

## Linnea Westlake



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Linnea Westlake is owner of Linnea Westlake Advisory and the San Diego office of Transworld Business Advisors. Linnea is a Certified Business Broker (CBB), Certified Business Intermediary (CBI), Exit Planning Advisor (CEPA), M&A Professional (CM&AP) and M&A Master Intermediary (M&AMI). She is a member of the California Association of Business Brokers, International Business Broker Association, Exit Planning Institute, M&A Source and ProVisors. She is currently waiting for final approval of her M&A Master Intermediary designation.

### Tell us about your pre-M&A career and how it led you to doing this work?

I spent a large part of my career in corporate life – mostly building/leading client facing teams (sales, business development, professional services). I was a technical sales/biz dev oriented person comfortable with large, complex, multi-faceted “solutions” (term over used for a couple of decades) with long tedious

sell cycles. Early on I helped smallish clients start their businesses with the products and services being offered. Later, I was helping large clients “right-size” (also over used term for at least a decade) with cost savings derived from “solutions”. For a while I took on the role of “driving” “bleeding edge” technology into the marketplace (aka almost impossible but I’ve always been up for a challenge). In the early years of corporate life, I had extensive freedom and latitude to do entrepreneurial things and loved it. As time went on, I felt like I was continually dealing with the “square peg, round hole” problem...I didn’t fit. I enjoyed a very fun entrepreneurial time before the “dot bomb” working with fast growth startup companies helping them gain traction and move toward something beyond negative IRR but that sweet phase came to an end with that era. Eventually my role morphed into helping the companies I worked for kick things up a few notches in preparation for the sale of the company. I did that a bunch of times and finally I was exhausted by being in startup mode every four years, not to mention weekly plane rides – sometimes all over the world – while making others wealthy. My dad was the 50’s “mailroom to boardroom” guy (large HVAC brand) but he always liked his internal M&A experience the most. That stuck with me and at least subliminally, likely edged me toward what I’m doing now.

### What personal characteristics and strengths have supported your success in this industry?

This is not an easy business within which to be successful. Nothing we do is “rocket science”

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so to speak but it takes dedication, empathy, significant experience and a lot of work. It is as much art as science. Over the last 5-6 years, I have often thought that I should have pulled the trigger and gotten started sooner, but all my prior experiences (and at times frustrations) have prepared me well for this industry and the journey I share with my clients. I have tremendous admiration and respect for the entrepreneurs I work with. I have personally lived much of what they go through “day to day” and I am genuinely “driving” for the best possible outcome for them.

### What is your greatest M&A accomplishment?

That I am successful because of and for my clients. Some have been very small and others lower middle market. A large part of my business comes from past clients (both the buyers and sellers) – even some with whom the journey was arduous. Actually, most are arduous because of all the spinning plates. There have been a bunch of businesses that I have taken to market a few years after 1st conversation. I helped them assess what they needed to do to get the exit they wanted – and they did it! I really enjoy working with entrepreneurs with technical or other specialized professional background that have “built a better mouse trap” and created a company that is now too big and/or more complicated that what they want to manage but still a little too small for most PE or VC. The

sellers want to take chips off the table and let the buyer take it to the next level. I love this stuff.

### With regard to the majority of your engagements, do you work as a team or do you handle things on your own?

I generally quarterback the entire engagement. It is just simpler. That said, I am blessed with an extensive network of good people I can tap to bounce ideas off, task with elements of the process, and otherwise bring value to my clients through professional services I do not provide.

### Do you just do M&A or do you provide other services – valuations, consulting, etc.?

I do whatever my clients want but the ultimate purpose – and how I earn my living – is to get the deal done. Along the way, there is a lot of consulting, a broker opinion of value, exit planning advice and a tremendous amount of concierge service/hand holding customized based upon client need.

### What is the biggest mistake you have made when working on a deal?

Allowing a buyer (after the fact exposed to be marginally qualified) to take a good business hostage with an



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exclusive LOI (or even APA) for too many days.

**What are the three most important qualities that you think a good M&A advisor needs to have?**

Depth and breadth of experience  
Extraordinary work ethic  
Considerable empathy with superior integrity

**What is your most interesting deal that you are working on today?**

It's a lean and highly profitable professional services company that leverages a proprietary analytics tool to facilitate successful large scale project management of IT and related development and risk mitigation initiatives for government, utility, financial institutions, big consulting, and SI firms.

**How long have you been an M&A Source member and what do you get out of your membership?**

I joined within the last two years and attended my first conference in San Diego, fall 2022. It was a very good experience. I met some great people and learned some important new things from both fellow advisors and industry resources/sponsors. M&A Source seems to have new spirit and I like it.

**As a seasoned M&A advisor, what changes and trends do you see on the horizon that will impact on M&A?**

Right now, for those seeking SBA financing, it is a more difficult time for buyers. It's an expensive and time-consuming path forward for all involved. That means sellers may need to be a little more flexible when it comes to seller financing if they wish to attract a large pool of candidates. The best businesses will sell to a liquid cash buyer, perhaps with a small seller note, +/- earnout, or re-investment in "newco". There still seems to be a lot of money on the sidelines for the good businesses. The good ones can be in the "eye of the beholder" and the formulaic buyer that can't see past the dream target metrics will miss out.

**What advice would you give to new people entering the profession?**

Be sure you want this. It can be very rewarding but not a profession for someone looking for part-time work or semi-retirement – at least not until you have really done it. Be prepared to be patient and persistent. Pursue all the education you can get. Things change and you will never know everything you need to know. Do it for the right reasons. You could make a good – even great – living but commit to the best outcome for the clients you choose to work with first.

**Please tell us something about yourself that has nothing to do with your M&A career.**

This is where I get uncomfortable. I enjoy talking about my work with clients and colleagues and become uncomfortable when it's "me". Perhaps it's because I'm more of an introvert than extrovert. Here goes with the top-level stuff.

Most who know me well are aware that I have always been horse obsessed (as in show jumping horses). Levy is semi-retired and now 22 going on 12 but not showing anymore. Also, I am Standard Poodle crazed. Currently I am mom to another AKC Champion Stud poodle (Joey 10) and a new AKC puppy (Missy 5 months) who is starting her show career now. These passions create many opportunities for terrific life-long friends with others who share them with me. The horses and dogs have been my "kids".

On another front, I really enjoy learning about other people with cultural background different than my own. I speak quite a bit of Spanish and a little German and generally have an "ear" for languages. It's been a while since I lived internationally but I have lived in Switzerland, Bolivia, and Austria for 1 – 4 years over time. On my most recent international excursion, I joined friends in the UK just after the Jubilee and as Wimbledon was starting. We hiked the Cotswold Way – a lovely 130 miles or so over 7-8 days if you count detours.

Bucket List – Since I started in this business, I've not had the time to ski or play golf as I would like and endeavor to change that. Also hope to add an African Safari and Alaskan Cruise in the next few years.

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