

# LAW AS A CAREER – Q & A

Government and Alternative Careers Guide  
UNSW Law Society  
July 2009.

**UNSW LAW SOCIETY**  
**GOVERNMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CAREERS GUIDE**

**Q & A**

**LAW AS A CAREER**

The Hon. Michael Kirby AC CMG  
Past Justice of the High Court of Australia  
President, Institute of Arbitrators & Mediators, Australia

**Why did you decide to study law?**

I was one of those bright students who at school was good at English, history, debating, drama and public speaking. In short, custom-made to be a lawyer. And anyway, I did not like the idea of cutting up rats in the Old Med School.

**Where did you start off?**

I found it hard to get articles, although I had brilliant school results. My deficiency was that my father was not a lawyer. A law lecturer recommended a small legal firm which took me on. I plunged straight into the world of litigation. Forever after, I was hooked on oral advocacy and the drama of the courts. After graduation, I was a solicitor for five years, moving to the Bar and seven years later to the Bench.

**Did you have a career plan?**

I expected to follow the orthodox path of barristerial life, with a slow and stately progression. Someone threw the switch on the escalator and it kept going up and up, quickly.

**Advantages of an alternative career path?**

Life is what you want to make it. Not everyone is an obsessive workaholic like me. Not everyone wants to be a judge. Finding fulfilment is a personal journey. Doing interesting cases in the cause of justice is something that most lawyers secretly hope for. It is when our profession is often seen at its noblest. Unfortunately, pro bono work

pays poorly in money terms. But those are the cases you tend to remember as you get older.

### **Enjoying the role of a judge?**

In my humble opinion there are few better jobs in life than the judiciary. It is a world of individualists but working within an ordered community. It involves solving daily puzzles. There are intellectual and emotional challenges. Striving to do justice is a spiritual thing. Just making lots of money seems pretty empty by comparison.

### **Unenjoyable aspects?**

Some aspects of judicial life are unappealing. The very long hours. The build-up of reserved decisions. The sometimes unavoidable differences with close colleagues. The ultra complexity of particular cases and the boredom of a few of them. Stress and pressure and occasional loneliness need to be mentioned because this work cannot really be delegated. And shouldn't be.

### **Influences for success?**

Growing up in a calm and loving family helps. Finding a tolerant partner is essential. Good teachers and friendly colleagues and staff make the path easier. Doing extra things, like student politics and civil liberties cases pro bono got me known by influential people. Working my guts out became a professional hallmark of my life. Keeping a sense of humour and forgiving one's critics also helps. Sometimes they may even be right. Liking the challenge of solving legal problems helps. Being concerned about justice for the underdog adds a spiritual element.

### **Where now in your career?**

Strangely enough, I have only once in six months regretted my retirement from the High Court, and that very briefly, just a few minutes and it passed in a flash. I am busy with international activities; university teaching; arbitration and mediation affairs; broadcasting and speaking. I like people and communicating with them. It is a joy, after 34 years, to reclaim one's citizenship and to catch the bus to work.

### **Advice on the judicial career?**

I was always pretty sure that I would end up a judge. It sounds boastful to say so; but it is the fact. It is a worthy aspiration and a wonderful chance to contribute to a rule of law society. The next generation of judges will be engaged with regional and international law. They will use amazing technology. But the will to resolve a case justly and in accordance with law is still a noble human aspiration. Chance and luck

play a part in life and no lawyer can be sure, in our system, of judicial appointment. However, that system is itself changing. And if the offer comes, it can bring an office of great satisfaction. I loved every minute of it. Well, almost. But the lazy, intemperate and pompous candidates need not apply. We do not need them in the judiciary of contemporary Australia. Leave them in the *Rumpole* DVDs.

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