A Legal Career Journey: From Trainee Solicitor to Partner

Real Estate Partner, Mark Benham, began his career with Lester Aldridge LLP in 1998 as part of his university work experience, following that he began his training contract at the firm in 2000.

Mark was promoted to Partner in 2007 and is 'noted for his strength across development and strategic land matters, frequently acting on behalf of housebuilder clients. A source calls him “very personable, pragmatic and sensible.”' (Chambers and Partners 2019).

We talked to Mark about his journey from his work experience to becoming a Partner at Lester Aldridge.

What was the process of you becoming a Partner? (LA Career history)

My first involvement with Lester Aldridge was in 1998, at the end of my second year at university when I did a month’s work experience in the Corporate Law Team (which included working for a couple of existing Partners – Grant Esterhuizen and Susan Cowan).

My work experience allowed me the opportunity to impress and helped to get me an interview for a training contract. Two of my three interviewees, Karen Thompson and Susan Cowan, are still Partners at LA (and both are still involved in graduate recruitment).

I started my training contract in 2000, qualifying as a Real Estate Solicitor in 2002, where I have remained ever since.

I became an Associate Solicitor in 2005 and was promoted to Partner in 2007.

What made you choose to do a training contract at Lester Aldridge?

It really came on the back of my work experience. I liked the vibe of the firm and how the trainees were the driving force behind the (plentiful) social activities.

LA was also about the right size for me; large enough to attract quality work, small enough so it was possible to get to know most people and to receive direct exposure to clients and meaningful involvement in transactions.

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What seats did you train in?

Private Client, Real Estate, Litigation & Recoveries and then back to Real Estate.

Did you always know you wanted to specialise in the area of law you work in now?

Absolutely not! I disliked studying property law at university, although I quite enjoyed conveyancing at law school. I certainly didn't want to do a seat in Real Estate, but I'm delighted that I had no choice!

I soon realised that being involved in real estate transactions could be exciting and rewarding, and was a million miles away from my university experience of property law.

What has been your career highlight to date?

It is difficult to choose one highlight (as everyone says), but my promotions were proud days.

Exchanging contracts on eight development sites in one afternoon in 2015 for a national housebuilder, on the last day of its financial year, was a memorable day. I exchanged the last one in a petrol station forecourt!

Twice advising Monzo Bank on the relocation of its head office in London is another highlight.

It was also a privilege to present at LA's AGM last year about Corporate Social Responsibility.

If you could go back to when you were a trainee and give yourself one piece of advice, what would it be?

If someone gives you an opportunity to step outside of your comfort zone, then take it.

And, do you really think it's a good idea to throw a big Mexican party on the night before a Professional Skills Course exam?

What advice do you have for current trainees?

1. Ask questions (and then ask some more).
2. Throw yourself into each seat, regardless of whether you want to be in it. The more you put in, the more

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you will get back.

3. Build the right network, both internally and externally. The opportunity for Monzo to become a client came about because the GC used to be a trainee in my team.

4. Enjoy yourselves. My two years as a trainee were an absolute blast.

If you would like more information about our legal career opportunities across our Bournemouth, Southampton and London offices, visit our graduate recruitment page, email us or call 01202 786161.

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