

Fireside Chat with Vinod Mahboobani

Lessons from the Top

July 2021

*On 8 July 2021, the Association of Corporate Counsel Singapore and Bird & Bird ATMD had **Vinod Mahboobani** (Chief Legal Officer of KFC Global and Pizza Hut International) share his life lessons and experiences from trainee lawyer to globally successful general counsel – all in 60 minutes. Here are the key takeaways from the inspiring fireside chat. The webinar was hosted by **Christopher Y. Chan**, ACC Singapore Board Member and EVP Legal at the Lazada Group and moderated by **Lijun Chui**, Partner at Bird & Bird ATMD.*

1. Put in your best into every task, because even the smallest doors can open up great opportunities.

The session kicked off with a throwback to Vinod's first day as a trainee lawyer in Hong Kong. Clad in a brand-new suit, Vinod recalled his disappointment when asked to do the most mundane task of punching holes and paginating documents. But with the benefit of hindsight, his advice to young lawyers in that situation?

“Whatever you are given to, do your best at that task. Doesn't matter what task it is, you don't know what doors open up.”

Vinod later learnt that it was his positive attitude towards this first task that earned him an invaluable opportunity to work alongside some of the most prominent counsels for the entire duration of a landmark trial. Hard work and good attitude do pay off.

2. Surround yourself with “truth tellers” regardless of seniority.

Even as Vinod moved up the ranks and became more senior in the organisation, he never failed to keep himself grounded to reality. One of his secrets to success is to be open-minded about how, when and from whom to seek guidance. The key is in appreciating the diverse perspectives that people in different roles can bring, even those who are less experienced in the field. What matters more is that such persons are honest and direct when providing their feedback and views. In Vinod's own words:

“Surround yourself with what I call “truth tellers” – who will tell you things as they are, and not things that you want to hear.”

3. In new environments, have a thorough understanding of the audience and a good grasp of the situation.

As someone who has stepped into both legal and non-legal roles throughout his career, Vinod has had extensive experience dealing with different stakeholders and individuals with varying management styles. To connect with persons of different backgrounds, he believes that it is paramount to have a deep understanding of the other party's wants and needs. To put it simply:

“You need to understand the audience, and that’s how you will be guided on what message, in what way to target and deliver to the intended audience.”

Another tip that Vinod shared was to develop a sense of situational awareness and be flexible enough to adapt on the fly. For example, a presentation may have been scheduled for 1-hour but if it is before a group of jet-legged foreign guests which has overrun into lunchtime, one may be better off trying to compress the presentation to allow for the well needed break (in this instance, they had a flight to catch right after!). Drawing from that experience, Vinod advised that having the ability to work around contingencies is a useful skillset to demonstrate competence in new environments.

4. Invest in yourself – do not be afraid to step out of your comfort zone, but still remember to carve out your own space and be authentic

During the entire conversation, it was clear that Vinod's biggest asset is his personal conviction and beliefs. Vinod is a strong advocate of seeking diverse opportunities wherever possible to maximize personal growth and development, whether it be a new role in a different country or a new global project within the same organisation. And he himself walks the talk. Vinod's work has brought him across various portfolios traversing continents – from Hong Kong, to Singapore, to New Delhi and now to Dallas, Texas.

Yet through it all, Vinod remains steadfastly family-oriented with a keen sense of harmony between his personal space and his work life. In Vinod's view, taking time off for a “*reboot of the system*” is essential to staying in the race in the long run. Leading by example, Vinod himself does not send emails over the weekend out of respect for his team's personal time to recharge.

His parting advice to young professionals wanting to make an impression?

“Be original – you don’t need to put up a front, what you are is what you are... You need to be true to yourself, you cannot compromise on your values. When you show that your values are fundamental to yourself, that is how you gain trust and form relationships.”

ACC Singapore is your passport to connecting with the global community of in-house counsel. In Singapore, we offer local resources and connections with a global vision.

We provide a local network for Association of Corporate Counsel members in the region, expanding the reach of ACC's 45,000 members around the world employed by over 10,000 organisations. ACC Singapore members have access to quality educational and networking events, regional publications and resources, as well as insight and best practices from the global in-house profession.

For more information on ACC activities in Singapore, please visit <https://www.acc.com/chapters-networks/chapters/singapore>

Bird & Bird ATMD is a full-service Singapore law firm that combines local knowledge with international expertise to deliver quality legal services in Singapore and across the region.

As part of Bird & Bird's international practice through a global association, our strong local presence is complemented by our regional and international focus and reach.

We have been guiding clients in Singapore and across the region who seek to capitalise on Singapore's strength as a key business hub in Asia. We provide a comprehensive range of legal support on multi-jurisdictional transactions and projects, to meet our clients' business needs and ensure that their success is achieved both domestically and internationally. Our full-service capability encompasses advice on commercial, corporate, intellectual property, dispute resolution and arbitration, employment, competition, finance, data protection and real estate matters.

Working closely with Bird & Bird's extensive network of offices across Asia Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and North America, we are strategically placed to offer local expertise within a global context and deal with multinational projects and issues involving local and international laws, policies and business practices. In countries where we do not have a physical presence in, we have strong working relationships with highly respected law firms across Asia. You can expect an integrated delivery of expertise in relevant legal and business areas, wherever they need us in the region.

Visit us at: www.twobirds.com

Contact Us

Lorraine Tay
Joint Managing Partner,
Bird & Bird ATMD



[linkedin.com/in/lorraine-tay-02966927](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lorraine-tay-02966927)



Christopher Chan
Executive Vice President,
Lazada Group



[linkedin.com/in/christopherychan/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/christopherychan/)



Lijun Chui
Partner,
Bird & Bird ATMD



[linkedin.com/in/lijun-chui-崔丽君-084a84a0](https://www.linkedin.com/in/lijun-chui-崔丽君-084a84a0)



twobirds.com

Abu Dhabi & Amsterdam & Beijing & Bratislava & Brussels & Budapest & Copenhagen & Dubai & Dusseldorf & Frankfurt & The Hague & Hamburg & Helsinki & Hong Kong & London & Luxembourg & Lyon & Madrid & Milan & Munich & Paris & Prague & Rome & San Francisco & Shanghai & Singapore & Stockholm & Sydney & Warsaw & Satellite Office: Casablanca

The information given in this document concerning technical legal or professional subject matter is for guidance only and does not constitute legal or professional advice. Always consult a suitably qualified lawyer on any specific legal problem or matter. Bird & Bird assumes no responsibility for such information contained in this document and disclaims all liability in respect of such information.

This document is confidential. Bird & Bird is, unless otherwise stated, the owner of copyright of this document and its contents. No part of this document may be published, distributed, extracted, re-utilised, or reproduced in any material form.

Bird & Bird is an international legal practice comprising Bird & Bird LLP and its affiliated and associated businesses, which include Bird & Bird ATMD LLP as a Singapore law practice registered as a limited liability partnership in Singapore with registration number To8LLO001K.

Bird & Bird LLP is a limited liability partnership, registered in England and Wales with registered number OC340318 and is authorised and regulated by the Solicitors Regulation Authority. Its registered office and principal place of business is at 12 New Fetter Lane, London EC4A 1JP. A list of members of Bird & Bird LLP and of any non-members who are designated as partners, and of their respective professional qualifications, is open to inspection at that address.

1887663.2