

Wayne Lovett: Executive Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary of Mercury Air Group, Inc.

GCC Profile

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By Jen Woods

It was not Wayne Lovett's dream to become a lawyer. In fact, one might say he fell into the profession by accident.

"It wasn't some long-held ambition to go to law school," said Lovett, who is now Executive Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary of Mercury Air Group. "One thing that I do better than 99.9% of the country is read," said Lovett, who attributes his extremely high LSAT scores to his passion for reading. Based on his performance on the LSAT, he decided a career in law would be a good fit for him.



Lovett took night classes at South Texas College of Law in Houston, where he earned a Juris Doctor degree. After graduation, Lovett started his own practice as a trial lawyer. He handled pretty much everything, including family law, juvenile law, and even some civil law.

"Once I got into it, I loved it. I've never looked back," he said, adding, "I've

always felt honored to be a member of the bar. Lovett, who has a wide range of experience practicing law, said, "I've done everything I can do with the law without getting arrested."

Advice to Young Lawyers

Aspiring in-house counsel "need to know how to read a balance sheet," Lovett said. "It's important to know the numbers side of the business," he added.

Aspiring in-house lawyers should also learn about the particular business industries they want to break into. Lovett recommends attending trade shows to learn about pertinent business issues. For instance, Lovett frequently visits airports and cargo facilities to stay in touch with what is happening in his industry.

"Read *The Wall Street Journal*," Lovett added. The *Journal*, especially the editorial page, is a great source of business news, he said.

Lovett went on to become the presiding judge for the Lakeway Municipal Court in Texas. He decided to transition into an in-house position after the fuel oil bust in Houston. Prior to joining Mercury Air Group, Lovett served as Corporate Counsel and Secretary of Communications Transmission, Inc., which is now called Broadwing.

In 1997, Lovett was appointed General Counsel of Los Angeles-based Mercury Air Group, an aviation services firm. Since 1999, he has also served as Corporate Secretary, and in May 2001, he began serving as Executive Vice President, as well.

Mercury Air Group provides fuel and related services to commercial, business, and government aviation customers, as well as air cargo services for airlines and forwarders.

Air cargo service is one of the fastest growing components of Mercury Air Group because the demand for air cargo increases at an average rate of about 18% annually.

Mercury's government services unit, known as Maytag Aircraft, has also been profitable. Today, Maytag Aircraft is a major service provider for the Defense Energy Support Center and the U.S. Air Force Air Mobility Command, assisting with aircraft-refueling and air-terminal contracts across the globe.

At Mercury Air Group, Lovett deals with most of the same issues that any business does, including contracts and employment matters.

Even though Mercury Air Group is a large international company with locations on five continents, the legal department is very small. Lovett works with one other lawyer and two paralegals.

However, he manages a large team of outside counsel, and doing so is his primary responsibility. "I direct traffic with those attorneys," he said. There is "very little that I do directly and a whole lot that I've got my hands in."

Q. What do you do for fun?

A. Read, visit battlefields, visit museums.

Q. What CD was most recently in your CD player?

A. *Books on CD: The Letter of Marque* by Patrick O'Brian.

Q. What is the last magazine you read?

A. The January 2007 issue of *America's Civil War*.

Q. What is your favorite TV show?

A. *Numbers*.

Q. Who is your role model?

"Stonewall" Jackson, Carl W. McKinzie of Bingham McCutchen.

"When I wake up in the morning, I don't know what I'm going to do that day," which is one of the most enjoyable parts of the job, Lovett said. Even if he makes a schedule, it remains tentative because what he ends up doing is entirely dependent on what happens throughout the course of the day.

One of the biggest challenges he faces as a general counsel—and he expects most general counsel would agree—is "communicating the legal issues to the business people and vice versa—translating the business issues into legalese."

Another challenge is "not being the person that just says 'no.'" Many business people perceive lawyers as the people who act as dams or barriers to what they want. Lovett has to work to make sure his company understands that it is "a service provider." He said he has to help find ways to get things done and "mitigate the overall legal risk."

In order to be a successful general counsel, flexibility is a must, Lovett said. "You have to be able to move quickly, particularly in a business like ours, which is diversified." As his company's general counsel, Lovett does not follow a set schedule each day. "You really don't know what's going to end up on your plate," he said.

On the Net

Mercury Air Group, Inc.

www.mercuryairgroup.com/index.htm

City of Lakeway Court Services

cityoflakeway.com/cityDepts_court.asp

Texas Bar Examination

www.ble.state.tx.us/Rules/NewRules/rulexi.htm