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The land of the overachiever

EMMA MOSS, ARTICLED CLERK,
HERBERT GEER & RUNDLE

I remember a conversation I had with a good friend after he came back from the finals of the Jessup Moot in Washington DC. I was really excited for him because there had been talk that they'd performed brilliantly – beating all the big US universities to make it to the final.

Expecting to find him on a massive high after a successful trip, it was a real surprise to find him morose and uncommunicative. He was bitterly disappointed because his uni team had come in as runner-up. Runner-up! Wasn't such a fantastic result cause for jubilant back flips around the Law Quad? It was then that I realised that I had entered the land of the serious overachiever.

Coming to law school as an Arts graduate my first year was spent in a state of mild bewilderment. While I muddled my way through essays and three-hour exams, with the help of a lot of coffee and some very last-minute cramming sessions, people around me were in a frenzy of overachievement; weekly mooting competitions, chairing committees for the Law Association, entering essay writing competitions and generally excelling in everything. After a while this *modus operandi* started to rub off on me and I started to take on a number of extra-curricular activities. Soon, as well as the coffee and the cramming sessions, there was volunteering at the local community legal centre and editing the uni magazine – and I really enjoyed it (really).

Now I'm half-way through my articles year and there's talk among my peers of MAs in intellectual property and courses in every specialisation imaginable.

"So how does a (relatively) normal young lawyer survive in the land of the overachiever?"

Well, I'm new at this game so I'm a long way from the dispensing advice stage, but I think a bit of perspective always helps. There is no doubt that being a young lawyer can be stressful and sometimes overwhelming, and the thought of taking on other commitments might seem all too much. But, there are so many opportunities for young lawyers to further their careers and develop their skill sets and not all of them are as daunting as you might think.

Non-law related activities, while being a great source of time out, can also have really positive career consequences. A friend of mine did really well at French in school and, as a result of this, in his articles year flew to Africa three times to take witness statements in French-speaking countries. While running off to your nearest Alliance Francaise is probably not going to result in the immediate launch of a glittering career in international arbitration, there's definitely plenty of reasons to give it a go, not least that you might have a lot of fun and make new friends.

Finding your own way in a career riddled with overachievers can be a tough gig. To use a really bad diving metaphor – some days performing that triple pike, with tuck, no splash entry, is just not possible. Everyone does a few bellyflops before they figure out where they are and what they want to be doing. There are moments when dragging yourself off to another class might not be the answer. Maybe simply sitting down with a cup of tea and reading about what's going on in the world might be more beneficial. And, once again, perspective is really important – like realising that coming runner-up in an international mooting competition is actually cause for celebration.

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