

THE INSTRUCTOR SPOTLIGHT SERIES

Get to know the people behind the purpose

BY DEIDRE ALVES, M.ED.

“The only time I look down on someone is when I am offering a hand to lift them up.”

It’s interesting how some quotes stick with you so deeply because they hold such an important truth. Having been in the field of learning and development for more than 20 years, I have had the opportunity to lead teams from diverse industries to effectively improve and innovate their professional learning programs and systems. I’ve also had the opportunity to meet some truly inspiring people, such as the woman who said these very important words in her quote. This particular quote came from a terminally ill patient who was part of a program teaching aspiring physicians how to identify with the patient perspective. *Educating* others, whatever the industry, is about *servicing* others. Sometimes, education itself becomes the very hand that lifts someone up.

Sometimes it is support of another, an ear to listen, or an act of kindness. It is incredible how this woman selflessly offered her precious and fleeting time in service to educating others—with a powerful quote in tow that has changed my life and perspective, and I hope yours. Always strive to lift others up— always offer your hand—you may be very surprised and happy at what you see.

LORA GUNTER, J.D., SR/WA

Continuing our series, we put the instructor spotlight on Lora Gunter, J.D., SR/WA, a CLIMB Certified Instructor and attorney with the Texas Department of Transportation, Right of Way Division. Lora puts her right of way/infrastructure students first,



front, center and in the driver’s seat as an instructor for IRWA’s **C102- Elevating Your Ethical Awareness**. Lora also instructs many of our IRWA Law classes, including but not limited to **C800- Principles of Real Estate Law**, **C801- United States Land Titles** and **C804- Skills of Expert Testimony**.

What is the most rewarding part of instructing for the IRWA?

The most fulfilling part of instructing is having the opportunity to influence someone’s career development. Education is key to anything we do in our lives, so to have the potential to impact someone’s growth is an amazing feeling. It is also a tremendous responsibility, so I am always trying new approaches and implementing ideas in an effort to improve the education experience. With the availability of online learning for so many classes, I believe that raises the bar for instructors to offer something distinctive to make the classroom experience special.

The best part of a class is when the participants fully engage and share experiences. Not only do these perspectives enhance collective learning, but they also allow me to augment my instruction in future classes. In addition, class participation enables me to check for understanding and see what topics may need more or less coverage.

Ultimately, getting to know more about people in our profession is the most rewarding part of instructing a class and knowing the contribution I can make on an individual’s career is what gives me long-term gratification.

IRWA’s purpose is to improve the quality of life through infrastructure development. As an instructor, how do you contribute to the fulfillment of this purpose?

I love the IRWA mission statement! It really sums up the impact our industry has across the globe. Many times, the public sees infrastructure projects as a negative when they have to endure construction inconveniences or with the use of eminent domain power. However, I like the fact that everything we do on a daily basis is rooted in infrastructure. Whether it’s turning on a light in the morning, taking a shower or driving to work, infrastructure impacts *everyone’s* life every day!

As an instructor, I like to incorporate this mission theme into our curriculum so that our membership can take pride in the work that we do. IRWA’s ethical foundation is to protect the integrity of our profession. We are all representatives of our industry in various capacities, so we have a chance to market the positive impacts of our trade through our interactions with the public.

What is the most important thing you would like your future students to know upon entering your class?

I have two goals for each class: 1) the students will *retain* the material we cover in class, and 2) the class is fun. Many people take classes for credit and focus on passing the exam. Sure, I want everyone to pass, but the bigger goal of our classes is to impart knowledge that can empower the participants in their respective careers. That’s why my favorite class to teach is **Course 102—Elevating Your Ethical Awareness**. I start out by saying, “I am about to give you the best news you will hear all day—there is no test!” That seems to relax everyone and enable them to focus on dialogue and interaction.

My philosophy is that people retain information if it is associated with a positive experience. That is why I strive to have fun in class. Also, a relaxed, fun atmosphere allows a person to open up, which helps to foster participation.

Even though I am instructing, there is so much to be learned from the other participants in a class. That is why *shared knowledge* significantly augments the learning experience. In fact, this information exchange enables me to learn, too. When I begin a class by setting expectations, I ask everyone to participate. I tell them that my biggest fear is that they will go to sleep that night hearing my voice in their head, so let’s please hear some other voices, too! 🙌

A special thank you to Lora for sharing her instructional insights in right of way/ infrastructure professional learning with us. To book Lora or any of our other talented CLIMB Certified Instructors today in your Chapter, please visit <https://www.irwaonline.org/members/irwa-course-instructors> and click “Find an Instructor” or if you would like to nominate an instructor to be featured in our series, please contact education@irwaonline.org.



Deidre Alves is IRWA’s Chief Learning Officer.