

Dear Dr. Mazie,

After joining IRWA and taking a few classes, I am now looking at my career options in right of way. I thought I might make a good acquisition agent for an energy company, but friends in the business say I'd be better suited for a career in title services. What's involved with title work, and how do I know if it's a good match for me?

– Randy in Ohio



It's always a good idea to listen to our friends, but we don't necessarily have to take their advice. I suggest they answer a few questions for you so you can form your own conclusion. Ask them what's involved with title work and what skills and experience make someone successful in that field. Ask them which specific personality traits they see in you that make them think you would do well in the title business.

Title services in the private arena are unique and lay the foundation for all other right of way work that follows. It's important to know that title work in the public arena of right of way is handled very differently from that of the private sector. I will address your question from the private sector perspective since that is where my primary experience falls.

Specific skills are needed for private sector title work, and certain personalities are better suited for the many long hours of standing required for research work in courthouses. You need to have a bit of a detective aspect in your personality, an inquiring mind, knowledge of what you are looking for, plus a really good mentor to guide you.

Most project teams have very little idea as to what's required in title research. In fact, I've heard project engineers and project managers say that anyone can do title work. Maybe that's true when it comes to simply running title. However, in order create an end product that is accurate and usable, it takes someone who is thorough and investigative, and has extraordinary attention to detail.

I asked some seasoned right of way title professionals to help me create a list of traits that can determine whether or not someone is well-suited to a career in title services. According to these experts, effective title researchers share these common qualities:

Attention to Detail: As they say, "The devil is in the details," and this is certainly true in the field of title research. The preparation of title files and reporting documents requires a meticulous approach to ensure that there are no loose ends and that the chain of title is seamless.

Organization: Successful title research requires someone who is organized and methodical in their approach. Someone who likes to skip steps would not be well suited.

Self-Motivation: Title researchers typically work independently in the field without direct supervision. The ability to show up early, stay late and keep focused on the task at hand without distraction is essential.

Puzzle Solving: A good title researcher must have an inquisitive mind and enjoy the process of digging for missing details. Much like solving a puzzle, the researcher must know how to find the missing pieces and determine how they fit until the puzzle is complete.

Challenges v. Benefits

As with any job, there are challenges and benefits that should be taken into consideration before exploring a particular career.

A title agent can be confronted by a multitude of challenges, one of which is working with clients and project teams who may not fully understand the title process or what it takes to get the job done with complete accuracy. Working with different courthouses is another challenge, as each has its own unique set of requirements and most of them are over-crowded and lack the workspace facilities needed. Then there are the hurdles associated with tracking down missing property documentation, correcting incomplete or inaccurate information from taxing authorities and dealing with inadequate parcel mapping.

Fortunately, title research also comes with some important rewards, some of which include job stability, good compensation, career advancement opportunities and the chance to travel. For those who enjoy working alone as well as part of a team, this job offers a good balance of both. Everyone on your team has a common goal, and there's always a huge sense of accomplishment that comes with finishing a difficult title search.

Hope this helps answer your question. With so many good career opportunities available in right of way, I am confident that one of them will be an ideal fit for you.

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A nationally recognized speaker, workshop leader and trainer, Dr. Mazie Leftwich, Psy.D has a clinical background in applied psychology with expertise in organizational and personal development. She is Senior Vice President of Contract Land Staff, LLC, where she oversees training and team excellence programs.