



Danielle Flint

MAHRI

Senior associate
Deacons

Education

I have a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Commerce in Management/HR from Murdoch University, Western Australia. I finished both degrees in 1999.

First job

I started my legal career doing insurance and workers' compensation law for a firm in Perth. After that I worked in workplace relations and safety law at several other Perth firms before moving to Deacons about two and a half years ago.

Why workplace relations/safety law?

When I was at school I didn't know exactly what I wanted to do but I wanted to study something that gave me a definite career path, which is why I chose law. When I was signing up for law, the university encouraged people to do double degrees so I also signed up for commerce. In my first year I did a management unit as part of my commerce

degree and that really sparked my interest in the area so I tailored my studies towards HR.

By the time I got into the workforce, I already knew I wanted to do workplace relations and safety law and when I moved into that area I was really happy. I found the practice of workplace relations and safety law to be more stimulating and interesting than I'd imagined because the area is always changing, is intellectually challenging and it involves people.

Current duties

The best description of my role is that I'm like an HR and safety consultant. HR and safety managers ring me on a daily basis to talk about a situation they have, to check what the law is and what the legal parameters of their issues are. I spend a lot of my day on the phone, just talking people

I have a propensity to work too hard... I think it's important to pull yourself up on it every once in a while and ask yourself when was the last time you exercised or saw your family.

through decisions and the laws surrounding them.

I also draft contracts, policies and procedures, as well as doing court work. If an employer has an unfair dismissal, safety prosecution or discrimination claim, I'll work on the case before the hearing and then brief a barrister who will appear in court.

Challenges

Probably the most challenging part of my job is the constantly changing nature of the law. A good example of this is when the Work Choices Bill came in last year. When it was tabled in parliament, we spent all night reading it and it was a huge challenge to be up-to-speed when there was only a short period of time from when it was introduced and when it was passed.

I have a big challenge coming up in my working life as I'm expecting my first child in May and I'll have to learn how to balance everything. I'm not sure if I'll work full-time but luckily the firm I work for is very flexible and supportive.

Lessons

One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that you can't take it all too seriously. What we do is very serious and it's important

that we get it right, but it's also important to keep some perspective on life and to keep in touch with family and friends.

I have a propensity to work too hard, as most lawyers do, and I think it's important to pull yourself up on it every once in a while and ask yourself when was the last time you exercised or saw your family.

Professional development

As well as being a member of AHRI, I'm a member of the Industrial Relations Society. At the moment I'm studying a Certificate III in OHS at TAFE, which covers the practical side of safety such as workplace assessments and inspections.

When I'm on maternity leave I intend to focus on more study, probably in the safety area because I've already got HR and legal qualifications.

10-year plan

In 10 years time I'd like to be enjoying my career as much as I am now. I'm not sure what is in store but my focus in the coming years is to continue enjoying things and maintaining a work/life balance. At Deacons there is the opportunity to become a 'special counsel', which is a role that recognises your seniority and expertise in a particular area but is different from being a partner. I can see myself aiming for that but, if I was lucky enough to be a partner, that would also be wonderful.

Danielle Flint spoke with Bridget Cull.