



# Starting Out in PRACTICE

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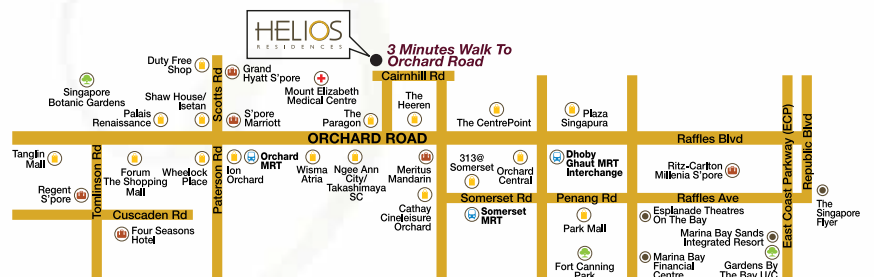
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WINGTAI ASIA

# Introduction

## The Lure of the Law

What attracts people to become lawyers and why do they stay in or step out of the law? Richard W. Moll's 1990 book titled *The Lure of the Law: Why People Become Lawyers and What the Profession Does to Them* sought to answer these questions through a series of interviews with a wide range of lawyers and non-lawyers. One of the memorable quotes by an interviewee was "Luck plays a part in success, but not so large a part as whom you choose to travel with".

Indeed, young lawyers starting out in legal practice need good mentors who can teach them how to navigate safely through the often exciting, but sometimes dangerous, realms of practice. In this special *Singapore Law Gazette* supplement for young lawyers, you will have the opportunity to learn from the practical wisdom gained by older travellers who have bravely journeyed through such realms.

For aspiring litigators, look no further than the entertaining piece titled *The Calling of An Advocate* by Chan Leng Sun, Senior Counsel, who persuasively argues why you have made the right choice in getting "into the trenches of humanity". Litigators have an important role to play to "protect their clients from others of their species" and perhaps inspired by Middle-earth wisdom, Leng Sun points to sage advice from what a hobbit almost said: "There's some good in the world and it is worth legal representation".

The perils of practice are well-documented in the disciplinary cases that we see from time to time. But what about the perils of being young? Chiam Tao Koon suggests that a young lawyer is probably his or her own enemy and offers practical tips to overcome the two most common reasons for young lawyers leaving the profession: "Practice is not for me" and "Working hours are just too long".

From perils to possibilities, Rajan Chettiar, a large law firm lawyer turned sole proprietor, touches on an issue on every young lawyer's mind: job satisfaction. What lures him to stay on in the law? In his inimitable personal style, as readers of the *Singapore Law Gazette's* Alter Ego column would be familiar with, Rajan tells us that being a lawyer-entrepreneur is what keeps him going in practice.

Many young lawyers called to the Bar will often ask what the Law Society can do for them. Malathi Das cleverly re-frames the question and says that young lawyers should instead ask: "Why not make the Law Society really work for you?" Joining a committee, writing an article for the Law Society or volunteering for a *pro bono* project would greatly enrich a young lawyer's legal career. Malathi should know – she served continuously on the Council of the Law Society for 16 years.

Finally, in your amazing race as an incredible lawyer, remember that there are pit stops for you to get help from the Law Society on any issue that you may encounter in practice. The Ethics Committee and the Young Lawyers' Committee are just two of the Society's many support mechanisms for young lawyers.

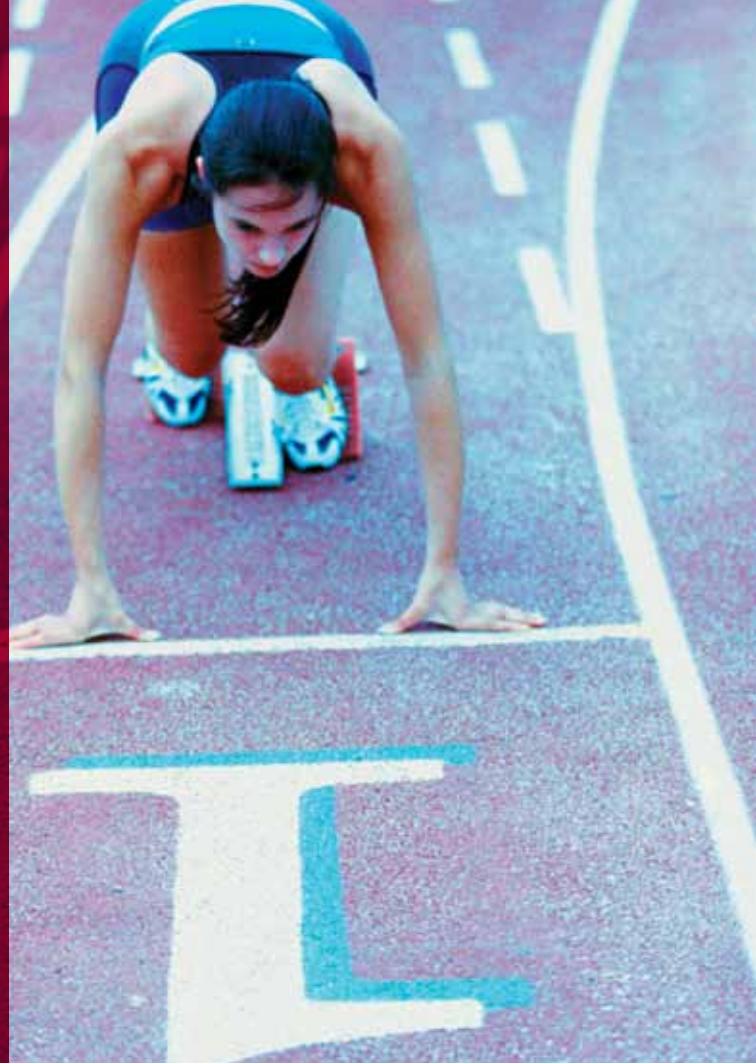
You are in esteemed company with the mentors in this supplement. It is now time to bid you farewell and wish you good luck in your journey through practice.



**Alvin Chen**  
Chief Legal Officer  
Director, Representation and Law Reform  
The Law Society of Singapore

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# The Calling of an Advocate

I am asked to write some encouraging words for young lawyers. Unlike Solomon, I have no deep wisdom to dispense. What I can offer are some perspectives gained by virtue of being just a little ahead of you. You may acquire these by yourself in a few years, but why wait? Let's start with why you are here. No, not because you were queasy in biology class. What is your purpose here, reading this supplement available only to the privileged few? Well, a couple of thousand are still few when there are many more who have tried in vain to be admitted and are now languishing in overpaying careers as bankers.

Even more specifically, why a career as a litigator, the advocate rather than the solicitor in your job description? A litigator is only called in when things fall apart, so you are not going to see happy faces around you. Your clients are not happy, their counterparts are not happy, and while the Judge may appreciate your efforts, you are not going to see a courtroom that rejoices in having a dispute brought within its hallowed walls. Your colleagues in the transactions department help to put together the deals that keep the economy going. What do you do? Well, you are here because of our propensity for disagreements. Ever since two Neanderthals shared a cave, society has been experimenting with systems to correct wrongs and deliver justice in a way that maintains peace and order. We are still experimenting because there are new laws and amendments every time Parliament sits. As the rules of conduct and compensation become increasingly complex, comprehending them has become a full-time occupation. You are tasked to lead your clients

through this labyrinth, and if the circumstances call for it, persuade a Court or tribunal that the true path is the one for your clients.

Make no mistake about it. This is a noble profession. You do serve an important function in society. Doctors heal, accountants count. Lawyers, it has been said, protect their clients from others of their species. Many of you aspire to a lifetime in the company of learned friends with whom you always respectfully disagree.

To fulfill that weighty role, you ought to constantly live by two precepts: Integrity and Industry. Ethics is the manifestation of integrity but integrity transcends ethics. It is the covert quality that determines your overt action. No other profession requires a fine balancing such as that required of you. You are duty-bound to honour the system as an officer of the Court, and to do right by your clients as their trusted counsel. A litigator gets into the trenches of humanity the way a transactional lawyer will not, when the measure of a person is laid bare in the rigours of battle. The recent Singapore Academy of Law publication, *A Civil Practice*, teaches you how to maintain good form while plotting the demise of your opponents' case. Nobody likes a rude assassin. By all means pay your respects to grace and virtue, but do not send condolences to good. In the course of your work, you will come across darkness and light. As a hobbit almost said, there's some good in this world and it is worth legal representation.



Let's move to industry. Everyone knows about hard work. Some, like Garfield, are fascinated by it – they can watch people work all day. In the practice of law, there is no room for a pedestrian. Industry requires initiative as well as the intelligent application of labour. Lawyers are often great philosophers. The study of jurisprudence demands it. It is also inherent in the confrontational nature of advocacy that lawyers are encouraged to think out of the box. Some even try to think their way out of work. Avoid emulating those who fall asleep at their desks and wake up to the discovery of Bertrand Russell's maxim, "The road to happiness lies in an organised diminution of work". And if your research is of insufficient depth, do not seek doctrinal solace in John Rawls' pronouncement that "The principles of justice are chosen behind a veil of ignorance."

No profession is easy. Anyone who is on top of his game has his share of failures and self-doubt. So I am told ... . It does seem perfectly logical and self-evident that in litigation, someone wins and someone loses. An Assistant Registrar might decide this way. The Judge on appeal might say the Assistant Registrar is wrong, and on further appeal, the Court of Appeal might say the Judge is wrong. The case or its outcome is not all about you. Sometimes you win despite yourself. Sometimes you lose despite the best of preparations. Life happens. Jettison the ego and get on with the job. If these words are scant consolation, sit back after a hard day, have a drink and put on the song: "For when my chin is on the ground, I pick myself up, dust myself off, and start all over again." Flashes of brilliance might carry you over a hill but fortitude will take you the full distance.

Do not forget to be human. Sad is the servant of law who forgets that law serves life. A frog under a coconut shell will not truly understand the functionalism of law. I am not sure that a frog above one will either, but let's not nitpick over metaphors. You may even find that the positive qualities you bring to bear in leisure will manifest itself in your work. A leading practitioner who imbues passion into everything he does can teach us a thing or two about living *la dolce vita*:

1. Drive an F1 car. Work like you have Vettel on your heels. When something has to be done, do it promptly and do not procrastinate. An hour wasted is an hour gone forever. This does not apply only

to work. Time spent on leisure can still be time well spent. Just do what you are supposed to do when you are supposed to do it.

2. Climb mountains. Be bold, aim high, and do so with commitment. Put in the hours needed and go beyond your comfort zone.
3. Play in a band. You may set the pace, but you can only go solo for so long. It is about teamwork. In the process, have fun with your mates.
4. Give your whole being. Whatever you undertake, do it with passion and with the determination to excel. Life is too short for half-hearted attempts.

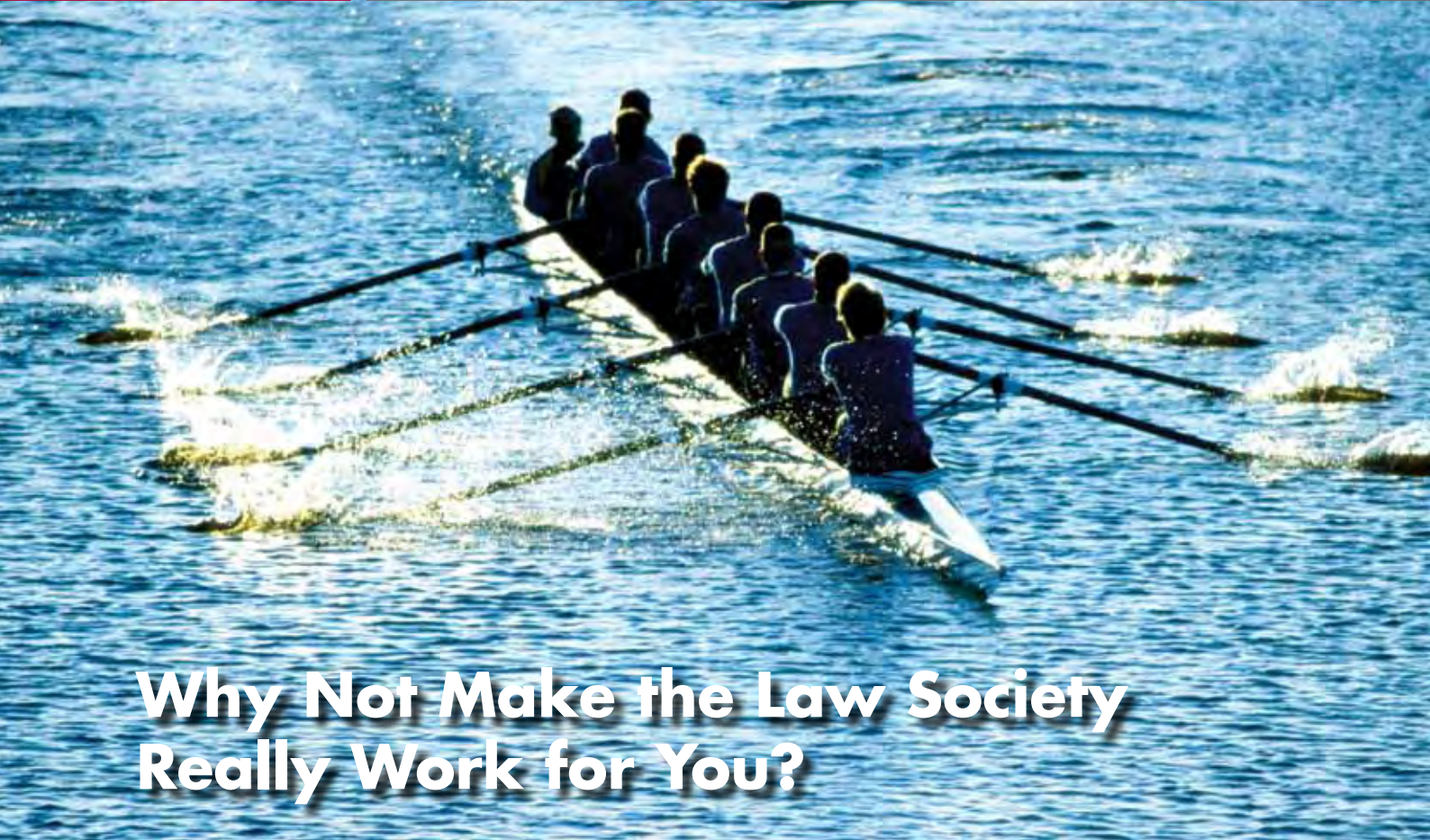
So, back to the question: Why are you here and where do you want to be headed? Each of you will have your own answers. "*Hitam putih masa depan, sendirian menentukan*" – you determine the colour of your future. Then again, some of you may neither understand the forces that brought you here nor see beyond this Saturday's drinks at Butter Factory. That is fine. What is important is that, in the here and now, you do yourself justice by leaving a legacy that you will be proud to be remembered by. Hopefully, in the process help our system deliver justice the way it is intended to. What you do in law, echoes eternally in law reports.\*



**Chan Leng Sun, SC\*\***  
Ang & Partners

\* The allusions to The Killers, Jerome Kern, Sheila Majid and movies featuring unshaven men demonstrate that song and theatre are not inimical to legal discourse. Do not take this too far – fiction is not part of Court craft.

\*\* Advocate and Solicitor (Malaya)  
Advocate and Solicitor (Singapore)  
Solicitor (England and Wales)



# Why Not Make the Law Society Really Work for You?

One of the challenges that every bar association or law society faces is its relevance to its members.

But have you ever considered what you can do to make the Law Society really work for you as a source of making personal connections and building your practice?

The Law Society of Singapore has more than 3,500 members. Of these, every year, up to 10 per cent of its members volunteer in one way or another. But many more don't than do.

Having said that, having served continuously on the Council of the Law Society for 16 years prior to has given me some insights and let me tell you a secret, it's not just an altruistic desire to serve that drives everybody to serve. Yes, there is access to justice and improving the image of the bar and giving back to the profession etc, but if you are going to have to pay your subscription every year to practise, you may as well make it work for you in more ways than just trying to get a warm inner glow or a warm and fuzzy feeling.

Here are six tips to get you started:

## 1. **Join a Committee**

The Law Society comprises 29 committees representing various practice areas: civil, criminal, corporate, intellectual property, family, conveyancing, insolvency etc; oversees regulatory functions: law practice management, ethics; or simply provides social interaction amongst members, such as law awareness programmes, social and welfare events and even sports.

We all know the obvious benefits of belonging to a committee such as attending lunch meetings (with lunch on the Society) or being the first to know of impending changes to your practice area and procedure.

But here are three things most volunteers on committees are unlikely to tell you, and they are among the most important benefits of committee work:

- a. You can quickly build relationships with people who do the same kind of work you do, and agencies involved in your area of work, so you can build your referral source network;



- b. You will make contacts who can act as sounding boards or mentors, which is particularly useful if you are a solo practitioner or decide to venture out on your own or even move firms at some point; and
- c. If you are so inclined, it lays out a straight path into Law Society leadership. Join a committee, work your way up to the chairmanship, meet members in your own category more often – the next thing you know you are on the leadership track. Having a leadership position in a bar association is impressive to clients and raises your reputation among colleagues locally and internationally, and it can all start with joining a committee.

## 2. **Write an Article for the *Singapore Law Gazette* or Other Law Society Publications**

Whether your goal is a law practice whose client base is fueled by referrals or establishing yourself as a specialist in a particular area of law, achievement of this requires at least two things:

- a. A lot of the right people need to know who you are; and
- b. They need to think you are worthy of their referral.

One great way to help with both of these requirements is to write an article for a publication or be part of a writing team for a Law Society publication. All you need to do is decide who is the right audience for your article, and then find out which publication addresses that audience. Most bar-based publications are starved for decent articles, so take your time, write a great article and then offer it to whoever controls the publication. Before you know it, lawyers across the country and even internationally are reading what you have to say on whatever topic you decide to say. The added bonus is the discipline of having researched and clearly articulated a point of view on a matter of practical or academic interest. Off the top of my head, I am aware the Law Society is currently working on a publication on family practice and collating materials for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication.

## 3. **Volunteer for a *Pro Bono* Project**

I know, I promised all six tips were going to be about helping you to be more successful in practice, and here I am writing about *pro bono*. This is not a carrot and stick – your participation in a *pro bono* project can really boost your practice. (I am using *pro bono* broadly here to refer to any publicly beneficial project, from raising funds at a golf game for the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme to adopting a charity and assisting them in transactional queries.)

Here is what is great about being involved in a *pro bono* project: it operates like a team-building exercise for the profession. It brings together lawyers from very different practices, locations, and experience levels and throws them into a shared exercise where most of the normal rules do not apply.

You may find yourself helping the managing partner of a 1,000-lawyer firm with something that is simple to you, but brand new and difficult to her. Those kinds of interactions foster strong and lasting relationships. Building strong relationships is why companies spend so much money doing team-building. You can do it by simply volunteering on one of the many *pro bono* schemes of the Law Society.

## 4. **Work the Discount on CPD**

The Law Society offers members a preferential rate on Continuing Professional Development programmes, with bigger discounts for lawyers from small firms. In some cases, it even offers free sessions. This translates into discounts that will help make a dent in your membership dues. Aside from the cost savings, CPD programmes are an under-utilised networking opportunity. Take advantage of the breaks and lunch to meet somebody new, exchange cards and broaden your network.

If you met one new person for each credit hour of CPD you take, at the end of the year you will have added approximately 12 new people to your network. At the end of 10 years it will be 120 persons, just from CLE programmes alone. Best of all, all of the other attendees need to broaden their networks too, so it is a win-win situation and you are keeping abreast of new developments in the law.

### 5. Leverage Your Affinity Partnerships

The Law Society, through its Membership Privileges, has special arrangements set up with several different companies to provide discounts to members. It might be for lifestyle and dining, office supplies or online backup.

If you are not currently taking advantage of the full suite of affinity partnerships available, log onto the Law Society website ([www.lawsociety.org.sg](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg)) to find out what you are missing. If you would like to see affinity partnerships that the Law Society does not currently support, make the suggestion to the membership interests department ([communications@lawsoc.org.sg](mailto:communications@lawsoc.org.sg)). The Law Society endeavours to help you in your practice. Tell them what you need.

### 6. Utilise Your Members' Support Schemes

The Law Society has a whole slew of members' support schemes ranging from providing the services of a legal practice management consultant who offers guidance and advice on practice risk management, practice management issues or client relationships on a strictly confidential basis; senior lawyers who have volunteered to provide advice and guidance to junior lawyers on various areas of law; a mentoring programme where proprietors and partners of small law practices are mentored by experienced senior lawyers on issues relating to practice management; providing the services of a counsellor under the LawCare scheme, a confidential counselling service administered in conjunction with the Singapore Care and Counselling Centre to assisting members facing disciplinary proceedings.

### Conclusion

Making the most of the connections you can create through the Law Society is an excellent way to build your practice.

As a Council Member, I learnt from watching the different management styles of Presidents. I was in the thick of discussions on policies affecting the profession. Professional indemnity, legal education, discipline, etiquette, practice structures, fees – the variety of issues were mind-boggling and challenging. It also provided me with the opportunity to meet with the Courts, ministries and other agencies and provide feedback on new initiatives.

Working with different chairpersons and serving on different committees made me appreciate the bigger picture that is the law. It brought me in contact with other professionals and lawyers in other jurisdictions.

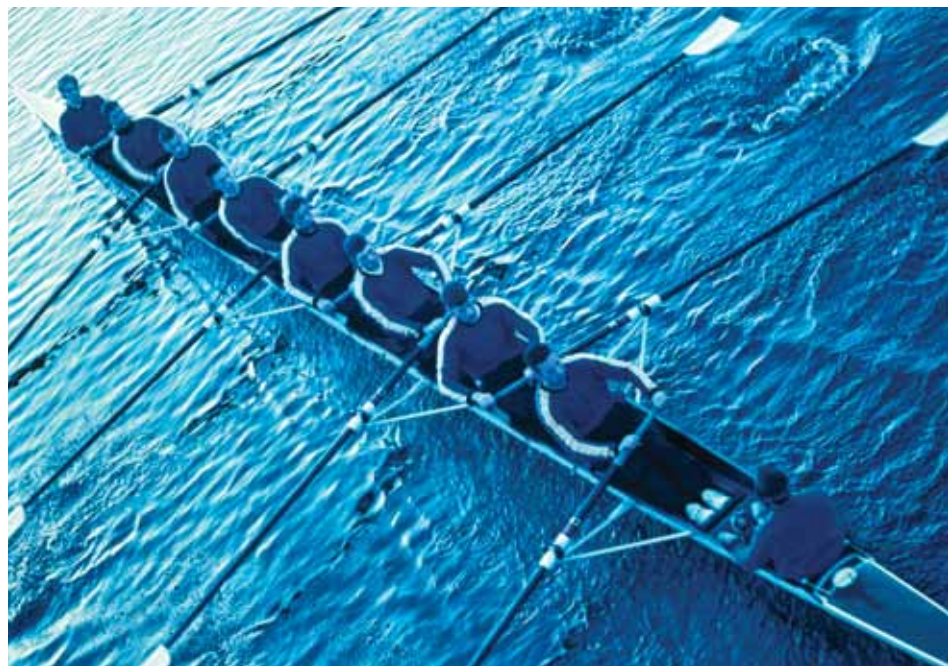
Serving the profession also brought about other challenges, especially from members who did not quite appreciate the work of either the Council or the Secretariat. This can be disheartening when one is a volunteer but it comes with the territory when doing *pro bono* work. It is rare to receive bouquets, even rarer to get ready responses to fund-raising efforts, but on rare occasions also expect to receive a kind word or a helping hand when you least expect it.

You are already paying the membership dues of a member, so why not reach out and utilise the avenues that the Law Society provides for making connections with other members as well as for making connections within the Secretariat and other stakeholders in the law. I am positive that it will bring you returns in ways that will surprise you, and yes, maybe even a warm inner glow.



**Malathi Das\***  
Joyce A Tan & Partners

\* The author served as Vice President of the Law Society of Singapore from 2006 to 2009 and is currently President-elect of LAWASIA, the Law Association for Asia and the Pacific.



# What Being a Lawyer Means to Me

It all started from the drama series about life in a law school in the 1970s, *Paper Chase*. This was followed by the other television programme, *LA Law*, which portrayed the glamorous lives led by American lawyers. As corny as it sounds, that was when I started thinking about becoming a lawyer.

The other serious career option in my mind then was social work. From the age of 15, I had always wanted to help people. My parents must have been alarmed when they realised that their eldest child wanted to become a lowly paid social worker. One day, my father told me that I could help people by becoming a lawyer. His gentle prodding changed my life.

Whilst I was studying law, the idealist in me told myself that I would change careers after practising for three years. This thought kept me going during the gruelling year in Bar School in London.

After completing the Bar course, I got lured into life in a large law firm. But I did not have the large dose of confidence that young lawyers of today have. I was not outspoken. I did not have many career opportunities at my feet. I did my work meekly and did not ask any questions or make demands of my bosses. In fact, I was in awe of my bosses.

I learnt that life in a large law firm is not for everyone. You have to understand your partners and work to please them. The long hours and stress do not get any better even after you become a salaried partner. In fact, meeting billing targets becomes even more real and stressful.

Financial rewards and other benefits may seem very attractive in the beginning. But does it matter if you do not have the time to enjoy it? The high life of fine restaurants, drinking holes, expensive holidays and modern toys is very attractive and even exciting. But being a slave to your handphone and laptop during the weekends and on vacation is no fun either.

I was not happy but the financial security (or what I perceived it to be then) offered by the job prevented me from leaving the firm. The workload and the stress even made me forget about my three-year plan. In the fifth year of practice, I started to dread going to work. It finally dawned on me that the financial rewards did not compensate for the quality of life that I was sacrificing. My dissatisfaction started manifesting itself in heart palpitations and constant flu symptoms. I decided to resign from my job in August 2002.

1 January 2003 marked the first day of my unemployment and the new phase of my life. For the first time in a long while, I turned off my mobile. For the first time in six years, I could really be free from the office and the demands of bosses and clients. The freedom was so sweet and refreshing. I travelled around India for four weeks. After I returned home, I completed a personal awareness and leadership programme. It was during the leadership programme that I firmed up my plan to set up my own law firm. Rajan Chettiar & Co was established on 16 April 2003.

Many lawyers shudder about setting up their own firm. They do not like to be involved in the administration of a law firm. They worry about the lack of work and financial stability. To me, I was just fulfilling my dream to be an entrepreneur. It was a toss between running a café and a law firm. The legal skills and experience won. I run a business, which provides legal services. The different aspects of a law business excite me. I now have the freedom to accept the instructions that I want to and practise law in the manner I wish to.

My colleague jokes that I have no life as I am always in the office. There is an iota of truth in what she says. But at the same time, despite the stress and hardships, I love what I do. For the lawyer that I am now, I have my former employers to thank for what they taught me and I would like to share some of the lessons I have learnt.

### 1. **Be Focused in Your Work**

The best lesson that my pupil master imparted to me was that life is all about working hard. I did not appreciate his full message then as I do today. Thank you, Ronnie.

### 2. **Treat Your Client's Problems as if They Were Your Own**

This was something I learnt from Ronnie as well. According to him, you will then find the most creative solutions to the problem at hand.

### 3. **Think Before You Run to Your Boss for Assistance**

Give thought to the legal problem in front of you and arrive at the best legal solution. Then go to your boss to discuss the matter with your proposed solution.

### 4. **Keep to Deadlines**

Clients like speedy and prompt delivery of work. They appreciate you keeping your promises to them.

### 5. **Be Meticulous**

Paying attention to the fine details even to the extent of punctuation marks and presentation of your work is good work etiquette.

There are many reasons why we become lawyers – parental pressure, lack of other academic choices or the lure of high financial rewards being some of them. Lawyering is a serious career. It consumes our whole life. Sleep, family and social life become secondary. Some miss out on marriage or are faced with divorce. The work becomes our master. The demands and expectations of lawyers scare many away from the profession.

I have been asked many a time why I have stayed on in the profession. It is not for a lack of alternatives or because I have stayed in the law for too long. Putting aside the stress and pressures of practice, I actually enjoy being a lawyer-entrepreneur.

You should know what you want out of your life from the beginning of your practice. Some want work-life balance. Others crave recognition, respect and status. For others, it will be the high financial rewards or challenging work prospects. Some young lawyers cite peer pressure for joining large law firms. I think choices have to be made according to your personal goals. If you have clear career goals, then working towards them will make life less stressful. It will keep you focused during the long nights and weekends in the office or during periods of stress and pressure.

I hear of young lawyers taking a sabbatical after the first few years of practice. Recharging and returning to practice is a way to keep going. Work-life balance is also a priority for young lawyers. This can be found in some smaller law firms or in jobs offered by the Legal Service. There will, however, be trade-offs in the form of financial compensation and types of work.

Friends have told me that law practice changes their personality. They become more aggressive or are overly driven. Those who know me will know that I am a gentle and caring person. Recently, however, a client told me over dinner that I have changed. He said that I have become more impatient and hardened over the two years that he has known me. As much as people tend to change as they age, I agree that I have changed. The idealism of my youth has been taken over by pragmatism. I am easily irritable and more demanding. "Is the change bad?" I asked my client. He did not think so. Clients seem to prefer strong-natured rather than soft-natured lawyers.

One thing has not changed though – the importance I place on my family, loved ones and friends. At the end of the day, it is their words, laughter and feelings which complete my existence.



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## The Legal Profession:

# THE PERILS OF BEING YOUNG



The life of a lawyer in Singapore can be daunting and perhaps more so for the young lawyer fresh in practice. Some law graduates, after hearing how difficult a lawyer's life can be, have even chosen to abandon legal practice without even being called to the Bar. This is certainly a sentiment that I understand very well. After being called to the Bar in 2004, I did not start legal practice with the rest of my cohort. Instead, I decided to pursue my interests in business. It was only in 2007 that I gave serious thought to returning to legal practice. And in early 2008, I commenced practice with Allen & Gledhill LLP because, amongst other things, I wanted a fulfilling and challenging career that would also give me the opportunity to give back to society. I haven't looked back since.

In the last few years, legal practice has been intensely challenging, even overwhelming at times, but nevertheless very satisfying. The firm's *pro bono* programme has also allowed me to give back to society, where it counts.

However, not all young lawyers find satisfaction early in their careers. Given the long working hours and the constant pressing deadlines that have become common in the legal profession, some young lawyers have chosen to leave legal practice upon reaching either of the following conclusions: "Practice is not for me" or "Working hours are just too long". Over the years, I have been privileged to receive insight from our senior members in dealing with some of these common pitfalls of legal practice. Here, I am sharing some of the advice I have gleaned and I hope that the advice will prove to be just as valuable to you.

### **"Practice is Not for Me"**

Fresh out of law school, you may have had your ideas as to the areas of practice you would like to pursue, the firm you would like to join and what being a lawyer would be like. You may even have been led to believe (whether by the media or otherwise) that your life as a lawyer would be exciting, glamorous and privileged (episodes of *Boston Legal* probably did not help). Upon joining a law firm, you quickly realise that daily legal practice is probably a lot tougher than you imagined and much more mundane.

Some of you will adapt quickly and excel in the work environment. However, most of you may be left feeling inadequate and ill-equipped to handle the pressure. You may even likely end up wondering if you are suited to legal practice.

*Advice No 1: Give it time.*

On my first day of work, one of the senior partners of my firm told me: "It does not matter how clever you are or think you are; it will take a while before you start to know what you are doing. For some, it never happens."

Every lawyer goes through the same self-doubt early on but more often than not, given the right amount of time and if you put in the required effort, that self-doubt will fade and be replaced with the same confidence you feel whenever you accomplish something difficult. Our legal profession, after all, is called a "practice" for a reason – it requires you to do, learn from your mistakes and then practice what you have learnt.

*Advice No 2: Consider a different area of practice.*

Another senior practitioner had this to share: "No one excels in everything. You will always be better in some areas of practice than in others".

What most of us do not realise in our early years of practice is that legal practice is immensely diverse. Even within corporate practice itself, you will find that different areas will suit lawyers with different skill sets and temperament.

Instead of concluding that the legal profession as a whole is not suitable for you, make the effort to speak with other legal practitioners about their practice and consider if there is another area of law you may be interested in. If you find it difficult to meet other lawyers, events organised by the Law Society will be useful to you. Do not be afraid to experiment early on in your career. While it is not advisable to always be switching between firms and/or areas of practice, it pays to spend some time in your early years finding the right fit.

### **"Working Hours are Too Long"**

Long hours and hard work have become almost synonymous with the legal profession. Unfortunately, there is no short-cut to this – to enjoy what you do, you have to be good at it and to be good at what you do, you will have to put in the hours to learn the ropes.

*Advice No 3: Take breaks every few months and after every major hurdle.*

I had been working on back to back transactions for several months when one of my partners pulled me aside and told me: "Take a break from time to time; it isn't cool if you suffer a meltdown".



Every three to six months or after every major trial or transaction, spend at least a couple of days away from the office to recharge. While this may strike you as obvious, you may be surprised to find that only a few lawyers actually do this. No one is suggesting that you should abandon your clients completely. Consider scheduling your meetings after your break or arranging for someone to take over your files for a week. Make sure you take the time to break the routine and be outside of your work environment for at least a few days.

On a weekly basis, consider doing simple things to take a break from work such as taking an hour out of each day to unwind, taking a slow walk around your neighbourhood or catching up with your friends for a drink even when you are tired. These activities will give you little things to look forward to at the end of each day or week. You'll be surprised at the difference it would make. You will feel less overworked and the long hours will become a lot easier to deal with.

*Advice No. 4: Work-life integration.*

Lastly and perhaps most importantly is a piece of advice I received fairly recently: "Forget work-life balance, it doesn't work. Think 'work-life integration'."

While we have all heard of the hypothetical "work-life balance", it is sometimes hard to see how it can actually exist in a practice where client expectations and deadlines are ever-pressing. Given the demands of the legal profession today, it is perhaps impossible to separate our personal lives from our work altogether. Perhaps the solution then may be to embrace the situation, instead of resisting it and attempt to integrate work into your life. It is far less ludicrous in reality than it sounds. Too many young lawyers try to finish their work quickly so that they can rush off and spend the rest of the day with family and friends. If that's the approach that you take, there is a good chance that you will end up making mistakes because you would be putting too much pressure on yourself to finish quickly. Instead of doing that, consider integrating your work into your life as

you would any other activity, ie, set aside time for work as you would set aside time for play. For example, many lawyers choose to leave work on time each day to spend a couple of hours with family and friends before getting back to work later in the evening (whether from home or back in the office). While such an arrangement may not be possible every day of the year, you would be surprised at just how often it works out for many of us.

As with anything in life, it is very easy to come up with excuses and to give up when faced with obstacles. Before you do so, however, consider if you have given yourself and legal practice enough of a shot. Do not let a few hiccups early in your career convince you that you are not suited for the legal profession. I would urge you to take your time and think very carefully as legal practice has, time and again, proven to be a wonderful and fulfilling profession for many people of differing talents, skill sets and temperament. Perhaps a final piece of advice: "Your career, as with life, is what you make of it."

**Chiam Tao Koon\***


Chairperson, Young Lawyers Committee 2011  
The Law Society of Singapore  
Allen & Gledhill LLP

*The views set forth in the above article are the personal views of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the law firm or the other lawyers with which the author is associated.*

\*Tao Koon graduated from the National University of Singapore with an LLB (Hons) degree in 2003 and was called to the Singapore Bar in 2004. He then spent four years as an entrepreneur cum consultant in a regional marketing company with offices in Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta, Hong Kong, and Manila. Tao Koon joined Allen & Gledhill in 2008 and is a Partner in Corporate Mergers & Acquisitions. Despite his busy schedule and hectic "work-life integration", he currently chairs the Law Society's Young Lawyers Committee, is the Pool Convenor of the Law Society Sports Committee, a member of the Law Society Golf Team and regularly provides pro bono advice at Community Legal Clinics.



# Seeking Help from the Law Society on Ethical Issues



As a new lawyer entering into the Singapore legal profession, you will have to grapple with a myriad of challenges in your first year of practice such as managing difficult clients, tight timelines and demanding supervisors. You may be in the midst of reading the 100th case to prepare for an upcoming trial or vetting the 100th page of a complex commercial agreement due to be completed the next day. The last thing on your mind is to update yourself on the latest authorities on a lawyer's professional ethical obligations. After all, having gone through the Bar course, you should have a basic knowledge of a lawyer's fundamental ethical obligations, which will steer you safely through all of your professional life. Right?

As you may have guessed, the answer is not simply "Right". Real-life ethical issues are usually not clear-cut. There may be nothing in the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules ("PCR"), the Law Society's Practice Directions or the local case law which addresses a specific ethical issue arising in your case. Even if there is a relevant rule, direction or judicial decision, its application to your ethical scenario may not be straightforward and you may ultimately need to exercise your own professional judgment. Who do you turn to if you are unable to resolve the ethical issue on your own?

Often, many lawyers will turn to their supervisors or colleagues for assistance. Sometimes, they may ask their friends in other law practices. But there is also a third way to seek ethical guidance, namely, through the Law Society's Ethics Committee.

The Ethics Committee, a committee of the Council of the Law Society, is tasked with providing guidance to

members on their ethical obligations. The Committee's advice or guidance is well-researched and generally entails substantial consideration and discussion by Committee members. You can expect a formal written advice or guidance within three to six weeks from the date that the Committee accepts a request for guidance, with a shorter timeframe where an expedited response is necessary. Queries to the Committee should be sent through the Representation and Law Reform Department at [represent@lawsoc.org.sg](mailto:represent@lawsoc.org.sg). Please observe the guidelines set out in the Council's Practice Direction 2 of 2009 (available on the Legal Ethics section of the Law Society's website at [www.lawsociety.org.sg](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg)) when submitting your query.

Many of the key guidances given by the Ethics Committee over the years have been published earlier this year in the Law Society's Guide to Professional Conduct for Advocates and Solicitors and you should refer to it as a resource in the course of your practice (copies are available for purchase from the Law Society). In addition, you should also refer to the Committee's "Ethics in Practice" articles published from time to time in the Singapore Law Gazette, which set out an anonymised version of past guidances for the benefit of members. To date, the following "Ethics in Practice" articles have been published:

1. Rule 64 of the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules – Solicitor Not to Act if He is a Witness (July 2009);
2. Rule 24 of the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules – Confidentiality (August 2009);

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# The Young Lawyers Committee



Mass Call



Launch of "The Incredible Lawyer" campaign

The Young Lawyers Committee (the "YLC") was established to address the needs and concerns of the lawyers within the "Junior" category, who have been in the legal profession less than seven years following their call to the Bar – that's you!

As young lawyers ourselves, the YLC members have experienced the perils of being young in the legal profession and are here to share what we have learnt and to support our fellow young lawyers.

## Welfare

Have you felt that the first few years of legal practice have been a steep learning curve without much support from your fellow peers from the Bar? The YLC's role in the Law Society is to highlight issues that are of importance to young lawyers and to ensure that the needs and concerns of the young lawyers are addressed and heard.

## Social

Do you wish to socialise with other fellow young lawyers and professionals but don't know how or always felt awkward doing so? The YLC organises events and activities to allow young lawyers the chance to relax outside of the work environment and to encourage networking amongst young lawyers and other young professionals in Singapore.

## YLC Events

The YLC's past events have been well attended and positively received by fellow young lawyers. Our past events included the regular Final Fridays @ Harry's, Champagne and Whisky Tastings, Cakes & Ale: Lawyers & Doctors; and the Mad Hatter's Tea Party.

As part of the Mass Call tradition, the YLC is responsible for hosting the Mass Call Reception and this year is no exception. Held after the Mass Call, the Mass Call Reception is our way of warmly congratulating and welcoming our newest members of the Bar.

Each year, students of the Santa Clara University Summer Law Programme come to Singapore to participate in an internship programme. As part of their programme, the students visit our Courts and attend Law Society activities. This year, the YLC hosted a tea for the students during their visit to the Law Society's premises and were given the opportunity to share their experiences and tips on the legal profession and legal practice in general.

## Law Society Events

To assist young lawyers to continue to develop their legal skills, the YLC organised a talk entitled the "Anatomy of the Legal Profession", together with the Young Members Chapter of the Professional Affairs Committee of the



Young lawyers' event - Final Fridays

Singapore Academy of Law. The talk gave young lawyers insight on the management of different sectors of the legal profession, such as in-house counsel and government bodies, and the expectations to be met by junior lawyers.

As part of the YLC's *pro bono* initiative, the YLC jointly hosted with the Law Society's Pro Bono Services Office the launch of "The Incredible Lawyer" at the Singapore Cricket Club in 2010. The "Incredible Lawyer" was a campaign to raise awareness and to encourage young lawyers to take on *pro bono* work. The YLC and the Pro Bono Services Office were delighted to have had Mr Gregory Vijayendran, 2009 Inaugural Pro Bono Ambassador; Mr Mark Nelson, Partner of Latham & Watkins; Ms Lim Hui Min, Deputy Director of the Legal Aid Bureau; and Ms Vimaljit Kaur, a young practitioner share their varied experiences on *pro bono* work, as well as the professional and personal benefits of *pro bono* work. The discussion was moderated by Mr Chan Hian Young, Partner of Allen & Gledhill LLP. The launch attracted more than 150 attendees comprising young lawyers as well as law students from the National University of Singapore and the Singapore Management University.

### Professional Events

In collaboration with other professional bodies in Singapore, the YLC looks out for and participates in

events relevant to the young lawyer's practice, such as financial and professional development talks to give young lawyers' opportunities and support needed in their early years of practice.

Recently, YLC members were invited to the Financial Women's Association of Singapore's ("FWA") lunchtime talk with Ms Sylvia Lim, Chairman of the Worker's Party where she shared her views and observations on Singapore's changing political landscape. YLC members also mingled with other young professionals at a mixer organised by the FWA where they were treated to champagne, chocolates and nibbles while playing ice-breakers and socialising in a boutique wellness centre in a beautifully conserved shophouse in Little India.

YLC events are not limited to activities within Singapore. We regularly receive invitations to events from other young lawyers committees from regional and international Bars. This year, at the kind invitation of the Malaysian National Young Lawyers' Committee, some of our YLC members participated in the Young Lawyers' Convention organised by the Malaysian Bar Council where in the spirit of the convention's theme, *Towards a Better Bar*, members exchanged views on matters such as the liberalisation of the Bar.

### Sounds Fun! How Can I Find Out More?

The YLC has much planned for this year including several professional networking events with doctors, finance professionals and in-house counsel and *pro bono* initiatives. Don't miss out! We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events!

If you're interested in joining the Young Lawyers Committee, or if you have an issue that you need to get off your chest, or you just want to say hello, drop us an e-mail at [communications@lawsoc.org.sg](mailto:communications@lawsoc.org.sg) and you'll be hearing from us shortly. Keep a look out for more YLC updates in the *Law Gazette* and *eJus News*.

### Young Lawyers Committee 2011

The Law Society of Singapore

*Continued from page 15*

3. Duties to Prospective Clients: Ethical Considerations (September 2009);
4. Duties to Former Clients: Ethical Considerations (October 2009);
5. Client's Termination of Retainer and Transfer of Documents: Ethical Considerations (December 2009);
6. Ten Questions on the Publicity Rules (March 2010);
7. Becoming an "Introducer" for an Insurance Company (September 2010);
8. Ethical Considerations in Preparing and Witnessing the Execution of a Will (April 2011); and
9. Reducing the Risk of Conflict of Interest Arising from Consultation by a Prospective Client (May 2011).

Four ways that the Law Society supports members in seeking assistance on ethical issues:

1. Formal written guidances provided by the Ethics Committee.
2. Law Society's Guide to Professional Conduct for Advocates and Solicitors 2011.
3. Ethics Committee's "Ethics in Practice" articles in the Singapore Law Gazette.
4. Legal Ethics section of the Law Society's website at [www.lawsociety.org.sg](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg)

To view these articles, just go to the Legal Ethics section of the Law Society's website at [www.lawsociety.org.sg](http://www.lawsociety.org.sg).

**Alvin Chen**  
 Chief Legal Officer  
 Director, Representation and Law Reform  
 The Law Society of Singapore

“Young lawyers today face many challenges. To help you manage these challenges, focus on establishing a good foundation in the law in your early years. However, more importantly, keep true to yourself and your values.”



**George Lim, SC**  
 Wee, Tay & Lim LLP

# What I Wish I Had Known When I Was a Young Lawyer

Senior practitioners share their thoughts on what they wish they had known when they started out as junior lawyers. The benefit of their hindsight and words of wisdom will hopefully stand you in good stead and help prepare you for the road ahead.

When I was a young lawyer, I thought my legal technical skills would be sufficient to equip me to become a good one. I learned over time that respect and trust are even more essential attributes - to be gotten not only from clients but also from fellow lawyers, colleagues and the community.

Respect and trust need time to develop. It is never too early to start nurturing them. They take a lifetime to blossom, and yet wither by a momentary act of indiscretion. Be vigilant always to protect and preserve them.



**Arfat Selvam**  
Selvam LLC

I wish I understood, when I started out, the value of looking at a client's problem from a big picture perspective (some call it a 'helicopter view') and seeing all the options - both legal and practical - available to resolve it. Unfortunately, many of us leave Law School thinking too small; we often fail to recognise the 'big picture', and dwell on minute details and technicalities, scoring what we perceive to be minor victories that don't really count in the end. While details are important, they are nothing unless they are aligned with the 'big-picture'. I learnt that truth the hard way, when things did not go my way in Court.

**Edmund Kronenburg**  
Braddell Brothers LLP

If I had known that IT will become an integral part of our practice today, I would have picked up computer science related studies to help me in my practice. Further, had I known that the world will become more compact due to easier accessibility via internet, I would have spent more time reading and learning about other countries' legal systems and how they differ from or complement Singapore's legal system.



**Ellen Lee**  
Ramdas & Wong

Clients are more interested in what they can do under the law than what the law says. Bosses are more interested in what profits the law can bring in than what the law says. Opponents are more interested in whether the law will be on their client's side than what the law says. Witnesses are more interested in not breaking the law whilst on the stand than what the law says. Judges are more interested in doing justice on the facts in accordance with the law than what the law says. Knowing what the law says is, therefore, only the beginning. Knowing the life of the law and how the law shapes human life is a lifelong pursuit in the marathon of law practice. The pinnacle awaits those who persevere.



**Eric Tin Keng Seng**  
Donaldson & Burkinshaw

Share and voice your concerns about impending challenges in practice. Suffering alone in silence does not resolve these challenges.

Sharing whether with your loved ones, fellow members within the legal profession or one's own friends and relatives could go a long way.

Never under-estimate the efforts in talking and sharing when walking through challenges as there is always a way to resolve the situation at hand, which on your own may seem hopeless.



**M. Lukshumayah**  
Central Chambers Law Corporation

A lawyer has to know his case inside out. He then has to remember that the Judge would hardly know the case as the Judge has seen the papers shortly before trial and it is one of many cases that the Judge has and will hear. Present the case accordingly. Be precise, concise and specific. If I had known this when I was a young lawyer, I wouldn't have been scolded by Judges so much!



**N Sreenivasan**  
Straits Law Practice LLC

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Introduction to various planning principles, ideas and opportunities that exist for the cross-border business, drawing upon International Taxation matters covered in other courses. Topics explored include the use of intermediate holding companies, financing companies and anti-avoidance provisions such as transfer pricing and CFC legislation.

#### Company Law and Corporate Governance

Looks at the impact of corporate governance thinking on the field of taxation in the corporate environment.

#### Economic and Political Context of Taxation

Balanced explanation and analysis of the economic principles of taxation with a broad-based description and evaluation of the policy and practical aspects of the tax systems operating in the UK and US. Highlights some international comparisons.

#### Selected Topics in Corporate Reporting

Enables students to develop an awareness of the current issues in financial accounting and reporting and the implications that they may have on taxation.

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