

Interview with Amritha Thiyagarajan, Head of Social Ventures and Senior Lawyer at LegalVision

CAMLA Young Lawyers representative, **Christian Keogh**, recently caught up with **Amritha Thiyagarajan** to discuss her role as Head of Social Ventures and Senior Lawyer at LegalVision, and her work in the NewLaw space.

CHRISTIAN KEOGH: Amritha, thanks for your time and for agreeing to be profiled for this quarter's CLB. Can you tell us a bit about LegalVision, and what your role involves as Head of Social Ventures and Senior Lawyer at LegalVision?

AMRITHA THIYAGARAJAN:

Thanks Christian. LegalVision is a commercial law firm that's all about using innovation and custom-built technology to help our lawyers provide efficient and cost-effective legal advice & support. We've been growing quickly and I think that really comes down to how we like to do things differently - both in terms of how we deliver legal work, as well as re-defining what it means to work at a law firm (we have an amazing in-house chef, Lucia, for starters!).

As Head of Social Ventures, I have the exciting responsibility of establishing our firm's pro bono practice and managing opportunities for our staff to make a difference in the community. I also sit on the management committee, to represent what our CEO has dubbed the "youf" voice in decisions around the management and running of our law firm. As a Senior Lawyer in Legal Transformation, I work with our team of talented developers and lawyers to design and lead the delivery of client-facing and internal legal transformation projects.

KEOGH: Who are the typical clients you advise at LegalVision, and what are the main issues they are facing today?



THIYAGARAJAN: I mainly work with large corporates and ASX200 companies. Through our conversations with large corporates, we often hear about pressures to keep legal spend down and a desire among in-house lawyers that they had more time to focus on strategic projects (rather than 'business as usual' work). Most of my work revolves around LegalVision's managed services model - which speaks to the main issues faced by our clients. At its core, a managed legal service packages together process design, technology and legal expertise and allows in-house legal teams to outsource work in a way that is more efficient and cost-effective than the traditional legal model.

KEOGH: What took you from a career in a traditional law firm to a NewLaw firm like LegalVision?

THIYAGARAJAN: Having spent years as a summer clerk, paralegal and graduate lawyer in a traditional practice, I witnessed first-hand the limitations - and strengths - of the conventional legal services model. I saw really clear opportunities to harness the strengths of traditional law, while at the same time innovating to address the root causes of disproportionate costs, inefficiencies and client dissatisfaction. When I came across LegalVision, I was inspired by the firm's journey since beginning as an online platform for legal documents, and was sincerely excited about what

lay ahead in disrupting the delivery of legal work. I joined LegalVision as a junior lawyer in 2016 and haven't looked back.

KEOGH: Do you have any advice for young lawyers who are considering a non-traditional legal career?

THIYAGARAJAN: Don't be afraid to try something new. If you don't like the direction you've taken your career in, you can always divert back to your original path. Nothing is forever, and every skill that you develop, and each different position you occupy, will give you some kind of transferable skill or knowledge (even if it isn't immediately obvious exactly where or when you'll need to call upon the particular skill).

I was told I was crazy for making the jump to NewLaw even before I'd properly wrapped up my graduate rotation at my previous law firm. At the time I made the leap, I honestly let the critics get inside my head a little bit and wondered if I should do the 'right' thing or the 'sensible' thing and get more years of traditional legal experience under my belt. I know now that how good you are at your job, or how quickly you can progress through the ranks, is not just about the number of years you've been working. It's also about other qualities - like being autonomous, adaptable, efficient, engaged. Those qualities can be built up in any role - it's not unique to the traditional legal position you might be in at the moment.

KEOGH: What is the greatest lesson you have learnt in your career as a lawyer so far?

THIYAGARAJAN: Don't be afraid to ask for more responsibility or new opportunities. Do you want to take some time off to volunteer overseas? Do you want to work part-time so that you can see if you can turn your side hustle into a full-time gig? The only way you'll know whether you can do these things is if you ask. I'm a firm believer in creating your own opportunities. I

spent 6 months last year working part-time for LegalVision and part-time for the Refugee Advice and Casework Service when there was an urgent need for legal assistance for people seeking asylum who arrived by boat. I was incredibly nervous when I sat down with our CEO to ask if I could make the switch from full-time to part-time for a short while. I'd never heard of anyone being a part-time franchising and part-time human rights lawyer and wondered if I'd be laughed out the door, but I figured "what do I have to lose?".

KEOGH: I see that you have been very involved in access to justice work, including your work with the Refugee Advice & Casework Service and The Oaktree Foundation. How has that involvement influenced the way you go about your role as Head of Social Ventures at LegalVision?

THIYAGARAJAN: It's given me a solid practical understanding of how non-profits and human rights organisations work. I also saw just how valuable partnerships with law firms and corporates can provide much-needed in-kind and financial assistance. Private partnerships can often provide stability and certainty in the face of fluctuating funding from public sources. It makes me excited for the sheer potential of our Social Ventures initiatives, as I know just how much of a difference even one individual can make - backed by over 100 employees, I feel like LegalVision has the resources and the capacity to make a huge impact in this space.

KEOGH: What advice would you give to young lawyers about achieving and maintaining balance in their lives?

THIYAGARAJAN: When it comes to achieving balance, I think it's all about working on understanding your limits and then practising standing firm. This looks for different for everyone. I know some of my colleagues jump out of bed at 4 am to get a head-start on the

day, and they smash through their to-do list so that they can leave by 5 pm and work on their side hustle or go pick up their kids. Me? I will fight anyone who tries to get me out of bed before 8 am. I work at my peak in the evening, so I keep this in mind when setting my work routine.

As for maintaining balance, do what recharges you (particularly when you're at or nearing your limits). If you haven't quite figured out the secret to re-charging, that's okay - just keep trying different things and know that the meditation app or 5k run that works for someone doesn't have to work for you. And just remember, there's nothing long with a good Netflix binge every now and then.



Christian Keogh is a commercial and regulatory lawyer at Webb Henderson.