Pioneers and Pathfinders: Ruby Powers

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Steve Poor
Hi, this is Steve Poor, and you're listening to Pioneers and Pathfinders.

We welcome all of you back and hope you had a wonderful holiday season. To start the new year, we're joined by Ruby Powers, co-vice chair of the 2026 ABA TECHSHOW. Ruby is an immigration law attorney with nearly 20 years of experience, a speaker, and author of *Power Up Your Practice*. Through Powers Strategy Group LLC, Ruby provides strategic consulting services and hosts the podcast *Power Up Your Practice*.

In our conversation, Ruby gives us a detailed preview of the ABA TECHSHOW and the range of topics the conference will cover in March. We also dive into the mindset shifts lawyers need in order to embrace legal technology and innovation. Additionally, Ruby shares her career journey and the insights she has gained along the way.

Ruby, thanks so much for making the time to talk to me today.

Ruby Powers
Yeah, thanks for having me, Steven. Appreciate it.

Steve Poor
Let's check the first box here. You were on the planning board of the ABA tech show.

Ruby Powers
Yeah, I'm really excited. I went to my first show in 2019 and then got electrified by the energy and all the information and just the whole ecosystem. And so I quickly joined the team to help out as soon as I could. And now I'm a co Vice Chair, and I want to get the word out that our next Tech Show is going to be in March in Chicago of 2026 and it's usually every spring, and our next one's coming up before we know it.

Steve Poor
You know March is not spring in Chicago. You know that, right?

Ruby Powers
I know I've been there and it snowed in March, and I was like, yeah, one time it was in a February. One time they had it in February. But, yeah, you're right. Touche, so it's March 25 to 28 of 2026.

Steve Poor
Tell us a little bit about what people can expect, what topics are sort of focused on, what trends are you seeing?

Ruby Powers
If you've never gone before, there's a startup pitch competition that Bob Ambrogi kicks off, and he gets 15 startups, and we get to vote and figure out, you know, what's sort of like, what's going on there? And then we have multiple tracks going on. We're gonna have an access to justice, like a marketing track. We're gonna have other ones with operation, tech stack, litigation. So there's, there's gonna be a lot to

expect. And AI has been out, like, in more mainstream for the last few years, and so we're really just going to incorporate it in all of our content. And I think we're also going to be thinking about the practicing attorney, and how are they implementing all of these tools to the best of their ability? Like I'm going to be on a panel about AI reception bots and just sort of the whole intake process and how to streamline that. And then we're going to have other panels about, like, using AI in our email responses. So, I mean, I think it's just great because, like, whatever we're asking the speakers to talk about, like, they're going to have to be revising. I mean, we're not giving them permission to do this, like, if they're listening, but they're going to be revising their PowerPoints up until the last minute, just because, you know, this is such an ever dynamic area, and new tools are going to be coming out, and so keeps us on our toes.

Steve Poor
As you're planning for a conference like this. How do you keep track of that? How do you stay on top of what issues and what presentations are going to help the attendees the most?

Ruby Powers
Well, okay, I think that was like multiple questions, right?

Steve Poor
It's not a deposition. Come on. Answer however you like.

Ruby Powers
Well, I guess what I'll go back a second and say, how I prepare myself is, I usually attend a lot of legal tech conferences. So in general, I'm attending like Lex for Filevine. Some of our attendees, our organizers, went to the kaleidoscope with 8am there's Lex with finder ClioCon. There's like a case status came out with one client experience. So there's a lot of different conferences in general. So we like to see what's out there. And then, second of all, many of us on the board are either podcasters, they're in legal tech media, they're consultants, they're practice management advisors for large bars. They're practicing attorneys. So we're keeping a pulse of what's happening, and then when we get together, that's why it's really hard to figure out. We only have so many spots to fill of the days with the tracks, and we have to prioritize what's the most important thing. Sometimes we like to keep the descriptions a little vague, so that if something happens between us, setting it in writing to the date of production, you know, they can pivot as needed. But yeah, I think we can start to see the trends emerge over time, and then new things will be coming out. But I do love that we have so many different perspectives on the planning board that helps bring it for to to fruition, for all the different perspectives that will be attending the tech show, from the vendors to the practicing attorneys, media, podcasters, and media in general. So we're trying to do the best we can. And we also know that there's, you know, the whole latent environment and latent market that's not being served, and that's why we're also making a whole mini track on access to justice. And we're our plan is to put in the exhibit hall. So if you just have the exhibit hall pass, you could attend and really just get that, you know, continue that conversation so that those providers and those who are working in that space can convene, and we can continue to do our best to help get the client served.

Steve Poor
I want to drill into the A2J track here in just a minute, but before we do that, we may have some listeners that might be going for the first time, and it's quite an experience. Do you have any tips or guidelines how they can get their best value out of it? How do they approach this incredibly chock full of good ideas and good presentations and vendors? It's a lot to take on.

Ruby Powers

Yeah, it is. I mean, I think it's that trite expression of like, drinking water from the fire hose. Okay? What I would suggest is take a look at the schedule. See who you want to what you want to listen to. It's going to be hard. There's probably already going to be like, two panels that conflict at the same times, but at least start being aware who's out there. Scope out, like the speakers. I would put something on LinkedIn and your social media saying you're attending. Who else is anybody? Let's connect up there. I would try to have a few people that you can already know who will be there, that you can sort of have as your buddy, your, you know, conference buddies, if you will. I usually make like a WhatsApp, and then it's like, Hey, let's go over here. Or hey, the startups about to to start, get over here, you know, I'll save you a seat, you know, that type of thing. And then if someone's you know, if you have a small group, at least, you can be thinking about networking with others and having dinner or lunches or just like, hey, that was a really good CLE come over here to this one, or something like that. So those are some practical tips about scheduling in advance, knowing try to figure out who's going to be going and letting people know on social media, if you can try to take a look at some of the content that we'll have on the app in advance, so you can sort of see what to expect in this session we're not recording. So that gets really tough when you see a lot of great content all at the same time. I would, you know, find it's a marathon, so don't go too hard on the first night in the after hour activities, because you still got the next couple of days. And every night there's something going on, like we're going to have the taste of tech show sign up for those dinners, because there's usually someone from the tech show board or another leader in the space is going to be helping host one the discussion. A lot of great connections can be made, and go down to the exhibit hall and really explore because I feel like of all the legal tech conferences I've attended, the ABA tech show is the most robust and diversified in terms of the you know who attends, because we're not we're case management agnostic, so you'll See a lot more than you wouldn't see at other case management specific legal tech conferences. And of course, this is more small, midsize practices. It's not like ILTA Con or, Oh, at the legal tech week in New York or something like that. But this is really for that. We're more a little bit smaller, midsize, but so low, but even larger firms can really benefit from it as well. So go to the exhibit hall. Have fun, enjoy that. And then I would say, give yourself time to debrief afterwards, like what you learned and your takeaways, and then make plans to connect with people out there afterwards and having those meetings. But don't do it right away. You know, if you're going to be overwhelmed by getting back to work and everything, which normally happens to me, give your time space. I think sometimes when I make a really good LinkedIn post after a conference, it's sort of like, selfishly, my way of getting it out there, but it's really more me, like putting my thoughts together and just sort of like, what did I learn? What are my takeaways? And so sometimes I'll do that, but I won't even post what I'm thinking, because I'm like, oh, like, I went to TLTF recently. I haven't posted my full final takeaway of it yet, but I probably will soon. But yeah, those are some of my tips I would suggest. And you know, a lot of the vendors are going to want you to schedule to meet with them right away. Maybe give yourself a week or two when you come back to see the demo of the product. But I do love that we give Expo Hall breaks to run around and network and run around the hall and and just sort of make connections happen. And I think because there's so many of them, the vendors out at one time, you really can sort of compare notes, and you can find other customers of those programs and companies, and so that you can sort of like, hey, what do you like about this program? What do you like about this program? And I think that's invaluable, so you can get a lot of that Intel in a small amount of time in just one place.

Steve Poor
Those are great tips. Thank you. Let's go back to the A2J thing, because the challenges in the A2J space are pretty well known, but there's a lot of people doing some very interesting things in that space, with technology and trying to expand capabilities to serve the underserved population. Give us a slightly deeper dive on how you're approaching that particular legal space in the tech show.

Ruby Powers

Well, I think we're still finalizing some of the speakers, but I'll tell you the topics that we have in mind for that. So first of all, I think it's only been the last couple of tech shows that we even had anything remotely on that genre. And then this is the first one we're making, like a little mini track, if you will. And the idea was, if it's in the exhibit hall, if someone comes with just the exhibit hall pass, which, last I checked, was there's no cost to that. And you're, you know, you're running around the exhibit hall. You could go attend this because we're not going to give CLE but it is an opportunity to learn. And we're also going to put the marketing, some of the marketing track, in the exhibit hall as well. So one of the panels is the pros and cons of technology driven dispute resolution. And we have, we're scheduled to have a really great speaker I've heard regularly on that topic, and everything from, you know, how is technology and AI changing the face of dispute resolution and how resources becoming more accessible and more efficient. And then another panel we have is just the AI tools for public legal access. And I do know from AI is rapidly transforming access to justice by helping people find legal information. So there's a lot of different tools for research and writing that are out there, and we even had one of them describe AI was in the startup alley last year, and they had a booth. So I think of them as well when I think in this space. So I think it's just like we're trying to create a place where people in this this ecosystem can convene, can share ideas, can let others know what's going on, what they're up to. But I think we can continue to expand the A2J resources and ABA tech show can be a really great place for that to be happening. So, you know, sometimes there's these programs that are popping up that are, like, really specific, you know, like landlord disputes or something, or maybe immigration naturalization or, you know, that are, like, really specific and so, but I think some, you know, practicing attorneys are also trying to think, like, how can I get that latent market in general that's not being served. I mean, I've heard a lot of people talk about like subscription billing or sort of having different tiers of unbundled services. And so I think that's can also be in this genre, and I think we can continue to expand this conversation. And I mean, I welcome to learn more myself and how we can help the underserved as well.

Steve Poor
No, I think it's great that tech show is moving in that direction. You can't give these folks too much publicity or raise these issues too often. Let me pick up on a comment you made in passing, and I'll come back to it. You recently were up to TLTF, the Zack fest up in Austin, if I recall our prior conversation. This is your first time to go to the festival.

Ruby Powers
Yes, that's right. We were talking right before, and I was sharing how I was excited and didn't know what to expect. And so I guess it's sort of like, how if someone doesn't know what to expect, ABA tech show, and, and you were giving me some tidbits, and I appreciated that. And, and it went really well, good.

Steve Poor
What did you learn from that that's applicable to the tech show?

Ruby Powers
Some of the panels that really struck me were one of them was big law. They said that they were doing value based billing, but they were leveraging AI, but they hadn't changed a lot of their billing modules, and they were models, and they were mostly using hourly. Still, I heard the buzzword value based billing a lot, and I realized that that just means mostly flat fee. And I was like, I mean, I guess you could use it for anything that's not hourly. I just didn't. I live that space in my practice area, we're flat fee for the most part. So I thought that was an interesting buzzword to use value based billing, but that was one takeaway. Just like they know they need to change. They're changing, but they haven't changed some of their models for their pricing. One panel, it was big law, actually, as well. One of the first ones I

heard, and they said that some of their clients told them two years ago, how dare you don't use AI at all. And then two years later, their clients are telling them, if you don't use AI like, I'm going to be upset, and you better and use these programs specifically. So just how, in two years, it went from don't touch it to you better be using it. And I want you using these programs so that that was eye opening. I liked there was a panel with law professors and law Deans from around the country, and one professor said to the lawyers in the room, the law firms in the room, if you don't like what we're producing, then don't hire them, and then that's the only way we're going to change.

Steve Poor
Oh, there you go.

Ruby Powers
And I was like, Whoa, you know, boom, you know. Because, like, I realized I am an adjunct professor. I teach law practice management, but I thought law is slow to change, but legal academia seems to be even slower to change, from just what I've gathered just a little bit, and not particularly one school or another, but just like in that space. But I was really grateful that they opened up opportunity to have the law professors and UT Law Dean was in the room and helping be on the panel. And then there was another session. It was like the future lawyer. And so a lot of us who were in that law academic panel attended the other one, and we were just talking about, like the pipeline. The students go to law school, and then they come out, and then what they can do is not initially what we need them to do. And if some law schools are saying, don't. Touch AI. And some are like, here, this is how to do it, and it's all over the map. And some law schools are saying, like, they're convening committees, but they haven't started implementing anything. So I just loved being in the room where they had investors, academia from law, practicing attorneys, big law and legal tech, like like, pretty much CEOs and founders all in a small space where we could compare notes, because some of the conferences I go to don't have certain components of those attendees, and just the rapid pace of change, I also like that they had international attendees. There were people from Europe and Australia, India that were also there, and so just how things are changing all over the world.

Steve Poor
It's a great experience. I didn't get to go this year, but I've been to prior years. The connections are the most important piece of it. And it sounds like that's an important piece of the tech show as well, being able to make the connections and farm those those networks.

Ruby Powers
Yeah, I definitely agree. I like, you know, you can connect on LinkedIn, and you can make that instant connection right there, but the follow up conversation, so you really have to make your time and be intentional about that. Like, I still, still have a lot of more. I've had a couple of people I met on my podcast since TLTF, but I need to have so many more follow up calls. It's just like, you know, we're getting into the holidays, and I'm still a practicing attorney, so, like, there's a lot of things, but you're right. Like, it shouldn't be just the sessions, and I think that's what I also saw with TLTF. It didn't have an exhibit hall. There were no CLE credits. It was, it was about the connections and the idea sharing. And I love that. So I'm also thinking how I can implement some of the best that I liked that possible to be transformable, transferable to ABA tech show over there, if as much as I can. But they really at TLTF, they really put a lot of thought into all the aspects of the conference.

Steve Poor
You mentioned you're a practicing lawyer. You've specialized in immigration, and you founded your own law firm. What's been the impact of technology, and in particular, AI, on that practice area. How do

you, how do you see it having changed, and how do you, how are you thinking through the use of this technology in your own practice?

Ruby Powers
I think that in the last year, we've had more of an abrupt disruption through the administration than maybe technology, but the technology has been, I've always been at the forefront of legal tech and immigration practitioner as long as I've been practicing so with research, with writing, I first started using it a lot in my like marketing copy, with social media, and then with emails, and then I love using it to get the like, not the transcript, but the gist, the summary of my consultations, and then run that through an AI tool to turn into like a post consultation email, and make sure my notes are clear for my team and requesting contract. So let's see what used to take hours to do for drafting a good brief is now can be done in like more or less seconds with the right prompt in our templates. So we've been leveraging it as much as possible the last few years. Between our case management and our email tools, we even have a tool to summarize freedom Information Act request like 300 or 400 pages of documents to be able to get a summary, which usually would have taken hours for a law clerk or an attorney. So every facet you could use it, from the marketing to email to drafting research, the summarizing information, we're trying to use it every which way we can. In fact, we have several companies that have been using our firm, sort of like for beta testing, and it's like, I feel like we have a little incubator at the law firm, and we give them feedback, and then we're paying for usage, or maybe, like, a lesser rate, to use the different tools, but then we're spending a lot of time giving feedback, and we Have a tech committee that everyone's using different tools and sharing feedback. So I think that speaking about that access to justice and latent market, my real intention would be to be able to reduce our costs as much as we could in the future, to be able to allow those who otherwise might not hire an attorney to hire us, but we're still sort of in that transition phase to see how it's it's all going to work out. But, yeah, I think it's definitely transforming our practice area, just like every other practice area. And I think it's really just that, you know, those innovators and early adopters that are going to be benefiting the most, who've started been intentional about leveraging the technology in their space.

Steve Poor
As you look at sort of the small firm, midsize firm operations, and I know you teach legal operations, what's the mind shift that owners or partners in those size firms need to make to really embrace technology and the technological changes? Maybe they've already made it.

Ruby Powers
Yeah. I think one thing...It's come to my attention recently, is that all the people who say they're AI experts right now, it's mostly just because they started playing around with the last few years. No offense to whoever who doesn't agree with me, but, but really, I think it's the if you have this risk adverse mentality that's like, I don't know what it is. I'm afraid I'm going to do something unethical. I blah, blah, blah, all these like, fear, fear, fear, paralysis, stuff. That's where they got to get over that. And really, the people who are using it the most are just sort of like experimenting, being creative, and trying, and then trying to stay on top of it, like listening to podcasts, reading the blogs, following several thought leaders, going to legal tech conferences. Nobody's truly an expert, and everything's changing. So if you get over that in your head and you're like, Fine, then I'm going to go and be a curious like a little kid and try stuff out. Then you're going to be with a lot of the rest of us who are sort of at the forefront in this space. So I think that mindset of overcoming being uncomfortable with the unknown, is probably the first thing I would say. And then I think once you overcome that, and then you follow other people that are experimenting and trying things out, and you have that paradigm like, there's got to be a better way to do what we do and to better service our clients, and sort of reimagine it like we were mentioning Richard Susskind. He's been a guest on your show, and so I'm reading one of his books about the future of professions, and I I just love how I love to think about that paradigm. And I know

he's, he was a keynote recently because he has another book out on AI. And I just sort of think about like, if we're not going, if we're not preparing for the revolutionary changes in our practice, then we're going to be left behind. And so that's, I think, the other thing, if you don't get excited about the experimenting, then maybe get a little scared of what might happen if you don't.

Steve Poor
Give us in the time we've got left, give us a little view of your professional career. Why a lawyer? Sort of what's led you to this sort of tech focused part of your life?

Ruby Powers
I think I was always wanting to do something in Human Rights International Law, helping others, and I traveled and lived in six different countries. So I think that's what led me to being an immigration attorney. My mom was born in Mexico, my husband was born in Turkey, and I lived in some other countries, not listed there, and learning languages. So that sort of made a good fit for me. I was interested in business and human rights and international law. So what else can you practice? And immigration seemed to be a good place for me. The tech is because I was always really techie as a kid, I took C++ in high school. I was designing my own website.

Steve Poor
Oh, C++. Oh, now you put us in the way back machine.

Ruby Powers
Yeah. I guess it's way back machine so, and, and then I, you know, and that helped me make my own website later on. And then I was, I took business courses. I mean, at UT in the early 2000s we had to memorize the Excel what drop down menu, I don't know is crazy for management information systems, what they made us do, we had to, like, memorize, like an Excel sheet without the having the computer in front of us. I was like, Are you kidding me? But anyway, but so...

Steve Poor
I guess, stuck with you, though.

Ruby Powers
Well, yeah. And then later on, when my husband, I moved to Dubai, I ran my law firm from Dubai in 2011 2012 and so then when the pandemic happened, I was like, well, I already know how to run my firm remotely, and I just sort of like always was thinking ahead in that respect and trying to just be as nimble as I could. And that's what's helped my firm in existence and thriving for 16 years, because we've gone through hurricanes and recessions and lots of different administrations and a couple of you know, countries and things like that. And then I realized I wanted to help others with their practices. So that's why I wrote my first book in 2019 about law practice management. And then I realized during the pandemic, I was doing these online retreats, and then I wanted to do a podcast and write a second book that was for all practice types. And so that second book is called power up your practice. And the podcast is as well as the same name, and I interview a lot of law firm owners and other guests and experts on topics that help law firm owners and practicing attorneys and managing attorneys. And so basically, I feel like I live two lives at the same time. One is the practicing immigration attorney, going to court interviews, trying to keep up with what's going on in the case law of that day, that minute, that second. And then to in the legal tech space and consultancy and law practice management, and so that's usually what I'm up to.

Steve Poor
Where do you find the time to fit it all in?

Ruby Powers
I think that might be my next book, because I get asked this all the time. It's a combination of time batching, leveraging assistance, drinking a lot of coffee, not doing things I don't have to do, like I said on another podcast. I said, I don't cook. And then I was like, Oh, I sound like a horrible person. Like, this weekend, I baked some focaccia and some banana bread this weekend so I can when I want to.

Steve Poor
Finding the time is always the challenge.

Ruby Powers
Yeah, because it takes like, hours, like, I forgot about that bread, you had to, like, let it rise, and then you have to pound it down. Pound it down and you rise. I was like, dear Goodness, no wonder I do this, like, every five years.

Steve Poor
Well, Ruby, we've run out of time. Thanks so much for spending time with us. I encourage everybody to get the tech show in your calendars and check it out and check out Ruby's podcast. We'll have a link in the show notes,

Ruby Powers
Thanks so much. I really appreciate it.

Steve Poor
Thanks for listening to Pioneers and Pathfinders. Be sure to visit thepioneerpodcast.com for show notes and more episodes, and don't forget to subscribe to our podcast on your favorite platform.