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Thriving through authenticity

*interview with Brazilian FQL
Mayumi Hattori Martins*





MAYUMI HATTORI MARTINS

Interviewed by Manvita Gandhi and Mei Gong

Mayumi is currently a paralegal at top-tier Australian law firm, Herbert Smith Freehills (HSF) and a final year Juris Doctor student at UNSW. She is a multi-time scholarship recipient, university medallist and qualified lawyer in Brazil, having interned at the Public Defenders and Federal Prosecution Office in Brazil. She has also completed a Masters of International Commercial Law from the University of Queensland with stellar academic results throughout her tertiary studies (detailed further in the article below). Having grown up in Brazil with a Japanese background, Mayumi has lived in five countries before moving to Australia in 2019. Along with an impressive list of extracurricular, Mayumi is a lifelong learner passionate about the legal aspects of digital innovations and sustainable business solutions. She hopes to pursue a career in which she can leverage her diverse background to contribute to innovative business projects and support sustainability causes countering social inequalities and environmental disasters.

Beyond good grades and impressive extracurricular

Before we interviewed Mayumi, the first thing that struck us about her was her impressive array of academic accolades. A Bachelor of Law University Medallist (Academic Excellence award) from the University of São Paulo, Brazil. First in class of the 2020 cohort for the Master of Law program (International Commercial Law) from the University of Queensland. Last year of studying the Juris Doctor (JD) program in UNSW and having been awarded two scholarships. That's before we even mention the over 11 extracurricular (yes, you read that right) that Mayumi undertook alongside her university studies in Brazil, including being an athletics captain, participant in international mooted competitions and being the founder and president of an international law society.

In short, the consistency with which Mayumi has achieved these impressive grades while balancing a very long list of varied extracurricular, and having been able to do this across two countries is an impressive feat by itself. Yet as you will find out in this interview, to simply summarise Mayumi's journey as consisting of 'good grades and impressive extracurricular' is a significant misnomer. In this article, we seek to unfold some of the layers of her requalification journey in Australia so far and consider what practical lessons other aspiring Foreign Qualified Lawyers (**FQLs**) may draw upon for their journeys.



Making one's luck

Mayumi has this inherent bright energy that transcends through computer screens (we interviewed her via Teams one sunny afternoon). She confidently and passionately answered our questions. Interestingly, her career path was scattered with instances of sheer coincidences where Mayumi "*made her own luck*" that paved the way for where she has landed.

Describing herself as a "***confident and confrontational***" child, Mayumi decided to pursue her legal studies in Brazil. Her plans to sit for the Bar examination was forcibly delayed due to city wide protests by truck drivers. The sudden and unexpected delay prompted her to consider other career options.

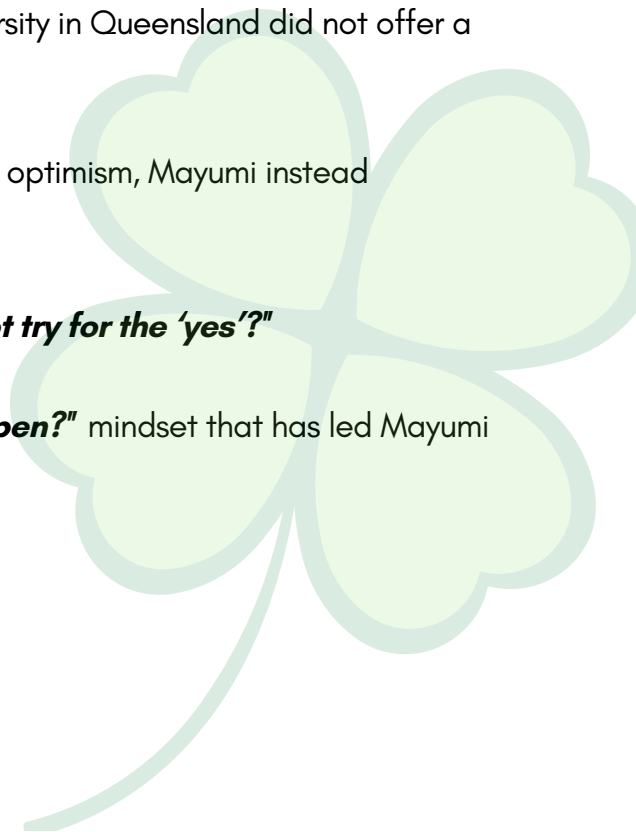
On an overseas visit to meet a friend in Adelaide, Mayumi was instantly captivated by the quality of life, the multicultural atmosphere and the beautiful beaches of Australia. Shortly after, she decided to pursue a Masters of Law in Queensland on a scholarship. Getting the scholarship was no easy feat. Since she had not technically completed her law degree in Brazil, she was not eligible to apply for the Australian scholarship. However, Mayumi persisted and travelled six hours from the countryside to meet the representatives from the University of Queensland to discuss her situation and eventually convinced them to take a chance on her.

Unfortunately, upon completing her Masters, Mayumi realised that in Australia, she needed a JD (rather than a Masters) to practice law. Since her university in Queensland did not offer a JD program, she applied to study JD at UNSW.

When we asked Mayumi how she managed to keep up her optimism, Mayumi instead responded with a rhetorical question:

'when you already have the 'no', why not try for the 'yes'?'

It is perhaps this fearless "***what's the worst that can happen?***" mindset that has led Mayumi to overcome various adversities and smashing her goals.



Challenging misconceptions, navigating cultural differences and gaining perspective



On being asked whether she faced any barriers in Australia, Mayumi frankly admitted that a lot of law firms in Australia avoided hiring international students. Acknowledging the potential reservations these firms may have towards international students, Mayumi nevertheless felt that it was a hidden, unfair and discriminatory **"blanket rule"**. She argues that:

"an international student exhibits a lot of grit and resilience when they move to another country, leave their comfort zone, study law all over again (in a completely different language and culture) in order to pursue their goals"

(and that this should be a valuable attribute for any employer).

Mayumi also admitted that there was a significant difference between the professional working norms in Australia as against Brazil in terms of the manner in which people exhibit emotions in a professional setting. In Brazil, it was very normal for colleagues to hug each other and share their emotions freely. In contrast, Mayumi found that in Australia, colleagues are more emotionally reserved. Mayumi advocates that people should be more vulnerable and open to sharing their emotions, whether socially or at work, as it engenders warmth and authentic connections.

It is perhaps apt to note that Mayumi is multi-lingual. In fact, she is proficient in Portuguese, English, Spanish, intermediate in French, currently learning Mandarin and Japanese. While her reasons for learning these languages are varied, a common thread was her desire to communicate and gain insights into the **"subtleties of different cultural norms"**. Mayumi is certainly making significant headways into understanding cultural norms and bridging these differences in a meaningful manner.

Giving back to the legal profession and the path ahead

When asked about why she does so much extracurricular outside of her work and full time studies, Mayumi had a heart-warming answer:

"I have a lot of passions. I want to give a lot of myself to everything because I feel so privileged to have done and experienced so much."

Amongst her various current extracurricular roles include being a Community Manager at The Legal Forecast - a not for profit organisation seeking to bring change in the legal profession using technology and innovation. Further, Mayumi is on the Advisory Board of RestartUs - a start-up that seeks to create a "safer and more equal world" for "low-income juveniles, adults and families living in underserved areas". Driven by her passion to make the legal industry a more inclusive space, Mayumi is also a Student Volunteer with Diverse Women in Law.

Not unexpectedly for someone with lots of passions and interests, Mayumi has a lot of things that she hopes to accomplish in due course. Amongst her numerous ambitious goals included contributing to digital law (particularly smart legal contracts) to revolutionise sustainability in supply chains; owning a plant-based business (stemming from her passion for environmental governance issues); and working with refugees in a pro bono capacity.

Nearing the end of the interview when we asked Mayumi whether she had any advice for our readers, Mayumi was quick to point to the importance of mental health, especially for international students looking for a legal job in Australia and working extra hours. She said:

"Don't forget to take care of your health first. Be vulnerable. It is okay to be vulnerable with yourself. It only makes you stronger. Contrary to the concept of 'being tough' for not showing any emotions, it is actually sharing our vulnerabilities and getting the support we need that make us truly able to conquer the world."

With a person who has achieved so much in so many different areas, it is only a matter of time that we will be hear more about Mayumi's forthcoming adventures. So watch this space!

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