

# How'd You Get That Job? Linda Sharp, In-House Counsel at ZL Technologies

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## IN-HOUSE PERSPECTIVE

*I climbed the academic ranks at night while working full-time during the day, completing a BA, an MBA, and a JD...*

There's more than one path to in-house success.

Mine was perhaps more winding than most. I didn't start college right after high school, instead going to work at a Las Vegas law firm in 1978 as a receptionist, and then working my way up to secretary, paralegal, and office manager. One of the benefits of working through the ranks of a smaller firm was that I was exposed to a uniquely wide swath of legal activities: doing essentially everything except sign documents and appear in court. Being in the right place at the right time in the early days didn't hurt either, as we engaged in some of the major litigation matters of the day, including the MGM and Hilton fires — which led to sweeping reforms in high-rise safety codes.

Although my time there helped me attain an invaluable breadth of knowledge, I knew that there was a ceiling to what I could achieve through practical experience alone. One day, as one of the partners stopped by my cubicle to drop off some documents as he headed out to lunch with clients, I made my decision. I enrolled in UNLV that week and began the formal pursuit of a law degree.



I climbed the academic ranks at night while working full-time during the day, completing a BA, an MBA, and a JD. During my studies, I had the opportunity to move to California, where I continued my educational path while working for a mid-sized firm. Although the focus of my BA had been in accounting, it soon became apparent that technology was a common and increasingly interwoven thread through the business and legal worlds; through electives, I pursued as many computer classes as possible.

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It took me 13 years to finally leave the law firm environment. I was hired at West Publishing, now Thomson Reuters, where I worked for eight years and was involved in their then-revolutionary CD-ROM product line. My computer classes continued to pay off: during the Y2K scare, I furthered my career at a technology integration firm, where we focused on large IT installations and infrastructure upgrades. By the late 1990s, it had become undeniable that digital media had perfused both the public consciousness and the world of business end-users; and data management grew as a business concern.

One consequence of the digital era's emergence was the exponential increase in data volumes, as well as the corresponding demand for storage. Rising data

volumes exposed a troubling corporate inability to appropriately respond to discovery during litigation. More importantly, most lawyers didn't have the skill set requisite to determining what data was needed, where it was located, or how they were going to get it out of the IT systems. Realizing that this convergence of issues was right up my alley, I saw the opportunity to use my background in order to make a difference. I joined Kroll Ontrack as a legal consultant, where I had the opportunity to work with some of the nation's top attorneys from Top200 Law Firms and Fortune 500 Corporations.

For over nine years, I worked on some of the world's largest and most complex regulatory investigations, mergers and litigation matters. I enjoyed the challenges that we faced; especially fascinating were the negotiations with agents from organizations such as the FBI, DOJ, and FDA. I was fully engaged in each step of the discovery process with both clients and their outside counsel. My responsibilities included, among many other things, expert testimony, preparing counsel and deponents for 30(b)(6) testimony, evaluating and working to implement reasonable legal holds, training attorneys from Federal Agencies, Top200 firms and Fortune500 companies, and identifying cost-effective ways to reduce the volume of data to be placed on hold, and ultimately processed while still meeting legal requirements. I spoke and wrote about the challenges that corporations face in the discovery process, as well as the best methods for proactively managing information. The legal canon continued to evolve with the growth of technology, and the current state of law around eDiscovery always gave me pressing topics to discuss.

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My time as a legal consultant in the eDiscovery world was rewarding, but something was amiss. I consulted with my clients on quick and easy ways to begin to eliminate unneeded data stores and data volumes moving forward. Despite my efforts to reduce data volumes, every day I would see too much

irrelevant data coming our way. We billed for processing and ingesting that data, and worse yet, review and expensive long-term storage had to be implemented for data sets of which only 5%-10% would actually be produced. Tens of millions of dollars would potentially be spent to process, review, and host non-responsive information. I realized that the problems endemic to the process were linked to strategy more than specific tools. Companies needed to gain full control over their information rather than simply reducing it, a concept we're now familiar with and known as Information Governance.

I looked for a solution that could meet the needs of records managers, legal teams, compliance officers, IT departments, and business teams. I searched for months, speaking with clients, other consultants, and company representatives. Nothing really seemed capable of the immense task at hand. One of my largest clients was using software from ZL Technologies, which prompted me to explore their offering; to my surprise, it provided exactly what I had been preaching all along. After analyzing nearly every existing solution on the market, I found that even though many had a fantastic marketing story to tell, ZL stood alone in terms of customer feedback corroborating the company's narrative.

After a stint at another litigation-related organization, the stars aligned and I was able to get a foot in the door at ZL. Speaking with the president and CEO on several occasions cemented my respect for the company's strategic direction, and before long, we agreed on an in-house role that perfectly suited my experience and expertise. My current role is truly a culmination of my journey since those days at the small law firm. Little could the partner at the old firm have known that, by dropping those documents at my desk, he prompted the chain of events that have led me to a varied and rewarding career in one of the most significant areas of modern legal practice.

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*legal profession and over 15 years focusing on data management initiatives.*

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