

A Journey into Law

Interview with Ms Khadijah Sim



Ms Sim Khadijah Bte Mohammed (“Ms Khadijah”) is an Assistant Registrar with the Supreme Court of Singapore. Prior to becoming an Assistant Registrar, Ms Khadijah was a practicing lawyer with the Commercial Litigation Practice Group in Rajah & Tann LLP. Ms Khadijah graduated from the NUS Faculty of Law and was the winner of the Faculty’s prestigious Advocacy Cup in 2005. In 2008, while taking the Postgraduate Practical Law Course, she was also awarded the Law Society’s Prize for Best Student in Advocacy.

Ms Khadijah is currently a Legal Skills Instructor for the NUS Faculty of Law and an Advocacy Instructor for the SILE Part B Course. Apart from litigation and advocacy, Ms Khadijah is deeply passionate about Mediation and is a prolific writer in the legal and non-legal spheres. She has been accredited as an Associate Mediator by the Singapore Mediation Centre since 2008 and is a mediation trainer for the SMC both locally and abroad. Her publications include:

- *“Managing Emotional Conflicts with Reframes”* [2012] Asian Journal on Mediation 31
- *“Do You Hear Me Clearly From Over There? (Communicating on Different Planes in Cross-Culture Mediations)”* (Paper presented at the Asian Mediation Association Conference in 2009)
- *“Discovering the Meaning of Tawakkal”* [2012] The Muslim Reader, Vol. 30(2): 30
- *“The Truth About Peer Pressure”* [2012] Teens’ Crossroads, Vol. 21(3): 2
- *“Discovering the Meaning of Tawakkal (Part II)”* [2013] The Muslim Reader, Vol. 31(2): 23
- *“Confessions of a Second Generation Muslim”* [2014] The Muslim Reader, Vol. 32(1): 40

Al-Mizan is honoured to have Ms Khadijah share with us the story behind her glittering career in law so far.

Share with us how you decided to pursue a career in law. Was there a specific event or individual who made an impact on you to reach that decision?

“My motivational force has always been my family. My family was not well-to-do and we faced financial hardships when I was growing up. Working hard was the most logical way to help my family out of the bind that we were in. At the same time, I have always wanted to make a difference in the lives of others. Law seemed like the perfect fit in terms of being able to make a small difference, while providing financial stability for my family.”

How did you first become involved in Mediation? Are there skills you feel are necessary to succeed in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), such as Mediation, as distinct from other fields of practice in Singapore?

“I took a Mediation course in law school and fell in love with it. The people and communication skills I picked up were life-changing. They came in handy not just for the *pro bono* mediations I conducted at the Primary Dispute Resolution Centre, but in my litigation practice as well. They have also proved to be very useful in my current job.

Often, lawyers get too focused on the legal issues without realising that there are other emotional undercurrents or interests of their clients that are not being addressed by the litigation process. This is where the people and communication skills come in handy. From being able to read body language, to identifying the real interests of the parties or stumbling blocks in the way of dispute resolution, to communicating an idea in the most palatable way to the particular audience, these skills are not easily attained or frequently applied in other fields of legal practice.”

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What drew you to the practice of Commercial Litigation in the beginning of your career?

I have always had a passion for litigation and advocacy. At the beginning of my legal career, I was not ready to specialise in any particular area of law. Being in the Commercial Litigation Practice Group allowed me to gain experience in all types of disputes including employment law, shareholder disputes, property disputes, defamation, professional negligence and other tortious and contractual disputes.

The profession is currently facing a high attrition rate for lawyers after 3-5 years of practice. What is your advice for young lawyers?

For young lawyers who are just starting out, I would say hang in there. Expect your first 3 years to be rough, but this is the time when you learn and develop the most. These are the years you will look back on and recognise to be the formative years of what I hope is a long and illustrious legal career.

“After the first 3 years, life will get better. I have been there, and I have found this to be true: You will learn to work faster and smarter; you will learn to manage your clients’ and bosses’ expectations better; things that used to be an uphill task for you will be achievable with greater ease; you will learn to manage your time better and you should be able to balance your work

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commitments with other interests and passions, the way I was able to take on my teaching appointments that are such a large part of who I am.

You should also take the time to consider what really drives you. This will be the motivational force that helps you carry on when the job gets challenging. It will also be your compass when the distracting job offers start pouring in. When I was in practice, I realised that one of the things that drove me was my passion for arguing in Court. Knowing this helped me turn away offers by head hunters for positions in offshore firms or as in-house counsel.

At the same time, I understand that as a member of the legal profession, I am in a privileged position to impact the lives of the everyday man. Knowing that I may be in a position to effect positive change in the lives of others is what drives me the most today. On days when I feel tired or overwhelmed, the reminder of the privileged position I am in pushes me to keep giving my best.”

Are there aspects of your current job as an Assistant Registrar that you find more challenging than when you were in practice?

“As a judicial officer, the impact of my decisions may be more far reaching than when I was in practice. My decision has the potential to affect not only the individuals or companies themselves but future

litigants, or the development of the law. As such, there is a heavier responsibility to ensure that each decision is the best decision in the circumstances, and under the law.”

What has been the most memorable moment in your career so far?

“One of my best memories was when a litigant-in-person who had been on the opposing side in one of my cases thanked me at the conclusion of the case for treating her fairly. It reminded me that acting for my client did not mean trampling on others’ rights and that I should always treat others the way I would hope to be treated. I have never been one to subscribe to the notion that the end justifies the means. Fairness in the process is just as important as the outcome.”

In terms of career and contributing to society as a lawyer, what are your hopes for the future?

“It is my hope that I will be able to continue contributing to the legal profession and to society as a whole; to assist in some small way to make a difference in the lives of those who cross paths with me. I also hope, through my teaching stints, to inspire more young minds to find their passion and calling in law.”

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