



Lawyer lottery, will yours take a risk
So...podcast – Episode #
Sam Lovrich – Legal Tech Helper

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John: Greetings. John McKenna. So...podcast. I'm going to first of all remind everybody that recently I've got all of my podcast episodes available on my website, which is johnmckenna.com.au. Now, what I'm very excited to share with everybody, and that is that these podcasts are now transcribed using YouTube, so people have got many options to listen to these episodes. You can of course hear our voice, you can read the transcription, or you can look at the captioning subtitles on YouTube. So, please, don't forget that; spread the word, and I'd like to thank all my regular listeners for enjoying and giving me feedback about these episodes. Today I'm with Sam Lovrich, who's an old friend, great friend, we've been through many journeys together, Sam, haven't we?

Sam: We have, indeed, John.

John: Around the areas of equality, accessibility and all of that. As like I say to all my guests, Sam, what's your story?

Sam: Thank you, John, first, for having me here, it's an absolute delight, and I'm very excited. So I'll tell you a bit about myself. So I'm a corporate lawyer in a former life. I was a lawyer in-house for 10 years, and then I made a transition in my late 30s into a corporate legal operations role, and I did that because I felt – I loved being an in-house lawyer, but I felt that I could make a broader contribution to the legal department that I worked in through process improvements, through development of our lawyers and our professional staff, and through other programs which really, I felt, contributed, were important in contributing to the culture of the legal team. So things like our legal pro bono program, which I was involved in managing, and also leading our Diversity and Inclusion Council, which was extremely active. I feel very passionate around the importance of developing younger lawyers and





ensuring that they have that support and guidance in those early years of their career.

John: You're right 'cause you learn law from books and universities, but how do you learn the people stuff? And I think when we spoke before this interview you were talking about how you do some lawyer coaching and stuff like that. Do you want to just talk a bit more about that, 'cause I think that's really interesting, because not that you're a dinosaur, you're as young as I am, but it is about passing on that, you know, being client centred and stuff like that?

Sam: Exactly, I think it's so important. I think at this point in my career, that feeling of I really do want to give back, the idea of giving younger practitioners, also women lawyers who are looking at what the next stage in their career is, giving them that coaching guidance, and really helping them get clarity around what their goals are; professional goals, personal goals, and that all comes from really deep listening. We talk about this in the profession now, this need for the profession to be deeply empathetic, to really listen to our clients, the users of legal services; that really comes from the listening process. And that's a bit of undoing of our own training too, because we do listen, but we listen to problem solve and come up with solutions, we do that very quickly. Here it's really interesting because you actually have to take a step back, and you have to say, actually try to get underneath, what are the actual needs. When someone's telling you that they've got a problem that might be the tip of the iceberg, it's really doing that enquiring beneath the surface to really understand what are their goals, what are the real issues here, and that can come, as I said, that's in the coaching context with lawyers, but it's in the client context too, like when you're really trying to get into the shoes of your clients, and often we don't have the time to do that, but it actually would make a huge amount of difference, I think, in terms of outcomes.

John: Are there lawyers listening to us right now and saying, "We are not counsellors." Is there some of that stigma that's got to be broken down, because what I'm getting at I guess, is there were different ways that lawyers think, and that they've got their role and there to help the client.





Sam: Yep.

John: And you've also spoken about listening. So how do you create empathy to say you are listening, because there you are, a lawyer on the other side of the desk writing down notes and nodding your head. Any tips that you can share to other new lawyers to say, how do you improve your listening? I know it's a tough one.

Sam: Yeah, that is a tough one.

John: Because counsellors, social workers, they've got their own tricks, like repeat what the person said, but right now, as you know, when anyone goes to a lawyer ...

Sam: Okay. I think maybe one of the biggest questions to ask is, when you've got all the detail, but "What's the most important thing to you?"

John: Sure.

Sam: And maybe that's one of the first things you ask once a client has spoken to you about their issue. And you can go from there; it's open questions. So there's a lot of – I think there's quite a bit of writing about this, but the open questioning model, where you try to get people, that idea of getting them out of the detail into the sort of higher state of looking at their – the situation.

John: It actually reminds me of an interview I did way back when I was talking to a woman who is a refugee nurse, and in the medical system you get refugee clients whose English is not perfect, and when they did a medical assessment, this example was the woman said, "My heart hurts, my heart hurts," so all of a sudden you think, "Okay, you've got problems with your heart." No, no, no, she's sad. All right?

Sam: Yeah.





John: So it gets back to – so I love what you just said about lawyers need to ask, “What do you want to get out of this?” and I think it’s really very direct, plain English, and you can’t mix it up, can you really?

Sam: Yeah, I think that’s right. Another thing I think is really important, too, is in terms of how lawyers interact with each other, so that idea of really instilling a coaching culture within legal teams, so that regardless of your position in a team, you might be the most junior, the most senior, but being able to ask each other those open question, I think opens up a greater degree of ability to give feedback, honest feedback, in-time feedback, again that idea that you can show vulnerability, and listen openly without judgment, I think that’s really important. I would love to get to that stage where we’ve got leaders and all teams basically working with each other that way.

John: In a court room, it’s very competitive, isn’t it; you’re competing with each other, they’re an opposition in a way, so I hear what you’re saying, but I’m also saying, hang on a second, you guys hate each other sometimes.

Sam: I’m not going to boil the ocean, John [laughing].

John: Sure. Interesting, isn’t it?

Sam: Yeah.

John: It certainly is. Another real passion of yours is bridging the access to justice gap. Tell me a bit more about that.

Sam: Yeah. So essentially I got to that stage in my life where I really felt like I need to give a much more meaningful contribution, you know, what do the next 20 years look like, and one element is basically helping lawyers change for the better, and the other is making that impact, the one to many, and using technology to do that. So I contacted an old friend of mine, who I’ve been friends with for many, many decades, who’s a software engineer, and she and I are, I think, in similar life stages, and we’re both saying we want to do something different, we want to do it together, we want to do it creatively,





collaboratively. There's only the two of us, but we have complementing skills, me from a legal perspective, she from a software/engineering perspective, and we look to develop tools in partnership with organisations, with the experts, that will help bridge the access to justice gap.

John: Okay.

Sam: Particularly the area around legal information. There's a huge amount of legal information out there, and for people who are trying to navigate the legal system, it's a really complex system. One of the things I felt last year in talking with my co-founder, was that there is legal technology that's available. It's available to corporates and to law firms and those who can pay for it, and there is a gap, I think, that consumers and the public sector basically are missing out on the benefits of that technology. And I hope that we can help bridge that.

John: So you and your partner have set up a little organisation called Legal Tech Helper.

Sam: That's right, so it's a company, and what we do is we are looking to partner with courts, Legal Aid, organisations that have that direct contact with consumers, and have a lot of information that's available to consumers that at the moment might be difficult for consumers to navigate on their own, and particularly for people who can't afford a lawyer, and they don't qualify for Legal Aid, there's a so called – it's a missing middle, it's described, like people who, for various reasons, it can be cost, it can be other reasons why they don't seek out a lawyer. They may not identify their problem as a legal problem. They might just be trying to navigate the process across different websites. There's a lot of information out there.

John: There's too much.

Sam: So much. And so what we're doing, our first point is to create client-guided interviews. So through guided interviews people answer questions, and based





on their response will get targeted information that's relevant to their situation. So areas ...

John: I need an example, I'm looking confused, sorry.

Sam: Okay. I will.

John: Look at me, look at my face.

Sam: Yeah. Absolutely. So when we started looking at this, we said, look, our primary purpose, or our initial focus is around access to information in those areas of your life that are extremely, like if you end up dealing with the legal process, it's extremely stressful and quite confronting; so areas like divorce, children, access to children if there's a divorce, property, tenancy, various areas where you might find yourself interacting in a legal process, and needing to navigate quite heavy processes. And what we did was we said, okay, let's actually develop an app ourselves, so a demonstration, and what we ...

John: An app. Yeah.

Sam: Yeah, well, it's an application service, so you can basically, on your mobile – and this was what we created – it was a guide to the documents you need to file a divorce. So what documents you need to ...

John: Love it.

Sam: ... accompany your divorce application. And we actually spent quite some time actually going through multiple websites to identify all the relevant information and put that into questions that then generate a list of documents that are relevant to the individual.

John: Okay.

Sam: The thing we wanted to ensure was – there are a couple of principles – were that we want it to be an app that you could use on your phone.





John: Yes.

Sam: And very easy to use, very, very simple interface, language, if we could, where we could, at Grade 3 level, and that was a huge challenge.

John: What's Grade 3 language?

Sam: Like a Grade 3 person, a child in Grade 3 could read it.

John: Okay. Yep.

Sam: Which is really a challenge. And also that you don't have to give personal information to get information, so I've seen that there are some portals where you need to provide your email address in order to then access on-line information, and we said, well, there might be circumstances a person isn't ready to give ...

John: Exactly.

Sam: ... their personal information out.

John: People hesitate.

Sam: But they want to know, "What do I have to do here?" So the idea that you can get this information without actually divulging your name, your email address and your really particular circumstances, to still be able to get that information, because the fact that you can't afford a lawyer should not mean that you have to give away your anonymity.

John: Sure. With the app you're talking about, obviously any websites or apps need to be kept up-to-date.

Sam: Yes.





John: 'Cause things are changing all the time.

Sam: Yep.

John: How have you addressed that?

Sam: So the way that it's built it does allow for – this is a technical question for my co-founder - but basically the information that we link to, when it gets updated, our documentation updates.

John: Okay. So it's linked to other people's websites ...

Sam: Correct.

John: ... [0:14:50.4] website. So as long as that website's updating you're – I love that.

Sam: Yeah.

John: Because I think when we're talking about information sharing, it's all as good as it being up-to-date.

Sam: Yeah.

John: But in the legal system, obviously things are changing quickly.

Sam: I know. It changes. Exactly. Like fee amounts and whatnot. We built it as an app which we said, okay, it could be a stand-alone app. We've had feedback from people saying it could actually be something that you could offer to consumers today, we built it to show others, other organisations, and to get feedback from users of community legal centres or other organisations to get their feedback, because it might be something that those organisations could use, themselves, as an intake tool or have on their website. So yes, whilst we've built it to show people what we can do, I think it could even be its own stand-alone.





John: So it's up and running now?

Sam: It's up and running in a beta stage, so ...

John: Okay. So where do they find it? Where do people find it?

Sam: Well, they can contact me and I can share it with them.

John: Your email address is?

Sam: Yes, it's samantha@legaltechhelper.com.au

John: That's good. Yeah, no, I think it's sort of – we always hear about different topics and industries, it's a maze, and how do we navigate through it. So it sounds really good.

Sam: Thanks, John.

John: I want to talk a bit more about your coaching for lawyers, 'cause I think it's good. Have you come across lawyers who are proud of what they've achieved, which is great, but also the ones to say "You know what, I'd love some more advice 'cause I'm not – I keep" – is it always the younger ones that need help, or have you ever heard of older lawyers that are happy to listen?

Sam: I think it's amazing that when people are wanting coaching they're wanting it at a particular point in their lives, and it can be regardless of your age, it really is all your life experience. I think you can't coach people if they're not ready for it too, I think they need to be seeking it out, and it can be at any stage. So in answer to that, it's when that person is ready, and they've got something that they're really looking to, but they're struggling with or they're trying to work out that – yeah, get that clarity around whether it is the next step, or what is it that they need to develop in themselves professionally.





- John: You spoke earlier, Sam, off mic around young female lawyers, about the gender balance with regards to empowerment. You do a bit of work empowering the legal profession, in particular women, or?
- Sam: John, in terms of - the work that I've done in the past has been around trying to find opportunities for younger professionals, and it's men and women, who are looking to get into the profession. Having worked in-house, the in-house route is ...
- John: Can you define "in-house" for me?
- Sam: In-house, so working for a corporate or a government and being employed by the corporate or government as their lawyer rather than working in a private law firm.
- John: Sure. Thank you.
- Sam: And the experience of being in that in-house environment is quite different to being in a private practice, because you are really, you're obviously advising your employer, but you're also able to be involved in projects at the outset, and able to see them through, and that can be sometimes difficult for private practice lawyers who are brought in with their expertise and then step out again. So you've got this great opportunity to be involved from beginning to the end, and see what's going in the pipeline and have that strategic insight. The challenge for younger professionals, whether they are law students, graduates, they don't really know what an in-house role involves, and when you're in an in-house role generally you're in and you start working, and it may not be with the same level of supervision or structured training and supervision as you would get in one of the bigger law firms, so the challenge is giving younger practitioners that experience, but ensuring that they're getting that training and supervision. So one of the things that I did in my previous role was develop a program so that students could get experience and see what it was like working in a corporate law environment. Graduates, so graduates of the corporation who had legal degrees could actually get their professional training that they require, the practical legal training that they





need before they get admitted to practice, and that's just a real challenge to get that training because it's very competitive, for one thing, but it gives them then that experience, they've had a certain number of weeks working in a corporate, that they can either take back into the corporate with enhanced skills into their own roles, or they can take elsewhere. And also roles for younger stage lawyers. The challenge, as I said, is that idea of having good training and support for them, and setting that up in a way that is really sensitive to the fact that as a younger professional, you need supervision, opportunity to be mentored and really grow, and just starting without that support is a huge challenge. So just making sure that structure is in place, something that I feel very – which I did – I felt was very important.

John: Sure. Sam, we've been talking about the environment in Australia. But I'm imagining all your message right now, knowing our podcast goes to the world. Are there any golden tips you would like to share to the world about your own journey and that they can perhaps consider as they go through, 'cause obviously, yeah, they can contact you via email, but other lawyers around the world listening to this show, would you like to perhaps share any tips at all?

Sam: Some tips that I would give are around, firstly, it's okay to get out of your comfort zone. I feel that sometimes we hold ourselves back, not for anything but for fear and for our inner critic, who holds us back, and fear of making mistakes. I think lawyers have a strong perfectionist streak, so being able to, if you have that, being able to manage the inner critic, and saying it's okay to make mistakes. So I think getting out of your comfort zone, I think that's where we learn, making mistakes, but in an environment where we're supported, so creating cultures where we can actually make mistakes but that we're supported and we're not making huge risks for our employer or whatever.

John: Exactly.

Sam: So that idea, you know, that's very important. As senior lawyers, supporting your junior lawyers, and that idea too, I think so critical, I was thinking about





this the other day – I was thinking, I was saying to myself, “I thank all the mentors I’ve had, you don’t know who you are.” And it’s really true.

John: For sure. Yes.

Sam: You know those conversations that you have with people, that idea of, really take care with the people that you’re dealing with, because what you say, words matter, and people will take things away from what you’ve said, your clients, your colleagues, so just that really – yeah, listen carefully, listen deeply, and think about the fact that you do have this broader – you can have this broader impact, and take it with care.

John: Are you sure you’re a lawyer? You sound so nice, and you talk in plain English. I love it. Sam, thanks for coming on to the So...podcast. I’ve enjoyed the conversation.

Sam: Thanks John.

John: All the best.

Sam: Thank you.

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