

Digest of Ethics Advisory Panel
Opinion #91-42, Request #161
Issued July 18, 1991

An attorney seeks Panel advice concerning the ethical propriety of steps the attorney proposes to take to inform the public that X is working as a paralegal in the attorney's firm.

The Panel is of the opinion that it is improper to place the name of X, who is not an attorney, among the names of the attorneys employed by your firm when identifying the lawyers associated with the firm in printed materials. The Panel takes the position that X's name should not appear on the firm's stationery because it poses a very real danger of misleading the public that X is an attorney. A notation near X's name which states "Public Adjuster" does not diminish the potential misleading effect of placing his/her name on the letterhead, especially in light of the fact that all other names on the stationery are those of licensed attorneys. It is the view of the Panel that only the names of attorneys who are members of the firm, or associated with the firm, should appear on the firm's stationery.

The Panel also believes it is improper to list the name of X in the building's floor directory. His/her name should not appear among a listing of licensed attorneys who practice on behalf of the firm. The terms "Legal Assistant" and "Administrator" are misleading because they do not specifically identify X as such. The Panel is of the opinion that the names of non-attorney employees of a law firm should not be included in a listing of attorneys employed by the law firm.

The Panel does not believe it is proper to place an advertisement in the Providence Journal in which you list the name of X with those of the attorneys practicing in the firm. The Panel also questions the meaning of the title "Public Adjuster." This title, in and of itself, appears to be ambiguous.

It is not improper for X to distribute business cards to clients on which are printed his/her name and the word "paralegal." There is no ethical problem in placing a name plate on X's desk which states his/her name and his/her title, "paralegal."