

ALUMNI Q&A WITH... LOUINE MCKISACK

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Louine McKisack was a trainee and then an associate in the London corporate team from 1991 to 1995. She is now Senior Legal Counsel, HR – Europe, Eurasia and Africa at Chubb, the world’s largest publicly traded property and casualty insurance company, serving consumers and companies of all sizes with traditional and specialty insurance products and industry-leading claims and risk engineering services.

Q: Describe your role. Do you miss private practice?

A: I am Chubb’s employment counsel for the Europe and Eurasia & Africa regions. I report to the General Counsel for Europe, Eurasia & Africa and provide legal support for all labour and employment matters in these regions, including legal matters arising from staffing relationships, litigation, restructuring, M&A/divestitures, automatic employment transfer provisions, site moves, and managing outside counsel. I haven’t worked in private practice for nearly 20 years and am sure that it is very different now from the way I remember it. I have fond memories of camaraderie, fun and support from my colleagues and enjoyed working in an international environment. It is good to see that there are many more senior women in the practice now and that the firm has a greater emphasis on diversity and culture.

Q: What do you enjoy about your role? What do you dislike? What is a typical day?

A: I love the variety and international nature of my work, and the fact that I don’t have a typical day.

Q: What motivates you?

A: Interesting work and humour – my role provides many opportunities for both.

Q: Did you consider any other careers?

A: No.

Q: What is the best and worst decision you have ever made or what is the strangest/funniest thing that happened to you during your career?

A: The best decision I made was taking my father’s advice to study languages at university instead of history, as I gained a practical skill as well as a degree. I’ve made many bad decisions and just hope I learn from them.

Q: What advice would you give for people building their careers? Do you think it is harder for women and if so, why?

A: Opportunities in the workplace for women have improved since I started out, which is encouraging, but there is still a way to go to improve pay and promotion prospects for women and other under-represented groups. I'm fortunate that my employer, Chubb, is very active in promoting diversity.

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Q: What were the most valuable lessons you learnt at WFW? How do you think this experience helped you to succeed in your present role?

A: I learned to be flexible at WFW and had the opportunity to work for different teams during my time there. I used to assist the employment team, working with Margaret Burton and Angharad Harris, and now I am an employment lawyer. I gained broad experience at WFW, not only of the law but also practical skills such as project management and working with a variety of people. This facilitated my move to an in-house career.

Q: Were there any people that you particularly enjoyed working with at WFW?

A: I have great respect for William Fossick, who was my boss when I was newly qualified, and Jan Mellmann, also in the corporate team. I learned a great deal from them. I also enjoyed working for Nigel Thomas as a trainee in Oslo and appreciated the opportunity to work abroad. I am still in touch with friends I made during my time at WFW, and value those relationships.

Q: How would you describe the culture of WFW?

A: I recall a culture of supporting trainees and junior staff but also pressure during lean times.

Q: Do you keep in touch with the firm? And fellow alumni? What value do you see in this?

A: I do keep in touch with friends I used to work with. I am part of an informal network and we support each other professionally and personally and help each other with referrals and advice. The WFW alumni programme will help us build on this. I think the legal profession can learn from the accountancy firms who maintain good relationships with their alumni, which supports ongoing professional relationships.

Q: What do you do to relax?

A: I play bridge and go to the theatre. I went to see 'Lungs' recently at the Old Vic, which I enjoyed. I tried to see 'Death of Salesman', but part of the ceiling collapsed during the first act, so the theatre was evacuated. I hope to see the play in December instead, but while leaving the theatre I saw a colleague in the crowd, who explained this was her second unsuccessful attempt to see the play, so I may not be lucky. We are very fortunate in London to have so much choice.

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