

# Checking In

In this series, Practical Law Advisory Board members discuss their current work and key legal developments in their practice area.



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**Education:** 1988: LL.M., Harvard Law School; 1986: LL.B., *with honors*, University of Melbourne Law School; 1984: B.Com., *with honors*, University of Melbourne.

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**What do you think is currently the biggest challenge facing corporate attorneys?** The impact of technology on how we practice law is a major challenge. More powerful technology has allowed corporate attorneys to become much more efficient, but it has also made the practice of law much more demanding.

With wireless networks, mobile devices and information-sharing technologies, we can work remotely from nearly anywhere at any time. As a result, we are well equipped to better serve our clients, but it also sets a new precedent of expectations.

The struggle to balance the ability to be on call and to produce the highest quality work product 24 hours a day, seven days a week, versus the need for time to reflect, be thoughtful, rest and recharge is becoming increasingly difficult. We want to give our clients the highest quality legal services and exceed their expectations every time, but not at all times.

**Have any recent legal or market developments had a significant impact on your practice?** There has been a very dramatic uptick in M&A activity in the US in the last 15 to 18 months. I believe this reflects substantial pent-up demand for M&A and other strategic activity, combined with a

significant increase in overall confidence in boardrooms and management suites. This has led to a significant and constant flow of M&A activity. I believe this increase will not be sustained. However, the increase is keeping many corporate attorneys, myself included, very busy for the time being.

**Are there any changes on the horizon that you think will significantly affect corporate practice?** The continued application of modern technology will further revolutionize the corporate practice. If people can create planes that fly without pilots, and cars that operate without drivers, I am confident that someone will develop further, better and more powerful ways of practicing law that reduce the role of the human attorney as measured in time, but increase the importance of the human attorney in terms of value added.

**If not an attorney, what would you wish to be?** I have not given it much thought, as I always aspired to be in the legal field and I very much enjoy what I do day to day. However, as I think now about what I enjoy most about being an attorney, I would wish to be an engineer.

I enjoy thinking critically and problem solving to help others achieve their objectives. Though I have never been an engineer, and I do not know anyone who is a practicing engineer, it seems that is what engineers do.

**What was your first job?** Believe it or not, my first job was working in a car garage, changing tires. I still know how to do it. It is not very hard to learn, so it is fairly hard to forget.

**What is the best career advice you have ever received?** As I was starting out my legal career and choosing my initial job out of law school, I was told to

aim high. I would never do better than my first job, and even if I thought my first job was not where I would want to end up, it would be easier to go anywhere else if I aimed high.

That was likely the most impactful advice, but a close second came when I had decided to leave Australia and was choosing between relocating to London or New York. An attorney I had worked for in Australia said that if I went to London, no matter how good I was the English would never forget that I was an Australian. If I went to New York, however, I would have to prove how good I was every day I worked, but no one would care that I was an Australian. So I went to New York.

**What one piece of advice would you give to a junior attorney considering specializing in corporate law?** The process of becoming a skilled and well-rounded corporate attorney takes a very long time. Everyone, even the most fervent supporters of the US legal education system, recognizes that junior corporate attorneys have much to learn.

I would encourage every junior corporate attorney to view this process of learning as not a race to the finish (because it never really finishes) but rather to keep investing in their own development, even past the point at which the law firm or the entity that retains them has ceased to do so.

**Cravath, Swaine & Moore LLP**