



Alan Grinsell-Jones

MAHRI

Special Counsel
Deacons

Education

I completed a Bachelor of Law degree and a Bachelor of Jurisprudence degree that included a three-year major in industrial relations. What started as a summer holiday job working as a process worker on a factory line in Botany, Sydney, ended up as a two-year break half-way through my study. I realised law and IR was what I really wanted to do.

First job

While I was studying, I started working in an HR capacity at the Caltex oil refinery in Kurnell, Sydney. On my first day the oil operator workers went on a two-week strike.

At 28, I landed my first full-time job as an industrial officer at the Employers Federation of NSW. I answered queries relating to industrial relations, awards and conditions of employment. I worked there

for eight years and was industrial relations manager when I left to join what is now Deacons.

Why industrial relations?

When I was at university, I planned to do economics as my major but after six months I found it too theoretical. So after one year I converted to industrial relations. I find IR interesting because it's constantly changing and you are dealing with different issues and people every day.

Current duties

As part of Deacons National Workplace Relations practice, I provide legal advice to employers in all areas of employment, including contracts, awards and agreement entitlements, occupational health and safety, discrimination, privacy and workers compensation. I generally liaise with HR practitioners or the chief executive. As I am based in Canberra much of my work is in the federal public service area.

I try to keep clients out of court and prefer to advise them before they get into trouble, rather than by trying to fix things up.

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Challenges

Keeping abreast of current legislation and the IR laws is always a challenge, as it is one of the most amended pieces of legislation under the Commonwealth government. I also need to be aware of recent decisions of courts and tribunals.

Providing legal advice that is relevant to my clients and putting it in context for their workplace is a challenge, as well as providing solutions and ensuring my advice adds value to their business.

A personal challenge for me is ensuring the practice is growing and is viable.

Lessons

I think one of the biggest lessons is to never think you know the answer off the top of your head – always check. No matter how sure you are about the law you should check before you open your mouth. If you give your client the wrong advice it leaves them in an awkward position and does nothing for your or the firm's reputation.

The law is always changing, so you need to make sure you are referring to the correct legislation, are aware of any recent decisions and giving the right information.

Professional development

I am a member of AHRI and I spoke for AHRI at HR Week in September. I have spoken at 18 seminars in the last year addressing mentoring groups, special-interest groups and AHRI events as well as internal firm seminars, inhouse client

seminars and those organised by professional conference holders. Networking keeps me in the loop, gives me a broader perspective of HR, and helps me to know that the advice I am providing is relevant.

In the mid-1980s I did an intensive management development course at the Australian Graduate School of Management. It was a 28-day live-in program and went from 8am to 10pm. Although exhausting, it was very interesting and covered topics including industrial relations, general management issues, business planning and development and financial issues. Since then I have been learning on the job.

10-year plan

I don't necessarily want to be performing my current role but I'd still like to take an active interest in IR and HR in a different capacity, like mentoring lawyers, rather than a hands-on role. I'd also love to travel more. South America fascinates me and up until now I haven't had time to travel there. ✕

Alan Grinsell-Jones spoke
with Christine Antoniou.