

STAYING POWER

Longevity in business is something to be admired. In a new series of features, we are celebrating some of the most accomplished professionals from across the North East business community. Aimed at major players with 20+ years' experience in their respective sectors, we provide a fascinating insight into what makes them tick and what we can learn from them.

This month we speak to...

SURBHI VEDHARA

Specialist Commercial Property Solicitor and Managing Partner at Sweeney Miller Law

In her role, Surbhi deals with all aspects of property law and management across the firm at its offices in Newcastle and Sunderland.

Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

No, I didn't. I grew up in India and moved here around 20 years ago. At that time I had a business degree from India and I didn't really know what to do with it. There is a very strong legal tradition in my family - there are numerous lawyers and even a Judge. That background inspired me to go on to do law.

What is your favourite aspect of the job?

Much of what I do in my role is develop the young people in the firm. This includes the numerous members of the Sweeney Miller family who come in at a junior level and work their way up. We take in law graduates as paralegals and ultimately as trainee solicitors as well as apprentices who join us often straight after finishing school. I really enjoy watching them grow from the day that they join to becoming fully-fledged solicitors or whatever they go on to become. That's the 'mother' in me - when you see a child taking small first steps and then watch them flourishing, that's what I really, really do enjoy. A clear example of this has been the development of my colleagues Jess Fenwick and Damien Todd who joined Sweeney Miller from University and are now equity partners, demonstrating that there are no 'glass ceilings' at the firm.

What has been your career defining moment?

It was when I opened the Newcastle office. The move elevated us from being the largest firm in Sunderland to being a major player in the North East, particularly in the property industry. Opening a new office makes moving house look like a doddle! But like everything else, challenges bring opportunities. As the next chapter in the firm's growth ambitions, at the start of 2022 we relocated our Newcastle office to larger premises in Gosforth. This gives us more room to grow the team and be more accessible to our clients.

How do you measure success?

For me it would be the impact that I've made on people including clients and colleagues. If I've impacted anybody in any small way, once I've gone and they miss me, then I think I've made my mark and I would regard that as 'success'. Everything else is peripheral - money and material things come and go and are transitional. It's what you make of your life while you're here that matters.

What have been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?

The biggest change or challenge has been the rapid evolution of technology. In the 'olden days' you would write a letter to a solicitor or client, it would get there in three days, you could expect a response in about 10 days. Now with emails and platforms like Teams and Zoom, clients' expectations are understandably quite high. Clients want their solicitors to be available when they are, which is usually outside the traditional 9/5 model. As a progressive, client centred law firm, if you don't adapt to that, then you're behind the curve.

How has your skillset developed accordingly?

As a firm, we have embraced different technologies - we have our own App for example, that gives people instant notifications, any time of the day when dealing with property transactions. New members of staff are trained to be fully up to speed on all aspects of technology so that it becomes embedded as part of our firm's culture. We also developed our own admin software during Covid which allowed us to provide dedicated admin support during the lockdowns over the last two years and continues to support the people working from home.

Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

I'm definitely not conservative, but I do take calculated risks. You can't get anywhere in life without taking certain risks. Equally, they don't have to be reckless risks. Having started out with a business degree, I always reflect on the business side rather than just the law. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs and running my own business both really help when building relationships with commercial clients. You understand the client journey and challenges more when you have a business yourself.

To what would you attribute your success?

The standard answer would have to be hard work, however, most people work hard. So, for me, a lot of my success is down to the support of my friends, family and colleagues. I am fortunate enough to be surrounded by people who support me and my dreams and that positive energy pushes me to always better myself.

What's your biggest weakness?

I would say sometimes I can impose very high standards on people around me - the same high standards that I would want my clients to expect.

How do you remain motivated?

If you truly enjoy doing something, then it is far easier to keep motivated. Because I enjoy my work and developing colleagues so much, that keeps me on the right track and always motivated.

Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

Definitely respected. I'm not here to be liked or to be popular. If you are respected, you may be liked and popular as an end result, but that shouldn't be the goal.

From offices in Newcastle and Sunderland, Surbhi and her colleagues at Sweeney Miller Law work with individuals and business clients across its key practice areas of conveyancing, commercial property, company and commercial, family law, dispute resolution, private client and landlord and tenant.

To find out more visit www.sweeneymiller.co.uk or email enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk

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