

Paul White

Looking for work that fits

Paul loved Medical School and has always wanted to be a doctor. It was about the end of the first house surgeon's year that he began to have doubts. *"I started to think 'I'm not sure about this', and I discovered when talking to some consultants they said they wouldn't do the same again. This put huge doubt in my mind, along with the thought, 'I can't see myself doing this for the next 40 years'."*

Paul was also involved in the politics of his work, the Resident Doctors Association, and doing "crazy hours". He was working 50-60 hours on a demanding and stressful run, and was involved in the work of the union for another 50 hours a week. *"I thought, I can't keep doing both, which one would I choose? I found I preferred advocacy to treating sick people."*

Paul went to work in Australia in an effort to revive his enthusiasm for medicine, working in a different specialty; but it didn't, and again he became attracted to the politics of the profession. Then with his partner he backpacked through South America en route to work in England, and it was at this time the decision was made. *"No, I'm going to quit medicine and study law."*

Reactions to his decision were mixed: peers and senior doctors were encouraging; friends outside medicine were more sceptical. *"But you spent so long at Medical School!"* was the typical response.

Paul considered his investment in medicine – about 8 years – balanced against another 40 years of work he would not enjoy, and decided to enter Law School. It was a perfect time in his life, as although now married, he had not started a family.

So, four and a half years after graduation, and after two and a half years of decision-making, he became a law student at Auckland Law School. *"It was hard",* he says, *"it was uncharted territory at the time"*. However from day one he was happy with his decision, and enjoyed Law School and the different style and nature of the learning.

In reviewing aspects of the work that contributed to his decision, Paul identifies his enjoyment of problem solving as a key factor. *"I like problem solving, and in medical work I became disheartened as it is not really like that. It is more pattern recognition. What is interesting is the 1% that doesn't fit the pattern. What I discovered in my law training is that is what law is – problem solving – and that fits me to a 't'."*

Other highly valuable skills learned in his medical training were complex communication skills. Paul identifies a key skill, which is often underrated by doctors, as the ability to assess a person quickly and pitch your communication style and process appropriately. *"It's the ability to translate messages to the right pitch for the receiver."* He also considers the reflective listening training very helpful, and his ability to make an informed intuitive response is very useful in his current work. He counts the ability to store and remember facts, pick up a lot of information and remember it as a valuable skill he learned as a doctor and uses as a lawyer.

In considering the satisfying factors of his current role (a barrister) Paul says, *"It keeps me interested, I enjoy the problem solving – I get retained to solve problems. I'm also naturally competitive, and in*

law you have a competitor. I enjoy this.” Paul also enjoys being part of a merit based system – “if you’re good, you get rewarded.”

Dr Paul White is a Barrister.