

# Making the most of your secondment

**A**t some stage in your career you may consider or be offered the opportunity to undertake a secondment with a client of your firm. The secondment opportunity will generally arise through a particular inhouse legal need of that client.

## Opportunities

As is the varied nature of your firm's clients base, the variety of secondment opportunities can be vast. You may well find yourself being offered the opportunity to provide your specific expertise to a related industry sector, as examples, a bank or financial institution may require the short or long term services of a banking and finance lawyer; a petroleum company may need a general corporate/ commercial lawyer or even a specialist projects lawyer; or a State Government department may require a property, construction or even a workplace relations lawyer to service a particular need.

## Preparation

When you have secured a secondment role you will need to prepare. Consider the following matters prior to the commencement of your secondment:

- resources/ specialist knowledge you will require during your secondment – swot-up and gather information. In terms of legal knowledge, your firm will have chosen you because you have the appropriate skills and experience, so you should not have to work too hard, if at all, in terms of preparing. If you are unsure of what to expect, ask the partner in charge, or, if appropriate, make enquiries with your client contact;
- learn about your client, the industry and your client's history with your firm; and
- inform your existing client base why and how long you will be out of the office for and who will be managing their matters in your absence.

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have a good handle on issues, and raise their hand if they think that it is outside of their competence.

## What are your thoughts on further study such as a Masters of Law?

I do recommend further study. What we try and do is tailor it to what the business needs. I am a great believer in the intensive masters subjects offered by Melbourne and Monash Universities. This is done so that we can understand where the law is and where it is going.

## Do you have much communication with many of the other Holden head offices?

We have a lot of communication. The legal team is organized globally. We have global process leaders for issues such as product development litigation, IP, compliance or logistics and so, we have reporting lines up and across. Part of it is to make sure that we are utilizing all of the skills which GM's roughly 300 lawyers have got.

## What to expect

Upon arrival, do not be surprised if your computer does not have a time recording program or there are not any timesheets on your desk. Most often you will not be required to account for your time. Be ready for a different reporting/ work approval/ sign-off structure – which can be minimal, or alternatively, you may be faced with multiple gatekeepers who are required (due to some internal policy or the like) to review your work prior to sign-off. You may or may not be the only lawyer in the organisation, there maybe employee lawyer(s) or other lawyer(s) on secondment – these lawyers will be a great source of information regarding the internal workings of the client.

## Making the most of it

To make the most of your secondment you should attempt to:

- identify legal issues relevant to your client which your firm may not have been aware of previously. These issues can be existing or possible future issues arising due to a change about to occur for your client internally or an external influence such as a legislative change – you have the opportunity to be proactive in the provision of advice, or suggestions for your client;
- gain insight into the operations of your client and their legal needs. How can you make your services more valuable? Can another practice team in your firm offer services to your client?
- use it as an opportunity to build or solidify the existing client relationship with your firm;
- remember, if you are in the market for an in-house role in the future or your client is, you maybe the first person that comes to mind when the client is seeking an in-house/ corporate counsel; and
- above all be, professional and add value to your client. ■



By **Megan Drysdale**,  
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## What would you consider to be the most important tip for young lawyers looking to manage their careers?

You have to be able to manage it, and not wait for someone else to do it. I think you need to decide what you really want to be. Do you want to be a lawyer or a business person? What is it that excites you from a corporate point of view? Is it being engaged in broad ranging business activities or is it resolving a legal issue? Do you want to go into a business which lies in a highly regulated environment, where you are going to be doing a lot of black letter law, or do you want to be involved in the cross-functional commercial transactions of a business which is not so highly regulated? I do think that this will dictate where you might position yourself in the corporate/legal world on what type of business you want to go into?

## Have you learned a lot about cars?

Actually I have, which is surprising!

## Which is your favourite Holden?

Well currently I am driving a Saab convertible (Saab is a GM company), but my favourite Holdens would be either the Caprice as a large car or the Astra as a smaller car. ■