

Maryjane Crabtree

How did you get started out in your career?

I didn't want to be a lawyer from the age of three or four or anything like that. I wanted to be a vet actually. So I did science all the way through and then suddenly decided I didn't want to be a vet anymore, so fell into law and had no clear idea where I would go or what I would do with it, but things just sort of kept on unfolding in a way that I enjoyed at the time and it just went on from there. So I studied at Melbourne Uni and then went and did my articles at Blake & Wriggle, old Melbourne firm, which has now morphed into Blake Dawson, and I was there for a few years and then decided at that time there were no women partners anywhere in major law firms in Melbourne. I just thought well you know, if that's not an option I'll go and do something else. So I went to a small firm in the Yarra Valley and focused on horses so I was riding horses a lot. I'd work a couple of horses before work, go to work, working very much nine until five and then work another couple of horses at night and compete at the weekends. And that was my focus really, the horses, not career at all. And then after about six years I realised that probably I should grow out of that and think about a career and that's when I came back to the city and came to Arthur Robinson Heddewicks. So I guess that's how it all started.

How do you define success and being successful?

I suppose I don't think a lot about measuring my success, so I think that means for me it sort of translates into whether I feel happy and confident and secure in what I'm doing, whether that's at work or outside work and that sort of constant state of flux. Sometimes you have a day where you think gosh, you know, I'm just on top of the world; I can do anything; and other days you think gosh, I'm hopeless at this and it might be work or it might be trying to manage things at home or just all those sorts of things, so it's really a measure of how you feel about yourself. So if I tried to think about gosh, am I being a success at one particular thing, and you know a work related aspect, I would sort of think am I being effective? Am I doing this in a way that doesn't necessarily bring applause and acclaim and the goodwill of all concerned because sometimes to get things done you have to make hard decisions, which aren't going to please everybody but am I moving things along? Am I being effective? You know is there some good indications of being effective and therefore successful.

Did you or do you have mentors?

I've been really fortunate. I've had a lot of mentors in the working environment but also outside, so I've had great support from people at my university college for example, I was the master of my university college and the head law tutor really kind of helped me focus on wanting ultimately to have a career and a career in the law but also a career in community and doing things in the not for profit sector. They were really keen in sort of instilling that a long term goal, and then I had a lot of good relationships with senior people where I've worked and that's been really really positive. One of my great mentors in this firm was Peter Hobday who's the senior law partner and a great friend and a great advocate of young people but particularly women in a very unconscious, relaxed sort of way.

How do you balance work and life?

I hate the concept of having to balance work against life as if they're in some kind of conflict. I approach it as work is a subset of life and it's really challenging and rewarding aspect of life. It is where I have my major challenges and rewards in that sort of professional sense obviously and I enjoy it. It's a social construct for me as well because so many of my friends and people that I engage with all the time I meet either in my own working environment or in the professional working environment. So it's a really big part of my life. I don't have to balance it against life. I do have to balance work against other things like family and health and leisure and all those sorts of things and that's a constant juggle and I suppose how I approach that is trying to identify what the priorities are at any given time and just going with the thing that's most urgent and the most needy at that particular time. Sometimes that's work and sometimes that's my son or extended family or it's just the need to get some sleep, or the need to just go out and do something for myself, so it's those things I tend to whichever is the most urgent is the way I allocate priorities and you do sometimes get the feeling that you're doing that well and sometimes you get the feeling that you're doing that badly but if you're doing it badly you just go well, I'll take stock and think you'll get better tomorrow. I also am a great delegator; I'm a great delegator at work but I'm also a great delegator at home. I think that when you're busy you should focus on doing things that you either really enjoy or things that make money, so you can do the things that you enjoy.

What has worked for you and good advice for someone coming up in their career?

I didn't have a great plan. I didn't have a very definite sort of plan and that's remained constant all the way through. I've got a few really broad things that I want to do and I knew that I wanted to be

financially independent and I knew that I wanted to be professionally stimulated and I knew that I wanted to combine a whole lot of different roles. Apart from that I really had no idea where career would take me so I didn't have a really fixed idea about what kind of career I would have or what I would be doing outside, as long as I met those sort of three broad concepts. So I think the best advice to somebody who's starting out is to decide what those underlying important things are and then be very flexible and accommodating to the opportunities that come along your way, and don't get disappointed if things don't happen as quickly as you wanted. Don't have regrets about things that you expected you would so that you haven't done at a particular timeframe and just be really adaptable to see an opportunity and go, 'I didn't think about that but that looks good' and go off and have a crack at it. So being flexible and not being governed by a particular kind of timetable or plan that you might set out for yourself. That's not to say not to plan because that can give you some immediate goals and things to work on. Don't be wedded to it and don't be inflexible if it doesn't all come out the way you were thinking it might.

Apart from the Law, what would your dream career be?

Funnily enough, it would definitely not be being a vet. That was a really good career choice to head away from that one. I mean I like the outdoors and that's the one thing about what I do that I feel a bit constrained about sometimes. I'd like to spend more time outside, so I'd probably like to do horticulture at Burnley or be a landscape garden designer and gardener or something that was creative in that kind of visual way and a bit more outdoorsy. That's probably what I'd do. But then sometimes I think I would have liked to become a wine maker, so that's my other one. So maybe I could be a wine maker, horticulturalist, something like that.

Who is a women you find inspirational? Why?

I find lots of women inspirational. Lots of women that I work with I find inspirational. At the moment I'm watching Masterchef, so I find Julie inspirational. I think she is, you won't get this if you're not watching Masterchef, except I think almost everybody is at this point, she is a woman who has just been so humble and realistic about her abilities, but so driven by her passion and she's come such a long way. She's come from being somebody who could cook but couldn't present anything on a plate and now she's just been amazing, seeing her develop in that way. But if I'm really thinking about people that you would ordinarily think about as being a great inspiration, I think I've always been

totally in awe of Aung San Suu Kyi. I just think that to approach your commitment to what it is that you think is important with that kind of stainless steel devotion and commitment and absolute rigour is just amazing. She's just awesome.