

A day in the life

ROBERT DUNK

Robert is an inspiration to us at TLD. Dividing his time between Italy and London, his work as a lawyer is just one strand of his professional life. A man of many interests and diverse skills, he has rejected the more prosaic path of full-time employment in one business in favour of the variety and diversity of a portfolio career. I rang him up for a chat to find out more.

By Rachel Hyland

So, Robert, how did you end up joining TLD?

When I left my last employer at the end of 2015, having been there for six years, I didn't want to just go and replicate what I'd been doing for the last 15 or so years as a GC. I wanted more of a change than just a different desk and a new company logo. I didn't immediately fall in with The Legal Director. In fact, it took me a little while to make the decision and to see how I wanted my career to evolve. I ended up talking to Ed, Kirstie and James for eight or nine months before I decided this was right for me. At the same time, I was working as a contractor doing outsourcing projects (which is my area of experience). I enjoyed being involved in project work and it was nice, at the time, to have a break from a lot of the more time consuming things that can come from being part of a business – like management meetings, budget settings – those types of things.

But you didn't stay with contract work?

No, I ultimately found it quite stressful. I didn't want to be doing a project for nine months and then have it come to an end and find myself wondering where the next one is coming from, not necessarily having anything else lined up. I still wanted to be working full time. And I started finding it difficult to take holidays – if I was in work, I felt like I couldn't take a break from it.

I also found it too transactional. I'll give you my time, you pay me my money. That's not really me. I wanted to have more of an ongoing engagement with that business. I still wanted to be emotionally engaged

with what I do and the businesses I was supporting. TLD offered me the solution – an opportunity to get involved without putting all my eggs in one basket. It wasn't a binary, all or nothing choice – I had the flexibility to choose the number of people I wanted to work with and to connect with. With TLD, I can tailor the amount of work to suit my situation. If a client disappears (say because of an exit or because they recruit a full-time lawyer), I may decide I don't need to replace it. It allows me a lot more flexibility to ebb and flow my client work as I chose. I can also really see the benefit of that in the years ahead as I look to consider how full time I want to be working.

So, that was my rationale in joining TLD. And as I was making this decision, my partner and I were beginning to move our lifestyle in part to Italy. Those two events happened at the same time, and I found that TLD enabled this to happen as there were no real geographical constraints on where I work.

That makes perfect sense. So, how does that work practically?

Pre-pandemic, our place in Italy was like a holiday home. But in lockdown, when everyone was working from home, and once the borders re-opened, we decided to decamp to Italy and escape the hustle and bustle of London. We improved the internet and made sure we both had proper desks. It worked. We now basically do two to three months at a time there and three months or so in London. And, because I haven't got a full time General Counsel position, clients don't expect me to be down

the corridor. As long as I am at the end of a phone line and able to jump on a conference call relatively quickly, they're happy. It allows us to have this amazing split lifestyle. Ultimately, I am always only a plane journey away. Currently I am in London working and enjoying its culture and energy. In a few weeks we will be back in Italy for six weeks still working but also doing the olive oil harvest at the weekends.

And how many clients do you currently have?

I probably have five or six clients on an ongoing basis. And several other people that come and go or speak to me about doing discrete projects. Probably 40% of my time is on this sort of project work – I could be asked to put an EMI scheme in place or an employee ownership trust or support a business who is looking to do an acquisition.

You do work outside of TLD too, don't you?

Yes, from time to time, I help businesses with real estate outsourcing procurement. I often get contacted by ex-colleagues who know that I have a lot of experience in helping to get these type of relationships over the line. So, I help them with their RFIs and sit in on interviews with bidders and give another perspective and insight.

I am keen to use all my skill set to bring variety in my career – to have different strings to my bow. I did mentoring for many years at CBRE and, as you know, I'm interested in doing something in the mental health space. I oversee the Mental Health Matters initiative at TLD, and this is something I really want to develop and do more of. I'm looking at training or maybe even therapy, counselling or coaching – not as a hobby but as a strand of my career, as part of the evolution of my professional identity.

This got us ruminating about how make the second half of adult life rewarding and successful. As Rob pointed out, though we may feel in decline, it is important to remember that the wisdom, knowledge and experience that later life brings gives us an opportunity to carve out a career and a lifestyle that is varied and fulfilling.

TLD supports that opportunity. If you're a senior lawyer from an in-house background and looking for a different way of working with more flexibility and more control, have a look at our '[Working with The Legal Director](#)' guide or contact our Recruitment Manager Georgina Rylance for a chat on 07305 902876 or georgina.rylance@thelegaldirector.co.uk.

