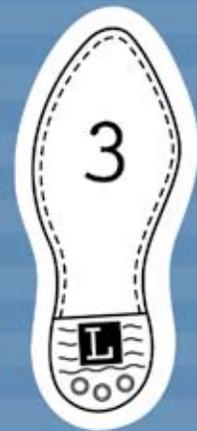


# SOCIAL MEDIA AS LEARNING TOOLS: Learning to Dance

by Natalie Huha



According to Nielsenwire.com, “Americans now spend a third of their time online communicating and networking across social networks, blogs, personal e-mail and instant messaging.”

Over the last 10 years, training and learning has truly undergone a paradigm shift. The myriad technologies that can now be leveraged have transformed the avenues by which we can communicate, train and learn.

To obtain training in the past, you may have attended college courses, seminars, classes or live conference events and received handouts as reference materials. More recently, you might have also rented a video on a particular topic, signed up for an online webinar, or read research books, manuals and articles online.

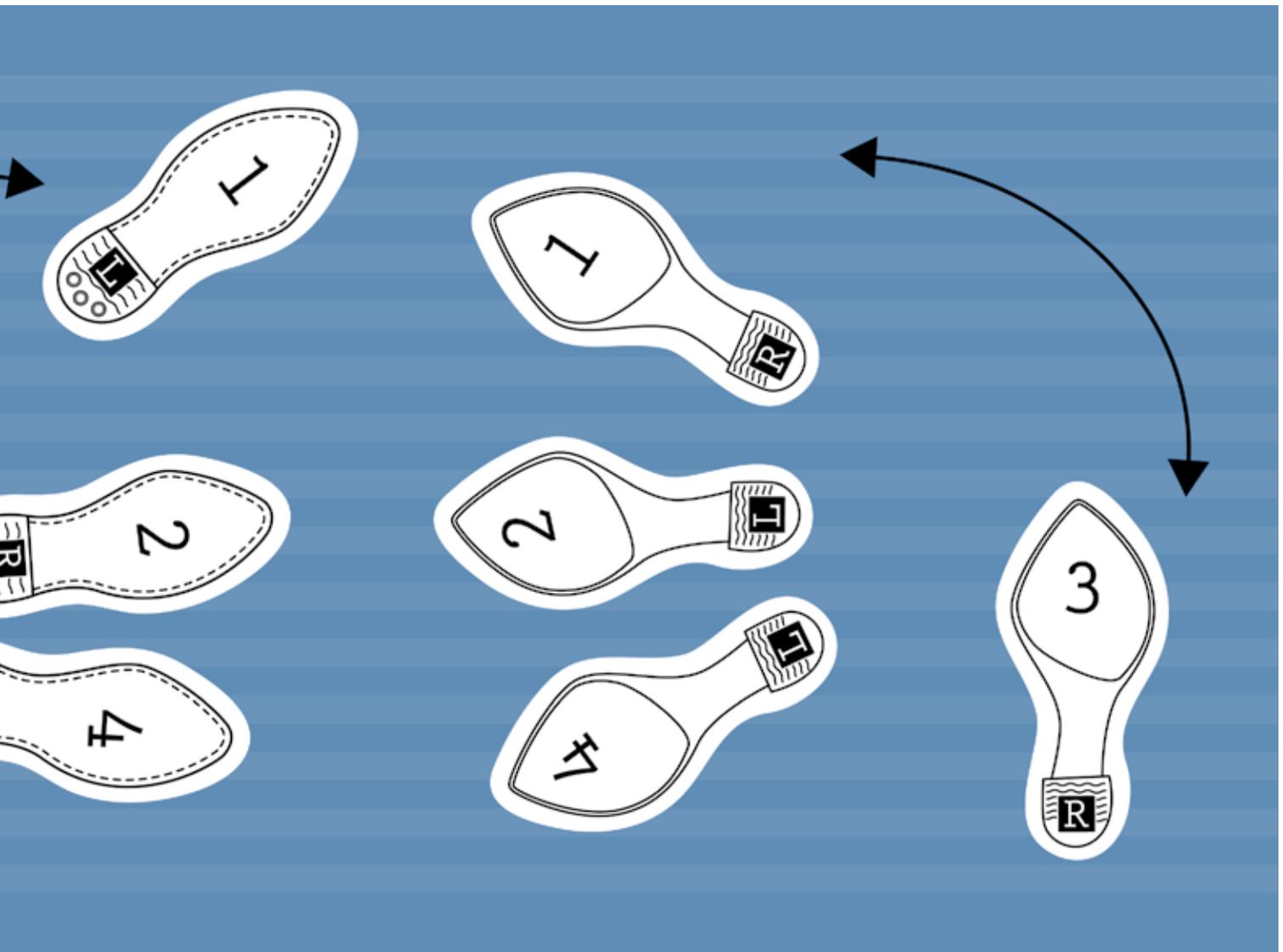
These methods for training and learning are still widely utilized today but could be considered “traditional” compared to new technologies that have emerged.

## New Technologies

Now, because Web 2.0 and Enterprise 2.0 technologies have invaded every aspect of our lives, the question of how one learns takes on a whole new meaning. Andrew McAfee, in his book *Enterprise 2.0 New Collaborative Tools for Your Organization's Toughest Challenges*, talks about three trends that have yielded better collaborative tools. These trends are:

- **Free and easy platforms for communication and interaction**
- **A lack of imposed structure**
- **Mechanisms to let structure emerge**

These days learning takes place anywhere, at any time. You can learn in a group, by yourself, in a rush, when relaxing, on the road, in your office, on your front porch, on your mobile device, reading an e-mail or while surfing the Web.



Learning is internalized and becomes personal because we search for and choose information relevant to our needs in any given moment. One could argue that learning has always been this way, but the way we learn through collaboration has changed. This has to do with the first trend McAfee lists; we now have free and easy platforms for communication and interaction, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, blogs, wikis and RSS feeds. We call these technology platforms and avenues “social media.”

### The Social Media Two-Step

The term “social media,” in my opinion, is backwards. The media provide another platform for learning and socializing. “The people,” you and I, support the media, like the man behind the curtain. It’s our collective knowledge and research that is now presented, responded to and collaborated on with our peers, and shared with audiences across all borders. Social media are about people,

knowledge, listening and sharing through avenues that are inexpensive and accessible to all.

In their book *Social Media for Lawyers, the Next Frontier*, Carolyn Elefant and Nicole Black describe social media as “fast and cheap.”

*In a society that’s on the go 24-7, social media deliver the news at a record pace. A few minutes a day on Twitter can update participants on the news more quickly than scanning the newspaper. And as society continues to move at a record pace, social media’s currency will become even more valuable. What’s more, social media are largely free, which make them harder to ignore.*

Because social media tools are everywhere, in every industry, in every country and exist for any topic, they become an ideal platform for learning. In addition, social media contain short bursts of information, much of it in 140 characters or less. So, how can these little bits of information lead to learning?

## Learning To Do the Social Media Dance

The question, “How do you use social media for learning?” was recently posted on the LinkedIn group (coincidentally named) “Social Media for Learning.” Tami Schiller, a learning specialist at Traveling Coaches, responded that she had read a summary report on the use of social media from The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). But because she works from home, she couldn’t do what she would have if she were in an office, which is run down the hall and eagerly share it with her colleagues. So, Tami decided to share her research via a LinkedIn update. For her, social media served as an avenue to share the research and her thoughts on it with all her connections on LinkedIn. For Tami, this was learning through the use of social media.

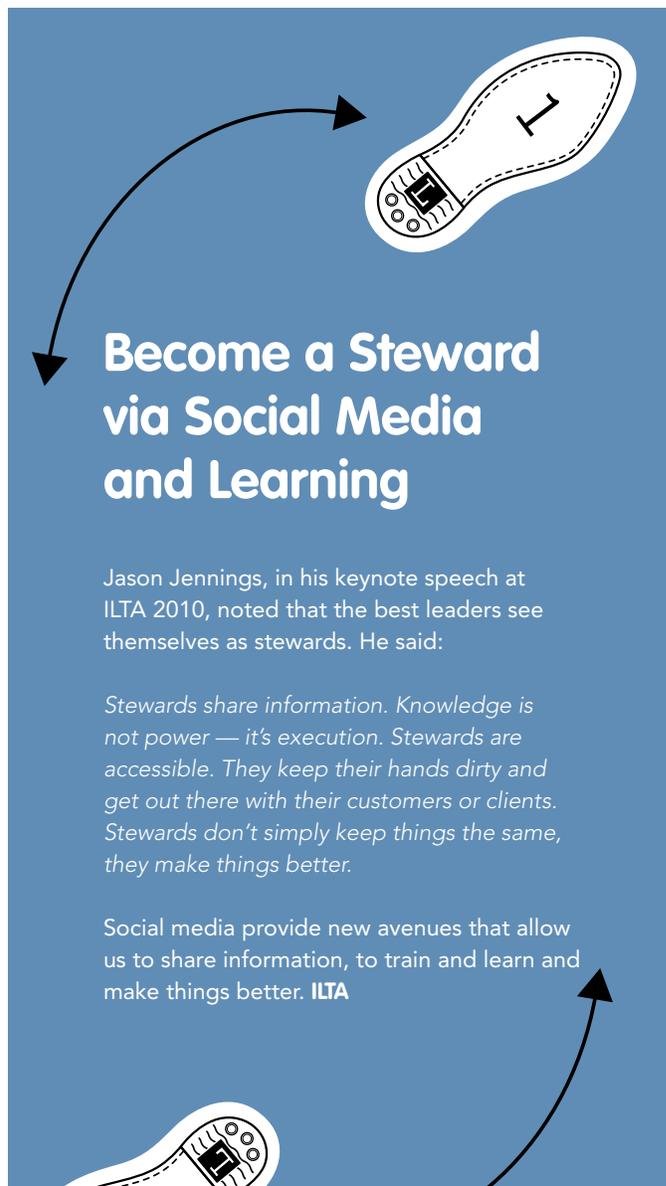
Using social media for learning is like learning steps so that you can participate in the dance. A good example is the following scenario:

You have a topic or issue you want to learn more about and decide to use social media as a resource. You begin by choosing a specific search term; for simplicity’s sake, let’s use #law. A search is run with this term via Twitter. It returns a series of 100 tweets. Within those tweets are “nuggets” of good information that contain links to further blog posts, articles and research related to #law. You may, in turn, tweet a question related to what you’ve found for others to comment on via Twitter. With these basic moves, you can go on to more advanced steps.

You’re now fast becoming a star performer. You could then repurpose that information by creating an FAQ list or an e-book. You may choose to create a video on the topic from the information you’ve found and post it to YouTube or your internal LMS. If you’re feeling especially motivated, you could create a presentation and write a whitepaper, and then upload these to LinkedIn Groups that you’ve joined. You could share them via some of the LinkedIn applications that are installed on your profile page. At your next training class or speaking engagement, you refer to the FAQ list, whitepaper and presentation. If you’re a lawyer, you could share them via your blog, firm website or client extranet. You could blog, tweet and post about your entire experience and what’ve you learned from sharing your collaborative efforts with your colleagues. Someone new comes along, reads about what you did and Boom! — the cycle for learning begins again, but this time with a different topic, a different audience and in a different part of the globe.

Now you’re participating in the online “dance” that is learning through social media. If you still think social media for learning is a waste of time, consider that you’ve also made a whole slew of new professional connections with whom you can continue to build relationships for future learning. Through the various social media outlets (blogs, wikis, feeds, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) you can listen, learn, share and teach others. You may even become an expert and thought leader in your field. You’re now the principal dancer in the social media spotlight! **ILTA**

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## Become a Steward via Social Media and Learning

Jason Jennings, in his keynote speech at ILTA 2010, noted that the best leaders see themselves as stewards. He said:

*Stewards share information. Knowledge is not power — it’s execution. Stewards are accessible. They keep their hands dirty and get out there with their customers or clients. Stewards don’t simply keep things the same, they make things better.*

Social media provide new avenues that allow us to share information, to train and learn and make things better. **ILTA**



Natalie Huha, Learning and Support Manager at Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor, LLP, has over nine years’ experience in the legal industry and has worked in several firms designing, developing and delivering technology solutions. She specializes in workflows, collaborative technologies and support services. Natalie is proactive and dedicated to enhancing awareness for social media and technology professional development in the legal industry. She currently serves as the VP of Content Management for the local Delaware Valley chapter of HelpDesk International and a Steering Committee Member of ILTA’s User Support Peer Group. Her mission is to “Share well, share often, share till other ‘legalers’ finally get it!” You can connect with Natalie via her blog ([www.legalerswelcome.com](http://www.legalerswelcome.com)), Twitter (@legalerswelcome), LinkedIn or via e-mail [nhuha@ycst.com](mailto:nhuha@ycst.com).