

SPEAKING UP – AN INTERVIEW WITH NINA VON GROOTE

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Nina von Groote was a lawyer in our London office from 2000 to 2012 in the Finance team. She is now Company Secretary at Future Biogas, a leading developer and operator of anaerobic digestion plants* across the UK.

Nina loves her in-house role. “I have enjoyed aspects of being in private practice but I just find it so exciting to play a direct part in the growth of a business,” she says. Nina was, until recently, Head of Legal at Future Biogas, a company set up by her husband ten years’ ago and which has grown in that time from five to 160 employees with a legal department of four. She recently stepped back to take on the Company Secretarial function.

Nina enjoys seeing her work make a clear and immediate difference to the business and finds it rewarding to be part of a team that consists of people with very different skill sets and roles who all work together towards the same goal. “I like being the ‘client’ for a change,” says Nina, “though not one who makes unreasonable demands, I hope!” She is less keen on the inevitable consequence of working in a fast-growing business. “Extremely long hours – including weekends – are stressful at times, as the stakes can be very high”.

Describing herself as a ‘completer-finisher’, Nina says “I want to do a good job, am driven to sort out any kind of mess, and feel very uncomfortable if I have not understood something or cleared up some doubt in my mind. This has held me back as it can seriously slow me down, but it has also meant that I have been able to warn about issues that everyone else missed,” she says.

A creative person, Nina had her sights set on art school but reviewed this decision in light of a poor art A-level result. “My talent was obviously wasted on the examiners!” She decided that a career where her success depended on other people’s tastes was perhaps not ideal and instead studied Classics. “This suited my other passion (languages), and I became interested in law (also a kind of language) when I was working at the European Parliament, so I went back to university for an LLB.”

It makes Nina happy to know that the work Future Biogas does helps to fight climate change and counts being involved in this as one of her best decisions. Her worst? “Picking a renewable energy business of which my husband is the MD...,” she jokes.

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What's Nina's secret to success? "In business, it's important to keep your experience as broad as possible for as long as possible," she says. "Also, be kind to everyone you meet; you may well meet them again!" She advises women in particular who suffer 'imposter syndrome': "I would tell anyone who thinks they are not good enough: trust me, there are plenty of people out there practicing law who are a great deal worse than you!"

Nina's time at WFW taught her that practicing law "is not an intellectual pursuit, but a tool to help business succeed." She also learned not to be awed by someone else's confidence or seniority but to trust her instincts and speak up. "If something does not make sense to me, this is usually because there is actually something wrong,"

she says.

She remembers former colleagues with fondness. Rubin Weston was 'enthusiastic, kind and encouraging' and James Watters really 'knew his stuff.' "I learned masses from watching how he interacted with his clients," she says. There were many other great people: Michael Kenny, David Robinson, David Osborne, Sally-Anne Panton, Winsome Parris and Lana Landsberg, to name but a few. She describes the firm's culture as 'supportive of colleagues, but also never forgetting the client.'

Nina wants to get better at keeping in touch with former colleagues. "I have come across WFW people (past and present) advising the "other side", which has been very entertaining (especially when they did not recognise me until the closing dinner)."

It is good to know that when Nina is not rushed off her feet at work, helping with homework and working in the garden, she still allows herself time to daydream.

* Future Biogas plants convert a wide range of feedstocks into clean, renewable energy, through a process of anaerobic digestion which produces biogas. Biogas can either be used to generate green electricity, or upgraded into biomethane and injected in to the UK's national gas network.

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