

Summer Clerk Testimonials

by Rania Jones

When applying for and choosing the firm at which to undertake a summer clerkship I was looking for three essential things in a firm: meaningful work, a progressive approach to clients, and a supportive team environment. Harmers Workplace Lawyers soon became the clear choice as it surpassed my expectations in all three areas.

"... meaningful work, a progressive approach to clients, and a supportive team "

As Harmers is already a specialised workplace law firm, it is not divided into distinct practice groups and thus clerks do not undertake rotations as they do in other firms. This provides a number of benefits. Rather than having to choose between and experience only a few discrete areas of workplace law, I had the opportunity to work in all of the areas in which Harmers provides services, including industrial and employment law, human rights and equal opportunity law, OH&S, and legal risk management. Moreover, it gave me the opportunity to work with and get to know a wide range of people within the firm. Whilst some may be reluctant to choose a specialist firm at the beginning of their career, it is important to note that employment law encompasses a wide range of legal disciplines. The tasks I conducted throughout my clerkship traversed many areas including corporate, contract, immigration, tort, constitutional and trade practices law. A clerkship at Harmers thus provides a valuable insight into the practical application and interaction of many of the different areas of law studied at uni. Examples of the tasks I was given as a clerk include legal research into bargaining processes under the Fair Work Act, drafting an independent contractor agreement, attending Federal Court proceedings, sitting in on client meetings and mediations, contributing to a client advice on termination payments, and writing a legal training paper on intellectual property and workplace surveillance. I found that each task expanded both my theoretical and practical knowledge of the law, giving me valuable insights into the practice of law that cannot be gained at uni.

In terms of its clients, Harmers is refreshingly progressive and egalitarian. The firm's provision of services to both employees and employers not only gives Harmers' staff a balanced understanding of the employment relationship, but also speaks volumes about the firm's commitment to justice for all parties in the workplace. The firm emphasises a proactive approach to workplace issues, with a focus on prevention rather than reaction, and aims to practice holistic lawyering, looking beyond the immediate legal problem to potential PR issues, employee moral issues, and so on. During our clerkship the importance of learning to think outside the box was consistently emphasised as we undertook what at first appeared to be 'left-field' research tasks, but which later revealed themselves to be part of overall plan to provide our clients with the most comprehensive service possible.

What sets Harmers apart is its work environment and culture. In all areas, not least its approach to staff, Harmers is an incredibly down-to-earth, open and supportive firm. From day one staff from all

areas of the firm made a genuine effort to welcome us as clerks and get to know us as people. Harmers' 'open-door' policy is no cliché, with solicitors from all levels making themselves available to chat about everything from matters we were working on, to processes and procedures, to what we did on the weekend. During our clerkship we worked directly with staff of all

"...The firm aims to practice holistic lawyering, looking beyond the immediate legal problem to potential PR issues, employee moral issues and so on..."

Summer Clerk 2009/10

levels of seniority, from graduates to the chairman of the firm, all of whom took time out to explain the background to matters, no matter how small the task. A concerted effort was also made to provide feedback and constructive criticism, always with the aim of helping us to improve. Harmers approach to firm management is equally inclusive, with the firm adopting a 'Full Firm' consultation model, whereby all staff are directly involved in determining the strategic direction of the firm and given access to all material relevant to firm management. Even as summer clerks we were readily included in these processes, being invited to engage in full firm meetings, given regular updates on firm developments, and permitted access to a wide range of confidential information about the firm.

Overall, my experience at Harmers was thoroughly enjoyable and rewarding. If like me you are also looking for a firm that will provide you with exposure to wide range of legal practice areas, coupled with a supportive team environment and a genuine concern for clients interests, I strongly urge you to consider undertaking a clerkship at Harmers Workplace Lawyers.