



# MOVING EFFORTLESSLY FROM LAW TO TECH: PETER DAVIES

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**Alumnus Peter Davies draws on his experience of law and sales in his current (non-legal) role developing new markets for the world's largest ride-hailing company, DiDi, where he is Head of International Business Development.**

“Inspirations from HSF? Three,” Peter says. “Simon Youdale was my most memorable supervisor and was a beautiful writer. Tim Bellis perfected the art of summing up a meeting. And in the interests of domestic harmony I should mention that I met my wife (Hwei May Tan, who joined a couple of years ahead of me) at the firm.”

Peter, who completed his training contract with Herbert Smith in 2006, is now Head of International Business Development at DiDi Chuxing, China's ride-hailing giant. A natural progression, to have a career spanning law, sales and...ride-hailing technology? “There's a few of us here actually – Hon Ng, from the year behind mine, had a similar trajectory at Uber. I think that training with HSF prepares you quite well for, let's call them very fast-moving environments with a lot of pressure and where you have to absorb a lot of new information very quickly.”

This appears to be based on personal experience: “It was late one evening. My supervisor and I were exhausted, when the client sent an angry email that could have totally wrecked the deal—weeks of work up the spout. My supervisor was furious! So he's sitting there, letting out a stream of invective while penning an email in response. ‘Well, that's it,’ I thought, ‘deal's over’. But he hit send and then seconds later this scrupulously polite email pops up on the screen that defused the situation. It was a masterclass in good communication, tact and professionalism.”

These days, Peter spends more time in Excel than in Word, but the imperative to draft clearly has never left him. “Private practice trains you to see what you write from two angles,” he says. “Yes, expressing in exact terms what is going to happen, the obligations of the parties and so on. But, second, people are 100% going to read everything in the least charitable way and you should draft and write to anticipate that.”

Peter's path out of law saw him practise for nearly a decade in London and Hong Kong before taking a sharp turn through sales. "I think all lawyers should do sales training. You have to unlearn the habit of 'telling' and learn how to listen actively and really understand someone else's business, which is client handling 101 really, particularly for juniors." This has led to his present role, in which he seeks out potential strategic partners for the transportation juggernaut. The opportunity to join DiDi came after Peter was approached by a former client from his days practising private equity M&A. "They were looking for someone with a sales background but who also knew their way around contracts, regulatory and licensing issues, and I happened to fit the bill."

So what does a company that does billions of rides per year look for in a strategic partner? "User value. We're always looking to create user value and that means finding partners that can add more than the sum of our respective parts and bring something new or exciting to the table. The ability to work at scale is also key, and finally trustworthiness." In what are often complex negotiations, he also draws on his acquired legal skills and knowledge of deals. "Practising law gets you comfortable with contracts, which means you put less pressure on your in-house legal team and speed up negotiations and deal execution."

Quite apart from the excitement of working for a prominent tech unicorn, Peter is effusive about the positive impact the company can have: DiDi has partnered, for example, with BYD to develop the D1, the first electric car designed exclusively for ride-hailing, which has a welcome feature of sliding doors to prevent riders from accidentally hitting passengers or cyclists. "Our logic is that if there are fewer, greener cars and they are more efficiently used, then not only do people gain from the convenience but also the planet benefits," Peter says, also pointing out that the company has helped millions of individuals in some of China's most deprived areas to make a living as drivers.

The lifestyle will be familiar to corporate lawyers, with calls often scheduled in the middle of the night due to time zone differences. "Working around the clock is table stakes now, unfortunately, for any kind of global role. If there is a silver lining, and it's a small one, it is that for the many people who do work like this, the world of constant Zoom has been a less jarring adjustment."

Before joining DiDi, Peter spent some time selling legal technology to law firms and corporates in Asia (he is fluent in Mandarin and can read and draft in Chinese), and led Practical Law's China business. Would he recommend that industry as a stepping stone for those lawyers looking to move to a more entrepreneurial career? "I would. There are some very interesting things happening in how law is practised right now, and as you see the new generation of lawyers who can code (as opposed to coders who are trying to understand what lawyers do and build product for that), I can see the way that firms and in-house departments practice changing a great deal."

*\* Peter is keen to hear from any alumni who see the potential for their company to partner with DiDi and encourages anyone in those countries where DiDi operates to download the app. His professional email is [peterdavies@didiglobal.com](mailto:peterdavies@didiglobal.com)*

