

## TRAVEL PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS

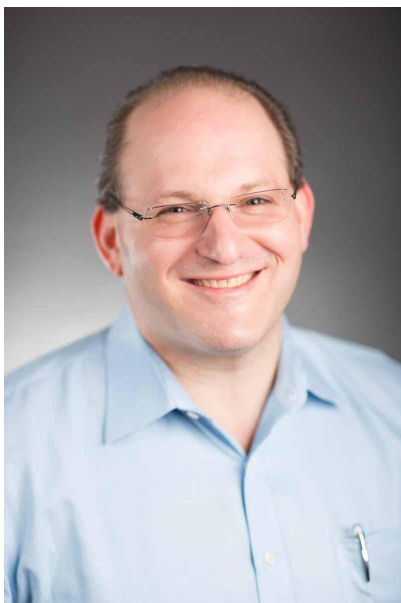
# Gary E Smith

FAQs

Travel Professional Interviews

Agency Membership

Agent Membership



# **Gary E. Smith, ECCS**

## **2018 Elite Cruise Counsellor of the Year**

### **Vacation Specialist/Owner, Dream Vacations - TravelPerks**

#### **Springfield, Oregon**

**Congratulations on receiving the 2018 Elite Cruise Counsellor of the Year Award, Gary! What does the honor mean to you? How did you feel when you found out?**

I was speechless, which for me is very rare. I am so very proud to have been bestowed this award. Although I know it was given to me, I do believe that it was earned by the contributions of many others. It was earned through the relationships I have with so many in this industry. In any relationship, I am at best only 50% of what makes it work. Hence, I'd like to thank CLIA, Dream Vacations / CruiseOne / World Travel Holdings, our suppliers, my incredible staff, our great clients, and most especially - my wife. Without these amazing relationships, I would not have been able to achieve this honor. I've been very blessed in my life, and I try each day to live up and give back to the life I enjoy so much. The honor of this award both gives me proof that I'm giving back as I should and gives me the need to do more.

**Describe your career as a travel agent. How long have you been in the business? What attracted you to it?**

Before I became a traditional travel agent, I owned a tradeshow and convention company, along with other businesses. We did large events (10-20,000 attendees). As an offshoot of that, we did a couple of conventions at sea. So, I first came to selling cruises as a group leader, not a travel agent, although I did use a travel agent for those groups. Fourteen years ago, after I sold the business I looked for a way to get back into the cruise industry, and I am so happy to have found CruiseOne/Dream Vacations. I bought my franchise after I had worked for a few years in Fortune 100 companies. That big corporate experience left me wanting to sell a product I could believe in, and to work with customers that I could truly make happy and provide great care and service.

**What is your approach to serving clients?**

I believe in the “Platinum Rule.” If it is “Golden” to treat others as I want to be treated, then it is a bit better to treat them as THEY want to be treated. I believe in customizing how I treat clients to match what they want. In general, I treat my clients with the assumption of intelligence, a desire to find them the best value, and the respect of providing my firsthand travel experiences in a way that helps them assimilate that experience into who they are and what it means to them, not me. I also believe that, like any great advisor, you need to build a relationship with clients, and I know that some will click with me and others won't, hence we have a diversity of great personalities and styles within our office.

## **What is your biggest challenge when selling cruises and how do you overcome it?**

Helping people see the value in Travel Agents. Since we don't travel with our clients (most of the time), we're not the ones taking care of them on the cruise. The cruise doesn't change depending on where you buy it. Hence, potential clients can see it as a commodity, and those are sold on price. I combat this head-on by letting them know from the start that I am an agent who helps you buy a cruise, and the process of actually buying the cruise is one where a lot of value can be added and that I should be the one to add that value to their experience.

## **How has your CLIA membership and certification helped you as a cruise travel professional?**

There are so many ways. I started getting my CLIA certifications as soon as I started with my Dream Vacations franchise. I saw it as a way to get both product knowledge diversification as well as something I could leverage in my marketing. When I started, I didn't have a reputation, I didn't have a dedicated customer base. Advertising my CLIA certifications gave me one more talking point when I was trying to convince a client to allow me to add value to their cruise buying process. This award is yet another way CLIA has added value. I've worked hard to build my profile in this industry and I see my relationship with CLIA as another key relationship in achieving that goal.

## **What cruising trends are you seeing?**

There are many. While not new, I'm a huge river cruise fan. I'm doing at least one a year, and three this year. I know that has been a hot trend for a while, but it deserves mention. We're seeing a trend towards more exotic and luxury options. We also have a good Millennial client

base and they are certainly pushing us to find more culturally immersive and adventurous options.

## **What is your fondest personal cruise memory?**

I have so many. There is nothing like that first cruise. I have my aunt to thank for that. I was only fourteen. It was my first flight and my first cruise. I'll also never forget my first cruise with my wife. A short 3-night cruise from L.A. We had been dating, but I knew it was only going to work if she liked to cruise, and she hadn't yet. I'm very thankful that she loved it, and now we are a very happy cruising couple. We did our honeymoon on the Douro, that was her first river cruise, and now we're recreating it this summer – so many great memories.

## **Any last thoughts?**

I've met so many amazing agents and supplier representatives. I'm proud to be a part of the Dream Vacations family. I still teach business at the college level, and I've owned and been a part of over a dozen organizations. The management of World Travel Holdings is incredible. I'm also constantly blown away by the amazing agents I meet at Cruise360 and other events who are independent owners, outside associates, or members of other host agencies. Finally, I am honored to call so many of the amazing cruise line industry executives my friends. The cruise industry truly sets the standard for professionalism and inclusiveness.

