

Venture further with Brannavan

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I wasn't sure I wanted to be a lawyer when I applied for a summer clerk position in 2006. My background was film and popular music, and I had pretensions of being a writer. The great thing I have found about working at Buddle Findlay is that I haven't had to compromise on that. I have had great experience as a lawyer. I have also had four novels published since starting at Buddle Findlay, and my latest has been long-listed for the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards (fiction).

I knew about Buddle Findlay as my then girlfriend (now wife) summer-clerked the previous year. I could see that she had a great time, and when it was my turn to apply, I knew it was a firm that had a great team environment and did top-notch work.

The thing that instantly struck me about Buddle Findlay was that everyone was interested in me as a person. In my interview, a partner talked to me about country music and the fact I used to do pranks for *Salient*, the Victoria University student magazine. I had a great summer clerk group and it was an incredibly social summer.

I started in the property team when I came back as a law clerk in 2009. I had taken a year off before starting to do my masters in film and popular music studies and backpacked through South America and North and West Africa.

I admittedly chose property as I didn't want to work on the same floor as my girlfriend. While that wasn't the most rigorous decision-making process, I haven't regretted my choice. A couple of key clients were working on major infrastructure projects. I was immediately thrown into helping organise property rights for Contact Energy in what was New Zealand's largest wind farm project and in Z Energy's acquisition of Shell.

As I started during the Global Financial Crisis, I also worked closely with the litigation team. There were a lot of property issues that arose out of the collapse of finance companies, and from various liquidations and receiverships. I enjoyed working with the litigation team as a result, and continued working on general litigation issues. To this day, I am 50/50 in the property and litigation teams, and I specialise in property disputes.

One of the things I have most enjoyed about Buddle Findlay is that as a junior you get excellent work experience. I have had excellent client contact from my first day. My bosses are very conscious of letting the juniors get stuck in.

A highlight has been junioring in the Supreme Court in a constitutionally significant judicial review case. I was involved in the case from the moment the agreement was drafted (in the property team) all the way through to the various High Court, Court of Appeal and Supreme Court hearings (in the litigation team). I drafted one of the key clauses, and it was nerve-wracking sitting five metres away while the Supreme Court analysed my sentence structure.

Other highlights included my first solo appearance in the High Court. A week after I was admitted, I bankrupted a property developer who had closed one of my favourite Wellington cinemas. I also got to go to Papua New Guinea to do preparatory work for a case.

The environment is also extremely supportive. I have made a lot of very close friends at Buddle Findlay. The senior staff are invested in wanting to make the junior staff better lawyers, but are also willing to have a laugh, a coffee or a drink. They are also interesting people too, and are keen to talk about their own passions or things completely unconnected to law. It is an approachable and friendly environment.

Outside of work though, Buddle Findlay has been extremely generous in assisting my writing. Buddle Findlay gave me over a year off to live in Paris to write my second novel. I was even able to extend my time off to go to the Cannes Film Festival as a reviewer. I was keen to stay with Buddle Findlay when I returned as it allowed me to have a good balance between work and other interests.

It can be difficult to determine which law firm to choose. You only get a couple of hours and a few interactions to evaluate an

environment that may ultimately shape your future legal career. All law firms try to be on their best behaviour in the recruiting process. Ultimately, where you choose comes down to what you think would work best for you, in terms of your legal career or any other considerations you may have. For me, Buddle Findlay has given me a fantastic environment to get great legal experience, while also giving me time and encouragement to pursue my own creative passions.

Brannavan Gnanalingam is a senior associate in our Wellington litigation team.

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