

Venture further with Susan

Susan Rowe

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I started my career with Buddle Findlay almost 20 years ago as a (nervous) summer clerk in the Wellington office. I had previously summer clerked for another large national firm at the end of my third year and my flatmate that summer had spoken highly of her experience with Buddle Findlay. I was fortunate enough to have another opportunity to summer clerk at the end of my fourth year and I was keen to work for Buddle Findlay. I was impressed not only with the work I got to do that summer but also with the people. By the end of my summer I knew I wanted to start my career with Buddle Findlay.

Years of watching TV law shows meant that I only wanted to work in litigation. I remember thinking there was no need to rotate through different teams but I found the rotation experience gave me a much wider appreciation of the firm and helped confirm what area of law I was interested in.

After four years in Wellington working for the employment and civil litigation team I had itchy feet and wanted to travel and get work experience outside of New Zealand. Buddle Findlay was very understanding and supportive of my plans. I left New Zealand and, after spending time in Europe, moved to Sydney to work in the insurance and commercial litigation teams of a large multinational law firm. I loved my time in Australia but when I decided to return to New Zealand I chose to come back to Christchurch where my family was based. Relocating was as easy as a phone call as Buddle Findlay had an office in Christchurch and I didn't have to apply anywhere else.

I remember worrying about what the work would be like in Christchurch after going from a firm of 700 people in Sydney to around 45 in Christchurch. I needn't have worried as the range of litigation work was similar and I had more autonomy in a smaller team. I have had a fantastic learning experience since re-joining and some really strong professional mentors to guide me along the way. Within our litigation team I was fortunate enough to work for over 10 years with two partners who were then appointed to the Christchurch judiciary. One became the first female High Court judge to be appointed in Christchurch (Dunningham J) and another was appointed as an Employment Court judge (Smith J).

I became a litigation partner in 2015 and it's amazing to see how many of the staff I met that first summer are in partnership with me today. Out of the junior staff in the Wellington employment team when I joined as a law clerk; I am now the employment partner in Christchurch, one is a partner heading the Auckland employment team and the other is a partner in the Wellington team.

Work is not everything though! Outside of work I have two boys under 10 years of age and I have taken two periods of parental leave of up to one year each time. I returned to work part-time after each child and I ended up working three to four days a week over a seven year period. The firm was very accommodating about flexible working arrangements and working part-time made it easier to juggle work and family life. I definitely try to reserve weekends for the family and you will find me outside with them as much as possible.

I am now actively involved in recruitment for our Christchurch office and I understand the process from both sides. I can still clearly remember my summer clerk interviews and the nerves of attending the drinks functions. If I could look back at that time and tell my university self one thing, it would be to "relax" and not worry so much about the interview! The recruitment process is not about testing you but rather about finding out if you are the right "fit". This has to work for both parties. I look for someone who has done their homework and knows what they like about our firm, and who is also articulate and passionate about what they do in or outside of university.

Choosing a firm is a big decision but you should trust your own instincts; you will know what people you want to work with. I hope your summer clerking experience is like mine in that it is only the first step in a long and successful working career with Buddle Findlay.

Susan Rowe is a partner in our Christchurch litigation team.

For more information on our 2017 summer clerk programme visit venturefurther.co.nz.

Auckland

**188 Quay Street
Auckland 1010**

**PO Box 1433
Auckland 1140
New Zealand**

**P: +64 9 358 2555
F: +64 9 358 2055**

Wellington

**Aon Centre
1 Willis Street
Wellington 6011**

**PO Box 2694
Wellington 6140
New Zealand**

**P: +64 4 499 4242
F: +64 4 499 4141**

Christchurch

**83 Victoria Street
Christchurch 8013**

**PO Box 322
Christchurch 8140
New Zealand**

**P: +64 3 379 1747
F: +64 3 379 5659**