

### **Things I wish someone had told me: Lessons from Hyderabad**

OK – you've finished your law degree now what.

Some of you may be going into a traineeship, others to Leo Cussens, or into a Grad Dip in Legal Practice. Others may even undertake a graduate entry program in management or something similar, such as an internship with an NGO (either here or abroad). Others may just wish to go backpacking for the next few months. To the later, I applaud you – smart move!

What ever your fancy, here is what I wished someone has told me 10 years ago, when I graduated from my LLB at LTU.

I think the most important thing to consider is if working in law is really for you. Often people feel that because they spent five or so years studying law at Uni they must practice law, or it will be a waste. This is not true. It makes no sense to spend your life doing something you don't enjoy just because you studied it at Uni: this is especially true as there are so many other things you can do with a law degree.

#### **Law school vs Legal practice**

Studying law at Uni is different to real life practice, so be prepared for it to be a bit overwhelming. It will require a big adjustment at first. You will have to deal with senior lawyers – who have some of the worse traits humanity displays under stress (ie of meeting their budgets, work deadlines etc). You will have to deal with difficult clients, vague instructions, incomprehensible laws, and meetings at all hours of the day and weekends.

There are many different areas within law you can practice. I suggest that you make an active choice which one you want to do and not just 'fall into one' by default. The converse is if you are absolutely sure about what sort of law you want to do then there is little use taking a job at a firm that doesn't do that sort of work.

You should, no **you must** try to maintain a healthy work/life balance. This will not only ensure a better overall and well-balanced person, but will be more efficient and productive at work, and be less stressed in your personal time. Walk to work where possible. Don't stay in the office for lunch or eat at your desk. Have a break!

Think about if you want to further your studies with a Masters perhaps. How does what you hope to do fit within the bigger picture of your life where you have the starring role?

#### **Values**

Values are something you have developed throughout your life and will continue to do so. My values can be summarised as follows: to respect and honour your parents; to give charity to the poor, destitute, orphans and for public welfare; to be honest and fair; to hold firmly to principles, but be flexible in methods; and to treat everyone with civility, giving greetings to all. What does this all mean? Be nice to everyone in your office, they are just like you. Never forget your manners, your "please" and "thank you's".

#### **Mistakes**

You will make mistakes – it's only natural. We all do. The trick is to learn from your mistakes and not make them again. You may fail in some of the things you set out to do, that's OK. Remember what it feels like, and use it as inspiration for next time.

## **Humour**

Have a sense of humour, be self depreciating. This helps break the ice, and makes people warm to you. Don't forget to balance – pick your moments.

You will soon be a fully qualified lawyer, with your very own practising certificate – which gives you certain prestige. But with these comes responsibility. You will be accountable for your action as a lawyer, so take the time to reflect and think about things. Always be mindful of your ethical obligations.

## **Slow down**

Life moves very fast, so whenever you can slow things down, do so. Take the time to enjoy the moment. Life in the 21st Century travels at light speed, and society has become very intrusive. There are all these tools out there like Twitter, the iPhone, Facebook, blogsites, all trying to capture what you are thinking right now. Enjoy your private and quiet moments, and take the time to reflect.

Don't forget the key to success is patience, tenacity and perseverance. Good things take time, and sometimes immediate gratification is only fleeting. What does this mean? Behind every 'overnight' success you read about, are hours and hours of hard work. If you want to make Partner in 6 years – that's fine, but enjoy the moment. It may never come again.

Travel when you can – now is your opportunity to learn a new language, pick up a hobby, do those fun things you've always wanted to.

Don't measure your life in billable or 6 minute cycles. Just because your charge out rate is \$300 per hour – does not mean that you are more valuable than anyone else. Never forget your humanity in all this.

## **OK – some practical advice:**

Keep more than one suit and shirt (and tie for guys) at work, with clean shoes.

Always have a good supply of your business cards.

Join the Young Lawyers at LIV. It's fun and you get to de-stress.

Be relaxed and natural; treat everyone the way you would like to be treated.

Smile! A confident smile not only makes you look friendly and approachable but also makes you feel that way too!

Be an attentive listener. You have 2 ears and 1 mouth for a reason, which means listen twice as much as you speak – you will be surprised at what you'll learn!

Show interest in what your colleagues and clients are doing by asking questions and finding out about them. And don't just talk business, discover any hobbies and interests they may have.

Keep your CV and notable transactions up to date.

Unless contrary to your employer's policy, keep a record of your stand out work. You just don't know when it will come in handy.

**Be the change you want to see**

Develop your own legal personality. You may encounter some rather 'toxic' personalities throughout your journey – those who have maladapted but deep down inside are good, decent people. However, it is up to you who you want to be. As we say in Asia: 'you catch more bees with honey'.

Help out in the community – volunteer your time the best way you see fit. This is your society, your world. As Mahatma Gandhi said: “Be the change you want to see in the world”.

Finally, life is full of challenges. I take solace in these very simple words, which I hope also help you: ‘Persevere in any good effort and do not fear to face difficulties and hardship, as success comes only after hardship’.

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