

mdp partner dreamed of working for the UN

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What made you choose a career in law, and what's your favourite part of the job?

I did not set out to have a career in the law. At school, I was passionate about global diplomacy and had dreams of working for the UN after studying international relations. However, I realised that to make a real impact in the field, I probably needed a law degree to complement my studies. I ended up studying arts (majoring in international relations and Middle East politics) and law.

I didn't love the black letter of the law. I enjoyed applying the law to practical, real-life examples and in particular, helping someone grow a business idea into reality. I chose to pursue a career in corporate law, specifically working on mergers and acquisitions, because it all clicked for me. As a young, independent female, I was also excited about the opportunities that a career in the law would give me financially and intellectually, and that continues to ring true.

What is the most memorable case you've taken on/been involved in?

It's hard to say – I worked on many high-profile, complex deals at my previous firm which exposed me to large, sophisticated clients and deals that were innovative and challenging. Initially, I loved the kudos that went with working on multibillion-dollar global M&A

transactions – it was hard work, long hours but fascinating and exciting. We worked with hundreds, if not thousands of people, to deliver a transaction.

However, I also find the smaller transactions enjoyable for different reasons. In those matters, with a seat at the decision-making table, we often bear the responsibility of providing legal advice to a family or founder who has put their blood, sweat and tears into a business. It has a greater emotional attachment, it's more personal for them. Helping an owner to structure a transaction that means they're happy and willing to part with their life's work? That's something I take very seriously and a big part of why I joined mdp.

What is going on at the firm? Are there any new programs and initiatives that you're particularly interested in?

mdp decided at the end of 2020 to continue working remotely. We are calling ourselves a "physical-digital hybrid" because face-to-face collaboration will always be necessary. During COVID-19 lockdowns, we ran lunchtime yoga over Zoom and regularly checked in with colleagues, but a lot of it was played by ear. In a pandemic, the whole world had to adapt quickly to working from home, so there was room for experimentation, trial and error.

In 2021, mdp is really taking this opportunity to establish sustainable law careers for ourselves; in terms of work-life balance, flexible working and being conscious about what does and doesn't work for staff and clients. While Zoom yoga may not be the answer, our staff will be given a membership to the RACV Club in Melbourne, so teams can work together two days a week in the new co-working space, in addition to working independently.

What has been your proudest accomplishment in the last year or so, and what advice can you give fellow lawyers about it?

Returning to work from maternity leave, changing jobs and being promoted to partner all during a pandemic. It is important to be honest; lockdown was a tough time for parents in professional careers with no access to childcare. It was a tough time for everybody, and I made sure I took the time to ask others about their experience. It has been a steep learning curve for me as a mother and lawyer, but I think I am a better mother and lawyer for it.

I learnt early in my career, from a partner I worked for in the UK, how to break issues down into separate questions and tasks that can be solved. Whilst I strive for excellence, I am also realistic about what is and isn't an issue. Time is precious, personally and professionally. Becoming a parent emphasised that to me, and as a result, I am very strategic in how I spend my time – optimising outcomes for my clients and supporting my colleagues is important to me.

What should the profession and law firms focus more on?

I am especially passionate about promoting and supporting junior lawyers. There have been times in my career that have been a struggle, and whilst the industry has come a long way, it has further to go. I have heard so many burnout stories from peers in the legal industry and seen the loss of so many talented lawyers, who couldn't juggle family and the demands of your typical big law firm. They leave the law when they don't need to.

Putting flexible working and well-being at the centre of everything can sound good on paper, but every employee has different needs and, as a small firm, we can be more mindful of people as individuals. Which I think is a great thing.