

JEREMY LEUNG: ARTFUL AMBITION

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Jeremy Leung has always been interested in the arts. A talented ballet dancer, he might have gone down this path when thinking about a career. Having qualified as a lawyer (with Herbert Smith Freehills in Australia), a move into arts administration was another top priority for him. That he has ended up doing a dream job, working for Carnegie Hall in New York is down to his ambition and enterprise and also due to the flexibility offered to him by the firm when he was considering his ideal career path.

Jeremy joined legacy Freehills in 2010, after graduating in law and arts from the University of Melbourne. He mostly worked on large-scale infrastructure and PPP projects and transactions, and thoroughly enjoyed his time with the firm. “It was a great culture. People were friendly, we worked hard, but also knew how to enjoy ourselves. It was a tremendous learning experience. I probably didn’t appreciate how much I was absorbing while I was with the firm, but, certainly afterwards, I have come to realise how much I learnt.”

Jeremy had been with the firm for four years when he once again gave thought to pursuing his interest in the arts world. He was not quite sure what that might be, but needed the time to investigate. The firm was understanding and agreed to let him work nine-day fortnights so he could do his research.

That offered the scope for Jeremy to become a board member of a non-profit visual arts organisation, BUS Projects, and to undertake an internship at Abbotsford Convent, a former monastic site turned Australia’s largest multi-arts precinct that had become an arts and culture hub in Melbourne. During his time at BUS Projects, Jeremy assisted, among other things, with amending the organisation’s constitution documents, while he on-boarded artist grant recipients working on site-specific art works to be exhibited at Abbotsford Convent. “What my initial experience proved to me was that I could definitely develop a career in arts administration,” Jeremy says.

He then applied to do a master's in performing arts administration at New York University (NYU) – choosing New York as one of the world's best arts centres. Again, Herbert Smith Freehills was accommodating, granting extended leave and welcoming him to return to his job should he want it.

Generous though that offer was, Jeremy had by now had his heart set on a change of career. While doing the course, and immediately thereafter, he landed three fantastic internships with, successively, American Ballet Theatre, New York City Ballet and the Joyce Theater Foundation learning about the ins and outs of hallowed dance organisations that he's always known and loved. Following a successful internship in strategy, analytics and business development at New York City Ballet in 2015, Jeremy was invited back to work with the corporate relations team to cover a maternity leave position. At the same time, he worked part-time for the Joyce Theater Foundation, helping the organisation formulate their marketing strategies with data analytics. If ever there was a case for taking on internships and seeing where they might lead, Jeremy is a shining example!

His strategy also proves the value of developing networks. “Even in a city like New York, the industry is small and concentrated, so building a strong network has been invaluable for my career here.” It is through these connections that have landed Jeremy at Carnegie Hall, the renowned music institution and concert hall that presents over 700 concerts by the world's finest artists each season. Carnegie Hall was looking to recruit a manager for corporate relations. Naturally, this came to Jeremy's attention and he applied for, and secured, the position, joining the organisation in April 2017.

For Jeremy, it was not necessarily a no-brainer (“I was not then very familiar with classical music”), but some level-headed advice from his mother convinced him that this was a fantastic opportunity. And so it has proved. Not only has he come to like classical music, he has found the work challenging, rewarding and exciting. He works with and supports some top sponsoring companies, such as Bank of America, Breguet, Mastercard, United Airlines and Jaguar Land Rover, and is responsible for corporate sponsorship accounts that contribute about 10 per cent of the Hall's annual fundraising targets.

Jeremy's role is to ensure that sponsors receive the recognition and relationship benefits as promised under their sponsorship agreements. The job entails much project management, event planning and logistics and working on marketing campaigns that showcase a sponsor's support of Carnegie Hall, while strategising on procuring new sponsors for the Hall. As well as having the enviable perk of attending some of the best concerts you could imagine (one of his favourites being Carnegie Hall's presentation of Angélique Kidjo performing her rendition of Talking Heads' Remain in Light), Jeremy also gets to travel. He toured with Carnegie Hall's National Youth Ensembles on their tours of South Korea, Taiwan and China in 2018 and 2019.

“Sometimes I miss the law, but not that often,” Jeremy jokes. “I put my legal knowledge into practice almost every day, whether reviewing contracts or considering the practical and commercial implications of sponsorship agreements. I remain very indebted to Herbert Smith Freehills for giving me such a strong foundation, not just in the law but also in the standards I set myself, to be excellent in everything I do.” Susan Brady, Chief Development Officer at Carnegie Hall, adds, “When lawyers consider nonprofit work, I’ve found most are aware of the well-established paths of in-house lawyer or work in planned giving, which is a heavily regulated sector. However, this is the first time that the corporate relations team has had such internal expertise and we’ve benefited tremendously from having Jeremy’s insights and advice.”

New York is also much to Jeremy’s liking. Quite apart from the arts and culture, it must be one of the best cities in the world for choice of restaurants (he himself is a keen cook). He has many friends, and, as from two years ago, has been joined by his partner from Australia.