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# TO AUS, WITH LAW

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Traversing industries and countries  
- reflections of a consultant turned  
lawyer  
*interview with Roshan Mark Singh  
Sidhu*





# R O S H A N M A R K S I N G H S I D H U

[LinkedIn profile link](#)

By Ying Ning Loo and Mei Gong

Roshan is a lawyer specialising in startup and tech, ex Citibank and ex Boston Consulting Group consultant, and has extensive experience across several fields such as Banking & Finance, Legal, Corporate & Public Sector Advisory. He is passionate about growing the broader tech & startup ecosystem and is always happy to help startup founders with legal questions & needs.

**Fun fact:** Roshan is a cat dad + coffee snob + long suffering Manchester United fan.

## a) How curiosity sparked a love of learning across three countries

When we met Roshan virtually over Teams one Friday afternoon, what struck us was his relentless curiosity - to learn and explore the world. This was a continuing thread underlying his story, with his decision to study law sparked by his love for ***“history and international relations”***.

Roshan's love for learning has also seen him learn from some of the world's best academic institutions across three countries - UK, Malaysia and Australia. Roshan fondly recalled that his studies in the UK were characterised by ***“late lunches and study sessions on rolling lawns with huge swans strolling around, who are surprisingly violent creatures.”***

When we asked Roshan what was the biggest difference that he observed between his experiences in studying in different countries, he remarked:

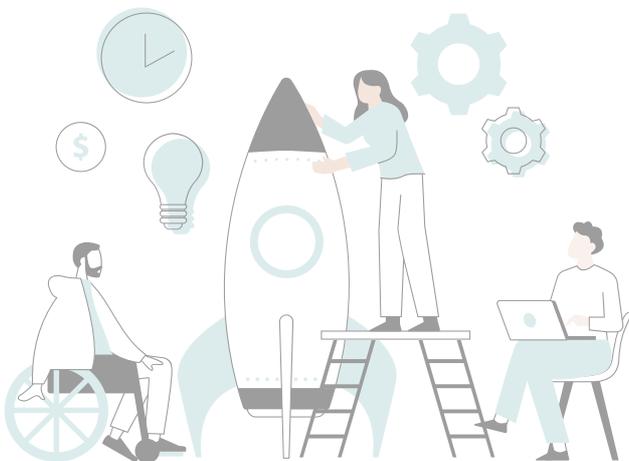
***“It is hard to compare as it's like comparing apples with oranges. There was not a significant degree of difference between UK and Australia. UK was more academically vigorous in terms of workload, whereas in Malaysia, the focus was a bit more on rote learning. Comparatively, in Australia, the subjects I took during my Masters was pretty commercial and focused on my researching and writing skills.”***



Yet it is undeniable that Roshan's academic journey has been both fulfilling and remarkable, having studied his A levels in Malaysia while serving as the head delegate and organising chairperson for various model United Nations conferences around the world. While studying Law in university, he was part of the team that successfully organised the largest overseas Malaysian student leaders conference. His most recent streak of academic learning was with the University of Sydney where he completed a Master of Laws while giving back to refugees by being a mentor and helping them to increase their proficiency in English.

## b) Transferrable lessons from traversing industries

One thing that may surprise you as you learn about Roshan's journey is that he did not join private practice right after law school. Instead, he decided to enter the commercial world in banking & finance at Citibank and in management consulting at the Boston Consulting Group in Malaysia, before his substantive career in practising law kicked off.



Yet this path proved to be a difficult one, as at the time that Roshan worked in Citibank, the Global Financial Crisis still had lingering impact and banking overall was a **“depressed industry, with Citibank having closed down its investment banking division.”**

After meeting his wife, Roshan decided that he wanted to pursue a Master of Law (having tried non-legal areas of work), where his interest in trade law and international disputes (including understanding the regulatory framework for start-ups) led him to come back to practising law.

All of these experiences culminated to Roshan working in a small commercial litigation firm, where he focused on doing enforcement work around foreign exchange markets. For a brief period of time, Roshan also worked as a paralegal for Anti-Slavery Australia, Australia's largest anti-slavery and forced labour charity before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.

Roshan currently works as a corporate & commercial lawyer who mainly have clients in the startup and technology space. When we asked Roshan about the key transferrable lessons that he has learnt from his time as a banking associate and management consultant that is applicable to his legal career, he remarked:

***“There are probably two key lessons. The biggest one is problem solving, it doesn’t matter what industry you are in, it is applicable to all professional services industries, you are paid money to solve client problems by applying critical thinking skills, you just use a different set of tools in each role. The second one is project management, in consulting, you learn to juggle multiple stakeholders while progressing the project.”***

### c) Overcoming adversities in the job searching process

Roshan was very candid that his job searching process in Australia can be distilled into one word, **“horrendous”**. When we probed Roshan further on why his job searching experience was so unpleasant, he elaborated on the fact that:

***“It was hard to explain my non-Australian experience. They looked at my previous non-Australian work experience and did not understand the value of it. So you were stuck in a catch-22 situation, even an entry level role required some level of Australian experience which you couldn’t get without having previous Australian work experience”***

Like many foreign qualified lawyers (FQLs), Roshan found his visa conditions was a barrier to him landing a job, even though he was already luckier than most as he was able to qualify for a longer term working visa with his wife. Most employers did not understand the often opaque & confusing conditions around working rights for different visa holders and almost exclusively preferred to hire staff that were Australian citizens or permanent residents.

Roshan’s advice to other frustrated job seekers is to **“just keep applying, grow & utilise your own professional and personal network and understand how to market your skills to the right audience”**, as Roshan eventually met a boss who hired him because they shared a similar background (both had commercial experience in Banking and Management Consulting before practising as a lawyer).



Another contributory factor to Roshan's eventual success in his job searching process was likely his ability to apply and justify the value of his previous jobs in Australia. For example, Roshan previously worked as a graduate student researcher where he developed a strong foundation for undertaking legislative and academic research which improved his legal research capabilities significantly. Further, when Roshan was a paralegal with Anti-Slavery Australia, he learnt how to handle sensitive information and maintain appropriate confidentiality protocols.

#### **d) For the love of start-ups, cats and food**

When we asked Roshan about what his passions were outside of work, Roshan was eager to share his love for working with start-ups where he loved **"learning new things all the time"**. Roshan also gets to act as external general counsel to some of the start-ups & scale-ups that he advises and has even helped one company to hire their own in-house counsel in one instance. It is certainly a field that canvases many areas of law, from corporate advisory, litigation, privacy, commercial contracting, taxation issues, intellectual property, non-compete arrangements and Roshan's agility in the law has certainly seen him thrive in this area.

Roshan also loves spending time with his 2 cats (domestic short hairs) and enjoys listening to metal and old school rock and roll. Roshan is also a serious foodie and particularly enjoys exploring food scene in Sydney, including hunting for the best banana leaf rice. Between all of these hobbies, Roshan's love for Sydney's sunny beaches and reading science fiction and fantasy books, Roshan's life can certainly be described as a jam-packed adventure!



## e) Tips for FQLs

Roshan's tips for those aspiring to qualify and practice law in Australia is very practical, including:

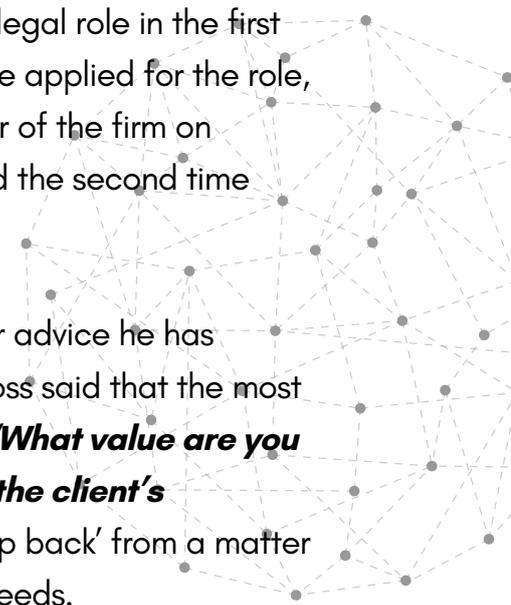


**1. Get a migration agent and understand your visa options so you can make an informed decision.** Roshan remarked that *“A lot of people don't understand the process and think it is too complex, including sponsorship by companies when it is not.”*

**2. Networking is crucial.** It is critical to understand what the practice of law involves in Australia and it is vital have a network of connections that you can lean on for advice or opportunities.

**3. Persistence is important.** Roshan remarked that he got his paralegal role in the first year of his legal studies in Australia. He was initially rejected when he applied for the role, but less than 2 months later, he connected with the principal partner of the firm on LinkedIn and found that they were hiring a paralegal and succeeded the second time around.

Last, but not least, Roshan also added a tip based on the best career advice he has received to date, which he gained from a former boss. His former boss said that the most important asset we have is our time and it is important to consider *“What value are you bringing to the table in each matter? Have you truly answered the client's question?”*. We certainly thought this is a helpful tip for FQLs to 'step back' from a matter and ensure that they have most effectively served their customer's needs.



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