

# Alternatively...

## Some different career paths

### Legal recruitment

MEGAN DRYSDALE, CONSULTANT,  
MAHLAB RECRUITMENT

**T**he decision to move from legal practice was not easy and involved months of searching the internet for something better. The law firm I left had fabulous employees, clients and opportunities; I knew the law firm didn't need a change, I did.

#### Why legal recruitment?

Staying within the legal industry was an easy decision; it was just a question of which job. Years of involvement with graduate recruitment at university and at my firm soon solidified my decision to help lawyers take the next step in their careers.

#### What do I do?

I liaise with lawyers and firms, review resumés, give advice about firms, practice areas and teams, in the negotiation of employment contracts and try to secure the perfect role for you, the lawyer, in either Australia or overseas. I assist lawyers to brainstorm their next steps and guide them with their future career moves.

#### How is it different to legal practice?

- A lawyer is in control of the matter from the time the file is opened, whereas the recruiter relies on the client and the lawyer to guide them regarding the next step they wish to take.
- Although a single recruitment can take anywhere from two weeks to 10 months, things move faster than your average property file. Firms and lawyers are generally grateful for my assistance!
- If you can't assist a lawyer in obtaining a new position, you tell them, but send them off with some helpful tip or information regarding their resumé or likely next career move.
- Practice requires knowing the law (or getting up to speed on it quickly) and getting it right the first time. Recruitment involves being able to match the exact skills/knowledge/personality of the lawyer to the right firm.

#### How is it similar?

- Every day there is a new challenge or scenario
- Both involve thinking outside the square
- High level service is required for clients.
- It is important to know clients in detail
- Both require organisation, systems, efficiency and promptness

#### Is it a waste of six years of study and three in legal practice?

Absolutely not. A recruitment consultant needs to have the ethics, morals and professionalism of a lawyer, coupled with the knowledge and skills acquired during practice.

When the time at work zooms by and I look forward to going to work each day, I know that I have made the right decision.

### Electoral Officer

LANCE WILSON, ELECTORAL OFFICER,  
PRAHRAN

**W**orking in politics is very different to working in any other field, and it is certainly very different to working in a law firm.

#### Electorate office

Parliament is intriguing and inspiring. Parliament House itself is amazing. The grand steps and stately, imposing columns outside emphasise the importance of what occurs within. Inside, the euphoric aroma of power wafts through the air. It is similar, in many ways, to the sense one has when first walking into Courtroom 1 at the Supreme Court.

In contrast, the electorate office is where Parliament intersects with the community and it brings you down to earth very quickly. You see precisely how the decisions made in the corridors of power take their effect on the ordinary person.

An electorate officer's job is primarily to assist the Member with their duties in the electorate. In doing so, you have the opportunity to help many people in need, with problems of varying complexity. Of course, there is also the politics. You need to have a firm interest in politics and a preparedness to support the Member, even when your opinions differ.

#### What does an electorate officer do?

My role at the office of Tony Lupton MP, State Member for Prahran, varies considerably, but tasks include research, marketing, community service, advocacy and administration.

While giving "legal advice" is strictly forbidden, legal skills still come in handy. There are many queries from members of the public, community groups and businesses that require research into government policy or legislation, and legal knowledge enables a better appreciation of some of the issues raised. For example, I have had to respond to complex queries about the levying of land tax against properties held in trust, and this would have been much more difficult without a legal background.

#### Skill set

The key to it all is communication; anyone working in an EO needs to be able to communicate with all people as equals. Patience and a sympathetic ear are also invaluable attributes.

Working in an EO is a rewarding experience, particularly for those with an interest in politics and a desire to help people in the community. It also provides an excellent

insight into the workings of government, and the interplay between our governmental institutions.

At a time when almost every aspect of our lives is regulated in some way, the role of a parliamentarian is extremely important and it is a great experience being able to contribute to the political process in a beneficial way.

## Journalist

KEN NGUYEN, MALLESON STEPHEN JAQUES & *THE AGE*

**L**et's not over-romanticise journalism. The money is terrible, career progression can be slow (Shaun Carney's column space in *The Age* doesn't look like becoming vacant anytime soon) and, if you're a television critic, much of your time can be taken up reading hate mail from over-60s after you've given a disparaging review to *The Bill*. It's a tough game.

**"Journalism will especially suit those who love four things: people, research, stories and words."**

Its intangible rewards, though, can be many and plentiful. Ultimately, journalism is for those who take joy in telling stories. Journalists are involved in countless different fields – in their first few years, a fresh-faced journo might go from breaking political scoops to interviewing Renee Zellweger – but what all the best journalists have in common is a passion for telling fresh stories, or passing on fresh knowledge, in a literate, inviting manner. Lawyers have a long history of working well as journalists: those who have done both include former *Bulletin* journalist Malcolm Turnbull, *Sydney Morning Herald* writer and former *Mediawatch* host David Marr and ABC radio host Jon Faine.

### How do I become a journalist?

With great difficulty. Strain in the media industry has meant that many outlets – including the Fairfax newspapers and the Nine Network – are either shedding or taking on fewer staff. Still, those with legal training are at a distinct advantage when pursuing employment opportunities: journalism graduates are a dime a dozen, while those with specialised knowledge in a field of public interest – that is, the law – can be a much sought-after commodity. The best advice any prospective journalist could follow is this: get published wherever and whenever you can. Freelance bylines in journals, magazines, web journals and so on are among the best assets a would-be journalist can have for separating themselves from the pack.

### What would I do as a new journalist?

Most journalists cut their teeth on news reporting: finding out stories that nobody else knows and bringing them to the public in, say, the front news pages. Many will stick with that, although others, once they have gained experience, will move on to other fields: for example, commentary in the opinion pages or feature-



writing in the supplements. Newspapers also usually offer the chance to move around different subject matters: say, from business to sports. In my two years as a full-time journalist with *The Age*, I wrote sections including the news pages (as a state politics reporter), Green Guide (as a TV critic), Preview (as a music critic), *The Age Good Food Guide* and the Travel section.

### What is great about being a journalist?

Journalism will especially suit those who love four things: people, research, stories and words. Your days are spent talking with other journos (maybe discussing the Streets with Shaun Carney or dishing political goss

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with Paul Austin) and, more importantly, regular punters with their own unique stories. Once you talk to people and pull together your story, there is then a real skill in bringing your knowledge to the page quickly, but in an intelligent, readable form. Humour, metaphors and subtle individuality: there's room for all that in journalism – a contrast, perhaps, with legal advice-writing.

## Federal Magistrate's Associate

JAMES NAUGHTON AND NADIA MORALES,  
FEDERAL MAGISTRATES COURT

**B**eing an associate to a federal magistrate is like being a roadie on the John Farnham comeback tour. In both jobs you get an insider's view of the inner workings of your chosen profession. You get to meet all the players in your field: the barristers, the techies, the litigants and the sound guys. And in both jobs you get to

**"There you have it, we are just one link in a chain reaction."**

wear fun outfits, whether that be a charcoal suit with toning paisley tie or the equally appealing "Whispering Jack is Back (Again)" tour T-shirt.

The Federal Magistrates Court was set up five years ago as a first instance court with the aim of assisting parties to resolve disputes quickly, fairly and at a comparatively low cost. Since its small beginnings, the Court has expanded rapidly and now processes more than 70,000 cases per year. This caseload is expected to increase, given the Court's mooted expanded jurisdiction and its escalating reputation for dealing with cases expeditiously.

Each federal magistrate has two associates, who divide their time between work in chambers and providing assistance in court. Like two strong hearts, we work closely as a team to manage our caseload. Having two associates ensures that our day-to-day work is filled with flexibility and variety. On any given day we could be researching or drafting orders on a variety of legal topics ranging from family law to migration, trade practices, bankruptcy and copyright. We move between chambers and the court, and from location to location – "That's Freedom!"

Having day-to-day access to the courtroom also gives an associate a fantastic insight into the art of advocacy and the litigation process. We are exposed to professional and experienced advocates who specialise in their respective areas of law. We also deal regularly with a number of self-represented litigants and we take the pressure down by familiarising them with the processes of the Court.

One of the most interesting aspects of our work is the research of relevant facts and law for the preparation of judgments. Working closely with a federal magistrate in the preparation of judgments is an excellent way to hone editing skills while receiving guidance on challenging or complex areas.

Much like John Farnham, we also do the regional circuits. While "The Voice" may get the opportunity to belt it out at the Frankston Cultural Centre, more likely than not there is a federal magistrate working quietly away in a local court somewhere near you. These circuits give us the opportunity to meet local practitioners, who always make us feel most welcome in their communities. Circuits also give us the opportunity to see parts of regional Australia that we might otherwise never visit. Being a Federal Court, you may be in Dandenong one day and Cairns, Darwin or Townsville the next!

There you have it, we are just one link in a chain reaction. So if you want a career that is interesting, challenging and complete with a touch, a touch of paradise, then maybe a role as an associate is the right choice for you.

## Barrister

CLYDE A MILES, VICTORIAN BAR

*[The following represents one barrister's views only and is in no way intended to represent the views of the Victorian Bar.]*

**Y**ou must be sure that you will be happy with a life that necessarily involves some degree of conflict on most days. You will have little or no control over this for as long as you are involved in the litigation side of things you will have to stand on your feet no matter what your mood or disposition. You must be comfortable with this. While we all live in the adversary system, barristers are usually at the "pointy end" of this system.

Nevertheless, it is a good thing from time to time to be a little anxious about your case. Such anxiety shows that you care about your client and your professional performance.

Do not come to the Bar in the expectation of a clerk providing the majority of your work for you, it will not happen. Likewise, all your "mates" that promise you work will not always deliver.

When starting off, you must have some form of financial backing. Rich parents or a working spouse would be helpful.

**"You cannot beat experience 'on your feet.'"**

Know your rules of evidence thoroughly. Even if you do not practise in a jurisdiction where the rules are strictly applied, it will still be necessary to have an instinct for evidence.

Be aware that in those cases where you score a miraculous win against the odds, there is a high likelihood that you will never hear from the solicitor who benefited from your amazing result. This is especially so if the solicitor promises to send you more work in view of the meritorious win.

Provided you have the personality type that is comfortable with the matters set out above, then life at the Bar can be a very satisfying career. The Victorian Bar has a long tradition of being welcoming to new members no matter what their background or sex.

While a knowledgeable mentor is useful to you, you cannot beat experience "on your feet".

Most new barristers make the mistake of spending their fee once it goes into the fee book and spending it again when (if indeed this happens) the fee is paid. This is not a good long-term financial strategy. Indeed, come to think of it, you would probably make more money as a solicitor. That is why the majority of us just do it for the lifestyle advantages of working long hours with insufficient thanks.