

Meet the team

Simon Tovey

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What do you do at Outset and how do you support our clients?

Basically I'm a problem solver. Clients contact me on their particular employment related issue and I use my knowledge of the relevant law (and sometimes a bit of amateur psychology) to come up with a practical solution to achieve their preferred outcome, whilst also helping them to understand the potential benefits and risks of taking that course of action.

I see myself as an extension of the client, so my focus is always on supporting them to make the best decision for them/their business. To do that you have to be prepared to trust your experience and back your own judgement – maybe even be prepared to stick your neck out a little – to give practical advice and recommendations. If a client feels reassured when they put down the phone then I've done my job well.

Give us a brief timeline of your career so far

I trained and qualified at one of the largest international law firms in the world, which was a fantastic training ground for the rest of my career. Since then I've worked for another large law firm, a smaller niche employment practice, and even had a spell in the public sector. I have particularly extensive experience in contentious matters and different types of litigation. All of that has helped me to gain a broad range of experience, and gain exposure not only to what most might call employment law (strictly), but also the topics and areas around the edges that touch upon the employment relationship. In turn that means I am better equipped to see the big picture and help clients to achieve the best possible outcomes.



What has been your biggest challenge in your role?

This job is hard! There a massive amount to learn and it's changing all the time; so you can never stop learning. There is always a lot to do; and most of the time you are working under tight time pressure and managing competing priorities. There will never be enough hours in the day. So if you are working as hard as you can and doing as much as you can, you need to accept that you cannot be perfect.

As I've gotten more senior the biggest challenge is "letting go" of work outcomes. Something may not be 100% as you would like it to be if you have done it all yourself, but if its 80-90% where you want it to be (and you have high standards to begin with) then that's good.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Two things: the problem solving (even if it makes my brain hurt sometimes), and the opportunity to mentor others. Many people helped me along the way, and it's nice to return the favour. And I generally learn something as part of that process

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What do you think sets Outset apart?

I think mainly how engaged with and integrated we are within our clients' businesses. We are not just your normal hands-off external adviser; we genuinely look to help clients to operate their business well and productively and try to help them save money. That's why we prefer long term / retained relationships to one off instructions.

Internally the lack of ego: we all have something to bring to the table, and it doesn't matter who is 'right' or how 'senior' that person is; if they have a good idea then we take advantage of that. At the end of the day, if the outcome is the best one for the client, it really doesn't matter who does it or who gets the credit for it. A lot of the really great stuff happens entirely behind the scenes.

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What do you wish someone had told you when you started out? Or what piece of advice were you given early on that has stuck with you?

Don't be afraid to ask questions or say "I don't know". Or to put it another way, get comfortable with feeling like the stupidest person in the room. If something doesn't make sense to you, I can guarantee that it doesn't make sense to someone else. Often others are just too afraid to ask as they are afraid of looking silly. Worst case you learn something new. If you are constantly curious and always looking to grow and learn, that will stand you in good stead in your career. You will never know everything you want or need to know, but if you can get a little bit better every day then you will be doing okay. And don't trust anyone who never says "I don't know". They're probably not worth listening to.

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What do you enjoy doing when you are not working?

Being outdoors as much as possible. Golf is my passion, but a long walk listening to a podcast is a great way to relax (and learn something at the same time).

What piece of advice would you give someone in business?

Read "Rebel Ideas" by Matthew Syed. You might learn something about the true meaning of diversity in business.

Recruit intelligent people who are prepared to challenge you, your organisation, and your way of doing things. Consensus doesn't mean right. Different outlooks and real debate will make your organisation / product / service stronger.

And don't be overly influenced by other people's opinions or views, however confidently or authoritatively expressed. If you have done the work, trust your own judgement.

Who inspires you most and why?

I'm inspired by people who are true leaders, who have drive and determination, and who contribute something positive to the world – in whatever field they may choose. I would say that I have been inspired by many different people, in a wide variety of fields, ranging from athletes like Kobe Bryant (RIP) to coaches and counsellors who have developed and improved the lives of young people, all the way through to members of the Armed Forces.

Most recently I've been inspired by Ron DeSantis, Dr Pierre Kory, Dr Robert Malone, Steve Kirsch, and Dr Bret Weinstein, amongst others who have stood up to be counted in the face of strong opposition. Look them up with an open mind and I promise you that you will learn something about what is going on around you right now.



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When you were young, what did you want to be when you grew up?

A fighter pilot. But being short sighted somewhat scuppered that plan...

And finally... What is one thing you've learnt during lockdown?

The desire to be able to give truly informed advice to clients has encouraged me to learn more about the science of viruses, testing, and vaccination than I ever thought I would wish to know. And I've found it fascinating (and terrifying) in a way that I never imagined when I started. I've always been curious about the world, but that is now at an entirely new level. And I didn't enjoy science at school!

I have learned more new things in the last 16 months than I did in the previous 16 years, and have a new appreciation for things I thought I knew. It's hard to choose just one, but I would say the importance of freedom of speech and the open sharing of ideas, the dangers of censorship, and just how fragile the liberal democracy model we have all grown up in actually is.

If your argument is the better one, you shouldn't be afraid of debate. It can only improve your position. And if you are afraid of the debate, and can only win by trying to shut down your opposition, or you are refusing to engage in the debate at all, maybe your argument isn't that good.

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