With the steady growth of the paralegal profession, paralegals have become an integral part of modern law practice. As valued members of the legal service delivery team, paralegals must know and understand the legal profession’s rules for dealing with lawyers, clients, judges, coworkers, and other parties.

The ABA Center for Professional Responsibility has developed this guide to provide a practical reference on the basics of professional conduct. This handbook contains explanations of the law of professional responsibility as it affects paralegals, tools for identifying and resolving ethical problems, and practical tips to use in everyday practice.

This handbook was prepared to educate paralegals, secretaries, and other employees of law firms, corporations, and law-related organizations about ethical standards and to encourage the professional conduct of those employees. It is intended to be used by paralegals or those involved in training programs.

Legal ethics is becoming increasingly complex for lawyers and paralegals alike. With greater accountability to clients, increased mobility for all law firm personnel, and a growing
demand to improve the image of the legal profession, it is essential to keep abreast of current developments in ethics and to adhere to professional standards.

A breach of legal ethics can seriously damage a law firm’s reputation and profitability, causing client dissatisfaction and possibly triggering legal consequences such as professional liability claims or disciplinary actions. An ounce of prevention, in the form of ethics education, is worth a pound of cure after an ethical breach. Those using this book should consult with their supervising lawyer as to any questions they may have about the issues presented.

Professional responsibility is a matter of paramount importance for everyone employed in the legal profession. We hope this handbook will be a useful resource for addressing these issues. For other publications from the Center for Professional Responsibility, see http://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications.html. For links to legal ethics resources outside the ABA, see http://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/resources/links_of_interest.html.