

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF YOUR ASSOCIATION

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I had the honor of being a speaker at the NALS Region 6 Annual Meeting and Educational Conference (July 17-20, 2008) in Kansas City, Missouri. My topic was Investing in the Future of Your Association, and the presentation was made at the Sunday morning breakfast. Several members had early travel plans and could not stay for the breakfast. They expressed regret at missing the presentation and requested a copy of it. Although not exact since the presentation was more of a conversation with the members attending the breakfast, my presentation is restated below.

When I chose my topic—Investing in the Future of Your Association, I thought it would be an easy subject. Then I began setting down my thoughts on paper and discovered there was so much to say. Too much. So I began to pare it down. Out went this thought. Out went that one. Until I got down to what I really wanted to share. What was left was just two words—investment and passion.

Investment

I am going to share with you my thoughts on investing in the future of our association and then tell you about some of the milestones NALS has reached because investors let their passions for our association lead them.

Sometimes when we think about our membership in NALS, all we see is the work. Work as a committee member. Work chairing a committee. Work attending meetings. Maybe local. Maybe state or national.

If you haven't increased your involvement in our association to that level, you might wonder, "What's in it for me?" What's in it is opportunities. Opportunities to increase your self-esteem. Opportunities to further your education. Opportunities to advance in your job. Opportunities to make new friends. Opportunities to travel. And so much more.

The old adage is true—you get what you put into it. For example, let's use a rose garden. The roses may survive if you do not prune or feed them, but if you tend them and give them love and care, they will flourish. If you're "just a member," then what you have is a magazine.

Let's take a look at our membership in NALS from this direction. Analogies can increase the understanding of a concept. Because they can make things almost instantly clear, I have chosen one for this topic. My question to you is, "Do you have an investment or retirement plan through your employer or from another source?" Mine is a 401(k) where I choose investment options. I decide how much of my discretionary funds go into it and what percentages of that go to the different options available. By doing that, I invest in my future.

The same concept applies to our association. The options provided under the NALS Plan are the National Fund, the Region Fund, the State Fund, and the Local Fund. Under my current

NALS Plan, I have chosen to invest the largest portion of my discretionary time and energy in the National Fund, but since it is wise to maintain a balanced plan to hedge for the future, I also invest in the other three funds. Today my NALS portfolio looks something like this: 75%—National Fund, 5%—Region Fund, 5%—State Fund, and 15%—Local Fund.

I have not always divided my discretionary time and energy at the same percentages or even at the same levels, because investment levels and choices change according to where we are in life. For instance, when I began investing in the NALS Plan, there was no Region Fund. Since I was new to the NALS Plan, all of my discretionary energies went to the Local Fund. Then my world expanded with my first state meeting, so I began investing in the State Fund. Then I attended my first national meeting, and my world expanded again.

We know where to invest should we choose to do so, but how do we invest over and above paying for our membership dues? We invest by participating. When we participate, we invest in the future of NALS. When doing so, you should participate in things you enjoy or things that fulfill a personal goal or where your passion directs you.

- Do you enjoy networking and socializing? Attend local meetings. Attend chapter activities. Volunteer to plan a special event. Volunteer to be a greeter at your meetings.
- Do you enjoy writing? Write an article for your local or state publication.
- Do you enjoy creating flyers? Volunteer on a marketing committee.
- Do you want to carry the outward symbol of your professionalism? Get certified. Wear your pins at every opportunity and show off your accomplishment.
- Do you want to expand your knowledge of a particular area of law or learn about a new one? Attend a seminar or join an Online Learning Center chat or study group.
- Do you enjoy public speaking? Participate in a local school career day. Spread the word to high school or college students about working with the legal community. There are many opportunities for speakers, and every level of our association needs them.
- Do you have a passion for teaching? Teach a Legal Training Course or a certification study group. Become a mentor.
- Do you like to travel? Attend a state, regional, or national meeting where you can network, socialize, and expand your knowledge.

All of these things are investments in your association; and since NALS is a matching investment plan, all of these things are also investments in yourself. Do a little. Do a lot. Invest as much as your passion leads you to invest. Each one of us has something to contribute to our association.

I see two sides to this investment coin. Heads, if there are no investors or volunteers, we won't have the programs we enjoy or have new ones. Tails, if there are investors, whatever we invest comes back to us in profits through the enrichment of our professional and personal lives; therefore, our association thrives like the rose garden. Don't gamble with your future, invest wisely. And where you lead, others will follow.

Passion

This year there are over 100 passionate volunteers investing in the future of NALS through their contributions on the national board and committees. That's about a yearly average. If we only look back 50 years, that's 5000 volunteers who have invested their discretionary funds in NALS. Members like you who have been willing to invest their time and energies and share their ideas to keep NALS the premier legal professional association that it is. In the nearly 80 years since the seed of our association was planted, NALS has made many contributions to the legal community. NALS' history is rich and the product of its many investors. Here is a sampling of the contributions, some of which are put in the context of the president of the time.

- Eula Mae Jett, the founder of what was to become NALS, and five other legal secretaries formed the first legal secretaries association in September 1929 in Long Beach California, with Eula Mae as its charter president.
- Louise Cord (1950-1954, California) was elected as the first president of NALS in 1950 and was the only President to serve a four-year term.
- During the term of Rhoda V. Polley, PLS (1956-1958, California), NALS inaugurated the Professional Legal Secretary program, and in 1957 President Polley appointed Clara Lagow to head a committee to prepare the exam.
- Clara Lagow, PLS (1958-1960, Texas), became NALS President the following year. Her passion was a certification for legal secretaries, and in April of 1960 the first Professional Legal Secretary exam was administered. Today there are over 5400 certified PLSs.
- In April 1965 the first edition of the *NALS Manual for the Legal Secretarial Profession* was published by West. NALS has had a working partnership with West for 43 years.
- In 1966 the predecessor to the Legal Training Course, The Official Course for Legal Secretaries, made its debut. Even after so long a time, we sometimes still hear the Legal Training Course referred to as the "Official Course."
- The legal assistant concept had its beginnings in the early 1970s. President Toni Jochems' (PLS, 1972-1974, Kansas) passion was supporting legal assistants, and in 1973 the Legal Assistant Division of NALS was created.
- In June 1974 NALS Founder Eula Mae Jett passed away.

- In July 1974 President Barbara J. Kreissler, J.D. (1974-1976, California), obtained approval from the NALS Board of Directors for the creation of a Certifying Board for Legal Assistants to investigate the feasibility of a national certification program for legal assistants. Work was begun on the exam, which was based on the Professional Legal Secretary exam.
- In 1975 an oil portrait was commissioned as a memorial to Eula Mae Jett to be hung at the NALS headquarters. Today the 18 x 25 inch portrait hangs above the fireplace in the reception room at the NALS Resource Center.
- Also in 1975 the Legal Assistant Division of NALS was dissolved and became a separate association, the National Association of Legal Assistants.
- During the term of Barbara Akins, PLS (1987-1989, Texas), the 20/20 Patrons was established. The 20/20 Patrons later became the NALS Foundation we know today.
- During the term of Sharon Smith, PLS (1992-1993, Michigan), the first Accredited Legal Secretary certification exam was offered. Today there are over 2600 certified ALSs.
- During the term of Elaine Sumerel, PLS (1995-1996, South Carolina), the restructure of NALS had its beginnings. The restructure allowed members to have more input into decision making and reduced the size of the governing body.
- Completion of the reorganization of NALS occurred during the term of Donna Dendy, PLS, CLA (1996-1997, Texas).
- Under Debbie Nickerson, PLS (1998-1999, Maine), the first NALS Online Chat was held.
- After many years of talking about it, the members voted in 1999 to change the name of the National Association of Legal Secretaries to NALS with the tag line “the association for legal professionals.”
- The inaugural Professional Paralegal exam was administered in Tulsa at the end of the term of Susan Turner, PLS (2003-2004, Alabama). Today there are over 400 Certified Professional Paralegals.
- NALS purchased its permanent home in Tulsa in 2006 during the term of Catherine Hankins, PP, PLS (2006-2007, Ohio).
- In March 2008, Dee Beardsley, PP, PLS (2008-2009, California), was installed as President of NALS. NALS held the grand opening of the Resource Center hosted by Tammy Hailey’s mom and the NALS past presidents who were able to attend.

This is an awesome line of women who invested in the goals of our association and who led us to where we are today. They didn’t accomplish these things alone. They relied on those 5000

volunteers to make it happen. President Dee likens our volunteers to a chorus line and says that we don't make the high kicks without the support of the rest of the line to hang on to.

You are probably thinking that the NALS presidents—both past and present—are special people, and you would be right, but they are also ordinary people. Ordinary people who had heart and a passion. They looked past what was in it for them to how others could benefit from their investments. It is their legacy to us and to the next generation of legal support professionals. If NALS is your passion, then you can do it too.

I'm told speakers are supposed to include quotes in their presentations. Here is one that I think is particularly appropriate. It's from Ralph Waldo Emerson. "What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us."