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“Round my kitchen table podcast: the real way to get a training contract”
23 September 2011

Chair:

[Alex Aldridge](#) (AA)

Guests:

[Krish Nair](#), who has a 2.1 from Edinburgh University (KN)

[Kevin Poulter](#), Employment Law guru of [Bircham Dyson Bell](#) (KP)

Regular guest, an employment lawyer at Bircham Dyson Bell, tells LPC graduate [Krish Nair](#), who has a 2.1 from Edinburgh University, the real way to land a training contract – in 7 snappy minutes of high quality stereo.

With a little urging from me, Kevin – who started out with a high street firm in Doncaster in 2003 and has since gone on to forge close friendships with the likes of Justice Secretary [Kenneth Clarke](#) – explains how this generation of wannabe lawyers need to think outside the box in order to net a job.

AA: Kevin, been through the process, what’s your advice to Krish?

KP: Well, it’s not great, because at the moment we’re at the stage where the bottle neck seems to be the training contract, the true is, you can get a training contract through Clifford Chance, and at the end there is no at the end of that.

AA: Well, they are if you’ve done your contract at Clifford Chance

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KP: Well, arguably but I'm sure their retention rate is not 100%, so the bottle neck keeps moving and the trouble is there is a double bottle neck if you're lucky enough to get a training contract

AA: Comment here, not audible, something regarding Doncaster

KP: sighs

AA: No seriously!

KP: Seriously? I think you do it however you can do it. And whether that means...

AA: He (Krish) needs some effective advice (slaps hands) like what do you do? Imagine: You got to get a training contract within the next few months, what you going to do?

KP: If it was me now, I'd be dressing up in my suit, going around high street firms of London or wherever it might be, Milton Keynes, and I'd be saying can I have a chat with your recruitment person or managing partner.

AA: High street firms they do a lot of Legal Aid, they got no money?

KP: They got no money or disposable cash but if you can make yourself an attractive proposition (to them) as a trainee you can be profitable you don't have to be a drain on the resources, you can be profitable. If you got the experience which you've already got from the CAB ([Citizens Advice Bureau](#)) you can say look I can do this, day one, start making money for you. That's what I would start to push. And I would be presenting myself in such a way that I'm an attractive proposition, not a drain on resources, yes I want a salary for a bit, but again without giving to many guarantees, you can say look at the end of the year I would have brought in more money than I've cost. This is easy to say, and it is hard work.

AA: No, it's a good idea.

KP: And it means taking time out, trawling the streets in the winter months

AA: Mmm (in agreement)

KP: But it might work, it might pay off. Nobody else as far as I'm aware is doing that.

AA: In that case, you might get a firm that says, wow! I'm impressed by this person. We're really broke, but we might be able to give you a training contract, suddenly, you're back in the world of unpaid internship's...

KP: Yup, which I'd never say to anyone it is a good idea to do but equally I'd say if you got the offer of a training contract you'd be foolish to turn it down.

AA: Wait wait! Even if you got to work unpaid?

KP: Well, if you're sat at home watching [Jeremy Kyle](#) (laughter) I don't think it's right, I don't think you should be doing it, but equally I don't think it's right you should be speaking to your godfather who is a partner at a law firm saying 'can you give us some work experience and give me your job'

AA: Krish, you're working for Citizens Advice you're working unpaid?

KN: yeah...

KP: What's the difference?

KN: I completely agree with Kevin I think once we were just passively sending in applications here and there, and it was sufficient. Now, you need to be active, dress up in a suit and knock on doors. I completely agree with that, yeah.

KP: But people are not doing that (knocking on doors) But now (completing applications) is easier than it used to be! I used to fill out application by hand, now we got computers it's a 'cut and paste' job and people can do two hundred applications in a day

AA: Mmm

KP: People do! You get two hundred rejection letter or no response at all. But people do this, it's a much...people are no longer going out knocking on doors.

AA: There is an interesting point there because firms always say you can't cut and paste your details as you need to tailor each one, but the reality is many of these firms are very similar.

KP: They (law firms) pass them through a scanner and they are picking up on key words.

AA: So we got a plan here, number 1; get out in a suit and knock on doors. Number 2; do some cut and pasting, but some 'well thought through' cut and pasting.

KP: Strategic cut and paste!

AA: Strategic cut and pasting...

KP: Throw in the key words, go through their (the firm) website and put them into the application and it will get picked up by the computer. Number 3; have we got a number 3? As in...

KP: Get experience!

AA: Work experience?

KP: Work experience, legal experience

AA: Everyone's got that these days?

KN: Sometimes I question the value of legal experience. I have truckloads of legal experience and no training contract, I know 2,3,4,5 people who have zero legal experience and have training contracts already.

AA: There is a question mark over that

KP: Again it depends on the firm that you're applying to.

- All in agreement -

AA: What about finding contacts?

KP: Yup.

AA: I mean we're sitting here; you're with top legal firm [Bircham Dyson Bell](#) London. Krish, got no job. You know, if Krish could talk to you to say 'get me a job in your law firm' would that work?

KP: I think my influence (laughs) you're greatly exaggerating! But that said...

AA: You said you ran that place?! (laughter) *Caveat*: He didn't really say that!

KP: No, the reality is if you have a contact who is more influential than I am absolutely exploit it, 'cause if you don't someone else will.

AA: I still haven't figured out the big firms, because they still say their applications are so objective...

KP: OK, I'll tell you something that happens. If you get work experience and you do a good job, your name will be remembered. But I'm sure that's no great secret to anyone, but the key to that is getting work experience, getting in front of people, and if you get that and you are doing a good job then when the application process comes round your name will be flagged up. And I think that's true of the small firms, medium sized firms and big firms. If you can use contacts to get that? Then do it. I've certainly, when I was working in Sheffield, given friends (names) or people who I thought would be good, I would give them an opportunity to come and spend a day, week or whatever just shadowing and I think that's one way to do it. It's not a guarantee of anything; you have to perform on the day. You can't just sit back and relax, you have to prove yourself and that is only right. So, wherever the contact is, if you can exploit it, do it.

AA: Krish, Kevin it's been a pleasure we will be back next week, good night!