

SIDDHARTHA SHUKLA: SHAPING THE PATH OF DIVERSITY

11 April 2018 | London
Firm news

London senior associate [Siddhartha Shukla](#) talks about his incredible route to becoming a solicitor and his role in furthering diversity awareness across the legal sector.

“Diversity is a developing concept: it has changed and is constantly itself diversifying. From my experience, as an Indian joining an international law firm based in London, my particular interest in promoting diversity is in helping to bridge cultural gaps between those of different cultural backgrounds from different countries.”

Corporate senior associate Siddhartha (more usually known as Sid) co-chairs the firm's Multiculturalism Network and is a co-chair of an external organisation comprising law firms, called NOTICED.

As Sid explains, often these differences might appear to be small but can have wider implications. He gives the example of the reluctance of young Indian lawyers to ask questions of their superiors. In India, asking questions might be seen as a sign of stupidity or lack of respect, while in the UK, or at least in a firm such as Herbert Smith Freehills where open discussion is encouraged, the failure to ask questions can be interpreted as a lack of interest. “There are many more examples that I could give, which is why we need to have mechanisms for sharing information.”

NOTICED was launched in March 2013, as the UK’s first inter-firm diversity network aimed at promoting networking opportunities to integrate, celebrate and educate on diversity across the legal sector. The objectives are to encourage diversity in the legal profession and amongst member firms with a view to making the profession more accessible to individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds; and to raise awareness about issues faced by ethnic minorities, not just in accessing the profession but also in their progression. The network is open to lawyers in law firms and in-house, and those engaged in business services in the legal profession.

There is a strong social element, but NOTICED has also arranged some enlightening events. There have been guest speakers, including alumnus Chuka Umunna and Dame Linda Dobbs, the first non-white judge to be appointed to the High Court in the UK.

FROM A SMALL TOWN IN INDIA

Sid's story is a fascinating – and inspiring – one. Raised in a small town in northern India, he was attracted to the idea of law (“people said I was good at negotiating and I enjoyed public speaking”, he laughs) and studied at one of India's newly established national law schools in Jodhpur. Despite the poor facilities – there were no roads or university accommodation on campus when the students started and very few law books – Sid took to the course easily and excelled.

In his penultimate year, he started thinking of law firms for whom he could work. He was offered places at top Indian law firms, but he had set his sights further than that – and, in particular, on international law firms with connections to India. He was shortlisted for two firms and offered a training contract. This is where Sid demonstrated his good sense: rather than accepting the training contract immediately, he asked whether he could do an internship first. As he explains, “I had never been to England, let alone set foot in an international law firm, so I wanted to see what it was like. I opted for Herbert Smith Freehills as it was so welcoming.”

Nevertheless, Sid had to adjust to life in the firm as he got used to a different culture. “My biggest challenges were, and this might sound trivial, understanding the British humour or finding common grounds to talk about with others in the firm,” Sid relates. “For example, I had no idea about British TV series!”

Over time, he did adjust and integrate. However, he thought it would be helpful for others following in his footsteps to have a chance to assimilate more easily. Hence, his involvement in the firm's Multiculturalism Network and his role in NOTICED – both of which are aimed to inform people of cultural differences (on both sides) and therefore to avoid misunderstandings. Apart from the benefits these networks bring to their members, they also help the business.

Sid is a strong proponent for mentoring, which helped him and which he is sure can help others. “Mentoring is about trying to find and establish relationships with people around you, not just with partners or associates but also with more experienced trainees, who might be interested in you or your work.” Not surprisingly, Sid himself is a mentor. “I really valued and continue to value the contributions made by my mentors in my career progression and I feel morally obligated to help others as others have helped me.”

Sid has made quite an impact on the culture and processes of the firm. The process of attracting graduates onto internships in advance of accepting training contracts is now built into the system. Expect many more inspired initiatives to come from Sid in future.

KEY CONTACTS

If you have any questions, or would like to know how this might affect your business, phone, or email these key contacts.



**SIDDHARTHA
SHUKLA**

SENIOR ASSOCIATE,
LONDON

+44 20 7466 7474

Siddhartha.Shukla@hsf.com

MEDIA CONTACT

For further information on this news article, please contact:

ADAM MCCANN

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MANAGER,
UK, US & EMEA LONDON

Tel: +44 20 7466 3651

Email: adam.mccann@hsf.com
