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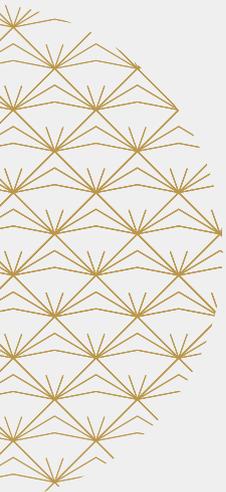
NEWS & LEGAL UPDATE



INTER-PACIFIC
BAR ASSOCIATION

Law Firm
Management—
Steering the Ship
in Stormy Waters

Welcome back to Tokyo!



IPBA

TOKYO 2024
24-27 APRIL

Online Registration started for the IPBA Annual Conference 2024 in TOKYO!

IPBA Annual Meeting and Conference 2024 in Tokyo

New World, New Wisdom

Date

April 24-27, 2024

Venue

The Okura Tokyo, JAPAN

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c/o JTB Communication Design, Inc.
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The Inter-Pacific Bar Association (IPBA) established in April 1991 at an inaugural conference held in Tokyo is an international association of business and commercial lawyers who live, or have a strong interest, in the Asia-Pacific region. IPBA 2024 TOKYO provides the collaboration of Inter-Pacific countries, seeing a more integrated approach of doing business and creating opportunities across and even beyond its reach.

Be part of this gathering of industry leaders and experts and discover why it's more fun in Tokyo, Japan!

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Publisher Ninehills Media Limited

Editor Paul Davis

Editorial Kiri Cowie
Julie Yao

Design Ester Wensing

Advertising Sales

Jennifer Luk

E: jennifer@ninehillsmedia.com

Frank Paul

E: frank@ninehillsmedia.com

T: +852 3796 3060

**ninehills
media**

Ninehills Media Limited

Level 12, Infinitus Plaza,
199 Des Voeux Road,
Sheung Wan, Hong Kong
Tel: +852 3796 3060
Fax: +852 3020 7442

Email: enquiries@ninehillsmedia.com

Internet: www.ninehillsmedia.com

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Contents

March 2024 No 113

IPBA News

- 4** The President's Message
- 6** The Secretary-General's Message
- 8** Message to Readers from the Chair of the Publications Committee
- 9** IPBA Upcoming Events

Legal update

- 10** Managing a Boutique Law Firm in Vietnam: Lessons Learned From 14 Years as a Law Firm Founder
By Diep Hoang, Vietnam
- 16** Emerging Issues in Law Firm Management: A Taiwanese Perspective
By Patrick Marros Chu and Eddie Hsiung, Taiwan
- 22** Navigating the Legal Landscape: Trends and Strategies for Running a Successful Law Firm in Australia
By Zoe Naylor, Australia
- 26** Navigating Through Storms: Enhancing Gender Equality in Law Firm Leadership During Challenging Times
By Mirella Lechna-Marchewka, Poland
- 30** Stand Out: Thriving Hub of Client Service
By Itzik Amiel, The Netherlands

Special Feature

- 37** Q&A with Keanu Ou

Member News

- 39** IPBA New Members



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The President's Message

Richard Briggs
President



Dear Colleagues, Members and Friends,

My two-year tenure as President of the IPBA draws to a close in Tokyo in April. The rollercoaster of planning and holding the March 2023 Annual Conference (and previous to that the attempted then Covid-delayed March 2022 Annual Conference) in Dubai has quietened into an enjoyably paced second year as President.

Although one always feels that you could have and should have done more, I have enjoyed the events that I have attended, most recently the Lawasia Annual Conference in Bangalore last November and the Opening of the Legal Year in Hong Kong in January. I also attended an enjoyable session for the Russian members in February, kindly hosted by ALRUD in Moscow. For all those who kindly invited me to events that I could not attend, please accept my apologies. I would have liked to have travelled and attended everything; there are so many interesting and wonderful events. I feel I could have spent the last year simply travelling from one IPBA event to the next ...

The President's message is usually a rundown of the events since the last such message. I don't want to disappoint, but as it is my last President's message, I wanted to be a little less lightweight than usual and touch on an issue which matters, at least to me.

The issue is the Constitution of the IPBA, and in particular Article 2(2), which states that the 'association is a non-political organisation and, as such, will not entertain any matter or proposal of any nature which is political in

character'. This clause has enabled the IPBA to remain neutral as an organisation and avoid the political issues which can create barriers in international legal organisations.

This does not diminish the IPBA as an organisation, nor diminish the rights and wrongs of anyone's political position. In my view, it is a benefit. Our members, from all around the world, are entitled to their views, and of course to discuss whatever between themselves within the Spirit of Katsuura—'remember that every man is a variation of yourself'—and of course, within the culture of respect and friendship which is the IPBA. However, the IPBA as an organisation offers no political comment and takes no sides. I am very much a supporter of this.

I would also add that many of us who have practised law internationally, including many of my generation, have enjoyed the diversity of a globalised region and world, with the wonderful opportunities that has brought. On a personal note, it also seems rather sad to me that some seem keen to create barriers that weaken the bonds and links which tie us together as practising lawyers. It is the ongoing exchange of ideas between lawyers that creates the opportunity to expand our learning and knowledge, and gives purpose to organisations such as the IPBA.

It is also possible that such links and friendships, so well nurtured within the IPBA and based on the Spirit of Katsuura, may preserve or create connections as positive bridges of communication for the future. Politics can indeed be a barrier, but one which the IPBA's Constitution, as well as its friendly and diverse culture, tries to break down.

I am conscious that in trying to be non-political, I may have strayed into the political. Sometimes this is the way of things. If so, I apologise; it was not my intention.

In April, I will hand over the Presidency to my colleague and friend Miyuki Ishiguro. I will, hopefully gracefully, accept the role of Past President in the knowledge that the IPBA's Presidency is left in great

hands. It has been a great honour and a privilege to have been President of this organisation and I look forward to supporting it in the years to come.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Briggs | President

Join the Inter-Pacific Bar Association

Since its humble beginnings in 1991 at a conference that drew more than 500 lawyers from around the world to Tokyo, the IPBA has blossomed to become the foremost commercial lawyer association with a focus on the Asia-Pacific Region. Benefits of joining the IPBA include the opportunity to publish articles in this IPBA Journal; access to online and printed membership directories; and valuable networking opportunities at our Annual Meeting and Conference as well as 10 regional conferences throughout the year. Members can join up to three of the 24 committees focused on various commercial law practice areas, from banking and finance, to insurance, employment and immigration law, and more. We welcome lawyers from law firms as well as in-house counsel. IPBA's spirit of camaraderie ensures that our members from over 65 jurisdictions become friends as well as colleagues who stay in close touch with each other through IPBA events, committee activities, and social network platforms. To find out more or to join us, visit the IPBA website at <https://ipba.org>.





The Secretary-General's Message

Jose Cochingyan III
Secretary-General



Dear Fellow IPBA Members,

I start with a short note on the last two regional events that I have been fortunate to attend: the Regional Conference in Los Angeles organised by Taisuke Kimoto, Jurisdictional Council Member for the United States, and the Regional Conference in Hong Kong spearheaded by Fred Kan, Jurisdictional Council Member for Hong Kong. Both events were well attended with close to 100 attendees each. The Los Angeles event was graced by Michael Chu, our Vice-President and Chair of the host committee for the Conference in Chicago in 2025. I bumped into some notable IPBA members at the LA Conference, such as Jeff Snyder, Ngosong Fonkem and Dierk Ullrich. In the case of Dierk, he came all the way from Vancouver. In Hong Kong, we had Sara Marchetta, our Program Coordinator, and the vivacious Olivia Kung, our Publications Committee Vice-Chair and member of the organising committee, to name a few. Both events had that IPBA characteristic mark of professional presentations in an atmosphere of warm camaraderie. As IPBA members, we should make a conscious effort to attend these regional events whenever our business calendars allow us to do so.

The theme of this publication is 'Law Firm Management—Steering the Ship in Stormy Waters'. On this subject, we can discern that there are many facets in the management of a law firm, from administration to finance, marketing, operations and workflow. Securing clients and recruiting, retaining and overseeing a pool of talent to be able to keep and grow one's clientele may be a chief concern of those who bear the burden of managing a firm. In today's world, we are beset by repeated tidal waves of challenges due to a constantly evolving seascape arising from technology, shifts in perspectives, globalisation and regulatory changes. But to my mind, a law firm must anchor itself through its people—it must look after them

so that they can look after the concerns of the firm. It is for this reason that firms dedicate so much time to nurturing a culture that will fit the firm's objectives. Our current environment demands that a firm's culture, aside from setting standards of quality, integrity and professionalism, will need to cultivate sensitivity to a variety of issues and assuage its associates' anxieties.

This can be overlooked given the pressures on the managing partner. He or she needs to look after the firm's brand, ensure that revenues meet expenses and, more importantly, meet and exceed the income expectations of the partners and the associates, keep clients happy and attract new clients and projects, and in the same breath, make sure that the firm works hard on issues that our grandparents did not need to address, such as diversity, gender equality and social concerns. In today's milieu, a managing partner will require the marketing skills of a salesman, the charm and finesse of a statesman, the kindness and wisdom of a sage, and the mathematical skills of a statistician. Thankfully, much of the work of the firm's management is assisted by a slew of in-house and external professionals, especially in the area of finance and technology.

But there is one area where a managing partner is expected to take a personal hands-on approach: providing leadership to all the people in the firm, from partners to associates, from paralegals to all the other souls who make the firm operate and deliver the services its clients need. The managing partner is the captain of that ship called the 'law firm'. Managing partners will have to listen to the needs of all the men and women under their command, ensure that they are all well nourished, and most of all, provide leadership so that as captains of their ships they can steer them to safe and profitable harbours. What it

takes to do this are age-old formulas for leading men and women: strength, truth, forthrightness and fairness.

It is this concern for individuals in our firms that works well with the IPBA's focus on the lawyers who form the membership of the IPBA. For those of us who lead our legal teams to participate in the IPBA we should encourage the delegates that we send to participate in the sessions and various programs of the IPBA. The

annual conference in Tokyo is fast approaching and the delegate list as of writing has already surpassed 1100. Let us celebrate the lawyer in Tokyo and appreciate the lawyer as an individual human soul. Most of all, let us look at the next generation and give them the space that they need to grow.

Jose Cochingyan III | Secretary-General

Publications Committee Guidelines for Publication of Articles in the IPBA Journal

We are pleased to accept articles on interesting legal topics and new legal developments that are happening in your jurisdiction. From time to time, issues of the Journal will be themed. Please send: (1) your article to both **Olivia Kung** at olivia.kung@onc.hk and **Scott Li** at lijian@jinmaopartners.com; (2) a lead paragraph of approximately 50 or 60 words, giving a brief introduction to, or an overview of the article's main theme; (3) a photo with the following specifications (File Format: JPG or TIFF, Resolution: 300dpi and Dimensions: 4cm(w) x 5cm(h)); and (4) your biography of approximately 30 to 50 words.

The requirements for publication of an article in the *IPBA Journal* are as follows:

1. The article has not been previously published in any journal or publication;
2. The article is of good quality both in terms of technical input and topical interest for IPBA members;
3. The article is not written to publicise the expertise, specialization, or network offices of the writer or the firm at which the writer is based;
4. The article is concise (1500 to 2000 words) and, in any event, does not exceed 2000 words;
5. The article must be written in English (with British English spelling), and the author must ensure that it meets international business standards;
6. The article is written by an IPBA member. Co-authors must also be IPBA members; and
7. Contributors must agree to and abide by the copyright guidelines of the IPBA. These include, but are not limited to
 - a. An author may provide a link on the website of his/her firm or his/her personal website/ social media page to the page of the Journal on which the first page of his/her article appears; and
 - b. An author may not post on any site an entire PDF of the Journal in which the article authored by him/her appears.



Message to the Reader



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the March issue of the IPBA Journal. The theme for the first issue of 2024, and my last as the Chair of the Publications Committee, is 'Law Firm Management—Steering the Ship in Stormy Waters'. Nowadays, the business of running a legal practice has proven to be challenging due to the downturn in the economy, increase in competition, increase in costs, high staff turnover and so on. A law firm is a professional services organisation, but it is also a business. Contemporary law office management comprises all the business processes that keep the firm operating and presents many challenges, such as balancing client needs, finances, marketing, business development, HR and more. It can be overwhelming for even the most experienced lawyers. In a rapidly changing legal environment which demands our focused attention and adaptability, how do we effectively manage a legal practice? How can senior lawyers manage and lead a firm? How should law firms innovate and what new technology should we adopt? What are the latest trends in running a law firm? How can we recruit and retain good staff? These are some of the issues addressed in the articles of this Journal issue. We are really thrilled with the positive responses we received on this theme and the authors in this edition have covered a wide array of extremely topical areas underscoring the developments in their jurisdictions.

The spotlight of this Journal's Q&A interview is with Keanu Ou, a Partner at Jin Mao Partners based in Shanghai and an incoming Co-Chair of the IPBA Legal Development & Training Committee. Keanu is one of my closest friends in the IPBA and has been a long-term supporter of the IPBA. It is amazing to see younger members like Keanu continuing to support the IPBA and taking on leadership roles. It

is people like him that strengthen our organisation and drive productivity increasing value for the IPBA. In the interview, we have asked Keanu questions that go behind the professional persona to find out about his personal interests, background and passions. I am sure you will enjoy discovering more about Keanu and his achievements.

In addition, you will also find in this edition details about new members joining the IPBA between December 2023 and February 2024. It would be great to encourage new members and see them contribute articles proactively and, of course, please do continue to share professional milestones for the Journal in the Member's Notes. Having served on the Publications Committee for the past four years, I had a chance to experience the truly global nature of the IPBA differently, by focusing on the content of the Journal and learning about legal developments across varied practice areas from different parts of the world. This would not have been possible without our former Chair of the Publications Committee, Priti Suri, who spent a lot of time coaching me and discussing all important matters in leading the Committee. I have also been fortunate to have a great and supportive (and a lot more artistic and innovative) Vice-Chair, Olivia Kung, who supported me all the way, with innovative ideas and suggestions. Lastly, the Publications Committee owes a debt of gratitude to Randa Morioka of the IPBA Secretariat, for her continued support and for her invaluable contribution in helping to review our Journal—her eye for detail and thoughtful feedback has played a significant role in improving the quality of our Journal.

As always, thank you for the consistent contributions, for which both Olivia and I remain grateful. My apologies to those who I have been unable to accommodate because I really tried to adhere to and respect the

timelines of the publishers, our rules in the Constitution and the number of pages of the Journal to stay within the budget.

As I transition out of this role, I feel a sense of pride and fulfilment in believing that I have made a small contribution to our organisation and I hope that the enthusiasm I have experienced will continue. It is time to pass on the baton to our incoming Chair, Olivia Kung

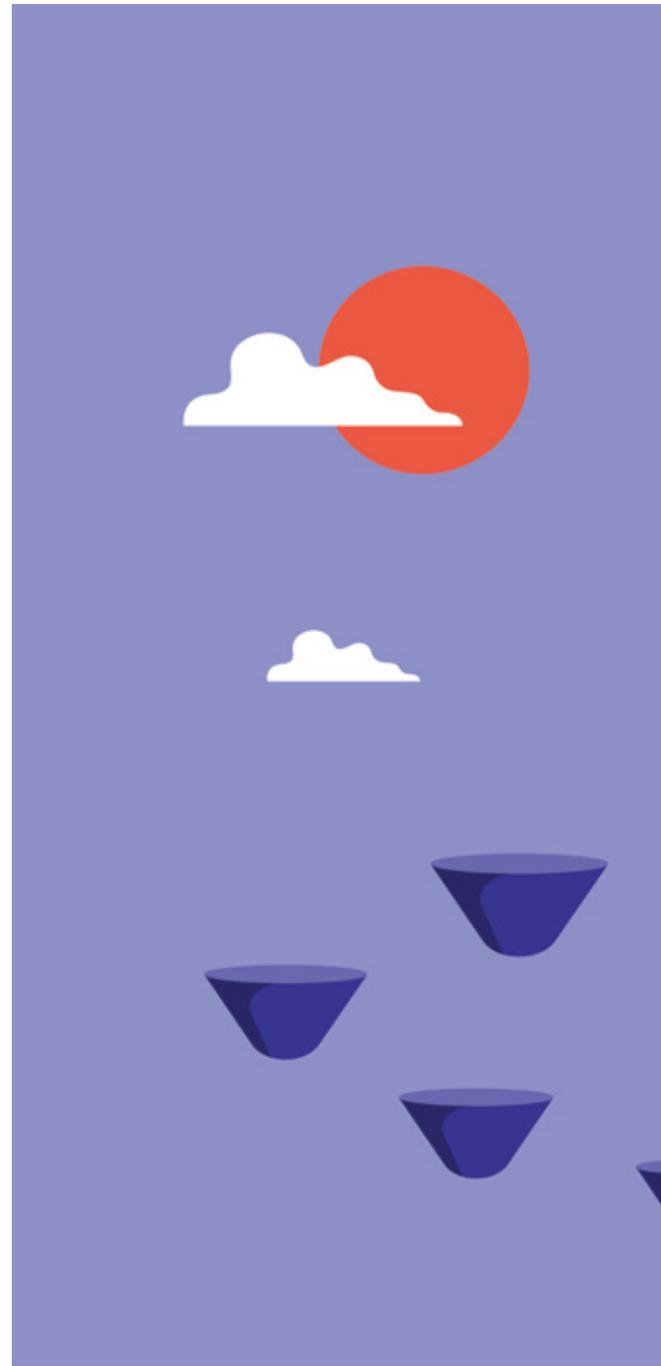
and incoming Vice-Chair, Scott Li. I have full confidence that they will do a fantastic job and will bring fresh and innovative ideas to improve our Journal. We hope that our publication leaves a positive and lasting impact on our members and I look forward to meeting many of you in person at the Tokyo Conference in April 2024.

James Jung | Chair, Publications Committee

IPBA Upcoming Events		
Event	Location	Date
IPBA Annual Meeting and Conferences		
32nd Annual Meeting and Conference	Tokyo, Japan	24–27 April 2024
33rd Annual Meeting and Conference	Chicago, IL, USA	23–26 April 2025
IPBA Webinar		
Establishing Yourself in International Arbitration	Online	14 March 2024
Mid-Year Council Meeting and Regional Conference		
Mid-Year Council Meetings (for Council Members only)	Warsaw, Poland	28–29 September 2024
Regional Conference (Topic TBD)	Warsaw, Poland	30 September 2024
More details can be found on our website: https://ipba.org The above schedule is subject to change.		

Managing a Boutique Law Firm in Vietnam: Lessons Learned From 14 Years as a Law Firm Founder

Trying to grapple with shifting client demands, regulatory changes, increased cybersecurity concerns, rapid advancements in technology, and the challenges of talent acquisition and retention—these are some common challenges faced by boutique law firms. Running a boutique practice in Vietnam is no different and the additional challenges we sometimes face due to more limited financial and human resources is a common issue amongst boutique practice owners.



Introduction

In January 2010 I left a top international law firm in Ho Chi Minh City after two years of working as a banking and finance associate. I left the firm trying to figure out what to do next, so I decided to join a project in the north of Vietnam involving promoting organic products. I quit that project after two months and returned to Ho Chi Minh City where I applied for and

received a few offers to join other firms; but I had worked for the top firm in Vietnam, so joining any other firm could have been a step back. Thus, in 2010 I decided to start Dilinh Legal, a boutique corporate law firm based in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

The firm has been ranked in Chambers Asia and The Legal500 since 2019. Chambers has also ranked me as a leading Corporate and M&A lawyer in Vietnam since 2022. More than 90 per cent of our clients are foreign or foreign-invested entities. My journey as a law firm founder has been challenging but fulfilling. In this article, I share my experience and lessons learned.

Lesson 1: Start as Soon as You Can

Most lawyers are risk-averse and consequently believe that they should establish their firm only when they have abundant experience and a significant client base willing to support them. While there is merit to this position, you should not be overly cautious because it can cause undue delay or no movement at all. You should move when relatively unburdened by financial or family obligations and can afford to take the risk. If you fail at a young age, you will likely be able to return to work for other firms without suffering a significant loss to your professional development.

I founded Dilinh Legal at the age of 27. While this might be considered relatively young in the legal sector, as compared to other industries like IT or entertainment, I was overwhelmed by the amount of support I received from clients and friends. People find it especially inspiring seeing young professionals carving their own path and making their way in the industry at such a young age.

Lesson 2: Be Selective When Choosing Your Clients

Some may think that small firms should take any kind of work or client available. However, because of your limited resources, you should be highly selective with the clients and the field of law that you practise.

From the early days of my career, I held firm to the principle of serving only corporate clients. Large corporate clients always have something for you to do and the resources to pay you fair compensation for legal work. Individual clients personalise the work and the attorney-client relationship, making work more stressful and less profitable. Concentrating resources



on a select group of clients also fosters the formation of enduring and dedicated relationships, proving beneficial throughout the years.

Some of the first clients I had in the initial years of my career were Taiwanese. I have focused on developing this niche. They are loyal clients and I understand their culture, business sense and needs. The fascinating thing about Taiwanese clients is that they are very close to each other and they constantly seek referrals from their business associates regarding legal services. Hence, most of my Taiwanese clients come from referrals. Taiwanese clientele remains a significant part of my firm's client portfolio, reinforcing the importance of marketing and tailoring services to your client base.

Lesson 3: Home-Grow Your Lawyers

Any law firm must have excellent lawyers. However, getting talented lawyers to join is challenging for a small local firm. Young lawyers always search for opportunities to work with large firms and I don't blame them. Most will only switch to small firms when offered much more money. It is easy to fall into the trap of getting a very expensive senior associate who becomes more of a liability than a benefit to the firm. Therefore, early on, I decided to home-grow our lawyers.

To recruit and maintain quality lawyers, the firm offers our recruits a scholarship for the compulsory legal practice courses needed before the bar exam. Our scholarships cover between 50 per cent to 100 per cent of the tuition fee for this course. This strategic approach has enabled us to attract and retain some of the most talented new law school graduates in town while maintaining a manageable payroll. Recent graduates are generally more adaptable to our firm's culture than lateral hires with experience at other firms. This policy plays a significant role in our firm's success and has become a fundamental policy at Dilinh Legal. While not all of our in-house-trained lawyers stay with us long term, they remain at least four years on average, or an additional two years after becoming a bar member.

Lesson 4: Be Open to Partnerships

Michael Lee and I initially crossed paths professionally in 2007 when we were co-workers at the same law firm. After I departed from that firm in late 2009, Michael continued his tenure there for another year. He then moved on to a regional firm, where he served as the head of that firm's corporate department. After

setting up my firm, we kept in contact, occasionally catching up over drinks and informally discussing our work and personal lives.

Michael joined Dilinh Legal in 2017 following his departure from the regional firm. As the founder of Dilinh Legal, I have always been open to bringing in a partner. Being a single partner firm, I was aware of my limitations and the constraints it put on my firm's potential for growth. Dividing the responsibilities and efforts would allow us to actualise the firm's goals more effectively.

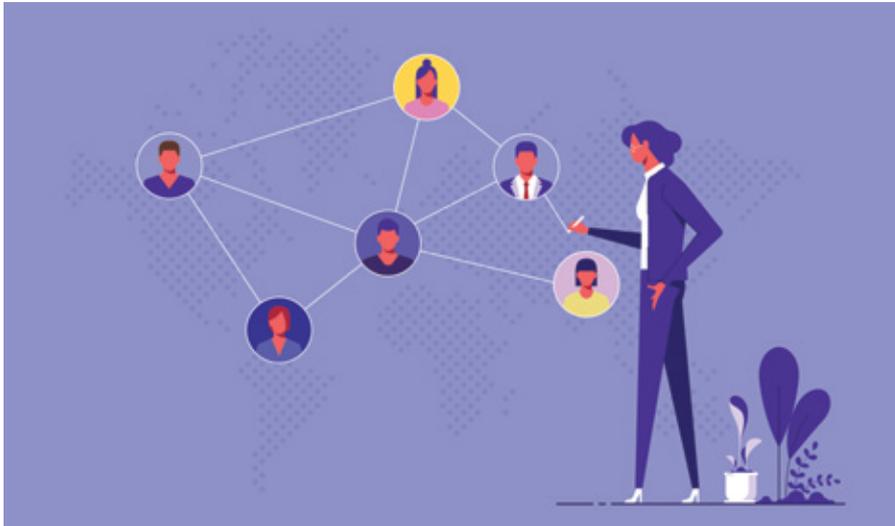
In the past, I had attempted a partnership with another former colleague. Unfortunately, it didn't work out. This setback didn't dampen my spirits or my pursuit of finding a partner and my persistence paid off when Michael came on board. Accepting Michael as a partner was a significant milestone for Dilinh Legal. Michael brought key clients from America and Europe to the firm and expertise in specific areas of law, such as labour, life sciences and data privacy. For a boutique firm like ours, having a diverse portfolio of clients across various nationalities and industries is crucial to our growth and sustenance.

Our collaboration has proved to be synergetic in other ways. I can assist in areas where foreign lawyers are not allowed or ineffective, such as litigation, dealing with local authorities and handling local counterparts. On the other hand, Michael led international marketing efforts by making submissions to Chambers and Legal 500 and securing our membership in the law firm network, State Capital Group. Furthermore, Michael introduced me to the IPBA, encouraging me to network internationally. Michael's native English language ability and his understanding of Western culture as an American have also been valuable contributions to the firm.

Our present partnership has worked exceptionally well for us and bolstered our ability to serve the diverse needs of our clients. We actively seek to add new partners because we believe in the potential growth and additional capacity that new partners can bring to our firm.

Lesson 5: Network Consistently

Dilinh Legal's first attendance at the IPBA Annual General Conference was in Manila in 2018. Since



schedule private meetings to introduce yourself and the firm.

Dilinh Legal is a member of the law firm referral network State Capital Group ('SCG'). As the only member with an office in Vietnam, the 110-plus other members of SCG Legal can look to use it if their clients need assistance in Vietnam. As with most referral networks, SCG does not have its members exclusively use each other. Therefore, like the IPBA, it is merely a networking platform that provides networking opportunities you otherwise will not have. You must spend the requisite

then, I have been privileged to serve as Vietnam's Jurisdictional Council Member (JCM). For boutique corporate firms like ours, the IPBA offers a valuable platform for engagement, mainly due to its prime focus on Asia. The IPBA's expansive network of industry professionals has played a crucial role in bolstering our clientele base, particularly in markets with significant inbound investment and trade with Vietnam, like China, Japan and South Korea. We have consistently marked our participation in IPBA events and conferences to reinforce our network and industry relationships.

time, money and effort to bring in the referrals. Besides inbound referrals, joining a network will give you access to professional development opportunities (for example, online seminars, training for new partners, etc.) and the capacity to refer clients to a reliable group of law firms outside your jurisdiction.

Like any professional association, building network connections and receiving work referrals takes time to cultivate. It requires regular presence at conferences and a respectable number of interactions before other lawyers remember and recognise you. When they have a client to refer or a matter that needs attention in your jurisdiction, your name will come to mind. An added advantage of active networking within the IPBA is the opportunity to collaborate and learn from senior lawyers specialised in diverse niches.

Lesson 6: Technology—Key to Efficient Firm Management

For instance, in 2023 I had the chance to be a speaker at a session discussing competition laws. Following this event, I was recognised and introduced by a senior lawyer from Nishimura & Asahi to contribute to a project launched by the World Bank on competition law in Vietnam. This exposure was a rewarding opportunity that I believe would not have been accessible had I been outside the IPBA fold. You should make it a practice to review the attendance list before any significant conference, identify firms or lawyers of interest and

For boutique firms like ours where the budget is often constrained, allocating significant resources to software or artificial intelligence ('AI') can seem prohibitive. However, I firmly believe that one of the factors for our firm's success to date has been our decision to purchase a timesheet and billing software system. It is incredibly beneficial for smaller firms to consider investing in a consolidated system handling both billing and timesheet management. Before implementing this software, I spent roughly four days each month reviewing timesheets and billing for the firm. I can do the same thing in less than a day post-integration of the new software. The software proved instrumental for time management, tracking overdue bills and generating needed financial reports.

To ensure prompt maintenance and troubleshooting, especially during the initial adjustment period, I recommend engaging a software company in the same or near time zone as your firm. Instant assistance in the face of any issues can significantly ease the transition. We partnered with GainPlus, an IT company recommended by an American lawyer based in Thailand, to customise their timesheet software for

our firm. I credit GainPlus's software for augmenting our firm's management efficiency. It streamlined our accounting and management processes, freeing up substantial time for direct client interactions and case management.

Currently, we are exploring software solutions to standardise our contracts and manage licensing work. The rapid advancement of AI is reshaping the landscape of routine legal tasks and if we are not prepared for this shift we can lose a significant portion of our business.

By staying ahead of these developments, we ensure that we retain our competitive edge in a technology-driven future.

Lesson 7: The Importance of Ranking

It is essential that a reliable organisation ranks a boutique law firm with mostly foreign clientele. Typically, potential clients will not know small firms by reputation. Therefore, they will often look up the law firm's rankings from reliable sources to vet the firm—the most well-known organisations are Chambers & Partners and The Legal 500 in Asia.

Owing in part to the relatively small legal market in Vietnam, we were fortunate to secure rankings in the categories of Corporate M&A and Litigation in both Chambers and Partners and Legal 500. Obtaining a place in these directories in many larger jurisdictions can be extremely difficult, especially for small firms.

Knowing the importance of ranking, we focus on the specific practice areas where our firm excels. This targeted approach yields better results than submitting for multiple legal fields, which might dilute the firm's focus and weaken the overall submission.

Another critical aspect of rankings is client testimonials and interviews. Understanding their importance, we typically reach out to our significant clients and communicate the importance of these rankings to our firm. We express the importance of their role as referees and ask for their willingness to participate in interviews with ranking directories.

Lesson 8: Prioritising Client Relationships

The success of boutique firms will rest on their ability to retain key clients. Many of our principal clients have

chosen us as their trusted legal counsel for over a decade. This loyalty is a testament to their trust in our services and signifies our involvement in all aspects of our clients' businesses in Vietnam. Several clients have grown from small, lean operations to large enterprises employing thousands of individuals.

Maintaining a long-term relationship becomes a virtue when clients understand that you are with them through thick and thin, are familiar with their business intricacies and genuinely care about their success. This level of connection and understanding makes it difficult for clients to consider switching to another firm. They appreciate our services and expertise, but what indeed endears us to them is our caring and informed approach towards their business.

These key clients often contribute more than 60 per cent of a boutique firm's revenue, so their relationship management becomes paramount. Our commitment extends beyond the direct services they hire us for and includes ancillary services reflecting our initiative and interest in their business. For instance, if new legislation impacts their operations, we proactively prepare legal updates tailored to their business, highlighting the potential effects.

Occasionally, we have offered complimentary work or waived legal fees as a token of our commitment. Recently, a major real estate client required a comprehensive comparison table of Vietnam's new real estate and housing laws. Despite the analysis being complex and tedious, upon delivering the work we informed them of our decision to waive the legal fees for the service as we benefitted by understanding these new laws. Our client greatly appreciated this gesture. This instance demonstrates the depth of our relationship with our critical clients.



Diep Hoang
Managing Partner, Dilinh Legal,
Ho Chi Minh City

Diep is the founding Partner of Dilinh Legal. Her areas of practice include banking and finance, competition law, corporate and M&A, labour and alternative dispute resolution. Diep serves as the IPBA Jurisdictional Council Member (JCM) for Vietnam.

LABUAN IBFC ASIA'S PREMIER INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL HUB

Labuan International Business and Financial Centre (Labuan IBFC), located off the North West coast of Borneo, offers global investors and businesses the benefits of being in a well-regulated jurisdiction that provides fiscal, legal and currency neutrality, in addition to being an ideal location for cost-efficient substance creation.

Labuan IBFC is a wholesale financial, risk and wealth management intermediation centre that also boasts a wide range of business structures including solutions for fintech or digital businesses. It is also home to the world's first sukuk and is acknowledged as an Islamic financial hub.

Well-supported by a robust, internationally recognised yet business-friendly legal framework, Labuan IBFC operates within comprehensive legal provisions and guidelines, enforced by a single regulator, Labuan Financial Services Authority – a statutory body under the Ministry of Finance, Malaysia.

Labuan, also known as the 'Pearl of Borneo', offers a myriad of business and leisure opportunities. It is also a hub for financial tourism as its excellent location and compact structure offer easy connectivity between the financial district, and nature offerings.

Labuan IBFC Inc. Sdn. Bhd. (817593-D)

Suite 3A-2, Level 2, Block 3A,
Plaza Sentral, Jalan Stesen Sentral,
KL Sentral, 50470 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Tel: +603 2773 8977  @LabuanIBFC

Fax: +603 2780 2077

Email: info@LIBFC.com  Labuan IBFC

www.LABUANIBFC.com

Emerging Issues in Law Firm Management: A Taiwanese Perspective



The operating environment for law firms is becoming increasingly complex and Taiwan is no exception. This article aims to discuss certain impacts of geopolitics, the rise of in-house counsel and AI developments from the viewpoint of Taiwan law firms.

Shifting Geopolitics: Impact on Strategies of Multinational Companies and Law Firms Handling Cross-Border Legal Matters

In the past, during the period when China transformed from a closed economy to become the world's factory, and even the world's market, foreign enterprises or multinational corporations entered China one after another based on various factors such as the labour force and consumer market. However, this phenomenon seems to have undergone changes in recent years, partly due to geopolitical factors. In an era dominated by shifting geopolitical landscapes, the rising tensions between China and the United States have become a catalyst for significant changes in the laws and policies of many countries in the world. This geopolitical issue has prompted multinational companies to reevaluate and realign their strategies. These are not only visible in the discussion among the management teams of such companies, but have also brought about a notable transformation in the strategic planning of law firms.

One noteworthy consequence of these geopolitical shifts is the reconsideration of business locations by many companies that once had a significant presence, especially factories, in Mainland China. In fact, with the rapid increase in labour costs and other production factors in Mainland China, many industrial enterprises that originally relied on relatively low labour costs have been moving their factories from Mainland China. In addition, in recent years, faced with uncertainties arising from geopolitical tensions, many more businesses, including those headquartered or founded in Taiwan, are exploring alternative locations in, for example, Southeast Asia, India and Mexico. This strategic relocation is driven by the analysis of various production factors and considerations, reflecting a proactive approach to mitigate risks associated with this geopolitical turbulence.

Industry giants have responded to this geopolitical climate by expanding their global footprint. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company ('TSMC'), known for its pivotal role in the semiconductor industry, has strategically begun building factories in the United States, Japan and Germany. It is generally considered that such a move would not only serve as a risk mitigation strategy but also align with the evolving geopolitical dynamics, ensuring a diversified and resilient supply chain.

As multinational companies diversify their operational bases, law firms in Taiwan are finding themselves at the forefront of dealing with an increasing number of legal issues pertaining to these jurisdictions. The spectrum of challenges encompasses outbound investments, particularly foreign direct investments ('FDI') into these alternative locations, and the provision of legal services for local operations. These challenges necessitate a nuanced understanding of the legal framework and regulatory (or even cultural) environment in each destination, demanding adaptability and expertise from law practitioners.

The outbound investments into the abovementioned Southeast Asia, India and Mexico require law firms to navigate the intricacies of diverse legal systems, cultural nuances and regulatory landscapes. Companies engaging in FDI are confronted with a myriad of legal considerations. Law firms are expected to be helpful in guiding their clients, offering legal expertise to facilitate seamless investment processes and protect their clients' interests in these new jurisdictions.

Beyond the areas of FDI, law firms are confronted with the challenge of providing comprehensive local legal services for the day-to-day operations of their clients in these diverse jurisdictions. This includes advising on, for example, general corporate work, employment laws, environmental laws (especially if there are local factories), intellectual property protection, commercial contracts, taxation, and even dispute resolution alternatives tailored to the legal framework of each country. The ability of law firms to offer a seamless legal experience across borders can be a pivotal factor in the success of multinational companies navigating this complex geopolitical landscape. All the above will involve legal considerations ranging from compliance with local regulations, guidelines and policies (written or unwritten), to addressing potential disputes.

On the other hand, companies expanding into developed economies such as the United States, Japan and Germany may face cost issues due to the relatively high level of cost in many aspects, including legal fees. Taking Taiwanese companies as an example, in the case of a relatively large outbound investment project, it is more likely a company would be willing to pay higher legal fees, but many Taiwanese clients are generally sensitive to costs, so they may not be willing to spend on the same level of legal services for some

other legal matters. For instance, after settling down in a new jurisdiction, a client may wish to collaborate with a more affordable quality firm/legal services provider with respect to the new presence's legal affairs regarding day-to-day operations. So, it may be a challenge for Taiwanese lawyers as to how to manage client expectations with respect to costs involved in such legal matters.

Regarding the above jurisdiction-specific legal needs, assuming cost is not a concern, ideally it would be best for Taiwanese law firms to set up offices in every jurisdiction. However, taking the above-mentioned Southeast Asian (or ASEAN) countries as an example, the Taiwanese government introduced the 'New Southbound Policy' in 2016 to encourage companies to develop in ASEAN countries, not just Mainland China. However, ASEAN countries are diverse in legal systems, politics, cultures, etc., making setting up offices in every country less practical. It is rather difficult to imagine a Taiwanese firm setting up offices in every location. Given that, we think greater collaboration with local legal experts would be more feasible and the writers' firm, Lee and Li, has been actively building and maintaining good relationships with firms around the world.

In summary, the evolving geopolitical dynamics, particularly the high tensions between China and the United States, are not only reshaping global business strategies but may also significantly impact the development strategies of law firms. The strategic relocation of businesses underscores the need for law firms to adapt and provide expert guidance in navigating the complexities of diverse legal systems. As businesses continue to respond to geopolitical challenges, the role of Taiwanese law firms becomes increasingly crucial in helping Taiwanese clients ensure legal compliance, risk mitigation and successful cross-border operations in this ever-changing global landscape, and these may need to be achieved by collaboration with legal experts around the globe.

The Rise of In-House Counsel in Taiwan

In recent years, Taiwan has witnessed a transformation in its legal landscape, particularly in the realm of legal professionals. Historically, Taiwan's per capita lawyer ratio has been relatively modest. However, a significant shift has occurred with the recent relaxation of admission requirements for lawyers, making the path

to obtaining a licence more accessible. This change has not only altered the demography of the legal profession but has also made Taiwanese companies reevaluate their approach to hiring talent for legal and compliance functions.

In the past, generally speaking, 'legal' or 'compliance' might not have been a function that a company would put emphasis on, especially given that it is difficult to correlate the revenues of a company (being profit-seeking in nature) with the efforts of the legal/compliance personnel (who may be considered as a 'cost-incurring division' only). It was generally not surprising to see a listed company with only one employee responsible for legal/compliance matters, and such one-man function was put under the supervision of other functions such as finance or human resources. Some reckoned that such a phenomenon might be due to the fact that the legal consequences of non-compliance in Taiwan were generally less severe (for example, a lower level of administrative fines compared to other jurisdictions).

However, given the abovementioned ease of obtaining a licence to practice and more and more talents participating in this profession, it has become much easier for local companies to hire legal professionals who are duly licensed in Taiwan. Also, given the increasing complexity of the regulations and compliance burden (in areas such as corporate governance, anti-money laundering, etc.), Taiwanese companies now seem to have more tendency to recognise the contribution of legal/compliance work. Some regulations (especially those applicable to regulated industries such as financial services) now require companies to hire more legal/compliance personnel.

The shift indicated above is not only reflected in the increased recruitment of professionals related to the functions of legal and compliance, but also in the quality of professionals being hired. Companies are now seeking higher-calibre legal professionals to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing legal landscape.

One notable consequence of this shift is the growing reliance on in-house counsel to handle legal matters. The traditional reliance on external lawyers is diminishing as companies build internal legal teams equipped to address a range of legal issues. The in-house counsel model can offer several advantages,

including enhanced efficiency, cost-effectiveness and a deeper understanding of the company's specific needs (including the company's products and industry knowledge) as well as challenges, and even the culture within the company. Also, as legal expertise within an organisation becomes more important, the role of in-house counsel has become integral to the strategic decision-making processes of many Taiwanese companies.

Furthermore, there has been a significant shift in the perception of in-house counsel as a career choice among the younger generation of lawyers. It is not surprising to hear that companies offer competitive compensation packages to attract skilled legal professionals to join their in-house teams. A relatively stable work environment, coupled with the opportunity to contribute directly to corporate decision making, has made in-house positions increasingly attractive to legal professionals in terms of their long-term career planning.

Another driving factor behind the rise of in-house counsel is the evolving priorities of the younger generation of lawyers. From the perspective of many younger legal talents, achieving a work-life balance has become a critical consideration, prompting many legal professionals to explore in-house opportunities after gaining a few years of experience in law firms. The demand for an environment offering such a possibility has led to a growing trend of lawyers transitioning from private practice to in-house roles.

This shift in career preferences poses challenges for large law firms in Taiwan. The demand for in-house counsel roles, coupled with the desire for work-life balance, may result in a talent drain from traditional law firms. To stay competitive, law firms will need to adapt their recruitment strategies, offering more appealing work arrangements and career development opportunities to attract and retain legal talent.

Moreover, the evolving legal landscape necessitates that law firms position themselves as strategic partners to businesses, providing value beyond traditional legal services. This requires a paradigm shift in the approach of law firms, emphasising collaboration, industry-specific expertise and proactive legal counsel. Firms that can align with the evolving needs of Taiwanese companies and provide comprehensive legal support will thrive in this dynamic environment.

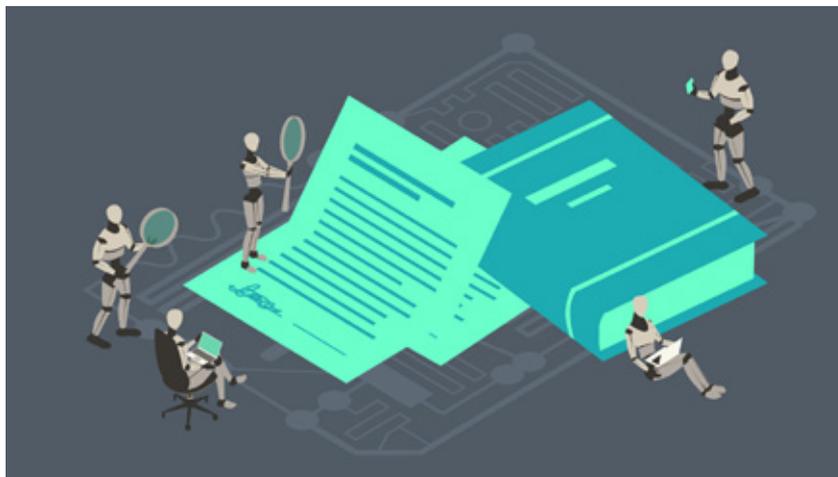
Given the above, Taiwan's market for legal professionals is undergoing a transformative phase, marked by an increased focus on in-house counsel and a shift in the priorities of legal professionals. The relaxation of admission requirements and the increasing complexity of regulations and compliance burdens have resulted in the increased demand for in-house lawyers in terms of both quantity and quality. Also, in-house positions could provide alternatives for legal talents (especially young talents) who prioritise work-life balance and seek fulfilling roles within companies (especially given that companies are embracing the heightened emphasis on the importance of legal expertise within their organisational structures), not to mention that some companies may offer competitive compensation packages to attract lawyers to make the move.

As Taiwanese businesses recognise the importance of legal affairs, law firms must adapt to these changes and re-examine their strategies to remain competitive and relevant. The rise of in-house counsel signifies not just a change in career preferences but a fundamental shift in how legal expertise is integrated into the core operations of businesses in Taiwan. Law firms should not only consider carefully how to attract and retain legal talent, but also address the evolving needs of clients in order to survive and thrive.

Impact of Artificial Intelligence: Challenges and Opportunities

In the same way as the rest of the global legal community, lawyers in Taiwan are also dealing with the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence ('AI') on the legal profession. The development of AI in private legal practice presents a myriad of possibilities and offers undeniable benefits, such as liberating lawyers from routine and time-consuming tasks as well as boosting efficiency. Automation can streamline processes, allowing legal professionals to focus on more complex and strategic aspects of their work. In Taiwan, as in other countries, this aspect of AI development is viewed as a positive that can reshape legal practice by fostering innovation and improving overall service quality.

However, such transformation is not without its challenges. A key concern raised by lawyers in Taiwan is the potential replacement of certain tasks traditionally handled by legal professionals, especially routine



and repetitive work, as they may be susceptible to AI automation. Examples of these include, among other things, contract drafting and translations. This has led to discussions about the risk of replacement for legal-related human resources in Taiwan. Given that, firms may also need to examine and identify tasks that AI could take over.

Furthermore, it is expected that lawyers will, to some extent, face the challenge of clients being unwilling to pay for certain services that can be traditionally invoiced. The emergence of AI in legal practice may introduce a shift in client expectations, raising questions about the perceived value of services that can be automated. This challenges legal professionals to redefine their service offerings, ensuring that clients continue to perceive value in a landscape where certain tasks are seamlessly handled by AI technologies.

Junior lawyers will also be impacted by the potential replacement indicated above. As AI assumes more routine tasks, the traditional methods for junior lawyers to receive comprehensive training should be updated. Although the tasks that can be replaced by AI might be relatively repetitive, some could be advantageous to junior lawyers in terms of acquiring and improving certain foundation skills required for practice and lawyering. The diminishing opportunities for hands-on practical experience may hinder the development of such skills crucial to their professional growth.

Another key challenge lies in the preparation necessary for legal professionals to effectively incorporate AI into their practice. Acquiring the skills necessary to

effectively utilise AI has also emerged as a potential concern for legal practitioners and law firms in Taiwan. The need for lawyers to invest more time and effort in acquiring these skills and to be proficient in collaborating with AI systems are recognised as critical aspects of staying competitive in a technologically advanced legal market. The learning curve involves not only understanding the technical intricacies of AI but also developing a strategic mindset to use these tools effectively. It is generally expected that legal professionals must actively engage with AI technologies to remain relevant and maintain their role as

strategic decision makers in commercial deals and even legal proceedings.

A crucial dimension of this adaptation process is the potential risk of being surpassed by competitors who are better at leveraging AI technologies. Given such fear of potentially falling behind in a competitive market, law firms might wish to proactively integrate AI into their practices, emphasising the urgency of staying ahead of the technological curve. Failure to do so may result in being outperformed by competitors who are more adept at navigating and leveraging the capabilities of AI.

On the flip side, lawyers in Taiwan are also exploring the potential opportunities that AI presents in private legal practice. Liberating lawyers from routine and repetitive tasks to focus on higher-value work is a key advantage. The increased efficiency in completing tasks is not only a time saver but also allows legal professionals to dedicate more time to complex legal analysis and strategy formulation and even tasks that would heavily rely on interpersonal interactions—which might be more difficult to be replaced by AI.

Automation of tasks is another notable opportunity that AI brings to the legal profession. By automating routine and repetitive tasks, law firms can streamline their workflows, resulting in increased productivity and reduced operational costs. The potential feasibility of transitioning from human-rendered services to those without human intervention, such as software and AI-driven legal services developed by firms, represents a paradigm shift in how legal services are delivered.

In addition, note that it was recently reported in Taiwan that a legal tech startup has developed an advanced conflict check solution with AI technology. We expect to see more and more service providers developing and providing emerging legal technologies and cooperating with law firms to streamline processes and reduce costs incurred by firms. It would also be one of the firms' tasks to determine how and to what extent firms should collaborate with these new tech providers.

However, the integration of AI into legal practice is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It requires a thoughtful approach that aligns with the specific needs and objectives of legal professionals in Taiwan, so it is not something that can be achieved solely by a firm or a technology provider. Instead, sufficient dialogue and communication should occur between the two sides. According to related news, 'Harvey', a legaltech AI platform introduced by Allen and Overy, is 'built on a version of Open AI's latest models enhanced for legal work'.

Another consideration is that the introduction of AI represents an investment in AI resources, which would definitely incur additional costs. Given that, for a relatively small-sized firm, it would be rather difficult to engage in a firm-led AI project purely from a cost perspective, practically, a more effective strategy would be to purchase packaged software or software as a service ('SaaS') and other services provided by technology providers. Large-sized firms might wish to initiate certain AI projects by themselves, but again, this kind of development initiated by a firm itself may require a considerable capital investment and would the firm's profits therefore be substantially eroded? In short, budget allocation for AI investment is a dilemma even for firms that are relatively capable of investing. It would depend on a firm's needs and objectives and should be decided on a case-by-case basis given the current market situation in Taiwan.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of AI on the legal profession in Taiwan is both transformative and challenging and the challenges facing junior lawyers can be even more daunting. Lawyers and law firms might have no choice but to embrace the opportunities presented by AI while navigating the challenges it brings with it. Crucial steps might include identifying the tasks that AI can replace, reevaluating the training methodologies for junior lawyers and investing in the acquisition of AI skills. To

stay competitive, law firms may wish to have in place their own AI strategies, including the extent that they would collaborate with AI technology service providers by considering factors such as budget as well as their operational needs for AI technologies. Adjustments would need to be made dynamically from time to time based on future technological progress as well as changes in market conditions.



Patrick Marros Chu
Partner, Lee and Li, Attorneys-at-Law,
Taipei

Patrick Chu is a member of the Taiwan Bar Association. He is an experienced corporate and litigation lawyer at Lee and Li. His main practice areas include dispute resolution, corporate governance, competition law, labour law and M&A transactions. Patrick represents many international financial institutions and companies handling compliance and general corporate matters, as well as civil actions and arbitration. He also assists media and e-commerce businesses with regulatory issues and contract reviews. In addition to handling English matters, Patrick is fluent in Japanese and is the leading partner of the Japan desk of Lee and Li.

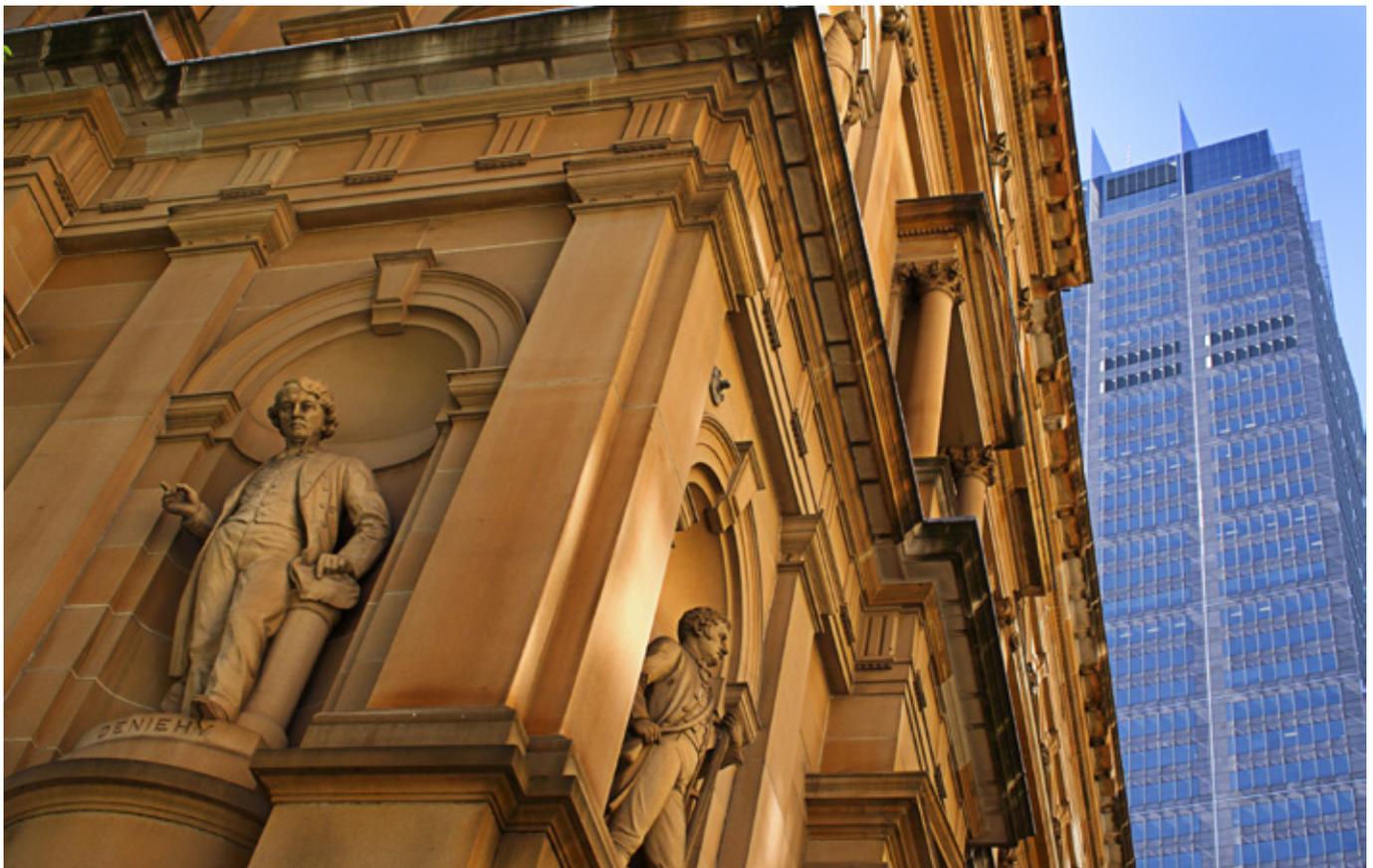


Eddie Hsiung
Partner, Lee and Li, Attorneys-at-Law,
Taipei

Eddie Hsiung, a Partner at Lee and Li, focuses his practice on M&A, securities, banking and financial services, PE/VC investments, general corporate and commercial. He has participated in many corporate transactions spanning a broad range of industries and areas, including TMT, bio-tech, big data, financial services, etc. In addition to traditional practice areas, he is familiar with legal issues regarding the digital economy and the application of emerging technologies such as fintech, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, AI and data protection, and is often invited to provide advice to the government, regulators, legislators and universities/research institutions in these areas on regulatory policies.

Navigating the Legal Landscape: Trends and Strategies for Running a Successful Law Firm in Australia

In the dynamic and ever-evolving legal landscape of Australia, law firms are facing a myriad of challenges and opportunities. From technological advancements to changing client expectations, staying ahead of the curve is crucial for the success and sustainability of any legal practice. The latest trends shaping the legal industry in Australia continue to evolve, like most of the world, as we continue to navigate a post-Covid work environment. This article discusses how law firms can navigate the evolving legal landscape in Australia.



The Legal Landscape in Australia

The legal system of Australia has foundations in the English legal system but has developed and evolved over time. With a written constitution, unwritten constitutional conventions, statutes, regulations and a judicially determined common law system, Australia seems familiar to those abroad from afar, but displays its nuances and complexities up close.

With a robust legal system based on common law principles, supplemented by statutes and regulations at both federal and state levels, navigating the legal terrain can be daunting for law firms of all sizes. Moreover, the Australian legal market is highly competitive, with thousands of law firms vying for clients across various practice areas, from commercial law to family law.

Australian law firms must find ways to highlight reasons why their firm is the best option for their client. Lawyers must develop strategies and tactics to succeed in an ever-changing world.

Technological Advancements

One of the most significant trends shaping the legal industry in Australia is the rapid advancement of technology. Although artificial intelligence ('AI') is infiltrating Australian legal practices, many practitioners may not think about the time savings AI has had on their practices. Using websites to create documents or contracts saves enormous amounts of time and is a form of AI. Utilising data from intake systems to create documents is a form of AI. From AI-powered legal research tools to cloud-based practice management software, technology is transforming every aspect of legal practice.

Law firms that embrace technology can streamline their operations, improve efficiency, and deliver better outcomes for clients. The *IPBA Journal* addressed this trend extensively in a past issue,¹ but the benefits and detriments of AI are similar in Australia as elsewhere. Australia has always been at the forefront of technological experimentation in the western world as a small population eager to try new things provides a testing ground for companies. Investing in new technologies to streamline operations, improve efficiency and enhance client service has continued to be seen as a strategy for law firms to embrace and stay ahead of the competition.

Changing Client Expectations

Client expectations are also evolving rapidly in response to technological advancements and shifting market dynamics. Today's clients demand greater transparency, efficiency and value from their legal service providers. Unlike in the pre-internet days, clients do not think that they have to rely on their lawyer's advice—or even think that they should have to pay for a lawyer's advice. Dr Google and Judge Bing are there to assist. Lawyers and law firms have had to show clients why their skills matter and how an effective lawyer can bring value to a matter. Clients are demanding more and more evidence of skilled work without understanding the benefits experience can bring to their situation.

Clients expect real-time updates on their matters, easy access to information and documents and innovative fee structures that align with the value delivered. Law firms that fail to meet these expectations risk losing clients to competitors who offer a more client-centric approach to service delivery. My boss always says that it can take years to gain a good client but seconds to lose them. In this day and age, we see this played out when lawyers do not return phone calls or reply to emails quickly enough. In a world of instant gratification from our televisions, music and phones, the legal profession is not immune to this client-consumer need for quick responses and easy answers.

Regulatory Changes

The regulatory landscape in Australia is constantly evolving, with new laws, regulations and court decisions shaping the legal environment. Law firms must stay abreast of these changes and ensure compliance to avoid legal and reputational risks.

Recent amendments to privacy laws² have imposed stricter obligations on law firms handling sensitive client information, requiring them to implement robust data protection measures and ensure the security of client data. New migration policies are announced as courts make radical decisions.³ From charity regulation shifts⁴ to laws on self-managed superfunds,⁵ law firms must not only know the law, but know when the law changes. Some laws have been passed, but are yet to go into effect,⁶ adding additional complexities to a lawyer's knowledge base.

Unlike civil jurisdictions, the power that courts have in common law countries adds to the complications of

keeping up with legal changes. Overnight, a law may be found unconstitutional or invalid and change the legal landscape. Australian practitioners must continue to maintain high levels of legal education post-schooling and stay apprised of any number of legal changes.

Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity and inclusion have emerged as critical issues in the legal profession, both globally and in Australia. Research has shown that diverse teams are more innovative, better at problem solving and ultimately more successful.⁷ Law firms that embrace diversity and inclusion can attract top talent, foster a more inclusive work culture and better serve the needs of a diverse client base.

Moreover, promoting diversity and inclusion is not only the right thing to do but also makes good business sense in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. Although the US is considered the 'melting pot', Australia is a tapestry of indigenous culture, European colonialism, Asian migration and Pacific influence. Without a diverse workforce, law firms will be unable to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse Australian culture.

Recruiting and Retaining Top Talent

Attracting and retaining top-tier talent is essential for the success of any law firm. In a competitive market like Australia, where skilled legal professionals are in high demand, law firms must differentiate themselves as employers of choice. Particularly for rural and remote Australian cities, experienced lawyers are hard to find, harder still to find specialists as remote lawyers are likelier to be general practitioners.⁸ While these general practitioners often see more diverse legal work as young lawyers, the absence of lawyers specialising in a particular skillset can cause a community to miss out on necessary skills.

Law firms are in a position where they must offer competitive salaries and benefits, opportunities for career development and advancement, and a supportive work culture that values work-life balance and employee well-being. Additionally, firms can leverage their unique selling points, such as specialisation in a particular practice area or a strong commitment to pro bono work, to attract top talent who share their values and goals.

Law firms must prioritise continuous learning and professional development for their lawyers and staff. This may involve offering training programs on emerging legal trends, technology tools or specialised practice areas.

Continuing legal education ('CLE') courses can provide lawyers with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate complex legal issues and deliver exceptional client service. Professional development initiatives, such as mentoring programs or leadership training, can help lawyers advance their careers and contribute to the firm's success. By investing in the ongoing growth and development of their team members, law firms can ensure they remain competitive and capable of delivering high-quality legal services to clients.

Alternative Legal Service Models

Traditional law firm structures are no longer the only option for legal practitioners. The rise of alternative legal service providers has revolutionised the industry, offering innovative approaches to legal service delivery.

Virtual law firms leverage technology to operate remotely, reducing overhead costs and offering greater flexibility to lawyers and clients alike. Legal process outsourcing companies specialise in specific legal tasks, such as document review or contract drafting, allowing law firms to outsource non-core functions and focus on high-value activities.

Similarly, freelance legal professionals provide on-demand legal services, enabling law firms to access specialised expertise without the overhead of traditional hiring. This is often seen in the Australian legal field where the difference between solicitors and barristers in many states is a distinct and specific model where clients or solicitors will hire a barrister for a specific matter or single court hearing.

By embracing these alternative models, law firms can adapt to changing client demands, enhance efficiency and remain competitive in the market. However, the balance between losing human connections, learning from experienced lawyers in the same working environment and clients' expectations of a traditional law practice are benefits to keep in mind for law firms.

Strategic Marketing and Branding

In today's digital age, effective marketing and branding are essential for law firms seeking to differentiate themselves and attract clients. Building a strong brand identity involves defining the firm's unique value proposition, identifying target markets and developing consistent messaging across all

marketing channels. Content marketing, including blogs, articles and whitepapers, can position the firm as a thought leader in its field and attract potential clients searching for legal expertise.

Social media platforms provide an opportunity to engage with clients, share insights and showcase the firm's expertise. Thought leadership initiatives, such as speaking engagements or industry publications, can further enhance the firm's visibility and credibility. By investing in strategic marketing and branding initiatives, law firms can increase their market share, attract high-value clients and build a reputation for excellence in the legal industry.

Collaboration and strategic partnerships can provide law firms with access to new markets, expertise and resources. By forming alliances with complementary service providers, such as accounting firms, consulting firms or technology companies, law firms can offer integrated solutions to clients and differentiate themselves in the market.

Joint marketing initiatives, co-branded events or referral arrangements can help law firms expand their client base and generate new business opportunities. Strategic partnerships can also provide access to specialised expertise or resources that may be lacking internally, allowing law firms to deliver more comprehensive solutions to clients. By building and nurturing strategic partnerships, law firms can enhance their competitive position and create additional value for clients.

Embracing Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility

In an era of increasing social and environmental consciousness, law firms are under pressure to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility. This may involve adopting environmentally friendly practices, such as reducing paper usage, implementing recycling programs or minimising energy consumption.

Supporting community initiatives, such as pro bono work or volunteer programs, can help law firms give back to society and address pressing social issues. Promoting diversity and inclusion within the firm and the broader legal profession can foster a culture of equality and belonging, attracting top talent and enhancing the firm's reputation.

By aligning their business practices with ethical and sustainable principles, law firms can build trust with clients, employees and the community, positioning themselves as responsible corporate citizens and driving positive social change.

Conclusion

In conclusion, running a successful law firm in Australia requires a proactive and strategic approach to navigating the dynamic legal landscape. From embracing technological advancements to meeting evolving client expectations and staying compliant with regulatory requirements, law firms can position themselves for long-term success and sustainability. With the right strategies and a commitment to excellence, law firms can thrive in an increasingly competitive and complex legal market in Australia.

Notes

¹ See https://ipba.org/sites/main/media/normal/6064_IPBA_Sept_2023_web.pdf.

² Privacy Legislation Amendment (Enforcement and Other Measures) Act 2022.

³ *NZYQ v Minister for Immigration, Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs & Anor HCAASP 36 (7 November 2023)*.

⁴ Changes to the Register of Environmental Organisations; available at www.ato.gov.au/businesses-and-organisations/not-for-profit-organisations/getting-started/in-detail/types-of-dgrs/a-k/environmental-organisations (accessed 5 March 2024).

⁵ Key Changes for Self-Managed Super Funds; available at www.ato.gov.au/tax-and-super-professionals/for-tax-professionals/prepare-and-lodge/tax-time/overview-of-key-changes/key-changes-for-smsfs (accessed 5 March 2024).

⁶ The Property Law Act 2023 (Qld).

⁷ David Rock and Heidi Grant, 'Why Diverse Teams Are Smarter', *Harvard Business Review* (4 November 2016); available at <https://hbr.org/2016/11/why-diverse-teams-are-smarter> (accessed 5 March 2024).

⁸ 'The Rise of the GP Lawyer in Regional Australia', *College of Law* (11 March 2021); available at www.collaw.edu.au/news/2021/03/10/the-rise-of-the-gp-lawyer-in-regional-australia (accessed 5 March 2024).



Zoe Naylor
Lawyer, FC Lawyers, Sunshine Coast

Zoe Naylor works in the Business/Corporate and Migration teams at FC Lawyers in Queensland, Australia. After graduating in 2013 with a Juris Doctor and Master of Arts in Political Science, Zoe practiced law in Arkansas alongside teaching for the Political Science Department at the University of Arkansas. Moving back to Australia in 2021, Zoe shifted her focus to business and corporate law. Zoe is licensed to practice law in the State of Arkansas, the Eastern & Western Districts of Arkansas, the US Supreme Court and Queensland, Australia.

Navigating Through Storms: Enhancing Gender Equality in Law Firm Leadership During Challenging Times

At a time when the call for gender equality is louder than ever, the legal industry finds itself at a crossroads, striving to balance the scales of leadership within its esteemed corridors. This article delves deep into the heart of this issue, challenging the notion that flexible working alone is enough to foster a truly inclusive environment.



Introduction

'We are a gender-inclusive law firm because we offer flexible working hours to our female lawyers.' This statement, although well-intentioned, barely scratches the surface of what true gender equality entails. In the current landscape of economic uncertainty, escalating competition and technological advancements, law firms face the dual challenge of managing operational complexities while fostering an environment that promotes gender equality. This article aims to challenge the simplistic notion that flexible working hours alone can cultivate an inclusive environment and instead argues for a multifaceted approach to retain and support female talent, thereby enriching law firms with diverse perspectives and leadership styles.

The Evolving Landscape of Law Firm Management

Law firm management today requires a delicate balance of client service excellence, financial acumen, marketing savvy, business development, human resources and technology implementation. For seasoned lawyers, navigating these multifaceted responsibilities can be overwhelming, sparking crucial questions about the efficacy of law firm leadership. Amidst these challenges, one persistent question remains: How can law firms better promote women into leadership roles to leverage the unique insights and leadership capabilities they offer?

Personal Journey Through Gender Inequality

Ever since joining the legal profession, I have often found myself in the gender minority during business meetings, transactions or advisory assemblies—it wasn't uncommon for me to be the only woman present. Admittedly, I struggled to assert my opinions and views, a challenge compounded by often being the youngest person in the room. However, as time passed and I gained experience and maturity, I no longer found any professional setting to be problematic. I have attained the highest leadership positions in my field.

Yet, as I advanced in my career, achieving leadership positions, the underlying issue of gender undervaluation within the professional sphere persisted. Despite advancements, women's representation in senior leadership within law firms remains disproportionately low, underscoring a significant gap in gender equality.

Many of the law firm management conferences and gatherings that I have taken part in during the last year

as a managing partner, despite primarily addressing the technological advancements and strategies for resilience to change, continuously venture into the realm of gender inclusion, pointing out the weakness of attracting female talents into the profession and into law firms, now and in the future. A critical takeaway from the discussion usually is that although women make up 50 per cent of lawyers, they rarely hold more than 30 per cent of senior leadership positions and achieving even this representation often requires enforced parity.

Numerous studies and analyses indicate that law firms are proactively working to enhance gender diversity within their ranks. The 'Transforming Women's Leadership in the Law Global Report 2020' by Thomson Reuters, which examines law firms across the Asia Pacific region, Europe and North America, highlights the challenges of gender diversity at the senior level. It demonstrates the positive impact of gender diversity on a law firm's success, noting that teams with diverse genders achieve a 10 per cent higher client spend. Additionally, it was found that organisations in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 per cent more likely to outperform financially. Despite these benefits and significant advancements in hiring and promoting women, including to senior positions, law firms are still facing challenges in retaining female talent.¹

Observing the attendees of Law Firm Management events (i.e., law firm leaders), I note that women constitute less than 30 per cent of all participants, reflecting the very issue at hand. During a particularly striking discussion, a male lawyer shared how his firm attempts to support women's career advancement by offering flexible working hours. This admission was eye-opening—it laid bare the fundamental misunderstandings of equality in business and the pervasive challenges in providing equal opportunities for men and women in the legal profession.

Unwelcome Legacy

I am far from indicting anyone for perpetuating traditional family roles exclusively to women. My varied familial experiences, as inferred from my surname, have allowed me to witness diverse expectations of me as a woman and a mother. The experiences during the 'Lechna' phase of my life demonstrated that societal norms are still rigid, often burdening women with disproportionate responsibilities in family settings compared to what is expected of men.

A particularly telling example that remains etched in my memory is the time when my daughter was taken by her father to the doctor for a vaccination, and despite the doctor being a woman, the child was asked, 'Couldn't your mummy come with you?' Such instances perpetuate the critical viewpoint that a mother's absence at any moment equates to her failure in parenting.

Such perception is to be blamed for promoting the false notion of flexible hours as a remedy for gender inequality in the legal profession. But relying on flexible hours as a panacea for gender inequality fails to address the root of the problem. True equality in the workplace demands that we also establish parity in family responsibilities. Simply put, we cannot achieve genuine equality by perpetuating existing imbalances. So, to treat women equally at work, we must (start to) treat every parent equally at home. This prompts a crucial question about family life: when we advocate for equality, do we mean a strict 50/50 division of responsibilities?

Rethinking Equality: From the Home to the Workplace

It appears that only the concept of socialist equality is uniquely predicated on the notion of 'equality for everyone'. However, true fairness doesn't necessarily equate to absolute material or status equality; it is more about ensuring equality of opportunity and treatment that caters to individual needs and circumstances. My experiences, which I fondly refer to as the 'Marchewka' phase of my life, have shown me that family responsibilities are a shared obligation for both men and women. The division of these duties does not always have to be perfectly equal but should instead be tailored to each family member's abilities and availability. Therefore, a woman's contribution to family life should be appropriately valued and balanced with the nature of her professional work. This approach fosters a balance that acknowledges and accommodates the unique contributions of each family member. In a well-functioning partnership, responsibilities are shared naturally and sensibly, resonating with the metaphor by therapist Andrzej Wiśniewski, where 'in a healthy home, windows clean themselves'. Each family member is then fairly able to pursue his or her ambitions, including professional development.

Hence, promoting women's equality, including in the workplace, is not just about offering flexible hours so

a woman can be more available at home to serve her family. It is about reshaping our understanding of shared responsibilities in society, including at home. Only then can we begin to dismantle the long-standing barriers to true gender equality in both professional and personal spheres.

Are the Working Hours for Lawyers and Leaders Truly Fixed?

There is a certain degree of pretence regarding the 'genuine' offer of flexible working hours in law firms. All of my colleagues, regardless of their gender or position, find their working hours dictated by client needs. As the legal profession becomes increasingly global, the necessity for extended working hours grows to accommodate clients operating across different time zones. It is hard to assert that working hours for lawyers have ever been truly fixed. Now, especially, with the advent of hybrid working models, the idea of fixed working hours seems even more illusory.

When we seriously contemplate providing women with equal opportunities for high-level leadership roles, the idea of confining them to a specific schedule becomes impractical. All managing partners and CEOs are acutely aware that such roles extend well beyond the typical 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. workday. So, dedicating a sort of preferential time schedule to women actually equals eliminating them from the path to reach the highest leadership positions.

Leadership Styles and Gender Dynamics

A wealth of research and literature indicates that women typically exhibit a collaborative, empathetic and democratic leadership style. Female leaders often focus on building relationships and supporting the development of their teams. These traits are frequently highlighted as differing from the more traditional male leadership style.

My personal observations as a long-time team leader confirm that this certainly rings true. Women generally approach their responsibilities with a high level of involvement and dedication, paying close attention to the outcomes their actions bring to the organisation. They particularly prioritise the collective well-being of the team or organisation. In contrast, men, all too often, seem to prioritise their individual interests and achievements. And here is the root of gender inequality in the workplace: it is deeply

entwined with differences in leadership styles. The traditional male style, which is more dominant and often less democratic and more focused on individual achievements, is commonly perceived as the hallmark of effective leadership. This pervasive emphasis on competition over collaborative actions for the common good is not an environment many women wish to be part of. Moreover, women tend to withdraw from situations where they are expected to conform to rules set by male-dominated paradigms. This is not because they are weaker or averse to competition, as it is sometimes misconstrued. Rather, it is because devoting time to unproductive internal rivalries instead of constructive actions is seen by many women as a wasteful expenditure of energy and time.

The prevalence of the male leadership style in business is largely due to the higher number of male leaders. Thus, meaningful change in gender dynamics within leadership is most likely only when there is an increase in the number of women in these roles.

The Path Forward

Challenges faced by women in the legal field are part of a broader pattern of gender-based obstacles in various professional domains. In other male-dominated environments, such as business, technology or engineering, to name a few, women experience gender-based discrimination which can impact their confidence and career progression.

Forging a path towards true gender inclusivity in the legal field, as well as in other male-dominated environments, is not just about a firm's policy changes; it is about a fundamental shift in our societal fabric. We must challenge and redefine our roles, expectations and biases, both in and out of the workplace. As we embark on this transformative journey, let's remember that inclusivity is not just a professional goal, but a societal imperative that will enrich us all.

Crucially, increasing the number of women in leadership roles, achieved through enforced parity or other methods, can transform organisations into spaces that are more conducive to women's leadership development. In such environments, women would not feel pressured to conform to traditional male leadership styles, but rather be encouraged to harness their unique strengths and capabilities.

When female lawyers are provided with genuine opportunities to evolve in the life roles they choose, it becomes evident that traditional working hours have little to do with the success women can achieve in their careers. Moving beyond the stereotype of women being indispensable only in domestic roles, it will become clear that they are equally capable of managing family commitments and leading law firms.

Conclusion

The journey towards gender equality in law firm leadership is complex and multifaceted. It demands a departure from simplistic solutions like flexible working hours and calls for a comprehensive strategy that addresses the root causes of inequality. By redefining our understanding of shared responsibilities and embracing diverse leadership styles, we can dismantle barriers to gender equality and create a more inclusive and equitable professional landscape.

Notes

¹ See www.thomsonreuters.com/en-us/posts/legal/twll-global-report-2020/.



Mirella Lechna-Marchewka
Managing Partner, Wardyński & Partners, Wrocław

Mirella Lechna-Marchewka is an attorney at law and managing partner at Wardyński & Partners. Her legal work involves three of the firm's practice areas: infrastructure, transport, public procurement and PPP; environmental protection; and the energy sector. She also coordinates the firm's Korean Desk and Chinese Desk. She is a member of the International Construction Projects committee of the Inter-Pacific Bar Association, a member of the Council of the PPP Centre Foundation and a founding member as well as a board member of the Public Procurement Law Association.

Stand Out: Thriving Hub of Client Service

Are you ready to elevate your legal practice to new heights of success and transform it into a thriving hub of client service and business development, even during the most challenging times? Whether you are a litigator handling high-stakes cases or an M&A lawyer, as an expert lawyer in your industry, navigating market fluctuations, mastering client service and business development effectively are essential for sustaining growth and fostering long-term relationships, especially when demand seems low or the market has a downturn. In this practical article we will explore proven actionable insights, ready to implement, that can keep your practice vibrant and your clients engaged, even in quieter moments or challenging times.



Dispelling Misconceptions

First and foremost, let's dispel a common misconception: client service and business development are not just tasks to check off a list; they are ongoing commitments that require consistency and authenticity. Instead of waiting for the phone to ring off the hook or the market to rebound, proactive engagement with clients is key to laying the groundwork for future success.

So, if you agree, you are probably asking—how can I do it in an effective and efficient manner? This article will share with you how to proactively enhance client service and business development efforts.

Consistent Proactive Approach

Picture this: You are a tax lawyer, the phone isn't ringing off the hook with new cases or as an M&A lawyer, the market is in a slump. What do you do? When my mentees and clients ask me this question, my short answer is that you don't wait idly, but instead you proactively engage with your existing clients and lay the groundwork for future relationships. Ways to do so are discussed below.

Stay Engaged: Keep Your Finger on the Pulse

You want to show clients that you are invested in their success and offer assistance wherever possible. To stay connected with your clients, keep abreast of their businesses in one or more of the following ways:

1. Leverage technology tools. In today's digital age, numerous tools and platforms can help you stay informed about your clients' businesses more efficiently. Consider setting up Google Alerts or subscribing to industry newsletters and publications relevant to your clients' sectors. These tools can provide real-time updates on industry news, regulatory changes and market trends, allowing you to stay ahead of the curve and offer timely insights to your clients.

2. Attend industry events and conferences. Make it a priority to attend industry events, conferences and seminars related to your clients' fields. These gatherings not only offer valuable networking opportunities but also provide insights into emerging trends, best practices and the challenges that your clients' industries are facing. By actively participating in industry events,



you demonstrate your commitment to staying informed and engaged in your clients' business landscapes.

3. Schedule regular check-ins. Proactively schedule regular check-in meetings or calls with your clients, even when there are no immediate matters at hand. These check-ins serve as valuable touchpoints to discuss industry developments, address potential concerns and explore opportunities for collaboration or strategic planning. By maintaining consistent communication, you reinforce the notion that you are genuinely invested in their success and well-being beyond just their legal matters.

4. Offer value-added services. Look for opportunities to provide value-added services that go beyond traditional legal advice. For instance, you could offer to conduct educational workshops or webinars for your clients' teams on relevant legal topics or industry trends. By sharing your expertise and insights in a proactive manner, you position yourself as a trusted resource and strategic partner, further deepening your client relationships.

5. Personalise your communications. Tailor your communications to reflect your understanding of your clients' businesses and challenges. Instead of sending generic updates or newsletters, craft personalised messages that speak directly to your clients' specific interests and concerns. Whether it is sharing an article related to their industry or congratulating them on a recent achievement, personalised communications demonstrate your attentiveness and genuine interest in their success.

By incorporating these practical insights into your approach to staying engaged with your clients, you can strengthen your relationships, build trust and position yourself as a proactive and indispensable advisor in their professional journey. Remember, the key is to demonstrate your commitment to their success and well-being, even during periods of relative calm or market uncertainty.

Nurture Relationships: Past Clients Matter

Do not overlook past clients. Past and lost clients are not lost relationships. Strengthening these connections, also during challenging times, can lead to future opportunities. Remember, it is not always about discussing business; sometimes, it is about fostering genuine rapport and cultivating genuine connections. So, what can you do? Here are some ideas:

1. Organise client appreciation events. Consider hosting client appreciation events or gatherings to express gratitude to your past clients for their support and loyalty. Whether it is a cocktail reception, a networking brunch or a themed dinner, these events provide an opportunity to reconnect with past clients in a relaxed and informal setting. By fostering a sense of community and camaraderie, you reinforce the value that you place on your relationships beyond the confines of legal transactions.

2. Send personalised thank-you notes. Take the time to send handwritten thank-you notes to your past clients, expressing your appreciation for their trust and partnership. I guarantee that in a digital world inundated with emails and automated messages, a handwritten note stands out as a thoughtful and genuine gesture. Do you want another golden tip? Include in your handwritten note specific details or anecdotes from your past interactions to personalise the message and demonstrate your ongoing commitment to maintaining the relationship.

3. Offer exclusive benefits or discounts. Show your appreciation for past clients by offering exclusive benefits or discounts on future services. Whether it is a discounted rate on hourly fees, complimentary consultations or access to premium resources or educational materials, these incentives can incentivise past clients to reengage with your firm and explore new opportunities for collaboration. By extending special privileges to past clients, you reinforce their value and importance to your practice. This worked every time I did it for my practice or with my mentees.

4. Seek feedback and input. Proactively solicit feedback and input from past clients about their experiences working with your firm. Consider conducting a feedback session to gather insights into their satisfaction levels, areas for improvement and suggestions for future engagements. Why? Because by demonstrating your receptiveness to feedback and your commitment to continuous improvement, you not only strengthen your relationships with past clients but also lay the groundwork for enhanced service delivery and client satisfaction in the future.

5. Facilitate referral opportunities. I must admit that every time I share this practical strategy with my clients they are surprised, since it is a very simple one but not many lawyers are using it. You need to actively

facilitate referral opportunities among your past clients by connecting them with other professionals or businesses in your network. Whether it is introducing them to potential collaborators, service providers or industry contacts, facilitating meaningful connections demonstrates your investment in their success beyond your immediate legal services. Encourage reciprocity by offering to make introductions or referrals on their behalf, further cementing your role as a trusted advisor and strategic partner.

By implementing these practical insights into your approach to nurturing relationships with past clients, you can foster a sense of loyalty, goodwill and reciprocity that transcends individual transactions. Remember, the strength of your relationships with past clients is a reflection of your commitment to their long-term success and satisfaction. So, invest time and effort in maintaining and deepening these connections and you will reap the rewards of enduring partnerships built on trust and mutual respect.

Stay Informed: Industry Trends and Regulatory Changes

Maintain awareness of industry trends and regulatory shifts affecting your clients' businesses. Providing timely insights and guidance demonstrates your proactive approach and positions you as a trusted advisor, not just a service provider. Your clients will appreciate your foresight and expertise in navigating complex landscapes. Here are some practical ideas on how to achieve it:

1. Establish industry news alerts. Set up customised news alerts and notifications using online platforms and industry-specific websites. Tools like Google Alerts, industry newsletters and legal news aggregators can help you stay informed about the latest developments, regulatory changes and emerging trends in your clients' industries. Tailor your alerts to specific keywords, companies or regulatory bodies relevant to your clients' businesses to ensure that you receive timely updates that impact their operations.

2. Engage in continuing education. Prioritise ongoing professional development and education to deepen your understanding of industry trends and regulatory changes. Yes, you read it right. One way of achieving this is by attending relevant seminars, webinars and workshops conducted by industry associations, legal organisations and regulatory agencies. Participate in continuing legal education ('CLE') programs focused on

specific practice areas or emerging areas of law to stay abreast of evolving legal frameworks and compliance requirements. By investing in your professional growth, you enhance your ability to anticipate client needs and provide informed guidance and counsel.

3. Cultivate relationships with industry experts. One of my favourite ways to stay informed is by fostering relationships with subject matter experts, industry analysts and regulatory authorities to gain insights into evolving industry dynamics and regulatory landscapes. My advice is to attend (offline or online) industry conferences, networking events and professional gatherings to connect with thought leaders and influencers in your clients' sectors. You want to engage in meaningful conversations, seek perspectives on emerging trends and exchange knowledge and best practices. I have no doubt that by leveraging these relationships, you can gain access to valuable insights and expertise that can inform your client advisory and strategic decision-making processes.

4. Participate in industry forums and discussion groups. Another opportunity to stay informed is to join online forums, discussion groups and professional networks dedicated to your clients' industries and practice areas. Platforms like LinkedIn Groups, industry-specific forums and legal communities provide opportunities to share insights, pose questions and engage in discussions with peers, clients and industry stakeholders. [If you want to get more tips on how to use them well, send me an email and I will be happy to share more!] Actively participate in relevant conversations, share your expertise and contribute to thought leadership initiatives. By actively engaging in industry forums, you not only stay informed about current trends and challenges but also position yourself as a trusted resource and thought leader within your professional community.

5. Conduct client briefings and updates. Proactively communicate with your clients about significant industry developments, regulatory changes and emerging trends that may impact their businesses. Many lawyers and law firms are missing this opportunity and if you are the one who implements it, you will definitely stand out! Schedule regular client briefings, updates or webinars to discuss relevant topics, share insights and provide guidance on navigating regulatory complexities and compliance obligations. I suggest that you should

tailor your communications to address your clients' specific concerns and priorities and offer actionable recommendations and best practices.

By incorporating these practical insights into your approach to staying informed about industry trends and regulatory changes, you can enhance your ability to anticipate client needs, mitigate risks and provide strategic guidance that aligns with your clients' business objectives. Remember, staying informed is not just about acquiring knowledge, it is about leveraging insights to add value, foster trust and drive positive outcomes for your clients and your practice.

Redefine 'Former Clients': Every Interaction Matters

Shift your mindset from 'former' clients to 'inactive' clients. Every client interaction is an opportunity to rekindle the relationship. Stay connected, even when there is no immediate business on the horizon. Let me share with you some ways that I help my clients to implement in their firm, without being too busy:

1. Implement a client relationship management ('CRM') system. Invest in a robust CRM system to track and manage interactions with former clients effectively. [Get in touch if you want to know how to choose the right one!] A CRM system allows you to maintain detailed records of past engagements, communications and preferences, enabling you to personalise your interactions and stay connected with former clients over time. Leverage the CRM platform to schedule follow-up reminders, track communication history and identify opportunities for re-engagement based on past interactions and feedback. By centralising client data and insights, you can streamline relationship management and maximise the impact of every interaction, without becoming more busy!

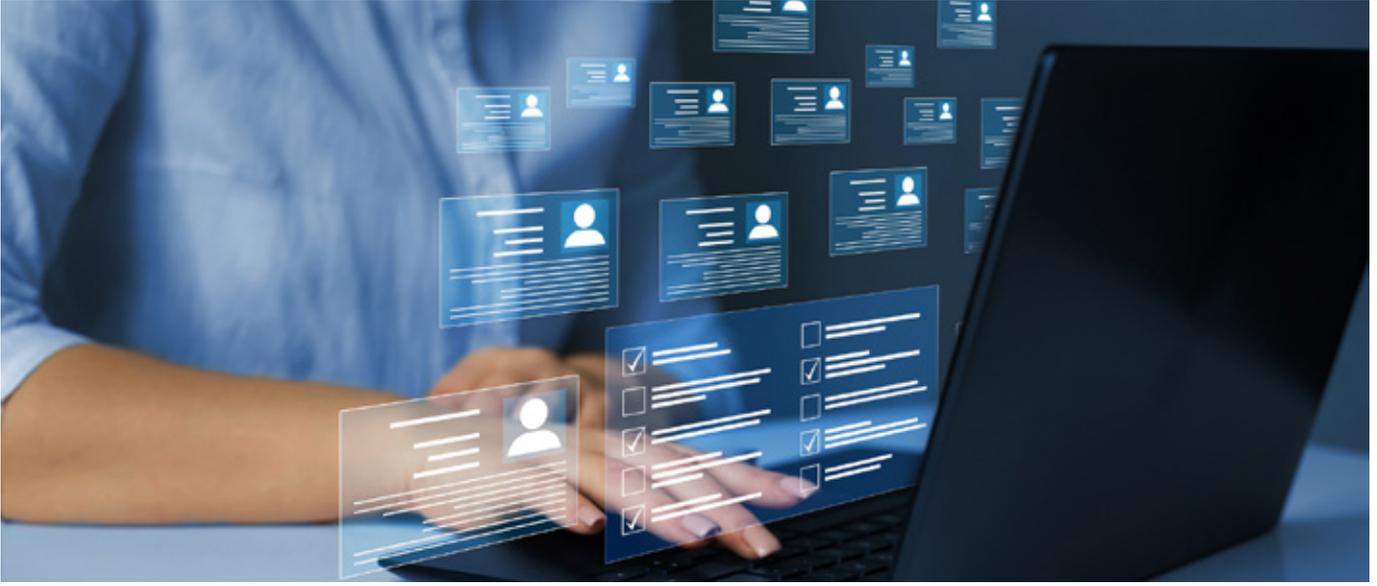
2. Create tailored content and resources. I love this strategy and in fact have helped many of my clients to achieve it by doing it for them. You want to develop tailored content, resources and educational materials designed to resonate with the specific interests and needs of your former clients. Whether it is industry insights, legal updates or best practice guides, provide value-added content that addresses their pain points and challenges. Distribute the content through targeted email campaigns, newsletters and client portals to stay

top-of-mind and demonstrate your ongoing commitment to their success. Do not forget to encourage feedback and engagement by inviting former clients to share their thoughts, questions and suggestions, fostering a sense of collaboration and partnership.

3. Offer reconnection incentives. This is one of the best ways to get reconnected with inactive clients. Think how you can incentivise re-engagement with former clients by offering them exclusive benefits, discounts or value-added services for returning to your firm. You can also consider extending special promotions, referral incentives or complimentary consultations as a gesture of goodwill and appreciation. You may also want to showcase the unique value proposition of re-engaging with your firm, highlighting the benefits of your expertise, personalised service and track record of success. Based on my experience, I am positive that by making it enticing for former clients to reconnect, you increase the likelihood of fostering renewed relationships and generating new business opportunities.

4. Networking and referral opportunities. Actively facilitate networking and referral opportunities among your former clients by connecting them with relevant contacts, professionals and resources within your network. You can organise networking events, alumni gatherings or industry roundtables where former clients can reconnect with peers, exchange insights and explore potential collaborations. In fact, by following these actions you foster a culture of reciprocity and mutual support by facilitating introductions, sharing referrals and showcasing success stories of clients who have benefited from collaborative partnerships. What do you get out of it? By facilitating meaningful connections and fostering a sense of community, you position yourself as a catalyst for professional growth and relationship building among your former clients.

5. Conduct client feedback and satisfaction surveys. Another way to solidify your relationships with inactive clients is to solicit feedback and insights from former clients through structured surveys, interviews or feedback forms to understand their perceptions, experiences and areas for improvement. By doing so, you will seek candid feedback on your firm's performance, service quality and communication effectiveness and use the insights to refine your service delivery and relationship management strategies. Please do not forget to demonstrate



your commitment to continuous improvement and client-centricity by acting on feedback, addressing concerns and implementing changes based on client input. You want your clients to know that whatever happens your firm is dedicated to delivering exceptional client experiences.

Especially in challenging times, by incorporating these practical insights into your approach to redefining former clients, you can maximise the value of every interaction, nurture lasting relationships and unlock new opportunities for collaboration and growth. Remember, every interaction with a former client is an opportunity to reinforce your value proposition, demonstrate your commitment to their success and lay the foundation for future partnerships.

I am asking you not to underestimate the value of investing in proactive relationship management strategies that prioritise long-term engagement and mutual trust. If you follow these strategies, you will witness how former clients become valued advocates and ambassadors for your firm.

Know Your Clients: Beyond Legal Matters

This strategy may seem obvious to many of you, but I insist on sharing it with you due to its significance. Treat your clients as individuals, not just corporate entities. Understand their personal goals, career aspirations and challenges. Let me explain. Your ability to empathise and support them beyond legal matters

strengthens your bond and deepens your relationship with them. This can be achieved in the following ways:

1. Conduct regular client reviews. Schedule periodic client reviews or assessments to gain deeper insights into your clients' goals, challenges and evolving needs. Use these sessions as an opportunity to explore their business strategies, industry trends and competitive landscapes. One of the best ways to gain these insights is by asking open-ended questions to uncover their long-term objectives, risk tolerances and areas for growth. As I have shared in my bestselling book, 'The Attention Switch', by fostering open dialogue and active listening, you demonstrate your commitment to understanding the client's holistic needs and aspirations beyond the scope of legal matters.

2. Develop client personas. I am aware that many have never heard of this concept before, so let me explain. I want you to think and create detailed client personas or profiles to segment and personalise your approach to client engagement and relationship management. You do this by identifying key demographic, psychographic and behavioural attributes that characterise your clients' preferences, communication styles and decision-making processes. Based on that, you will be able to tailor your interactions, communications and service offerings to align with the unique needs and preferences of each client persona, fostering deeper connections and rapport. This is one of the best ways to enhance your

client satisfaction, loyalty and retention by delivering experiences that resonate with their individual preferences and priorities. In short: go invest in this process—you will gain a lot from it!

3. Cultivate strategic partnerships. One of the actions you need to take in challenging times is to actively cultivate strategic partnerships and alliances with complementary service providers, industry experts and business advisors who can add value to your clients' broader ecosystem. The way I explain it to my clients is that you need to establish collaborations with financial advisors, accountants, consultants and other professionals to offer integrated solutions and holistic support tailored to your clients' multifaceted needs. Facilitate introductions and cross-referrals among your network of partners, positioning yourself as a trusted connector and strategic advisor who prioritises the overall success and well-being of your clients. Thus, not only you will expand your value proposition, but you also will enhance your capacity to address clients' diverse challenges and opportunities across various domains.

4. Implement client feedback mechanisms. Establish formalised mechanisms for soliciting ongoing feedback and input from your clients about their experiences, preferences and areas for improvement. Deploy client satisfaction surveys, feedback forms and post-engagement evaluations to gather insights into their satisfaction levels, service expectations and areas of satisfaction. In fact, by prioritising client feedback, you demonstrate your responsiveness and commitment to continuous improvement, fostering trust and loyalty over time.

5. Foster a client-centric culture. I left this point for last, since it is one of the most difficult to implement but at the same time it is very important. I refer to fostering a client-centric culture within your firm that prioritises empathy, responsiveness and proactive engagement at every touchpoint. I want you to empower your team members to cultivate meaningful relationships with clients by encouraging active listening, empathy and a genuine interest in their success. One of the ways to achieve this, as I do with many of my clients, is to provide ongoing training and professional development opportunities to enhance team members' interpersonal skills, communication abilities and client engagement techniques. You want to lead by example and embody the values of client-centricity in your interactions and decision-making processes. You want to set the tone for

a culture that places clients at the heart of everything you do. By fostering a client-centric culture, you create an environment where clients feel valued, understood and supported, driving long-term loyalty and advocacy for your firm. And, by adopting a proactive and client-centric mindset, you can strengthen your relationships, foster trust and position yourself as a valued partner and advisor in their professional journey.

Here is a reminder again—the key to success lies in forging genuine connections, demonstrating empathy and delivering exceptional value that transcends traditional legal services.

Conclusion

In essence, effective client service and business development transcends mere transactions, it is about building lasting relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect. By investing time and energy into these endeavours, you are not just cultivating business, you are fostering a community of advocates who value your expertise and commitment. So, the next time you find yourself in a lull, remember that there is always an opportunity to connect, engage and add value. Embrace the in-between moments, for therein lies the essence of true client service and sustainable growth.

If you have any specific questions with regards to building long-term relationships or your authority position and your personal brand, please send me an email and share it with me. I will be happy to help and may include my answer in one of the upcoming articles.

Now, keep STANDING OUT!



Itzik Amiel
Attorney-at-law; Founder & CEO,
THE SWITCH™, Amsterdam

Itzik is considered a global leading authority on business development, business networking and personal branding. He is a sought-after international speaker, trainer, business mentor and attorney-at-law. Itzik is the bestselling author of 'The Attention Switch' and Founder of THE SWITCH™, the global community for professionals to grow their practice. Itzik trains, consults and mentors leading lawyers and law firms globally to attract and win their ideal clients by becoming seen as authorities in their field, building long-lasting relationships and to SWITCH their relationships to referrals+revenue+results.

Q&A with Keanu Ou

Keanu Ou is a Partner at Jin Mao Partners based in Shanghai and the incoming Co-Chair of the IPBA Legal Development & Training Committee. In this interview, Keanu discusses his life from growing up in a small city in China to becoming a Partner at a prestigious law firm in Shanghai.



Tell us about your years growing up, such as interests, hobbies and causes that you were passionate about. What are some of the childhood experiences that shaped you?

I grew up in a small city called Liuzhou, located in Guangxi Province, which is approximately 10 hours away by high-speed train or two and a half hours away by air from Shanghai. I come from an ordinary family, much like most Chinese families. We witnessed the rapid economic growth of China, and as our living standards improved, we also had many opportunities to pursue our interests and experience different cultures around the world. My biggest hobby when I was young was playing football. I joined the school football team in primary school and dreamed of becoming a professional football player (which, you might have already guessed, never happened). I was a small and quiet child, but since I started playing football, my life began to change and I became physically and mentally stronger. Football is a team sport and requires discipline, mental toughness and socialisation. This has helped shape a large part of my personal and professional character, making me who I am today. I enjoy making friends, collaborating with friends, colleagues and clients, and thrive on working on challenging legal tasks.

Why did you choose to work in the law? Describe your career trajectory.

Choosing law as my major was something unplanned. When I was filling out my college application during the university entrance exam, I simply felt that law was a fascinating subject, and also studying law meant I wouldn't have to continue studying math (which I was not good at). So, I chose law as my major and thus began my career studying law. College life was joyful and I gradually developed my own understanding of law. After graduating from college, I went to the United Kingdom to pursue a Master's degree in Law, which exposed me to a different cultural atmosphere during my postgraduate studies.

After graduating from university, my professional career has been spent at Jin Mao Partners. I am also fortunate to have met our law firm's founding partner, Jack Li, 30th President of the IPBA. He has provided me with numerous opportunities and has been willing to continuously push and mentor me. There is an ancient Chinese saying: 'A day as a teacher, a lifetime as a teacher'. Jack will always be my mentor and teacher, and at Jin Mao Partners I have gradually evolved from a young lawyer to a partner, continuously scripting the chapters of my life.



What is the biggest challenge you have faced to date and how did you overcome it?

Everyone encounters various challenges at different stages of their lives. If I were to mention a significant challenge in my professional career, it would be closely related to the IPBA, particularly the organisation of the IPBA 30th Annual Conference in Shanghai. Jack, as the 30th President of the IPBA, led the organising committee of the Shanghai Conference. As a member of the organising committee, I was involved in numerous tasks, including preparing various plans and documents, coordinating with speakers and guests, liaising with the event PCO and setting up forums. Due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of the Shanghai Conference's preparation were disrupted. The Conference, originally scheduled for April 2020, was postponed to April 2021 and the format changed from entirely onsite to a hybrid of an online and onsite conference. Jack and our team faced immense pressure during the preparations. Throughout the process we worked tirelessly day and night in the office to ensure the smooth and spectacular execution of the Shanghai Conference. Despite the challenges, with the collective efforts of all conference personnel and the support of the IPBA community, the Shanghai Conference was a tremendous success. Once the Conference opened smoothly, the pressure was instantly relieved and everyone shared the joy of its successful organisation.

How did you become associated with the IPBA? What does the IPBA mean to you and what do you think other people should know about the IPBA?

I must say I am very fortunate because, thanks to my mentor Jack, I was able to attend many international

law conferences, including IPBA annual conferences, since my time as a junior lawyer. The first time I became associated with the IPBA was when I accompanied Jack to the IPBA Mid-Year Council Meeting in Brussels in 2016. It was quite surreal to think that upon arriving at the hotel in Brussels for the first time, I bumped into our former IPBA Presidents Huen Wong and Francis Xavier. Over the following years, I attended most of the IPBA's events and we visited almost all IPBA members globally, receiving warm welcomes everywhere we went. The IPBA means a lot to me; it has allowed me to meet a lot of people from all over the world, whom I now call family (my IPBA brothers and sisters). I want everyone to know that the IPBA is a very interesting platform. Despite coming from different cultural backgrounds across the globe, we can regularly gather every year to exchange business ideas and build friendships—which in itself is a very joyful thing. A career in law can also be colourful and enriching.

You currently serve as a Vice-Chair of the IPBA's Legal Development and Training Committee ('LDTC') and have been nominated as an incoming Co-Chair of the LDTC. What is your vision for the committee?

My good friend and brother, Raphael Tay, the current Chair of the LDTC, first asked me to join the Committee as a Vice-Chair four years ago. Coming up to the end of my term as Vice-Chair, Raphael asked whether I'd like to co-chair the Committee along with our fellow IPBA member, Martin Polaine, which I gladly accepted.

Becoming Co-Chair of the LDTC is a big responsibility for me which I will do my utmost to fulfil, and I believe I also face significant pressure because my predecessors in the LDTC—Varya Simpson, James Jung and Raphael—have



done a lot to really shape and lift the committee to where it is today. I am really looking forward to working closely with Martin to continue the great work that the LDTC is doing for the IPBA. I believe that the LDTC's upcoming work will continue to focus on the development of the legal industry and the training of young lawyers, attracting more young lawyers to join the IPBA.

This edition of the Journal focuses on law firm management. As a young partner of a law firm, do you have any advice for young lawyers who want to seek partnership opportunities in private practice?

My advice is to find the right area of practice for yourself and dedicate yourself to various tasks, continuously strengthening your professional skills and building good relationships with clients and partners. At the same time, seek feedback from senior partners and colleagues, identify areas for improvement, and actively seek guidance and advice (for example, finding a good mentor is key!). Ask to take on leadership roles within the firm and seek opportunities to go beyond task assignments (don't be afraid to ask!). Demonstrate initiative by proposing new ideas, volunteering for challenging projects and taking on responsibilities. Also, from early in your career, work on not only developing your technical skills but also your soft skills, which is fundamental to becoming a good lawyer. If you are interested in international work, seek opportunities to attend international law conferences

such as the IPBA Annual Conference. If your firm does not support you to attend, look into scholarship opportunities. Building international networks from a young age will help you to build your practice and pave the path to partnership opportunities.

**Finally some quick questions...
What is a motto you live by?**

The harder the task, the greater the reward.

What would you say to your 20-year-old self?

Be brave to do what you want to do, without hesitation; time is your most precious resource; every moment deserves to be cherished and effectively utilised. Whether in school or in life, maintain an insatiable curiosity, delve into deep thinking and commit to lifelong learning; seize the joy of the present moment, while also looking forward to the future (buy Bitcoin, LOL).

What is your favourite book?

I like a very famous Chinese writer named Lu Yao. He wrote a novel called 'Ordinary World', in which ordinary people live ordinary lives in an ordinary world. In this ordinary world, everyone experiences their own ups and downs, that is the taste of life, which we need to savour. Life is like this, it is not always smooth sailing, nor is it always dark. It is us, the ordinary people in this ordinary world, that make up the colourful world in which we live.

IPBA New Members December 2023 to February 2024

We are pleased to introduce our new IPBA members who joined our association from December 2023 to February 2024. Please welcome them to our organisation and kindly introduce yourself at the next IPBA conference.

Australia , Karen Heseltine <i>ForenPsych</i>	China , Weidong Nie <i>King & Wood Mallesons</i>
Australia , Florence Thum <i>College of Law Australia</i>	China , Jing Qiu <i>Zhong Lun Law Firm</i>
Bangladesh , Mahbubur Rahman Bipu <i>IDCLA</i>	China , Xiaorong Qu <i>River Delta Law Firm</i>
Bangladesh , Anita Ghazi Rahman <i>The Legal Circle</i>	China , Catherine Shi <i>DKI Qianhai Law Law Firm</i>
Canada , Keith Chatwin <i>Stikeman Elliott LLP</i>	China , Haiping Sun <i>SHBA (Shanghai Bar Association)</i>
Canada , Huy Do <i>Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP</i>	China , Tao Tao <i>Beijing Globe-Law firm</i>
Canada , Zaichi Hu <i>Dentons Canada LLP</i>	China , Wanshi Tao <i>Jiangsu Yi You Tian Yuan (Zhangjiagang) Law Firm</i>
Canada , Yuji Matson <i>Remedios & Company</i>	China , Keiji Tokujiya <i>Nagashima Ohno & Tsunematsu</i>
Canada , Peter Mendell <i>Davies Ward Phillips & Vineberg LLP</i>	China , Tianyi Wang <i>River Delta Law Firm</i>
Chile , Nicolás Yuraszcek <i>Prieto</i>	China , Jingan Yan <i>Zhong Lun Law Firm</i>
China , Jin Bingyi <i>Shanghai Runyi Law Firm</i>	China , Yue Zeng <i>Guangdong Sino-win Law Firm</i>
China , Tim Chan <i>Tim Chan & Co.</i>	France , Dirk Andreae-Nehlsen <i>Andreae Associates-Avocats</i>
China , Junling Feng <i>Beijing Globe-Law Law Firm</i>	France , Fiona Feubrecht <i>COME</i>
China , Yiqian Guo <i>Beijing Globe-Law Law Firm</i>	France , Adrien Khaznadji <i>CPC Associes</i>
China , Han Hao <i>Shanghai Toahway Law Firm</i>	France , Séverin Kullmann <i>BCTG Avocats</i>
China , Meng Yan Huang <i>Wang Jing & GH Law Firm</i>	Germany , Frank Becker <i>Atsumi & Sakai Europa GmbH - Rechtsanwälte und Steuerberater</i>
China , Yanan Li <i>Beijing Globe-Law Law Firm</i>	Hong Kong , Tom Christopher Pröstler <i>CMS Hasche Sigle, Hong Kong LLP</i>
China , Feng Liang <i>Jincheng Tongda & Neal</i>	Hong Kong , Sharon Andrea Ser <i>Rita Ku & Ser</i>

Hong Kong , Alvin Sin <i>O'Melveny & Myers</i>	Japan , Kazuma Higuchi <i>Higuchi & Partners</i>
Hong Kong , Amy Wen Wei <i>CMS</i>	Japan , Daisuke Inaba <i>TMI Associates</i>
Hong Kong , Careen Wong <i>Shum Wong & Co., Solicitors</i>	Japan , Daigo Kawano <i>Chuo Sogo Law Office</i>
India , Sanjay Gupta <i>Dentons Linklegal</i>	Japan , Yuri Kawashima <i>Oh-Ebashi LPC & Partners</i>
India , VJ Mathew <i>VJ Mathew & Co., International Law Firm</i>	Japan , Yumiko Kobayashi <i>Nakamoto & Partners</i>
India , Devika Mehra <i>S S Rana and Co.</i>	Japan , Tomohiro Kuribayashi <i>TMI Associates</i>
India , Neeraj Menon <i>Trilegal</i>	Japan , Jun Hee Lee <i>TMI Associates</i>
India , Nihit Nagpal <i>S S Rana and Co.</i>	Japan , Myongwon Lee <i>Ikeda & Someya</i>
India , Neha Naik <i>Phoenix Legal</i>	Japan , Yoichi Maekawa <i>Nagashima Ohno & Tsunematsu</i>
India , Sanjay Notani <i>Economic Laws Practice (ELP)</i>	Japan , Kentaro Minato <i>Atsumi & Sakai</i>
India , Namrata Shah Saurastri <i>Krishna & Saurastri Associates LLP</i>	Japan , Takehiro Miyoshi <i>Miyoshi Singapore Foreign Registered Attorney Office</i>
India , Kumar Shashwat Singh Sawno <i>S&A Law Offices LLP</i>	Japan , Ririko Nagura <i>KEIJU OHNO & PARTNERS LPC</i>
India , Ritesh Singh <i>The Precept- Law Offices</i>	Japan , Sho Nakayama <i>TMI Associates</i>
India , Vikramjeet Singh <i>BTG Advaya</i>	Japan , Jun Niizawa <i>Chuo Sogo Law Office, P.C.</i>
India , Anshul Sunil Saurastri <i>Krishna & Saurastri Associates LLP</i>	Japan , Yuri Nishiguchi <i>Yodoyabashi Yamagami L.P.C.</i>
India , Dhruv Suri <i>PSA</i>	Japan , Shota Ogata <i>Mori Hamada & Matsumoto</i>
India , Vividh S. Tandon <i>Law Chambers of Vividh. S. Tandon</i>	Japan , Junya Oishi <i>Kitahama Partners</i>
India , Huzefa Tavawalla <i>Nishith Desai Associates</i>	Japan , Masami Oishi <i>TNY Progress Law Firm</i>
Indonesia , Nazly Parlindungan Siregar <i>Assegaf Hamzah & Partners</i>	Japan , Rick Saito <i>Mori Hamada & Matsumoto</i>
Japan , Yoshikazu Abe <i>Mori Hamada & Matsumoto</i>	Japan , Megumi Sakai <i>Wadakura Gate Law Office</i>
Japan , William Asada <i>Higuchi & Partners, LPC</i>	Japan , Yuki Semba <i>Keiju Ohno & Partners LPC</i>
Japan , Kota Fujii <i>TMI Associates</i>	Japan , Satoshi Shinkuma <i>Itsumo Inc.</i>
Japan , Anne-Marie Doernenburg <i>Nishimura & Asahi (Gaikokuho Kyodo Jigyo)</i>	Japan , Alvin Hiromasa Shiozaki <i>Shiozaki Legal</i>

Japan , Satoshi Shono <i>Matsuda and Partners</i>	Malaysia , Nur Amira Ahmad Azhar <i>Rosli Dahlan Saravana Partnership</i>
Japan , Taeko Suzuki <i>Nishimura & Asahi (Gaikokuho Kyodo Jigyo)</i>	Malaysia , Nimalan Devaraja <i>Skrine</i>
Japan , Yosuke Suzuki <i>Anderson Mori & Tomotsune</i>	Malaysia , Mun Loong Brian Foong <i>Cheang & Ariff</i>
Japan , Rie Taiko <i>TMI Associates</i>	Malaysia , Wong Mun Hoe <i>Munhoe</i>
Japan , Yu Takahashi <i>Nagashima Ohno & Tsunematsu</i>	Malaysia , Sai Yeang Ng <i>Raja, Darryl & Loh</i>
Japan , Lexi Takamatsu <i>Mori Hamada & Matsumoto</i>	Malaysia , Aufa Radzi <i>Skrine</i>
Japan , Yusuke Takamiya <i>Mori Hamada & Matsumoto</i>	Malaysia , Mei Syen Tan <i>Messrs. Kuek, Ong & Associates</i>
Japan , Nagisa Takizawa <i>Takizawa Law Office</i>	Malaysia , Lilien Wong <i>Shearn Delamore & Co</i>
Japan , Kentaro Toda <i>TMI Associates</i>	Malaysia , Yeong Hui Yap <i>Chooi & Company</i>
Japan , Sho Tsuzuki <i>Atsumi & Sakai</i>	Malaysia , Sarah Li Hsien Yong <i>Sarah Yong & Co.</i>
Japan , Suzuno Yamashita <i>TMI Associates</i>	Mongolia , Usukhbayar Battogtokh <i>Melville Erdenedalai LLP</i>
Japan , Shinji Yamazaki <i>TMI Associates</i>	Myanmar , Khin Yadanar Htay <i>Tilleke & Gibbins Myanmar Limited</i>
Japan , Yoshika Yanagi <i>TMI Associates</i>	Nepal , Agya Shrestha <i>Daraz Kaymu Private Limited</i>
Japan , Tomoki Yanagisawa <i>TMI Associates</i>	Nepal , Miraj Shrestha <i>Kusum Law Firm Pvt. Ltd.</i>
Japan , Akihiro Yano <i>Yodoyabashi & Yamagami LPC</i>	Nepal , Shitoshna Kumar Shrestha <i>Kusum Law Firm Pvt. Ltd.</i>
Korea , WonSeok Cho <i>Kim & Chang</i>	New Zealand , Margaret Chen <i>K3 Legal</i>
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