

PROFILE

Yushanta Rungasammy
Director | Co-Head of Corporate & Commercial



A purpose-driven law career

From candidate attorney in a hometown to director in a multinational law firm in a big city.

Law school demands a high level of study and commitment. To be a successful lawyer in South Africa, a student must be knowledgeable about a wide range of technical legal areas and must be able to handle hundreds of varied cases at a time, and across a wide range of matters.

Without sugarcoating anything, studying law and successfully becoming a lawyer is not an easy feat. It can take 6-7 years of your life to complete: from earning the degree, to serving articles, to being formally admitted to practise law with a couple of years (between 3 - 4 years) of practice experience.

Successful law practitioners almost always have a true passion for it. The popular cliché, “choose a job you love and you will never work a day in your life”, rings true for many of those that practise law. Of course, we all know that in the real world it’s not quite that simple, but there is a wide body of scientific evidence that demonstrates the importance of passion for your work. And there are many people that have often displayed the highest level of purpose and passion that has driven their work and propelled them to great heights in their careers.

Director and Co-Head of Corporate and Commercial practice at international law firm CMS South Africa, Yushanta Rungasammy, started her career at a small law firm in Pretoria 15 years ago. It was here that she realised that she could be doing much more than she was doing with her career. At the young age of 24, her passion and drive made it clear that she belonged in the big league.

“I come from a home where hard work was second nature. Both my parents did not have university degrees; in fact, I was the very first in my immediate and extended family to graduate from a university. But my inspiration came from my parents

who decided to start a business. My mom encouraged my dad to start it. And eventually she quit her job to join him. Today they own a very successful business with a chain of testing stations serving a community of customers in different parts of the country,” says Yushanta.

“I was inspired by their hard work and determination and, when I decided I was going to study law, I knew it’d require me to work very hard. So, when I started working at a small legal firm doing basic legal work, I always felt that it wasn’t enough. I knew in my heart that law as a profession should offer much more than I was doing. It had to be bigger than this. I had more to offer,” she says.

It was during this time that she was tasked to assist a correspondent attorney of an international law firm with offices in Sandton. While filing and recording documents, doing research and reporting back to the firm, Yushanta realised that she was actually working on a very interesting matter. “I got so excited that I began going the extra mile on this work. At the end of the project, I submitted everything to my supervisors at my employer’s firm and I felt like I had a taste of what I really wanted to do; the more juicy legal work. Knowing that the law I was used to practising wasn’t the law I wanted to do, I immediately tendered my resignation. I had no job and I was not interviewing. I just felt that I was not seeing the level of dynamic work that I knew was out there and that I could be exposed to and that, where I was, I was not being fulfilled at all.”

After the resignation, fate would have it that the international law firm she was doing the work for on behalf of the firm she’d just resigned from, called her to ask her if she was interested in joining them. “They said that they were impressed with my work and that they wanted me to work with them. Of course I accepted the offer!” adds Yushanta.

As a woman of colour, there are hurdles

that must be overcome and challenges that have to be navigated in almost every career. But passion and determination go a long way in helping to surmount the challenging terrain. With her belief, passion and determination, Yushanta went on to become a director in one of the biggest law firms in the world. “And even though becoming a director in a big international law firm was a wonderful achievement, in that too, I reached a point where it felt that my purpose was much bigger than where I was. I knew that it had to be somewhere else where this could be done in the way in which I’d want it to be when I was looking for opportunities and growth as a young aspiring lawyer. It was then that I knew that I wanted to be in a reputable law firm with like-minded people whose purpose is to do what they love (practise law) but to also create opportunities and growth at levels within our community, our country, and on our continent beyond what others have explored.”

It was here that Yushanta decided to join up with her colleagues and friends to establish a firm that would be different and would be driven by the values of true transformation in the legal fraternity. RM Partners was born in 2018, led by Banking & Finance Legal Expert, Riza Moosa, looking to transform and modernise the South African legal market. The firm would grow exponentially to join the international firm CMS with a footprint across Europe, Asia, the Americas and in Africa, becoming CMS South Africa, as it is now popularly known.

Whilst it isn’t easy to get into and to grow a stellar career in law, Yushanta’s story demonstrates that it is possible if effort and energy are well invested into the vision. And, to see it through, it must be driven by a purpose to challenge the status quo and to create a transformed environment where others with similar backgrounds can be inspired by the possibilities knowing well that it can be done. No matter the challenges. 