

Shanti Berggren

Deputy General Counsel, Business Legal for Optus

Justin Kardi, Lawyer at Clayton Utz, speaks with Shanti Berggren, Deputy General Counsel, Business Legal for Optus about International Women's Day and Shanti's career.

JUSTIN KARDI: Could you explain your role and what a typical day looks like for you?

SHANTI BERGGREN: In reality, my role is like a poorly drafted Statement of Work – it is very broad in scope! I am the Deputy General Counsel for the B2B units at Optus. My primary role is a legal one but it incorporates elements of leadership, risk, governance and commercial acumen. The beauty of being an in-house lawyer is that my typical day is like Forrest Gump's box of chocolates – I never know what I am going to get but the high level focus is always the same, pushing Optus Enterprise to be better at CX (customer experience) and EX (employee experience). I am very involved in the Optus Diversity and Inclusion program and I am the Exec Sponsor of the Optus Enterprise Graduate Program. I feel lucky that I get to spend time working on these two areas that I feel so strongly about as part of my day job. A quick snapshot of my calendar for this week has me involved in the following activities - business trading, risk committee, women's affinity group, 2021 grad program planning, licensing issue, supplier back to back review, partner dispute, customer negotiation, legal tools training, product vendor risk, agile product planning, review of legal training video, team member 1:1s. At some stage, I also need to get my favourite pair of earrings fixed. Staying on top of and responding to emails thoughtfully, respectfully and in a timely manner is 'business as usual' and happens in addition to the other things in my calendar.

KARDI: Is there anything you have learned through your career that you would like to give as advice to your younger self?

BERGGREN: Take care of yourself. Work on yourself and learn your 'why'. If you know your why, the how will fall into place. Put working on yourself ahead of everything else including taking care of others. If you are not in a good space, you are no good to other people. For starters, I would tell my younger self to put on the sun screen that doubles up as a moisturiser everyday before you put anything else on your face. The harsh Australian sun will catch up with

you eventually. Good posture is another thing I really should have taken much more notice of but didn't! You learn a lot of things by osmosis, practice patience. Managing risk and ambiguity will become easier. Accept that your career will never go in a straight line, it will zig and zag, it will go backwards and forwards. What is important to look at is the trend lines. Over time, you will appreciate how much you have learned, that your reserve of resilience is building and that overall your experience and capability is trending more strongly.

KARDI: What's the greatest challenge you've faced or risk you've taken in your professional career?

BERGGREN: The catalyst for the greatest risk I faced in my professional career had nothing to do with my profession. It was a choice I made as a mother. 3 years after I began at Optus in Sydney, I chose to move back to Adelaide so my daughters could go to school where I went to school because I believed it was the best choice I could make for their 12 years of school. I was single-minded about this decision and offered to resign from Optus but instead Optus told me to grab a laptop and keep working from the Adelaide office. What this meant was that I did a lot of heavy lifting to make this work for me, for Optus, and my girls. Moving back to Adelaide after living interstate and overseas for 15 years was tough but I was clear about my why! I travelled back and forth a lot between Adelaide and Sydney getting up at 4am on a Monday to make a 6am flight to Sydney and be in my seat at the Optus campus for a 9am meeting. I found I worked harder at staying in touch with my interstate colleagues. It sharpened my communication skills and strengthened my networks. I worked hard to do a good job, to earn trust and buy in. The result is that I have a strong reputation, strong relationships and deep networks. Working remotely now away from headquarters is not a big deal. I like to think that I was a shepherd of this evolution.

KARDI: The 2021 International Women's Day campaign theme is #ChooseToChallenge. What does this mean to you and how might that be



implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

BERGGREN: In 2021 the International Women's Day #ChooseToChallenge is based on the same principles that have been around forever but now with a female centred lens coming to grips with what it means to be a contemporary woman. For me it means to lean into the causes that are bigger than you – stay connected and pay attention to them. When you are presented with new information take time to examine the facts on their own merits, question the source, identify your own bias and challenge your preconceived notions. Model self-determination, lift up your voice, take ownership and play your part in remaking a situation better for the women that come after you. If you want to go faster go alone, if you want to go further then we need to go together.

KARDI: If there is one thing you would celebrate about the legal industry on International Women's Day, what would it be?

BERGGREN: I love being a lawyer and more importantly an in-house lawyer. I am always asking 'why' to find ways to continually improve. The legal industry is perfectly positioned to ask 'why' and challenge the way society has operated, currently operates, and proposes to operate in the future. My experience is that collectively we use our voice, our influence and our talent to raise awareness on issues such as equity being the sense of belonging and safety you have when others see and treat you as equal.