

Homecoming a rewarding choice



CAM WARD

FOR ONE YOUNG LAWYER, RETURNING TO THE CITY IN WHICH SHE GREW UP WAS AN EASY – AND REWARDING – DECISION TO MAKE.



CAM WARD

I was chuffed when asked to write for the *LIV YLJ*. Surprised that anyone would want to read about me, but chuffed nonetheless.

I was born and raised in Geelong. It is where my mother lives and my father rests. Although I moved around quite a bit after completing high school, I always maintained close connections with Geelong and its greater community.

Unlike most Victorian students (at least that's what I'm told) I moved interstate to pursue law, at the University of Sydney. I then travelled for a bit before commencing my articles with Allens Arthur Robinson in Melbourne.

My two years at Allens were immensely rewarding. The legal training was comprehensive and the work was always challenging and exciting. I learnt a lot about myself in an environment that was 100 per cent nurturing and supportive. Allens provided an outstanding foundation for legal practice.

Accordingly, my decision to leave was not easy. But I resigned knowing that I was keen to pursue other interests and opportunities.

I left Allens without having secured another job and then travelled abroad. I therefore consider myself lucky in that Coulter Roache approached me.

You see, one of the advantages of Geelong is its tight-knit legal community. An ex-boss let it be known to his Geelong associates that I had considered moving back. I was called in for a meeting (which I initially thought was a coffee) by the chairman of partners and then fronted a panel comprising partners and HR.

I was so unprepared that I actually asked the question: "Are you interviewing me for a job?" The answer to the question was yes; the moral of the story is that you should always be prepared for the unexpected.

I began at Coulter Roache just over 12 months ago. As you can imagine, it is a very different working environment to that of Allens and was actually quite daunting to begin with.

Unlike some big city firms, here you are genuinely expected to manage your own files, interview and deal directly with clients, make appearances before the court and instruct counsel directly. You are even responsible for recovering your own debt and must be prepared to take responsibility for your professional development.

As many practitioners in my department acknowledge (having come from Arnold Bloch Leibler, Blake Dawson and Clayton Utz), one of the challenges of working in a regional firm is the fact of having to always be exceptionally mindful of client costs. It is easy to forget you are dealing predominantly with small to medium enterprises (SMEs) and individuals and not blue chip corporations. Even paralegals and research students have a budget.

But the pace is much, much slower. On a good day, word processing comprises one person (if that) so you can't expect your work to be done immediately or overnight.

There are no staff credit cards, gym memberships, in-house yoga, or communal dinners; but none of this really matters given that fee earners rarely work after 6pm. There is also a masseuse who attends once a week. And did I mention the easy five-minute drive to work, underground car park and mobile phone?

For those young city lawyers seriously considering the move to Geelong for work, the most important thing to note is that you must be prepared to accept a significant pay reduction. On the flip side, property prices are generally more affordable than in Melbourne and you will have much more time for yourself.

Geelong isn't for every young lawyer. But if you're looking for an environment that offers a slower pace, greater autonomy, a personal challenge and the opportunity to recharge and contribute directly towards the local community, it might just be the place for you. ●

LILY TSEN

is a lawyer at Coulter Roache Lawyers.