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PROMOTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE LAW

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Finding confidence and
courage as a junior lawyer
interview with Peter Muzariri





PETER MUZARIRI

Interviewed by Mei Gong

"HAVE FAITH IN YOURSELF,
YOU ARE YOUR BIGGEST
ADVOCATE"

Peter was born in Zimbabwe and is a member of the Shona tribe; one of the Bantu ethnic groups of people. He moved to New Zealand (NZ) in 2004 and grew up there. He completed his education (including tertiary studies) in NZ, graduating from The University of Auckland with a BCom / LLB (Honours) conjoint degree. Shortly after graduating and being admitted to practice law in NZ in late 2020, Peter relocated to Australia to pursue new opportunities and be closer to family. Throughout his life, Peter has pursued various passions. These included drama / acting, rap music, musical instruments, and bodybuilding. However, when Peter came across the law, he found his true passion, and what he considers his calling. In this interview, Peter reflects on his professional journey thus far as well as advice for foreign qualified lawyers looking to tread a similar path.

1. Achievements and Adversities

Sitting down with Peter over a virtual Teams meeting one sunny Saturday morning, what struck me the most was Peter's 'to the point' responses - he never said more than he needs to, and never felt like he needed to fill in the silences between my questions.

This personality trait is perhaps a broader reflection of Peter's incredible amount of self-confidence and proactive attitude. This strong inner belief helped him to adapt to living in NZ (which Peter described as a **"melting pot of cultures"**), after migrating to NZ from Zimbabwe as an 8-year-old child. The strength of Peter's self-belief never wavered as he started exercising diligently (becoming a personal trainer after graduating from high school and entering into bodybuilding competitions). It is perhaps unsurprising then, that Peter is the first lawyer in his family. Despite losing out on a graduate position in NZ due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Peter was able to forge a new, and rising path, as an Australian-qualified banking and finance lawyer at Arnold Bloch Leibler, a firm which he is proud to be a part of. Arnold Bloch Leibler draws in lawyers from diverse professional and personal backgrounds and encourages them to bring their whole selves to work.

Yet what makes the above achievements more remarkable is how Peter has achieved them despite the significant adversities that he has had to face and the reasons that motivated him to embark on this path.

Peter candidly reflected on his personal experience growing up in the unstable geopolitical climate of Zimbabwe, and subsequently the financial difficulties that his family had to overcome while living in NZ (which at one point, included trying to get by on \$20 for food for himself, his mum and his sister, for a week on a regular basis).

These formative experiences instilled in him that **“law can be used as a tool in the right way”** to change people’s lives for the better. While Peter didn’t consider himself as an ‘exceptionally smart kid’ in high school, and his parents did not push him to be a lawyer, Peter nonetheless decided to complete his law studies to fulfil his aspirations on his own terms.

2. Qualifying as a NZ lawyer in Australia

When we meandered our conversation to his experience in seeking requalification in Australia, Peter was eager to share his perspective that the requalification process for a NZ lawyer in Australia is **“simpler than what people think”**. He reflected:

“All I really had to do was provide my certificate of admission from NZ, police check for both NZ and Australia, and obtain a certificate from the NZ Law Society, file a statutory declaration here in Australia, and do an application form and pay the application fee. There might have been a few additional documents to file – but in essence that was the process required to be admitted as a lawyer in Australia.”

What makes Peter’s requalification experience particularly interesting is that while he got admitted in Victoria, he moved to NSW to take out his first legal practising certificate. This is a good illustration of the mobility of Australian qualified lawyers. That is, it is very easy to obtain a practising certificate in any Australian State or Territory, provided that you are already admitted in another State or Territory.

3. Looking forward and giving back

Given Peter’s extremely organised outlook in life, I was particularly curious about what his career aspirations are. Peter reflected that he has a strong interest in private practice, so intends to stay there for most of his career (although he does not exclude possibilities of exploring academia on the side in his later life).

When asked what he was looking forward to achieving in his career, Peter outlined two main goals.

“I want to learn as much as I can in my area - become renowned in my field, and I want to be able to hit career milestones at a good time and be able to observe my improvements over time”.

Peter’s curiosity to learn more about banking and finance law is voracious, with plans to pursue a Master of Laws one day to further his technical legal knowledge. When asked about what tips he would give to aspiring Foreign Qualified Lawyers (FQLs), Peter stated that they should just **“give it a go and just do it”**. While the requalification process may seem daunting, adopting a proactive attitude will ultimately give aspiring FQLs the freedom to fully explore their potential. Here, I thought Peter’s reflection on motivation and discipline was particularly insightful:

“It is not about being motivated; it is about discipline. While motivation may help you undertake a task in the initial stages, for all of us, motivation can die. But staying disciplined means that you have a chance to complete a task (even in moments where motivation may be low).”

While Peter said this in the context of his disciplined gym/exercise routine, you may well agree with me that this advice is very apt in empowering FQLs to continue and complete their requalification journey in Australia.

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