

CHRIS HILL: PLAYING FAIR

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One of the oldest, and it seems unattributable, clichés is the one that says if you do a job you love, you'll never work a day in your life. If this is true, Chris Hill retired at a very young age indeed, because for the last two and a half years his work has been in an area extremely close to his heart.

As senior legal counsel at Fox Sports Australia, this self-confessed 'big sports fan' left his first ever in-house position at Westpac to join the pay TV station, even though he was really enjoying his role at the bank. "I thought, 'I have to go for this'; it was one of those potential dream job opportunities."

The role required employment law experience, which Chris had in abundance both from his time at Westpac and his previous six-plus years at Herbert Smith Freehills, as well as in-house experience, which he'd also gained at the bank. After a couple of years at the latter and relishing the scope of work he was doing there, he says it was a hard decision to announce his departure.

"They completely understood it though, because I was always talking about sport!" he says. At Fox Sports he has been part of a small team supporting all parts of the business with its employment issues, while also looking after some other commercial matters and supporting the recently launched sports streaming product, Kayo Sports. The environment has changed recently, however, due to a merger between Fox Sports and Foxtel. "We now have a joint legal team, which is a bit bigger," he explains. The team's remit covers usual in-house areas, but with a focus on the television industry, including intellectual property, sports rights, general corporate issues, defamation, commercial agreements and employment.

But he's still steeped in sport – something he spends most of his free time immersed in too. Chris says he wasn't much of an athlete at school, and is certainly more of a watcher than a player, and this has only increased thanks to his career path. "Working in a place where they produce the content is fantastic," he says, listing rugby league, AFL, rugby union and cricket as favourite sports to follow. He's also become interested in international sports, like American football. "Yes, anything that's on really, I'll watch," he admits. But if this all makes Chris sound like something of a couch dweller with one hand on the remote and the other in a bowl of popcorn, there's another equally entrenched side to him. And it's one that is perhaps a little more surprising for a young man with a "pretty normal upbringing".

Despite having a few lawyers in his family, including his father, Chris was initially more attracted to journalism. But as his double degree in law and a media-related field progressed, he found it was the former that really fascinated him. This was only heightened by his experiences at the Kingsford Legal Centre (KLC). Many young lawyers will spend time doing pro bono or community-based work, but for Chris it connected on a deeper level. "I always did have a bit of a social justice bent, especially while at university," he says. While in Herbert Smith Freehills' graduate program, the opportunity arose to do a full-time secondment at KLC, and he jumped at it.

This community legal centre serves the south-eastern Sydney area and Chris says it provides free legal advice in most areas of law. "We didn't do criminal and family law, because those areas are well covered by Legal Aid, but it was the areas where people fall into a gap. They can't necessarily afford to get a private lawyer, but need some advice to try and help themselves." The issues ranged from debt and credit problems to social housing and employment concerns.

What it gave Chris was access to very different sorts of clients to those he'd been working with in corporate law. "It was lawyering 101, a really good grounding for my work now," he says. "Some of them were very, very vulnerable people, from disadvantaged backgrounds or just out of prison." And he found they often surprised him. "I think it does away with a lot of the stereotypes, seeing just how thankful everyone was for the support. No one ever came in and left unhappy. Even if we didn't have an answer for them, just to have had someone listen to them for half an hour or so and talk about their issues was good for them, even if we couldn't solve their legal issue."

After his initial stint at KLC, Chris remained as a volunteer, sharing his time and expertise around once a fortnight for several years while working at Herbert Smith Freehills and then at Westpac. It's now been about three years since he last worked in the centre; his time has been taken up with his young family of late, but it's still in his blood. "Maybe once the kids are older and in school, it's definitely something I would like to go back to."