

Our Trusted Advisors Produce Results Beyond Expectations

Competent professionals are expected to carry out their assignments with responsibility and expertise. ProVisors members ask the extra question, bring the additional insight, link up with trusted advisors from other fields to create interdisciplinary solutions. Their clients come to expect results they would have asked for if they had realized they were possible. Here are seven examples:

“Anthony” Builds Company, Is Fired, Wins 3.9M In Damages

By Paul Evan Greenwald and Paul A. Hoffman, Greenwald & Hoffman, LLP

“Anthony” spent two years seeking financial partners to accomplish his dream of purchasing and running a company that sells, installs, and maintains low-voltage security systems. With industry experience and a Pepperdine MBA, he just needed cash to get it off the ground.

Believing he had found the right partners for the \$6 million buy-out, Anthony entered into agreements making him a 20% shareholder, director, and president and CEO, with a 5-year employment guarantee. He also signed loan guarantees and a deed of trust on his residence as security on loans to the company.

Anthony hired a new management team, achieving a big increase in sales and positioning the company for strategic

growth. He also taught those around him, including his financial partners, how to run a successful company.

A year later, a week after signing a \$3-million loan guarantee, his financial partners fired him and his management team. They then accused Anthony of trespassing, changed the locks, and hired a security guard to keep him off the property.

Anthony and his wife, “Glenda,” were devastated, financially and emotionally. Anthony sought advice from his MBA professor and mentor, who referred him to our firm. We listened to his story and took his case, tailoring a fee arrangement to fit Anthony and our firm. We sued the company and his financial partners for

breach of contract, fraud, concealment, conspiracy, and severe emotional distress.

During a 4-week trial in Los Angeles Superior Court, we used video clips from depositions (which we tape and edit in-house), including a devastating admission by the primary defendant that “in brutal terms, we were looking for the cheapest way to get rid of Anthony.” The jury saw this video three times and awarded Anthony and Glenda \$3.9 million in compensatory and punitive damages. We also succeeded in protecting Anthony and Glenda from liability for the company’s debts.

Anthony and Glenda cried for joy, realizing that their long struggle had been richly rewarded.

Cathy Solomon Builds Ties, Matches Companies to Tax Credits

Cathy Solomon [OCM], a director of alliantgroup LP, works out of their Western Regional Headquarters in Irvine. Her company assists businesses to reduce taxes by matching them with federal and state incentives and credits. She says that many CPA firms outsource this function to alliantgroup.

Cathy acquires virtually all of her business through networking and building relationships. Attending as many ProVisors

meetings and events as she can squeeze into her schedule has been instrumental to her success. Equally important, she looks out for other group members. For the past couple of years, she has been recognized as one of the ProVisors members producing the most referrals. She has one of the highest closing ratios in alliantgroup.

Cathy is a founding member of CPA SIG, a special-interest group of trusted advisors that market to and are resources to CPAs.

She also collaborates with others to give continuing-education presentations to CPAs.

For the past six years, scuba diving has been a big part of Cathy’s life. She credits it with making her more fearless and strengthening her personal and business commitments. Cathy has served as a board member of Laguna Sea Dwellers, Laguna Beach’s largest dive club, and is now the club’s president.

Insurance Broker Jim Brakke Plays Hardball (Not What You Think)

“Most people live and work in a small world,” says **Jim Brakke** [SOC]. “By taking advantage of what ProVisors has to offer, including guesting opportunities, it’s possible to expand your horizons. You create valuable personal and business relationships.”

Brakke referred a client to a fellow South Orange County member, insurance lawyer **Eric Little**. The client had worked with 13 attorneys through the years and had spent \$600,000 in legal fees, with no positive solution. Through this referral, Jim’s client has made huge inroads and the future looks promising.

Brakke is the co-founder and president of Brakke-Schafnitz Insurance Brokers

Inc, a commercial multi-line insurance brokerage firm, with headquarters in Laguna Niguel and offices in Los Angeles, Northern California, Arizona and Las Vegas, Nevada.

He also owns and operates Dealer Protection Group, an agency that insures automobile dealers. And he is involved with Saddleback Valley Insurance Services, a provider of personal insurance.

As if running those businesses were not enough, Brakke recently started a new venture, Life Vessel Wellness Centers, which promotes self-healing.

With all that Brakke does professionally,

he still makes giving back to the community a priority. He serves on a number of boards, including First Foundation Bank and Mission Hospital Foundation.

A high-energy guy, Brakke’s interests include golf, travel, and spending time with family. Oh, and baseball. He’s an infielder on the Orange County Mavericks. In 2008 they won the World Championship for age 50 and older.

CPA Don Snyder Helps Companies Save on Taxes and More

Don Snyder, host of ProVisors’ Westwood group, is a partner at full-service accounting firm Green Hasson & Janks LLP. Don specializes in working with importers, manufacturers, and food distribution companies with annual sales of \$20 million to over \$200 million. Besides meeting their auditing and accounting needs, Don helps clients develop tax-saving strategies and design and implement internal controls and fraud-prevention systems.

A food distributor was a C corporation and was failing to take advantage of potential tax savings. Don recommended that the client convert to an S corporation to avoid “double taxation” upon an eventual sale of the business. He also showed them how they could qualify for research and development credits, accelerated depreciation, and other accelerated deductions. The client saved over \$100,000 in taxes.

In 25 years as a CPA, Don has learned that collaboration maximizes value. He works closely with his clients’ bankers, attorneys, and other financial advisors, many of whom are ProVisors members.

A competitive master swimmer, Don starts his daily workouts at 5:30 a.m. He brings the same commitment and dedication to his accounting practice.

Nancy Swaim, Tenacious and Creative Private Eye

Nancy Swaim [WW] and her team of private investigators at The SWAIM390 Companies, Inc. dig out information for civil attorneys, hedge-fund and other investment professionals, and private clients around the world: from background checks in England to asset searches in Cyprus. With offices in Los Angeles and San Francisco, SWAIM390's services include litigation support, due diligence, asset searches, surveillance, and subpoena service.

Nancy's former work in the entertainment industry, especially production, writing, and interviewing, honed skills she relies on as an investigator and president of

her company. Her first big case was to investigate the suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of billionaire Doris Duke. "It was a wild case, at times like being back in show business," says Nancy.

When a law firm, unable to locate a death certificate, came to SWAIM390 only one day before a filing deadline, the firm demonstrated its characteristic tenacity and ingenuity. "We also came up empty handed, so it seemed the source information was flawed," Nancy relates. "I called the law firm's researcher and learned a deponent's testimony was based on how she knew the name as a child." Nancy sped to Redlands, where the

subject had lived, and combed through newspaper card files. "I knew it when I found it—this was a kid's interpretation of the name." She rushed to the recorder's office, obtained the death certificate, and met the client outside the court minutes before the filing deadline.

Nancy is one of ProVisors' most prodigious guests, and it's been effective in developing business. On top of that, Nancy adds, "ProVisors provides what seems like an endless base of professional talent to whom we refer our clients, friends and family."

Pro Coach David Ackert Is a Pro Actor Too

David Ackert [WW] is the owner and principal of The Ackert Advisory, a coaching and training company that helps improve its clients' rainmaking, communication, and time-management skills. He works primarily with professional service firms, on a firm-wide basis as well with individual partners and managers. (David is also the founder and former leader of ProVisor's Growth Group.)

David coached a junior partner at a

law firm on rainmaking and stimulated a 500% growth in her book of business in less than a year. After he coached a CPA firm in time management, they reported an improvement in efficiency of more than 50%.

The back of David's business card reveals that he has a second career as a professional actor. He plays a supporting role (Mohammad) in the upcoming movie *La Linea*, alongside Andy Garcia and Ray Liotta. David also combines

his business background with his love of acting by teaching a business-strategies class for actors through UCLA extension. David is the co-founder of Voices in Harmony, a charity that works with at-risk youth, most recently in war-torn northern Uganda. He has been involved over the past year in an advocacy campaign to raise awareness and funding for the victims of the 22-year civil war in the region. David is also working on an M.A. in Spiritual Psychology at the University of Santa Monica.

Rosalinda O'Neil Helped Raise Productivity and Profits 200%

When a client of labor and employment attorney **Al Landegger** [WLK1-UNI] needed a resource to resolve a sensitive leadership issue, Al knew just whom to call. He referred **Rosalinda O'Neill** [WLK2-GL- CC3- WLK1], president of CEO Life Mentor, Inc. A licensed psychotherapist and master leadership/organizational development professional, Rosalinda excels at identifying goals and issues with leaders and deftly enabling boards, CEOs, and partners to create solutions and enjoy new gains without causing unwanted disruption to their organizations.

Knowing the importance of buy-in from the top and of meeting client's expectations, Rosalinda first asked for her "marching orders" from the firm's board of directors and confirmed them with their CEO. (The client had a nonprofit and a for-profit component.) With their support, and in consultation with Al, Rosalinda had one of her associates conduct initial interviews with the executive team.

Rosalinda began attending team meetings, reviewed the findings of her colleague, and added to those findings by conducting her own interviews. Rosalinda also interviewed the executive team's direct reports to get

even more details.

While keeping Al updated, Rosalinda prepared and presented the board with a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of the CEO and other leaders, the strengths and weaknesses of the organization, and a recommended plan of action. The summary described problems in management structure as well as in leadership and other personnel. The CEO's relationships and rainmaking strengths had kept the organization moving toward some of its goals. However, poor communication prioritizing, leadership, and organizational focus and skills resulted in low morale and productivity, in labor litigation threats, and in risks of leaking proprietary information.

The result of Rosalinda's work was

- Ongoing mentoring of the CEO and key team members.
- Reorganization to eliminate unproductive members and wasteful spending while not incurring wrongful termination lawsuits. (Al and his firm took steps to reduce the risks of future litigation.)

- Recruiting of a new IT provider: Cloudworks, owned by **Mike Eaton** [WLK2]
- Strengthening of the CEO/Board relationship.
- Improvements in client relationships and trust in the firm.

For the first time, the Board and CEO achieved and exceeded all of their key year-end goals. With morale and productivity up, the organization increased productivity and profits by more than 200%, and the Board was much happier. Rosalinda achieved all of this in six months.

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Jennifer Beaver's bio is on [page 3](#).