



# What has helped launch and support your career path?

## Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone

name ..... **Gina Buser**  
company ..... **Traveling Coaches, Inc.**  
website ..... [www.travelingcoaches.com](http://www.travelingcoaches.com)

**I started my legal career over 25 years ago in a small law firm through a co-op program in high school.** That program taught me some valuable lessons that helped me successfully navigate a career inside law firms for nearly 10 years before co-founding Traveling Coaches in 1995.

Over the course of my career, I've become a strong believer in looking for opportunities to learn and grow, and I try to be proactive and intentional about finding those opportunities. One thing that has proven successful for me is stepping out of my comfort zone and volunteering for different projects that allow me to learn about my peers, bosses and direct reports. I find that the more I understand about their passions, strengths and responsibilities, the better I am able to connect with them and speak to their needs.

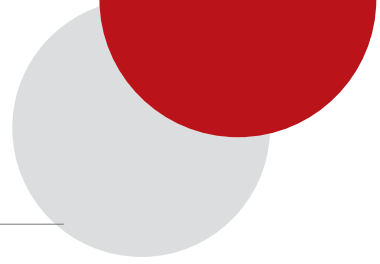
Another critical component to my career success has been networking with peers in other organizations and other

service providers. Networking has allowed me to share ideas and learn from the experiences of others, and I've found that when I intentionally go out of my way to make introductions and provide helpful information to others, I receive referrals and other critical information when I need it the most.

Networks can be powerful things — especially when you follow the rule to “give more than you receive.”

Above all, the most significant element in launching and supporting my career path has been in setting annual personal and professional goals for myself. The balance between personal and professional is important and helps alleviate some of the burnout that many of us (in the legal community) face over the years. Also, breaking my annual goals into quarterly and monthly goals keeps me even more motivated and on track, with smaller and more frequent achievements. And I always try to take the time to celebrate when I accomplish one of my goals, as celebration fuels me for my next goal completion. My career is a collection of 25 years' worth of goals and small celebrations.

Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, once pointed out, “If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there.” I've tried to look ahead at the destination, and then I've chosen the roads and companion travelers to help get me there. **ILTA**



## Refusing to Accept Limitations

name . . . . . **Donna Payne**  
company . . . . . **PayneGroup, Inc.**  
website . . . . . [www.payneconsulting.com](http://www.payneconsulting.com)

There's a quote by author Richard Bach that pretty much describes the first part of my career path advice: "Argue for your limitations, and sure enough, they're yours." Call it naivete, bravado or what you will, throughout my career people have been more than willing to tell me what I should or should not do — setting artificial limitations or even going so far as to laugh when I made a suggestion that they thought was out of reach. But I have realized many of my goals through sheer perseverance, simply because I refused to accept these limitations.

I also believe there is something to be learned from everyone and everything. Early on, before starting PayneGroup, I decided that I needed to work for a variety of companies while putting myself through school. My goal was to work for as many organizations as possible on a temporary basis; government contracts at that time were for a maximum of 90 days and there were always corporations looking for people with good computer skills. The jobs varied from receptionist to database developer to programmer, and there were lessons to be learned at each business.

Some of the most valuable lessons can't be taught in business school, such as how to treat others regardless of the title they hold. I also learned that it's possible to make yourself invaluable to an organization; however, it's amazing how few people actually know how, or care enough, to do this. It was during the time I spent working at these organizations that I focused on building my leadership skills. I quietly watched good leaders lead and bad managers fail, tucking away these lessons for future use.

My motto has always been to learn something new every day (and don't be afraid to get your hands dirty at any level). I truly feel that if you don't learn something new on a regular basis, you begin to mentally stagnate and lose your edge. This goes for every level in the professional food chain. Secretaries need to cross-train and helpdesk technicians need to continually learn new skills. CIOs and CEOs need to be in touch with what their people do on a daily basis in addition to developing their own professional skills. One thing that I do is to teach about five *Master Series: Word for Law Firms* classes each year. This is a tough class and it forces me to work hard in order to deliver good content. Even my kids have now gotten into the habit of asking me each night (as I do them), what did you learn today? Knowing that I have to answer this question makes learning not only a goal, but a way of life.

Reflecting upon the past 17 years since PayneGroup began, I think it truly boils down to believing in yourself and your products/services; not taking "no" for an answer; putting yourself out there and making yourself visible; and being a life-long learner. Lastly, I would recommend checking and then rechecking your ethics on a regular basis and focusing on treating others the way you would want to be treated. While it's business, it's also life; ultimately, you sleep a lot easier if you first do no harm. **ILTA**

## Supporting Others

name . . . . . **Lance Waagner**  
company . . . . . **Intelliteach**  
website . . . . . [www.intelliteach.com](http://www.intelliteach.com)

I have found the number one ingredient to launching and sustaining my own career is being passionate in helping others. This is particularly important in any support organization. I have met many people that had the background, education and other credentials to technically be outstanding at a job, but lacked a burning desire to help others; the motivation to go the extra mile and see things through to completion just wasn't there. One of my role models, my mom, often says, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care," and that could not be truer.

A second key ingredient in my formula is to always be in learning mode. With the pace of technology, this is no small task, but finding energy from learning new things has always been exciting to me.

Another ingredient would have to be teamwork. The higher you climb the corporate ladder, the less you personally produce, and the more you must rely on your team. Having a strong team that works well together can make or break any executive. Surrounding myself with highly skilled, passionate individuals who can and will work together towards the same goal or vision has been paramount to my (and my company's) success. **ILTA**



# What do you recommend to professionals in the legal industry who want to advance their careers?

## Get Involved

name . . . . . Lance Waagner  
company . . . . . Intelliteach  
website . . . . . www.intelliteach.com

**My advice on advancing your professional career in the legal support arena would be: get involved.**

As a “retired geek” myself, I spent far too many years living and working within my comfort zone and not pushing my social boundaries. Getting involved as a volunteer through ILTA or other trade/support groups can only advance your own knowledge, confidence and contacts. Legal is a small community and legal-IT is even smaller. You never know what you may learn or whom you might meet by getting involved.

I also believe you must be passionate about what you are doing. Don’t waste your time, or the time of your co-workers or employer, by just showing up to work. You must have a desire to do great things and make a difference, regardless of your position.

Finally, you must become an expert within your area of responsibility. Reading, trying new things and challenging accepted beliefs is all part of becoming an expert. Advancing your career will require more than what everyone else is doing — you must do more. **ILTA**

## Understand the Business of the Law Firm

name . . . . . Gina Buser  
company . . . . . Traveling Coaches, Inc.  
website . . . . . www.travelingcoaches.com

**My recommendations for anyone looking to advance their professional career in the legal support arena are three-fold.**

- Pursue opportunities to gain a better understanding of the business of the law firm, including the different roles and practice groups within a firm. You will gain credibility more quickly with the partners if you understand the business aspects, challenges and strategic goals of your firm and how your role can and should be tied to those areas.

- Build relationships with peers and others throughout the firm. Take the time to observe and understand their workflow and daily needs. When you speak to their specific needs, you will earn their trust. If you take the time to understand their needs, you will buy yourself a measure of grace that you would not normally have when you encounter bumps in the road.
- Take advantage of seminars and webinars to learn about trends in the legal industry. Explore trends both inside and outside your areas of expertise. Relevant knowledge coupled with a willingness to serve is a successful combo. It is also helpful to study trends of other industries as legal tends to lag behind “corporate America.” Find outlets/ seminars/webinars suited to professional development in a professional services organization. **ILTA**

## Build Strong Relationships

name ..... **Donna Payne**  
company ..... **PayneGroup, Inc.**  
website ..... [www.payneconsulting.com](http://www.payneconsulting.com)

**Hiring mistakes are expensive, so organizations tend to hire people they know or people that are referred to them from trusted sources.** One of the most valuable things you can do for professional development is to build strong relationships. Within your firm, make sure that everyone knows your name and has a positive impression of you; this includes the person in the mailroom all the way up to the managing partner. Even if you are happy with your current company, it never hurts to expand your network outside of the firm as well. One sure-fire way to do this is to take advantage of the ILTA membership and connect with other members. You can also join LinkedIn groups, utilize Twitter, Google+ and other means to find like-minded individuals. My first book deal came from volunteering and answering questions on a technical Excel newsgroup. You never know what connecting with others — even in the virtual world — will yield.

If you want to move ahead in any organization, be intellectually curious. Some managers say that when they hire, they look for someone who is a good fit for the current job as well as being capable of moving into the next higher position. This takes someone who is constantly focusing on self-improvement, and there are so many opportunities within the legal profession to gain knowledge. For instance, someone at the helpdesk might want to learn more about network engineering or document management systems; a trainer might want to know more about court rules in various jurisdictions or adult learning styles. By remaining intellectually curious and expanding your expertise, you also increase your perceived value.

And if you're feeling stuck and need some inspiration, look around your organization and find someone that you admire, even if this person is in a different job function. Watch them, and see how they interact with others. Find the qualities that make them successful, and take note. I've had many unofficial mentors over the years. Don't forget to pay it forward, and mentor someone else coming up in the ranks. Helping others also helps you learn and grow. **ILTA**

## Check Out ILTA's Job Bank!

ILTA's Job Bank has long been the most frequently visited page on our website, and it grows in popularity each day. With the ability to sort by location or job title, it provides a quick look at the employment situation in your neighborhood or your area of expertise.

The Job Bank has always been a popular online destination among ILTA members, but it's remarkable that even in these tough economic times, member entities continue to post jobs. As of this writing, there are more than 170 jobs posted in all aspects of legal IT.

Anyone can post a job to the site. Simply send the text of your posting to Jeanne Martinez at [jeanne@iltanet.org](mailto:jeanne@iltanet.org). Be sure to include the location of the office for that particular position, a list of all requirements and the contact information to which the applicant can send materials. The job listing will run for three months, though it can be removed sooner upon request. The fee to ILTA member firms and 2011 Platinum, Gold and Silver Sponsors is \$150, for all others it's \$500.

Don't forget: If you're looking for a job, make sure to subscribe to the RSS feed so that you receive notification whenever a new job is posted. Just go to [ILTAnet.org](http://ILTAnet.org) and click on Job Bank in the Services menu. **ILTA**

This article was first published in ILTA's September 2011 issue of *Peer to Peer* titled "Professional Services: Tools of the Trade" and is reprinted here with permission. For more information about ILTA, visit their website at [www.iltanet.org](http://www.iltanet.org).