

ASPEN COLLEGE SERIES

■ Laurel A. Vietzen

ELDER LAW FOR PARALEGALS



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Elder Law for Paralegals



Laurel A. Vietzen

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Preface

My experience with elder law began about 30 years ago, when my in-laws (who lived several states away) visited a law firm for the first time in their lives and were persuaded to sign estate planning documents that they did not understand and that were not appropriate to their situation. The attorney, who did not have a paralegal and charged an outrageous fee, did not listen to their concerns and showed them no respect. When I graduated from law school the following year and began practicing estate planning and probate, I promised myself I would do a better job. A big part of doing a better job involves use of paralegals to keep costs down and communication up. I was fortunate that my paralegals had excellent communication skills as well as substantive knowledge.

Later, as the coordinator of a paralegal program, I had a request for a course in Elder Law. I knew it was more than estate planning and I began exploring the topic. I was again fortunate: There were program graduates working in the field even though we had not offered the class. My preparation to teach the class involved learning a lot of substantive law and spending time in law firms to pick up the “culture” of dealing with these clients. A book on this subject could be huge, if it covered that substantive law in detail as well as the “soft skills” required for ethical practice and good client communication. I think I’ve found the right balance: giving students the terminology and legal framework they need to be effective without overwhelming them with detail and, at the same time, keeping the content client-focused, as this area of practice must be.

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Laurel A. Vietzen
February 2011

Elder Law for Paralegals



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