

New perspectives on

WHAT OTHER CAREER PATHS CAN YOUNG LAWYERS FOLLOW AFTER A FEW YEARS IN LEGAL PRACTICE?

Are you feeling the three-year itch? It's a term that has been bandied about for some time by lawyers in their second or third year, when they begin to realise that a career in the law may not be in their long-term plans.

The itch might present as a slight anxiety when you fill in a timesheet, interpret legislation or are subject to micro-management of your document discovery. It may rear its head over coffee with law school contemporaries, when discussing your desire to do something different becomes as common as discussing what you did on the weekend.

After the excitement of your graduate year fades and law firm life takes hold, many young lawyers ask themselves: "Is this what I want to do forever? What else could I do?" Others start reflecting on what their passions and interests really are and how they could pursue them in the professional realm.

However, just because you have landed a job that's not for you does not mean that it is the end of the world. The law degree is the new arts degree; with it you can do whatever you want to do.

It can be daunting to consider change, let alone act upon it, but you are not alone in experiencing these feelings. Although there is no doubt it is difficult to leave the traditional legal roles behind, plenty of lawyers have found that there are roles out there that suit them better.

In this issue of the *YLJ*, we explore some of the career paths such lawyers have followed. By talking to young lawyers who have taken up roles in government, communications, recruitment, academia and elsewhere, we hope to open your eyes to the other options that are available to you.

In the following stories, we have profiled six lawyers who felt the itch and moved off the well-trodden road of private practice. Their advice provides helpful insight into many of the considerations that may guide you on your professional journey. •

MITALI BRAVO is a regulatory communications consultant at Origin Energy.

the three-year itch

THE RECRUITMENT MANAGER

Many lawyers contemplate career transitions, but finding alternative opportunities within the law firm they work at is rare.

For Bryony McCormack, Allens Arthur Robinson provided the perfect opportunity to make the move from legal practice to human resources (HR).

After rotating through the firm's corporate/litigation and intellectual property departments, Bryony's move away from practice came unexpectedly. She was seconded to the firm's people and development section as a consultant responsible for graduate recruitment.

Initially, Bryony viewed the secondment as an opportunity to learn what drove the business side of practice and see how Allens' corporate services operated. She intended to return to law and reapply this knowledge, but her plans quickly changed.

"I moved into the role, and completely fell in love with it," she said.

Bryony was later promoted to a management position overseeing Australian graduate recruitment. Her role continues to evolve and now includes providing internal employment policy advice and implementing community initiatives.

Having worked in law and HR within the one firm, Bryony observes noticeable differences in working style, such as HR's high level of autonomy.

"You're not getting work delegated down the chain. You are responsible for project managing what happens in your space," she said.

Bryony also enjoys opportunities to view the big picture and "come up with a strategy rather than just respond to a problem".

Bryony's approach to career planning is to consider where she sees herself in the long term, and then what roles might help her get there. She points out that roles of interest can sit in different places in each organisation (such as in marketing, HR or business development), so you can gain mileage by focusing on the work you want, rather than just an appealing job title.

Even if you enjoy practising law (as she did), Bryony stresses the importance of being open to other opportunities. "All along, my career has been formed by taking opportunities when they come up," she said.

Bryony's willingness to take these chances has led to genuine professional diversity and fulfilment. •

LUCY DUNCAN is a consultant at Mahlab Recruitment



PEOPLE PERSON: Bryony McCormack's career change kept her at the same legal firm.

MATT JACKSON

THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Kristen Cook made the successful transition from lawyer to award-winning photographer and hasn't looked back.

She enjoyed public speaking, debating and theatre at school, but also had a passion for photography. Kristen obtained arts and law (honours) degrees from Monash University in 2003 and spent the following three-and-a-half years working as a property and finance lawyer at a Melbourne law firm.

During this time she was thrilled to become pregnant. But when she went on maternity leave in 2007, Kristen had no idea that she would choose not to return.

The joy Kristen experienced from her baby girl caused her interest in photography to sprout to a new level. Kristen became dedicated to capturing every moment of her daughter's life in photos.

After practice and study, she gained a reputation among her friends, their friends, and eventually the wider community, for her extraordinary ability to portray the raw beauty and emotion of the subjects in front of her camera.

"There is something infinitely precious about being chosen by people to capture some of the most momentous events in their lives," she said.

"I am connected to the honest, the pure, the exploration of tenderness and the simple beauty and authenticity that come from human connection."

Kristen now runs a very successful wedding and baby photography business (www.kristencook.com.au). Already this year she has been named the Australian Institute of Professional Photography's Victorian creative photographer of the year and was runner-up in the professional photographer of the year and portrait photographer of the year categories.

She believes that the skills she learned as a lawyer were a huge factor contributing to her success, allowing her to pre-empt issues, see where problems might arise and figure out what she could do about them.

Kristen's advice to other young lawyers considering an alternative career is to find something that they are passionate about and that truly speaks to who they are as a person.

"Don't discount something merely because it has nothing to do with the law. You'll find your skills and work experience to be far more valuable than you would ever realise," she said. •

IGOR GOLSHTEIN is a solicitor with DLA Piper



PICTURE PERFECT: Capturing moments like this is Kristen Cook's new career.

KRISTEN COOK

New perspectives on

THE ENTREPRENEUR



MATT JACKSON

FRENCH CONNECTION: Hugh Morley's love of French cooking helped decide where his career would next head.

With a Master of Arts in international relations from Yale, and a Bachelor of Arts and Juris Doctor from the University of Melbourne, Hugh Morley's academic credentials are impressive. No stranger to transition, he worked in banking before joining the legal profession. However, he realised "thinking abstractly about the law is very different from day to day doing of the law, which wasn't for me."

Having left a top-tier firm, he now co-owns La Belle Miette with his partner, Maylynn. The patisserie specialises in sumptuous macarons, with exotic flavours including pink grapefruit and cherry blossom with sake.

When Hugh left the law he took time off to consider his next step, and read widely on entrepreneurship and career transitions, including Paul Graham's essays "Why You Shouldn't Have a Boss" and "How To Do What You Love".

When Maylynn proposed opening a patisserie, Hugh's love of French language and cooking made "the prospect of building something cool together and not having a boss . . . very appealing".

Legal experience has proven an invaluable skill set in establishing the business, arming Hugh with the knowledge to navigate its legal complexities where possible.

He now finds himself working harder but enjoying it more; encountering more stress but finding it easier to manage. For Hugh, variety is the key distinction.

"You have to do everything from design to financial modelling to cooking to managing employees, to working in the shop," he said.

Hugh describes leaving the law as a mixture of relief and "an almost paralysing level of anxiety". However, a central part of the process was the effort he put into understanding his strengths and values.

He now easily passes Graham's test of whether people love what they do – whether they'd do it even if they weren't paid for it and had to work at another job to make a living.

Once you've tasted a macaron from La Belle Miette, you'll understand why. ●

LUCY DUNCAN is a consultant at Mahlab Recruitment

La Belle Miette
30 Hardware Lane
Melbourne
Monday–Friday
10am–6pm
Saturday
10am–3pm

THE POLICY ADVISER

Genevieve Vaccaro grew up watching *Ally McBeal* and *The Practice*. However, after a short stint at a top-tier firm, Genevieve got the itch to change careers.

She has ended up as a policy adviser in workplace relations at the Australian Industry Group (Ai Group). So how do you move to the forefront of industrial relations policy at one of Australia's leading industry groups? According to Genevieve, you can start by searching the net.

Simple enough, but how far can your skills get you? In Genevieve's case, she phoned Ai Group and asked the tough questions directly, about what kind of work she would be doing and how it might differ from the work she was currently doing.

Genevieve's major apprehension was whether making the switch would limit later opportunities in private practice – "I never want to close the door to the possibility of returning" – so she devised a strategy to talk to as many people as possible.

"I did a lot of talking to senior lawyers in and around my firm, everywhere in fact," she said.

"I also bounced my ideas off friends and others who had gone down different paths. I think that it helped alleviate some of the apprehension."

For Genevieve, the major difference between law and policy advice has been that familiar catch-cry: work/life balance. But she makes it clear that it is still hard work.

"I still have an office – that's the same, but it's a different working environment. Ai Group's primary focus is to achieve outcomes that benefit our members, there isn't the same billing pressure you find in a private law firm," she said.

"I probably work similar hours, but my working day is structured differently to accommodate my lifestyle. I have more flexibility to be able to have dinner at home, see family and friends."

Genevieve's advice to other lawyers contemplating a similar career change is to sit down and think if you are ready and prepared to leave private practice behind. Then it's a matter of acting decisively and asking frankly about what your skills can buy. You might be surprised. ●

CAL VINEY is a graduate at law at Hunt & Hunt Lawyers



ENGAGED: Genevieve Vaccaro sought the advice of many people before making her career move.

the three-year itch

THE POSTGRADUATE STUDENT

After investing five years in a University of Melbourne commerce/law degree and completing articles at a top-tier law firm, few lawyers would consider undertaking study in an entirely different field.

This is especially true if the course is a Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS), which would involve another five years of full-time study.

Tim Monaghan's decision to sit the Graduate Australian Medical School Admission Test just after he qualified as a lawyer was inspired by his desire to "not die wondering" about what might have been.

The 28-year-old first realised he might be interested in medicine during year 12, but beginning a medical degree straight after high school was not an option for him because he had not completed the pre-requisites.

"I enjoyed my law degree and working at Freehills, but still really wanted to try being a doctor," he said.

"When I finally got into medicine, I was stressed about making the change. There were a lot of factors to be weighed up . . . the length of the medical degree and training, how to survive financially while studying, and starting a new career when you're older."

But these considerations did not deter Tim.

He wanted his career to be more "people-oriented", something that he found could be missing in corporate law, and to combine exciting practical medical work with the problem-solving and analytical skills he enjoyed in law.

Maintaining these legal skills by continuing to work as a lawyer at Freehills on a casual basis while studying medicine is also essential as Tim hopes to combine the two fields some day.

Tim is now halfway through his MBBS. He acknowledges it has been a lot of work but is happy he made the move.

"Don't be scared to have a go and realise you can always go back to being a lawyer," he said.

"Your working life is long, so try to do the things that you want to do. Even if you end up going back to the law, it would be with a new perspective." •

SURALINI FERNANDO is a solicitor at Freehills



NEW HORIZONS: The prospect of years more full-time study did not deter Tim Monaghan from following a long-held interest in medicine.

THE JOURNALIST

From the get-go Anneli Knight was set up for corporate success.

She studied commerce/law at the University of Melbourne while working part-time at Goldman Sachs JBWere, then commenced articles at Blake Dawson, where she settled into life as a high-flying intellectual property lawyer.

But Anneli could not ignore the pull she felt towards journalism – a career she had first considered in year 12. In her second year of practice, Anneli began a masters in journalism, which she said was hard because she spent "all my time working and studying".

Halfway through her masters, Anneli quit law. She had saved enough to get by while building her freelancing portfolio and finishing her studies. Her hard work paid off when she landed a coveted traineeship at the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH).

Anneli identifies similarities between working for large law firms and newspapers – including late nights and working under extreme pressure. She says lawyers are suited to journalism because of crossovers between the professions including "a love of language", knowing how to structure writing and a heightened attention to detail.

Another shared skill is the ability to "get to the heart of the issue quickly", break it down and communicate it to an audience.

Now a freelance journalist and writer, Anneli regularly writes for *The Age* and the *SMH*. She avoids suits where possible and is much more comfortable setting up a temporary home in the Kimberleys (or other destinations) from where she can file copy over the internet and interview interesting people over Skype.

Anneli says anyone contemplating a career in journalism should:

- start building a portfolio now. Approach local newspapers, community publications, street press and local radio;
- be prepared to work for free and to start at the bottom; and
- consider further study.

"Sometimes I think it's not a career. Sometimes I think I should get a real job," Anneli said.

"You can self-direct your career. It definitely wouldn't suit a lot of people . . . but I love it."

And pages always need to be filled. •

MICHELLE BATSAS is a lawyer



COMPELLING: Former lawyer Anneli Knight could not ignore the lure of journalism.