



Debbie Johnson



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In our latest series we are catching up with those who work in the world of conveyancing to see why they joined the profession, the route in that they took, and what words of wisdom they have for those looking to join or who have recently joined.

This month we spoke to Debbie Johnson, associate and licensed conveyancer at Harrowells Solicitors who spoke to us about moving from nursing to conveyancing, and how ten years after qualifying she couldn't be happier with the direction her career has taken her in.

"After doing my A-levels I was sure I wanted to be a nurse, I even went as far as securing a place at college and doing two years of training but I finally had to admit that, in reality, it just wasn't for me. So, I fell into retail roles for the next five years where I enjoyed the variety but I had itchy feet, as it wasn't a 'career' as such and I wanted to feel challenged.

"So back I went to college where I enrolled on a couple of word processing courses that specialised in medical and legal terminology, and it was this that led me to landing a role as a secretary at Harrowells. I absolutely loved it, the environment was great, and I had far more exposure to the legal side of things than I had expected. I saw where I wanted to go, and had a chat with my boss at the time. They were hugely supportive and I gradually started to move over to the fee earning side. Simultaneously, personal circumstances meant that I now had to be the sole wage earner at home, and this also drove me to explore progressing my role.

"I'm very fortunate to be at a great firm like Harrowells, who were fully supportive and paid for my qualifications which allowed me to study alongside working and earning a wage. I got my CLC licence in 2012 I haven't looked back since.

"I think this really is one of the most appealing aspects of the licensed conveyancers' qualification. It allows people to career change, or access a legal career without going down the traditional university route. The law is often seen as the preserve of the wealthy and connected. I'm neither, I come from a working-class background, but I'm now an associate and I hope to make partner at some point.

"I'm really passionate about now giving other people access to the opportunities that were provided to me. My assistant has recently decided to study and qualify as a licensed conveyancer and I'm excited to support her on their journey in what I believe is a truly great career.

"I'm sometimes asked if I wish I was a qualified solicitor instead, and honestly, I don't, for a number of reasons, but mainly because I love conveyancing. As strange as it may sound, for me it has a lot of parallels with nursing, as I wanted to work in A&E. It's fast paced, it's challenging, no two transactions are ever completely alike, and you're there to help people at an important time in their life. Personally, I find it very rewarding when you get to the point of completion and you can let your client know they can collect their keys.

"Over the ten years I have worked in conveyancing, there's been a considerable shift in how we, as licensed conveyancers, work. The biggest has probably been the advancement in digitisation, but due to the nature of the property market there are always going to be ups and downs and new challenges. As a result, it's not a job where you're going to be stagnant, it's a great industry for those who thrive on being busy.

"For anyone looking to get into conveyancing, or who is in the early stages of qualifying I would say

find a great mentor, they're worth their weight in gold. I've always had good people I can go to for help, advice and guidance. Find someone in the firm who can support you.

"One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was actually in the CLC magazine, back when it was printed, and it came from the owner of a law firm, who had started out as an office junior and he said 'you will never know everything about conveyancing, but if you don't know the answer, go find it!'