So,

TJAG entrusted you with a Deputy assignment!

Disclaimer: This is an informational guide developed by Tia Hooper, a recently departed deputy. It is not endorsed by JAX or the AFJAGC and no endorsement is intended or implied. This guide was last published in February 2022. If you would like to contribute anything to this guide, please reach out to Tia at Justina.hooper@gmail.com.

## **Table of Contents**

## [This Guide](#_1._This_Guide)

* 1. The Purpose of this Guide
  2. Obligatory Legal Disclaimer
  3. New Deputy Checklist
  4. A few things to do before you PCS
  5. A few things to do within one month of arrival
  6. COVID

## [Initial Steps](#_2._Initial_Steps)

* 1. Talk to your SJA about their expectations
  2. Meet with CCs/Offices
  3. Review OPR/EPRs
  4. Review quarterly/annual awards process

## [Leadership](#_3._Leadership)

* 1. Battle Rhythm
  2. Strategic Plan
  3. Conduct an Off-Site
  4. Appointment Memos
  5. Communication
  6. Article 6 Preparation and Self Assessments

## [Help Take Care of Your People](#_4._Help_Take)

* 1. Welcome to the office
  2. Training
  3. Professional Development
  4. Office rotation plan
  5. TDY
  6. Bullets/inputs
  7. Physical Training
  8. Reserves – UTAPS

## [Organize the Office](#_5._Organize_the)

* 1. Standardization
  2. Clean
  3. Meetings
  4. Calendar
  5. Drive

## **1. This Guide**

[Table of Contents](#_Table_of_Contents)

**a. Purpose of this Guide**

This Guide is for newly assigned Deputies (and maybe SJAs who have not been at the base legal office in a while). I know what you are thinking right now, JAX just assigned me to the Deputy at base X, but wait, I feel like I just commissioned into the military myself, how can I be a Deputy already? Sure, I’ve been Chief of everything under the sun when I was at the base legal office and maybe I had a stint as an ADC or SVC, maybe even a bit of time at HQ JAC/JAO/JAJ, but now the JAG Corps wants to send me back into the storm (that is the legal office) and as the #2!!! Exciting and a bit nerve-racking, right? At least that is how I felt when I found out I was going to be a Deputy. Sure, I had DSJA on my WebPDI, but when I actually got the assignment, I have to admit, I was nervous.

I started by doing what most people do when they get a new assignment, I ROSTER stalked current Deputies that I knew and asked them for tips of the trade. Some information was helpful, some information, not so much. Some information wasn’t applicable to the office I was entering. I spent the first couple of months as a Deputy doing what we all do when we get a new assignment in the military, drowned in a sea of information overload while simultaneously trying to figure out how to make the program my own.

After coming out of that whirlwind, I decided to put all of my lessons learned into a guide to help newly assigned Deputies prepare for what is coming. Thus, the “So, TJAG entrusted you with a deputy gig?” guide was born.

**How to use this Guide**: Well, use it in whatever way provides you the most value, but do at least skim through all of the sections. I hope that at least one or two things in this guide will be helpful to you as you embark on this new journey. We all have our own preferences, hang-ups, quirks, and annoyances that will determine how we perform the duties of a Deputy. Additionally, your SJA and LOS will have a huge impact on the scope of your duties and how you conduct your duties as the Deputy. And let’s not forget the officers, enlisted and civilian support staff who will bring a wide range of issues to your door. All I can say is embrace it! Embrace the challenge that you are about to embark on as a deputy and I highly recommend that you start strategizing on how you will perform your duties. It is better to go into the position with a plan than it is to hope everything works out. The old proverb goes, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” So don’t let your people perish. Use this guide to help you figure out how you will tackle this new challenge.

**Biggest Piece of Advice**: Go into the Deputy assignment with your own strategic plan on how you are going to tackle it and set Specific Measurable Attainable Relevant Time-based (SMART) goals for yourself that will guide you through your day to day tasks. I had two goals going in: (1) I wanted my Captains and Paralegals to know more than I did when I was at their level; and (2) I wanted to leave the office better than I found it. Those two goals guided my day to day actions.

**b. Legal Disclaimer**

The information and recommendations in this guide are my own. They in no way reflect the thoughts or opinions of the Department of Defense or the United States Air Force JAG Corps. Additionally, I had a tremendous team in my SJA and LOS when I was the deputy. In this guide I often use “I” to make it easier to read; however, I would be remiss if I did not give credit and thanks to my SJA and LOS!

**c. A few things to accomplish before you arrive at your new base**

* Subscribe to the JAX KM Site, JAI KM Site
* Use ROSTER to get to know the people in your office and their history (to include the people who will be PCSing to the base with you)

**d. A few things to accomplish within your first month of arrival**

* Initial feedback with the SJA
* Get access to the Wing CC’s and SJA’s Outlook calendar
* Review the last Article 6 Report and Article 6 self-assessment
* Meet with the CCs and pertinent offices (SARC, EO, CPO, etc…) at your installation
* Get to know the LOS, take them out to lunch and get their assessment of the office and how you, as a team, can make it better
* Get to know your officers, take them out to lunch or do something fun with all of them

**e. A few things to think about**

* Prepare yourself, for you are now going to supervise millennials. Even if you are a millennial, you will still be shocked a bit once you start supervising them.
* Realize that your budget may take a hit so plan accordingly. At least when I was in the job, the SJA and I were always contributing more than everyone else, rightfully so. I also used food as a motivator for my team! So hopefully you can find a cheap pizza joint nearby.
* You’re not the SJA and you’re not one of the captains. You are in this weird middle position, so if you are a middle child it is probably familiar. For everyone else, make sure you go into the position with a game plan on how to deal with the odd social and professional dynamics this creates.
* Though you are not the SJA, you should strive to become a “buffer” between the SJA and the rest of the office. Sort of like the first line of defense (well, maybe the LOS should be the first line of defense, but you get my meaning).
  + Note: “Buffer” does not mean that the DSJA acts as an ever-present informational funnel through which communication with the SJA is curated or that acts as a guard to the SJA (though this is sometimes the case ☺ ) – people should think of their SJAs as accessible. “Buffer” means that a lot of things can be fully addressed/resolved by the DSJA and the SJA does not need to be the mediator of every little thing because this can lead to excessive micromanagement. Back briefing the SJA on the issues that arose and how they were resolved can be a huge time saver if the leadership team is on the same page.

**f. COVID or other potential disruptions**

* COVID definitely put a wrench in our office rhythm, as it did with throughout the world. Knowing what we know now, I recommend making sure your office is prepared for such an event to the. You need to have a good understanding of the telework/alternate duty rules for both military and civilians. Additionally, find innovative ways to engage your team, utilizing technology. Finally, stay on top of evolving policy in these types of situations.

**2. Initial Steps**

## [Table of Contents](#_Table_of_Contents)

**a. Schedule an initial feedback session with your SJA ASAP.**

Your job as the Deputy is to support the SJA. It is hard to support the SJA if you do not know what the SJA needs/wants. And let’s face it, every SJA is different. One SJA may want you to focus on the training and Article 6 program, while another SJA may want you to focus on helping the Military Justice section because it is full of young personnel. While another SJA may want you to be the face of the office to the squadron commanders. There are different things that your SJA may want or need you to focus on, but you will not know what that is unless you first ask.

Don’t take your initial feedback session as just a normal meeting. Go into it with a plan to figure out what the SJA wants and needs. Be prepared and cover everything. Below are a few issues/questions you should make cover with your SJA:

* Do you want me to handle the office EPR/OPR/Awards/Decorations process?
* Is there a specific section in the office that needs my attention?
* Is there a specific area of the law in the office that needs my attention?
* Are there specific people in the office that need my attention?
* Do you want my focus to mainly be within the office or outside to the base community?
* At what point do you want to get involved with any disciplinary issues I see in the office?
  + As the Deputy, you may find yourself as the first line of defense for leadership. Some issues you will be able to solve on your own and some may need to go to the SJA. Every SJA is different on how soon they want to get involved, so you should ask their preference.
* What type of battle rhythm do you want the office to run on?
* Do you want me to handle the office training plan?
* Do you want me to handle the Art 6 inspection process?
* Do you want me to handle the reserve program?
* Find out if there are any ongoing disciplinary issues that you should know about.
* Find out if there are any Captains that need your heightened awareness/attention.
  + Some new Captains may need help with time management, leadership skills, presentation skills, etc…
* Does the office have a Professional Development Program? If yes, ask to take it over. If no, ask if you can develop one. (An example Professional Development Program can be found in section 4 of this guide)
* Does the base/office utilize TMT or another suspense management/tracking program? If so, make sure to gain access, figure out how it works, and whose responsibility it is to manage it. Also make sure there are alternates as you want to ensure there are no single points of failure within the office.

**b. Meet with CCs/specialty offices within the wing**

As important as it is for the Deputy to focus on office dynamics, there will be times that you have to fill in for Wing level issues while the SJA is out. When you first arrive, make sure to shadow the SJA to these meetings so that you can get a feel for how the base operates. Additionally, you should make it a point to get out and meet the commanders and offices that work with the legal office. I recommend doing this as early as possible, because inevitably the inner workings of the legal office will start taking up most of your time.

Meet with as many commanders as you can, especially the ones whose squadrons or units have the most business with the legal office (e.g., SFS, MXG, FSS, etc…). Additionally, meet with the specialty offices that conduct a lot of business with the legal office (e.g. , CPO, RMO, IG, EEO, etc…). Even though you may have a GS attorney who works with these offices you still want to know who the POCs are. Finally, you need to ask for honest and candid feedback during the initial meetings with CCs/POCs. They may try to be nice and cordial during these initial meetings and overlook or downplay the real issues they may have with the legal office to avoid throwing people under the bus or causing trouble. You have to convey to them that you are not on a witch hunt, and instead want to make sure that the legal office is supporting their unit/office to the best of its ability. In addition, if you do find out about any issues or increased support that is needed, be sure to present that information to the SJA.

**c. Review OPR/EPRs**

Within a few weeks of your arrival, review the status of your office’s performance report (OPR, EPR, Decorations) program. If the program needs more structure, work with the SJA/LOS to develop a standardized process for performance reports. Part of being a leader is taking care of your people’s record and this is the first step. Completing comprehensive performance reports on-time can be tedious, but it is the right thing to do.

Set up meetings with your ADCON unit (typically CPTS for most base legal offices) and CSS to see what the process is for OPRs/EPRs/Decorations at your base.  You will want to know: (1) are packages due 30 or 60 days before close out; (2) who creates the vPC site; (3) how long does it take for the entire process to run its course (basically you want to know if this is a slow processing base or a fast processing base); (4) is there is a Wing or NAF performance report/decoration writing guide; and (5) who are the POCs at the CSS/CPTS/FSS, and the Wing front office who process and review OPR/EPRs/Decs. They may be a life saver when you are in a crunch. All of this will be vital information as you make a plan for how the office will prepare for OPR/EPR/Decoration season.

When you arrive at your duty station there will probably be a few OPRs and decorations that are still in the pipeline for those who just PCS’d. Ensure all packages are moving through the pipeline. Even if the member has PCS’d, it is still your responsibility to make sure they get their performance report and decoration in a timely manner.

Additionally, you will want to find out when everyone’s reports are due. Fortunately for the enlisted personnel and civilian employees, their performance reports/appraisals have static due dates (civilians in April, SrA in March, SSgts in January, TSgts in November, MSgts in September, and SMSgts in July). However, do not assume that all the officer performance reports are due in the summer. Many of your first-term JAGs will have random due dates and anyone that had an off cycle PCS may also have a random due date. Finally, do not forget about your reservists; as with your active duty members, when you arrive, review of all of your reserve OPRs/EPRs, especially for those who recently transitioned from active duty or who recently PCS’d. Make sure they are up to date and check to see if anyone should receive a decoration based on how long they have been assigned to the office (typically a reservist should receive a decoration after 3 years at a duty assignment). Reservist performance reports can easily slip through the system and you want to have a good handle on it as you begin the job.

If the office does not have a tracker, now is the time to create one. If the office does not have a standard policy for packages, now is the time to create one. A couple things to think about when making the performance report policy:

* Will leadership require personnel to write the first draft of their performance report or just provide inputs?
* When do personnel have to submit their bullets to leadership (30 or 60 days before close)? (this will depend on the Wing processing schedule)
* Will officers rate the enlisted? Will the LOS? Every base is different so talk to the SJA and LOS to see how your new base handles it. In addition, if the officers are rating the enlisted they will need training on how to do so effectively. Begin scheduling that training as soon as you can. This is also a good time to review the rating system in the office.
* Recommend establishing office calendar reminders for performance reports, awards, and decorations.

**d. Review quarterly/annual awards process**

Similar to performance reports, check with CPTS/CSS on how the installation quarterly/annual awards program is processed. You will want to know: (1) when are the due dates; (2) what are the rules; (3) is there a writing guide; (4) does CPTS or the Wing Staff Agencies (WSA) have a murder board for winning packages that will compete at the Wing level?

Now is also the time to create a standard process in the office, if there is not one, for awards (quarterly, annual, TJAG, and other/external). Some things to consider:

* Who will nominate personnel for awards? Solely leadership? Officers nominate enlisted? Self nomination?
* Do nominees write their own packages or just submit inputs?
* For the annual award nominees, consider whom you will nominate for the TJAG annual awards. Usually this is the same person as your installation annual award nominee and you can start writing the TJAG annual award at the same time that you are writing the base annual award.
* If your base has a board scoring process for packages, make sure the Captains can be potential board members. This will give them the opportunity to see how packages are written and what makes a good bullet.

## **3. Leadership**

[Table of Contents](#_Table_of_Contents)

**a. Battle Rhythm**

Regular, scheduled Leadership meetings are a necessity. Don’t think that just because you see the SJA and LOS every day that you are on the same page. A structured leadership meeting will ensure that you are all on the same page and will help eliminate the ball getting dropped on any one issue. I recommend meeting at least once a week. You should discuss general office issues, upcoming due dates for suspenses, leadership taskers, etc… Your leadership meeting must be purposeful; I suggest having an official agenda or plan so that all necessary topics are covered.

I developed a 1-page Battle Rhythm that kept our leadership team on track and let us know when things were coming up, what was currently due, training schedule/TDY schedule, birthdays, etc.  It also gave us an annual Big Rocks picture at the bottom of the page. I know there are excel sheets other offices have used to try to keep all of this info sorted, but I just found the excel sheet to be too cumbersome to use daily and it is not easily printable. This one page is easy to edit and it can be kept on everyone’s desk as a reminder of things that need to be accomplished that week/month.

* Examples Documents:

 

**b. Strategic Plan**

Every office should have a strategic plan. As leadership, you should be able to articulate to your personnel where the office is going and the specific steps on how the office will get there, together. A strategic plan can include a mission, vison, and mindset or philosophy. It should also include lines of effort that are incorporated into everyday life. Strategic planning may be new to you so I recommend seeking out resources that can help you in this area. And of course, talk to the SJA about their priorities in the office because that will ultimately drive the office strategic plan. Finally get the LOS involved and then the entire office. Make it a team effort.

Below are a few of my ideas on how to develop a strategic plan:

If you do not know where to start, start with the JAG Corps’ strategic plan, which can be found on the AF/JAZ KM site. In addition to the JAGC flight plan/brief, you will also find the National/DoD/AF strategies. These are all important documents to help you ensure that your office strategic plan is in line with the DoD, AF, and JAGC.

Additionally, check out your Wing CC’s strategic plan. Typically, every Wing CC will have a strategic plan for the Wing that is based on the MAJCOM’s mission. See what aspects of the Wing mission should be incorporated into your office strategic plan.

KISS (keep it simple stupid): Try not to overwhelm your office with the plan. Your personnel should be able to conceptualize it quickly and explain it to others.

It may take a couple months to come up with your strategic plan. You will have to get a feel for the office and the people. See how you fit into the Wing mission and the JAGC mission. It is also helpful to learn your office’s weaknesses so that you can develop a plan that will help strengthen those weaknesses. Be sure to ask the office for feedback once you make a draft plan because you ultimately want them to buy into the plan.

Finally, see how the plan is being utilized throughout the office. You should constantly brief the plan and work it into day-to-day duties/ideas/issues. After about 9 months, do a reassessment of the plan. Did it work? Is it time to make changes or tweaks? Again, ask for input from your office.

My Recommendation: A concise strategic plan should be no more than two pages, have a mission, vision, and mindset/philosophy. Additionally, it should have specific Lines of Effort (no more than 3) that the office can implement into their day-to-day activities. Finally, each section of the office (e.g., military justice and civil law) should be able to create SMART goals based on the Lines of Efforts.

Practical Example: My leadership team developed our office strategic plan in November; four months after the arrival of the SJA, DSJA, and LOS. As I said, it may take you some time to develop it. It was several months after the office’s most recent Article 6 inspection and directly following an Article 6 self-assessment, so we had the time and perspective to identify our strengths and to see where we needed to improve. We drafted the strategic plan based on the Wing CC’s strategic plan and the JAGC flight plan, so it reflected the priorities of those two plans. We also asked for inputs from the office. We finalized the office strategic plan at our first off-site in November and the leadership team signed it and disseminated it to the office.

* Examples Documents:

********

**c. Conduct an Off-site**

Conduct an off-site at least once a year. It is a good opportunity to shut down the office and get everyone together to make sure the office is on the same page. If possible, schedule a physical or fun activity to go along with your off-site. This will loosen everyone up and add to the esprit de corps of the office. In addition, plan some type of exercise that will help develop an office discussion based on whatever is going on in the office or a new idea that leadership wants to present to the office.

* Practical Example:
  + Our first office off-site was in November after the first Article 6 self-assessment. We started the day on a popular local hike that took about 1.5 hours. At the turning point we stopped, grabbed water, and actually discussed our personal goals (this became a quarterly ritual for our office). After the hike, we went to a bowling alley and had lunch while discussing the Art 6 self-assessment, what the office was doing well, and where we needed to improve. We sought feedback from the office and finalized our office strategic plan. After the discussion and lunch we went bowling. This was a full day and it really allowed the office to bond and get to know each other on a deeper level, which is especially important after a change in leadership.
    - If you want to take it up another notch: Based on the Strategic plan, we had each section of the office come up with SMART goals for each Line of Effort. We gave them a deadline of January and then we had an office “on-site.” We had pizza in the courtroom, while the junior ranking person from each section briefed how their section was going to implement their SMART goals, which were based on the Lines of Effort from the office strategic plan. We went over each sections SMART goals at least three times throughout the year. This helped keep the strategic plan alive.
  + The second office off-site was the following November. We used the FSS “Unite funds” to book an obstacle challenge course in the mountains. Everyone drove up to an MWR lodge run by FSS. We did the obstacle course, which took about two hours. After the course we had lunch and then went over the JAGC flight plan. We actually turned the JAGC flight plan into a game, split the office into teams, and made it a competition. We also discussed the updates that we were making to the strategic plan. Again, this gave us the opportunity to share our leadership vision with our office personnel while bonding over something non-work related.
    - We had another “on-site” in January to look at each section’s SMART goals based off the new office strategic plan. .
* Example Document:



**d. Communication**

Work with the SJA/LOS on how your office will communicate. Be willing to utilize group text messaging, WhatsApp, or the latest group chat function.  Just remember there are pros and cons to texting/group chats. If a group text/chat is utilized, you will be able to accomplish many things quickly and keep everyone appraised of last minute changes or emerging issues. It’s also easy to do a roll call on text/chat. However, group text/chats can get too comfortable/familiar and result in unprofessionalism. You will have to set ground rules for your office so that military bearing is maintained.

If you do not like the idea of text/chat apps, I would recommend you at least consider using it for events like a SAV/Art 6.  When you have people running around all over the place in support of DV presence, it is extremely helpful to have a text chain where people can update the entire office about the status and timing of things.  In addition, it makes the SAV/ART 6 team think you are running everything smoothly – if only they saw the text chain, ha!

**e. Appointment Memos**

Update and organize all the appointment memos that are required by law, regulation, or policy. I personally recommend getting rid of all other unnecessary appointment memos. It is an unnecessary extra task to keep organized. Keep appointment memos centralized with leadership, that way you can practice version control and update everything at once. Do not forget about the specific memos that the Wing CC needs to sign (e.g., VWAP, MJ stuff).

Practical Example: We got rid of all of our appointment letters, except those that were absolutely required from outside units.  We went from about 70 to about 15.  Lifesaver!

**f. Article 6 Self-Assessment** –

Running the Article 6 program for the office is extremely important and probably a task that will be assigned to you. If it is not, I recommend requesting it, or at the very least get involved in the process, because it will help you get a better feel for the office as a whole and it will help you prepare to be an SJA one day.

Additionally, many JAGs don’t realize how important it is to know the questions that are on the Article 6 checklist. I recommend almost memorizing them, or at least the categories. As your office goes through the normal day to day activities, many things are supposed to be captured in the Article 6. If you have the checklist almost memorized, you will be able to issue spot those things as they come up in the day to day. Then you can make sure the office is accomplishing that specific task per regulations and substantiate items on the Article 6 checklist that might otherwise have been missed. This is especially true for items that your office may not deal with consistently. For example, there is a question regarding whether the proper procedures were used when handing over a military member to civilian law enforcement. If you didn’t know that was an Art 6 question and the issue came up you may not be aware of all the requirements that go along with that sort of issue.

You may have people in your office who have never gone through an Article 6 inspections; so before the next self-assessment, walk the office through what an Article 6 is, the purpose, the grading criteria/scale, etc... You can find all this information on the JAI KM page. I recommend requiring each section (both JAGs and paralegals) to review the JAI KM site information that is relevant to their section/job. Everyone should look at the deficiencies and how to address them. Additionally, I would require everyone to look at the initiative section of the JAI KM site and see if your office is doing the same thing, can benefit from another base’s ideas, or come up with a completely new way of doing something based on an idea from previous innovations. The Innovation data base can be found under the “Inspection Materials and Tools” tab and then under the “Checklist Related Material.”

* Here are the steps to take as soon as you get to your office as it as it pertains to the Article 6:
  + Sign up for the JAI KM Site and thoroughly review everything on it
    - Especially the JAI Training, Briefing, and Outreach Materials, which will help you develop an Article 6 plan for your office
  + Find out when the next Article 6 is scheduled.
  + Pull the last two Article 6 reports for the office and read through them thoroughly, take notes and see what the office did well and what deficiencies we identified – if possible, you want to avoid repeating deficiencies.
  + Review all the office self-assessments that were conducted since the last Article 6.
  + Review the deficiency tracker from the last Art 6. If your office does not have it, ask the MAJCOM for the deficiency tracker from the last Article 6.
  + Start preparing for your next self-assessment.

* Practical Example: After about 2 months at my base, I orchestrated a thorough self-assessment. Since the office had many new people, we decided to complete the self-assessment from scratch. We had multiple phases of review and corrections to ensure that everyone was on the same page with how we were going to standardize our answers and substantiation records.
* Example Plans:

 

## **4. Help Take Care of Your People**

[Table of Contents](#_Table_of_Contents)

**a. Welcome to the Office PP and Brief**

It is that time again, PCS season. Inevitably, your office dynamics will change, as people come and go. However, that does not mean that the office culture you built needs to change, especially if it is a good one. If it is a bad culture, this is an opportunity to change that and start fresh.

Briefing new personnel is a great opportunity to start them on the right track and help them find their place in the office. New personnel will have an initial feedback with the SJA, but this initial briefing should have a different goal and be more focused on how to succeed in the office environment. Additionally, it is a great opportunity to introduce them to the Wing and office mission and strategic plan. I recommend giving this briefing to new personnel within a week or two of their arrival, preferably as a group. This is also an opportunity for them to ask leadership any questions that they may have. I do recommend that the entire leadership team participate in this brief, if possible.

* Practical Example: Things to include in the power point are
  + Wing mission, vision, and mindset
  + Wing strategic plan
  + Wing leadership pictures/bios
  + Wing promotional video
  + Office mission, vision, and mindset
  + Office strategic plan
  + Office Battle Rhythm
  + Office meetings
  + Leave Rules
  + PT rules
  + Anything else unique about the office
* Example Power Point:

****

**b. Training**

It is very plausible that you will be in charge of training as the Deputy, which is great. Now is the time to really develop the young JAGs and paralegals so that they can one day be exceptional lawyers and paralegals. However, like all things in this guide, you should have a strategic plan for your training program. Do not get caught up in the “oh we just need to do something this week, let’s plug something in” concept of training. I recommend that you develop a training plan/concept that will cover the entire year.

I remember the days of random trainings every Thursday. One week would be justice, the next would be a labor law issue, and then something related to legal assistance the following week. Though the trainings in and of themselves were good, I did not feel like I was really building my knowledge as it pertained to an area of the law.

If we are trying to train generalists to become SJAs one day I figured, they should have the chance to learn about every aspect of the law even if they are not going to practice it right now.  What I found is that the random subject matter trainings were: (1) too isolated; and (2) people would often miss the training, thus not having the opportunity to be exposed to that specific area of the law.

Instead of the random trainings every week I recommend that you build a yearlong training plan that focuses on one legal subject each month. This way: (1) your personnel are getting more than just the basics; (2) the lessons are building off each other; and (3) if anyone misses one or two trainings that month they will still hear at least 2-3 trainings on the subject matter.

When developing your training plan also look at what resources you can pull from around the base and around the JAGC. You would be surprised how many specialists around the JAGC are willing to provide your office some training. Moreover, do not just ask people from the base to come in and do training, see if you can schedule field trips to their office/shops/sections. Additionally, try to plan your monthly subjects based on when someone is going to an in-person training. That way they can cover one of the weeks for that month of training. For example, the contracts course is always in July timeframe, so scheduled your Contracts/Fiscal law month for August or September.

Make sure the paralegals get involved, they can provide trainings as well. Further, there may be specific requirements from their upgrade training that need to be covered so this is a good opportunity for those not so common legal issues that they need training on. Additionally, you don’t have to do all the work. If you have a JAG that is the Chief of Contracts, give them a month and tell them they need to create the training plan for that month. This will give them the opportunity to develop a training plan that touches on areas they see frequently so that others in the office can become familiar with those issues and obviate the single point of failure that might otherwise be created if only one person typically handles all of the issues in a specific legal portfolio.

* Practical Example
  + Environmental law
    - Possible trainers: Environmental law field support center, Range Management Office, Civil Engineering Squadron (they probably have many different sections that involve environmental law). This is a good option for field trips too.
  + Operations Law
    - Possible trainers: JAO, AFSOC, CAOC, wing-level deployed JAG, Intelligence Squadron.
    - This could easily be 2 months and don’t forget to include Space and Cyber law (or they can be separate if you think you have enough to get 4 solid weeks);
    - If you are at Wing that has cool Operations stuff, this is an opportunity for field trips.
  + Military Justice
    - Possible trainers: JAJM, AFJAGS, CTC, CDC, ADC, SVC, Military Judge, civilian criminal litigation attorneys
    - Possible Topic Areas: 1 month focused on the administration and 1 month focused on litigation
  + Contracts/Fiscal
    - Possible trainers: CPTS, CONs, Acquisitions
  + Labor
    - Possible trainers: CPO, EEO, Labor Law Field Support Center
  + Civil Law
    - Possible Topic Areas: FOIA, Air Shows, Flying Investigations, Civil Litigation, Claims, DSCA, Constitutional rights for military members
  + Ethics
    - Possible Topic Areas: OGE filing, WAGs, Gifts, General Principles, off-duty speeches/engagements
* Example Training Plan



**c. Professional Development Plan**

In addition to being legal professionals, we are also part of the profession of arms. Therefore, professional development as officers and enlisted should be your focus as a deputy. My motto as the deputy was that “these JAGs and paralegals will know more than I did at their age.” To ensure that outcome, I focused heavily on professional development. I recommend that your office focus on professional development at least once a month.

* Practical Example: When I was the deputy I made sure that at a minimum, at least once a month the officer and paralegals would have a professional development session. Sometimes the sessions were together, but mostly they were split so that each group could focus on things that were pertinent to their development. The professional development sessions focused on things like assignments, deployments, promotions, personnel records and how to find them, lunches with retired JAGs in the area and higher-level commanders on base, and bullet writing seminars. The LOS created the professional development plan for the enlisted, but we worked together to ensure that our team received as much information as possible to equip them for their next assignments.
* Example PD Training Plan:



**d. Office Rotation Plan**

If your office does not have one, talk to the SJA/LOS about creating an office rotation plan. It is important that you develop well rounded attorneys and paralegals. When you get to your base review everyone’s records and see what they have been the Chief or NCOIC of in the current office or a prior office. After reviewing the records make a plan on where everyone will move and when. You will also need to re-think the rotation plan once you know what JAGs/paralegals will be PCSing to your base. The office rotation plan should be reviewed regularly because things like deployments, out of cycle PCSs, or any other combination of events will occur that will disrupt your rotation plan. Our base kept the office rotation plan on our weekly battle rhythm, that way it was always front and center on leadership’s mind. Oh and finally, this is an Article 6 requirement so make sure your office has one.

**e. TDY Opportunities**

I know what you are thinking, of course we send people TDY.  However, you will be surprised how rarely people are sent TDY.  When you arrive at your base check the training records of all the JAGs in your office. See who has been to what courses and start to identify who needs to go to certain courses. Additionally, think strategically about TDY options and coordinate TDYs with your office rotation plan. If you know a JAG will be the Chief of Military Justice in a few months try to make sure that they have the opportunity to attend the Military Justice Administrative Course at the AF JAG School.

You and the LOS should constantly be in CNS and asking people what courses they want to go to, especially if it is centrally funded!  Additionally, look for non-CNS courses that may be available such as: (1) courses put on in the local area by the State Bar Association; (2) courses that support the base (like attending the national Air Show conference in December); (3) courses that are available to other career fields and will be helpful for JAGs to attend (like the IG course). Again, think outside the box when it comes to TDYs for your people.

**f. Bullets/Inputs** –

As the Deputy, you may be responsible for OPR/EPR/Awards/Decorations packages and there is nothing worse than asking your team to come up with a quarter or year’s worth of bullets/inputs at the last minute. To avoid that outcome, you should have your office submit bullets/inputs on a regular basis, either weekly or monthly. It will save the SJA/DSJA/LOS a lot of time if you have this information coming in on a regular basis.

There are different perspectives on what I am going to say next so take this with a grain of salt and see what your SJA prefers. I think everyone should be writing the first draft of their OPR/EPR and Award packages. I think this for multiple reasons: (1) you are your own best advocate and you should not leave your career in other people’s hands; (2) at some point, these junior officers and enlisted personnel will be deputies and LOSs and learning how to write earlier in their careers rather than later will help them once they get to middle management level.

If you are going to require your personnel to submit bullets and write the first draft of their packages, you have to teach them how to do it. As part of your professional development program incorporate bullet writing trainings. This does not have to be done by you or your LOS; in fact, I recommend that you find a senior NCO or officer who can train the office on bullet writing. You can also create bullet writing professional development games for the office to help people see how bullets stack up against each other in a board. Finally, look into getting your officers appointed as board members on the WSA quarterly award boards. This will be a great experience for them to see how packages stack up against each other.

* Practical Example
  + I always emphasized to my people that they are their best advocate and that they should not leave their careers in other people’s hands, not even the DSJA or SJA (we of course tell them that we have their backs but they do not know who they will have as their supervisor in the future).
  + I created a document for our people to submit each week.  They use one of the three options (which ever they prefer) and then they copy and paste it so that at the end of the month they have a 1-page document with a lot of information on it that can be used for bullets.  Everyone started with inputs and as inputs improved in quality, they started writing their own bullets.  I started off reviewing these weekly and then realized it would be too much work so I reviewed them at the end of the month and provide feedback on bullets (ask about numbers, ask about impact, have them clarify stuff, etc..).   Everyone has to submit their inputs to their supervisor, the LOS (for enlisted), and myself.  For the officers they really just sent them to me.
  + After about a year we switched to requiring the inputs/bullets to be placed on an AF 1206 so that the office could see how long their bullets needed to be.
* Example Documents:

 

**g. Physical Training**

Physical training is important! Give your people time to work out. It will really help office morale and ensure that people are taking care of themselves. Unit PT that involves sports can be fun, just watch out for the competitive nature of some members. You don’t want office sports to detract from office morale.

Additionally, make sure you know when everyone must take their fitness test. Though it is the individual’s responsibility you still want to make sure you are encouraging people before their test and potentially working extra with people who need help with certain aspects of the test. Also, keep a copy of everyone’s scores. You will often need their fitness reports for performance, reports, awards, and decoration and it’s faster if you already have that information on file.

**h. Reserves**

As the deputy it is very likely that you will be in charge of the reservists. Honestly, how to manage reservists should be its own guide. Understanding their system is a whole new world. After talking to your SJA, I recommend you reach out to the senior reservist in your office and see how the program has been run in the past. Then reach out to all the other reservists in the office to introduce yourself. Get to know them and ask for feedback or things they think will help the program run more smoothly. Also, see if they have any issues they need resolved.

* Here are a few things to look into for reservists
  + Check to ensure that everyone’s’ OPRs/EPRs are up to date
  + Check to see if anyone is due for a decoration
  + Figure out when everyone’s “good year” (RR year) dates are
  + Get access to UTAPS
  + Get access to AROWS-R

## **5. Organize the Office**

[Table of Contents](#_Table_of_Contents)

**a. Standardization**

I am a huge proponent of standardization. I had never heard of the concept before I entered the military and went to Commissioned Officers Training. And as much as I despised COT, I loved the idea of standardization. If done correctly, standardization allows efficiency and creativity. Not having to re-create the wheel every time something is done avoids wasted energy and frustration for all involved. Additionally, once things are standardized it provides more time to think outside the box and create better programs/products for the office and the Wing. I recommend standardizing as many things as you possibly can in your office, from the legal reviews to how emails are written/sent.

* Practical Example: A great example of standardization is standardizing the office legal reviews and creating a standard writing guide. These two items will eliminate the constant edits to work product that occur when personnel repeatedly make the same errors/mistakes. Additionally, a standard writing guide will help your office personnel learn the SJA’s and your quirks when it comes to writing. For example, I don’t like to split names between lines, a name should be all on one line. My team would not know that about me, unless I tell them. So the writing guides explains my little quirks and that eliminates me having to red pen an entire paper due to one personal writing quirk.
* Example Plans:



**b. Clean the Office**

Yes, have everyone physically clean and declutter the office when you arrive, to include their own office. My motto is “leave it better than you found it.” Of course, that applies to all things but especially the physical office.  We spend anywhere from 50-80 hours a week in these offices and you may not realize it but the physical atmosphere of the office has an effect on mood, productivity, and focus. Your people will appreciate you taking the time to make the office a pleasant and organized place to be. It will show them that you care about how the office presents itself to the base, which will encourage them to do the same in their spaces.

In addition to cleaning the office, make an effort to declutter it. Unfortunately, over the years, things have probably piled up around the office. Old desks, computers, monitors, cords, supplies, etc… Get rid of this stuff! Close the office for a day or two and just take it all to DRMO or a dumpster depending on whether it’s an accountable item. Clean out all spaces, closets, drawers, etc… There is no need to open a draw and find work product from 2001 or open a closet and find all sorts of computer equipment stacked to the ceiling. Make sure the entire office participates. This is not a job for the new Airman to accomplish. The Chief of MJ needs to be out there with the SrA cleaning and throwing stuff away. And you should set the example by getting your hands dirty and helping.

* A couple other things to help the physical space of the office:
  + When people come to you with construction project ideas try to see if it is feasible. They will appreciate you taking the time/effort to make their work experience better, and it is your job.
  + Spot checks: Just like at home, the office will get dirty/cluttered over time. You have to keep up the cleanliness, so do spot checks. If you have a kitchen do an alternating cleaning schedule between civil law and justice. Also, at least quarterly, close down the office at noon and have a pizza/cleaning party.
  + Remind people that this is not their house. This is a professional environment and they need to treat the physical space as such, especially the common areas. This may be a bit much, but I take dishes left in the sink overnight to my office (and the owner has to come claim them if they want them back, ha-ha. Yes, I find that funny but they were warned).
  + In the spirit of leaving things better than you found it, create a rule that at least 1 week before someone PCS/moves offices, their office must be completely cleaned and spotless. And do a check before they go! You don’t want the first impression of the new personnel to be, “wow this is a dirty office.” Because they will equate that to the entire office.
  + Part of this is also getting rid of checklists/appointment letters/extra duties that are just not necessary.  I try to cut down on that stuff as much as possible (at least 50% if you can). It helps free up time for people to actually work, and most importantly, it is less stuff that leadership has to track.
  + Make sure it’s not only the enlisted who are cleaning. The officers need to be out there cleaning up as well.
* Practical Example: It took my last office a year to completely clean it out, literally a year. There was so much, just crap (70 desktops computers, 40 monitors, countless random items that had piled up over the years that should have been trashed).  Every month I would find a new storage closet that was packed full of needless items. Once we were done, the office was able to create FIVE additional workspaces within the office.

**c. Meetings**

If there isnot a single depository of all the meetings that the legal office has with outside agencies, create one! This list should include the meeting, frequency, primary and alternate, and whether it is a meeting that is an Article 6 requirement and thus you will need the meeting notes. Everyone in the office should have access to this list so that if anyone is out the office can make sure that someone covers the meeting.

A few examples of typical office meetings are:

* + Law and Order with the Wing CC/OSI/SFS
  + SAPR with the Vice Wing CC
  + Weekly Leadership meeting with the Wing CC
  + Chief MJ meeting with OSI
  + Environmental meeting with CES
  + Non-appropriated Fund Council meeting with FSS
  + Emergency Management Working Group (EMWG)
  + Base Support Planning Committee (BSPC)
  + Planning and Zoning meeting with CES
  + Community Initiatives Encroachment Meeting with Community Initiative Team
  + Executive Committee of Medical Staff (ECOMS) with the MDG
  + Wing Orientation Meeting with Airman and Family Readiness Center
  + Family Advocacy Committee (FAC) with MDG
  + Central Registry Board (CRB) with MDG
  + Child Sexual Maltreatment Response Team (CSMRT) with MDG
  + High Risk for Violence Response Team (HRVRT) with MDG
  + Wing Inspection Team (WIT) Member Meeting with IG

Office meetings are unavoidable, but they should be utilized strategically. When you arrive, spend the first month attending all meetings to see how necessary or productive they are. Additionally, ask the staff if they think a particular office meeting is necessary. If the current meetings are not helpful, recommend getting rid of them. Give that time back to your office so that they can focus on accomplishing their work and leaving at a reasonable hour.

I recommend no more than four office meetings a week that are never over an hour (unless you tack on training with it). Short syncs or stand-ups are an option. This is a quick, no more than 15-minute get together where everyone bring up hot issues. Not what they are dealing with on a day in day out, but something that the SJA/DSJA/LOS needs to know is coming their way ASAP.

* You should have rules for your office meetings. Below are a couple examples
  + Set the time limit for the meeting.
  + Every meeting needs an agenda or specific purpose/topic to be addressed.
  + No meetings on Friday, unless it’s a meeting to let people out early.
  + Don’t let someone hijack meetings. And if you have someone who does it every week bring them aside and talk to them about it.
* Practical Example: My ideal schedule for office meetings is below:
  + Stand-up:
    - Who: The entire office
    - What: Quick morning meeting, lasting no more than 20 minutes
    - Where: Probably the courtroom where everyone can literally stand, to impress upon the point that this is a short meeting
    - When: Early in the week, maybe Monday or Tuesday
    - Why: So that people in the office can notify everyone at once about any hot issues that are coming up
  + Military Justice
    - Who: The MJ section and anyone with a need to know
    - What: Section specific meeting
    - Where: Conference room/Courtroom
    - When: Before or after the NAF MJ meeting, or early in the week
    - Why: Discuss the status of cases/Art15s/Discharges.
      * I recommend a different meeting to go over any active cases that will be going to trial. This would only include leadership, the Chief of MJ, trial counsel, and case paralegal. That way you can really focus on that one case and not waste everyone else’s time getting into the weeds of things
  + Civil Law/Ops Law
    - Who: The Civil/Ops Law section
    - What: Section specific meeting
    - Where: Conference room/Courtroom
    - When: Wednesday or earlier in the week
    - Why: Discuss the status of legal assistance, tax center, claims, labor/employment law, contracts, etc…
  + Staff Meeting
    - Who: The entire office
    - What: Full blown office meeting
    - Where: Conference room/Courtroom
    - When: Whatever date you do your weekly training
    - Why: Discuss office issues, things occurring around the base, present award/decorations, etc.
* Example Schedule:

****

**d. The Calendar**

I highly recommend that you get an organized office Outlook or shared electronic calendar that is color-coded and that everyone is responsible for keeping up to date.  I recommend limiting the office to one calendar, instead of separate calendars for MJ, civil law, and leadership. That is a personal preference because I hate switching back and forth between calendars. Instead, just create one calendar with a color coding system. It is invaluable information as the Deputy to know, generally, where everyone is throughout the week. It allows you to plan office functions, set up TDYs, and know when you need to call in for reserve support. I usually spent Monday mornings reviewing the calendar for the week, month, and future months. Additionally, if you are a visual person, you will be able to see the gaps in the office from the color schemes.

* Practical Example: Everyone had to put their information on one calendar, even doctor appointments etc… Basically, if they were going to be out of the office for more than an hour (besides like lunch) they needed to put it on the calendar.
  + MJ = red
  + Civil law = orange
  + Personal/leave = yellow
  + TDY/Reserve duties = green
  + Leadership/entire office = blue
* Example Document:

****

**e. The drive**

The Drive! The depository of everything the office does. What is interesting about the drive is that you have anywhere from 10 to 30 people with different personalities, organizational preferences, and structures all handling the drive at once. Which is why you have to standardize its use.

When you get to your new office, spend some time in the drive. See if it makes sense, are things easy to find, do you have a robust ERM drive/process where finalized products can be saved?

Not being able to find things on the drive or not saving things on the drive can cause many problems in an office if something happens to someone. This is one of those sad talks where you tell everyone that if a car hits them you will feel bad, but the work will go on and we need to be able to find what they were working on. Additionally, future office personnel will need the work product and final products for continuity and Article 6 purposes.

After reviewing the office drive, if you see issues now is the opportunity for you to make some changes and to ultimately KISS it. It may seem small but standardizing the drive will be extremely helpful to the production of your office. As the Deputy, you should review the office drive at least quarterly to make sure everything is still going as planned.

* Here are a few examples of rules for an office drive:
  + All work product must be saved on the office drive. Absolutely no work product on personal desktops/laptops.
  + There should be no personal folders on the office drive that contain work product.
  + Work product should be saved in a designated folder that corresponds to the legal issue.
  + If someone wants a personal folder on the drive, it should be under the general office folder and should only contain personal information (like OPRs, fitness reports, ABLRs application, etc…).
  + Finalized work product in PDF form belongs in the ERM drive, not the regular office drive (except for MJ stuff). The regular office drive should have draft documents
  + Drafts that you want saved to continuity of an evolving legal concept should be labeled “v1, v2, v3” or something like that with the ultimate version labeled “final.”
  + My motto is that everything needs to be in a folder, so no free radicals out there. This will keep it organized.
* Practical Example: At my last base, we spent months organizing the office drive but it was well worth it. Once complete, finding documents was extremely easy and if someone fell out it was easy to pick up right where they stopped. Additionally, it made it easy for leadership to find something if they needed to answer a question to the NAF/MAJCOM ASAP and did not have time to go ask a Captain.
  + The ideal office drive is very simple. There should be a folder for
    - General Office stuff
      * Leadership (this could be a separate big folder as well)
      * Training
      * Professional Development
      * ROSTERs
    - Military Justice
      * Courts
      * Art 15s
      * Administrative Discharges
    - General Law
      * Civil Law
      * Legal Assistance and Preventive Law
      * Ops Law
      * Ethics
      * Labor
      * Environmental