

IN CONVERSATION WITH ALEX MITCHELL

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Alumnus Alex Mitchell gets to travel the world doing what he loves.

Why did you choose to go in house at Unisys 10 years ago after three years at Herbert Smith Freehills?

At that time, I'd been working in law firms for over 10 years and was halfway through an MBA degree at the University of New South Wales AGSM. I was looking for new opportunities to use my legal skills with my business and commercial knowledge. An opportunity at Unisys presented itself through a former work colleague, which was too good to refuse.

What is your role at Unisys?

As Asia Pacific General Counsel, I'm responsible for managing the legal affairs of Unisys in around 14 countries across Asia. The role is both strategic and operational. Strategically, it's positioning the company for the best possible future in terms of growth and expansion. Operationally, it's ensuring that we manage risk appropriately for the company.

Has information technology always been an area of interest for you?

Absolutely. I began my legal career just before the Y2K period and during the dot-com boom, where there was a high demand for IT lawyers. It was an amazing time to be an IT lawyer.

Do you find that it's difficult for the law to keep up with technology?

Yes, developments in technology are occurring so fast that lawyers and policy-makers are constantly challenged to keep up with the pace. But that, I think, is part of the fascination of the area in which we work.

What made you want to be a lawyer?

It was always the intellectual rigour that attracted me, even back in high school days when choosing what to study at university. I was always very interested in debating and politics. The law was a natural progression from those interests. Also, looking back through history, many statesmen and people I admire have been lawyers, either practising or at least legally trained. That was an attraction also for me.

Can you give some examples?

Many previous Australian Prime Ministers and also US Presidents were legally trained – Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke, Malcolm Turnbull, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama – to name a few.

What were the main qualities that Herbert Smith Freehills instilled in you as a lawyer?

For me, it was an appreciation of very high standards of professionalism and quality of work. In particular, what stood out when I got there was an exceptional quality in terms of thinking and analysis, drafting and everything we did as a firm to meet clients' objectives and expectations.

What were your highlights in your time with the firm?

I really enjoyed and appreciated working with, and also learning from, extremely talented people. Some of the partners I worked with were leaders in their field and extremely good lawyers. They were also very commercially savvy. They taught me high standards and a strong sense of what you might call client-centricity.

Do you have any future career or personal plans to do something different?

I'm really enjoying working at Unisys and my role. It fulfils my current career ambitions in terms of combining great work, people, clients and travel. In the future I may do some teaching – a combination of law and business – and join a few boards. Personally, I'd love to travel more and live overseas again, or on a cruise ship, travelling around the world and seeing as many places as possible.

How much travel do you do at the moment?

Fairly regularly each year – most often to Melbourne, Canberra, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, India, Taiwan and the US. One place I'd love to get to is Sri Lanka. That's on our agenda in the near future.

What is your proudest achievement?

As a lawyer, it was working in London as part of an award-winning legal team on some of the largest and most complex technology transactions in the UK and Europe at the time. I worked there for about five years with Baker and McKenzie before joining Herbert Smith Freehills.

What is something interesting, people don't know about you?

I love playing bass guitar and drums. I'm also now addicted to the gym and go with my teenage son as often as I can. And I'm a huge fan of American muscle cars.

What sort of music do you play?

A combination of funk, rock and pop.

Herbert Smith Freehills is committed to supporting its former employees through its alumni network. Has that network been valuable for you?

Yes - I try to go to as many alumni events as I can. I think it's valuable because, just like the university and business school alumni networks, it provides a sense of community, and also shared experience. Whenever you get together at alumni events, you're in the room with people who have had the same amazing experience that I had at the firm. It's also a great network to tap into for advice or finding staff.

If you could go back to the beginning of your career, is there anything that you would do differently?

Perhaps I would have worked overseas earlier and written and published more on legal topics earlier. I'm pretty happy with how my career has gone so far. I've been very fortunate to have had many great mentors along the way.