input into their jobs and their careers.

Paralegals who succeed are those who constantly increase their knowledge base. But paralegals who refuse to learn new information needed to advance get stuck, stalled, and mired in the mud. I’ve never heard of a paralegal getting an out-of-this-world raise for old information.

Some years ago, there was a theory going around about people who had a fear of succeeding. It was easy to point towards pop psychology, fad syndromes, and well-meaning parents as the reason why someone didn’t “quite” make it. Today, people are a little more practical.

Successful professionals are those who *haven’t* refused to take advantage of the knowledge tools that have practically been handed to them. Very few of the many, many successful people I have met in my life say that they go to work, come home, and go to work again without ever going to a seminar; getting on the internet; networking with other paralegals; or finding up-to-date information about what’s going on in their field.

Instead, they read, read, read. They join associations, take online courses, join listservs, and soak up as much information as they can find. They go out of their way to find out what's working for other paralegals. And above all, they stay motivated.

Common sense tells us if we spend two-thirds of our week working hard, it's got to be at something we love. Don't be part of the Twenty Beliefs list. Do yourself, your family, your loved ones, and your firm a favor. Get motivated. Get going. You'd be surprised how much power you actually have over your career if you would just take the reins yourself. It's up to you to create your own success. Making our jobs an adventure in life we are passionate about and really love, starts and ends with us. Get off the list and onto success. Do it now.

The worst that can happen is you find a whole new world of joy in your work awaits you. Not bad, if you ask me.

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