

Episode Six: Global Thinking with Sophie Snow (sponsored by Baker McKenzie).

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Emmanuel is an Events and Engagement co-opt for the GLSA.

Sophie Snow is a Dispute Resolution Associate in Baker's Melbourne office.

Emmanuel: The GLSA acknowledges that the Melbourne Law School is situated on stolen Wurundjeri land of the Kulin Nation, of which sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Emmanuel: Hi there, welcome to the sixth episode of the Think Global: Careers in International Law podcast series brought to you by the Global Law Students Association and Baker McKenzie. This episode explores what it is like to work in various common law jurisdictions and work on large-scale global transactions. Baker McKenzie is a prominent multinational law firm headquartered in Chicago. Founded in 1949 as Baker & McKenzie, it has 77 offices in 46 countries, and over 6,000 lawyers worldwide.

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Emmanuel: Welcome to another episode of the GLSA Think Global: Career In International Law Podcast series. I'm Emmanuel, one of the Engagement & Events co-opts, today I'm joined by Sophie Snow, an Associate in the Dispute Resolution team at Baker McKenzie's Melbourne office. Sophie, it is so great to have you as a guest on our Think Global series, would you mind briefly introducing yourself to our listeners?

Sophie: Yes, hi Emmanuel. It's great to be here as well. This is my first podcast as well. I'm an associate in the dispute resolution team at Baker. So, I'm based in the Melbourne office but we have been working from home for a little bit. I do quite a bit of work with the Sydney office as well. I've been at Baker for three and a half years. I started as a grad, did rotations, and settled in Dispute for just over two years. So, I grew up in Melbourne but I have lived in other parts of the world which I am sure we will chat about as we go through this podcast.

Emmanuel: It's great to hear Sophie. So yeah, before diving into your legal career and your experiences at Baker, we just want to ask why did you decide to pursue a career in law?

Sophie: It's a good question. I had a bit of an, I mean it's probably not so unconventional now that people were doing the JD but at the time the JD was not really the common path into law, people would still be doing LLB. So, when I finished school, I did Arts and I majored in history and media communications, and I thought I was going to work in media and marketing. That was kind of the path I was going down. After I finished my undergrad, I went and worked in New York for a year in fashion marketing. Very different to law and I guess that experience just made me realize that I wasn't engage with marketing, I didn't like it there, I didn't feel challenged. I looked at my boss and I thought, I don't want to be doing what she's doing in five years, so this isn't really the path I want to stay on. I was sort of in this position where I had law in the back of my mind a little bit when I was in high school, and then also in undergrad, sort of coming to the end of my degree, a few of my friends have applied so it was sort of on my radar, but I just thought nah, it's not to me. So then when I wasn't enjoying what I was doing in New York, I thought well, I might as well apply and see if I get in because I've had it in the back of my mind. If I don't get in, I don't, if I do, I'll give it a go and if I don't like it, I've already got another degree and sort of a commenced career although very brief experience, but I've got something to fall back on and I can just figure something else out. So, I started law school and in my first year, but towards the end of my first year I started paralegaling at a boutique firm in the city and that was it. That's when I just knew that I was really enjoying it. I think the first year of law school, as everyone knows it's so challenging, I didn't really know what I was doing, I didn't know I liked it but once I started getting that paralegal experience I definitely was like I'm on the right path this is what I want to do and by then I was 24, so I was happy that I had found that I was on the right track.

Emmanuel: Thank you for that Sophie. I am currently at this position, twenty-four, first year, and not sure what I'm doing, so I'm sure a lot will be happy to hear that. As you mentioned, you started as a grad Baker and eventually now as an associate. Can you tell us more about how you ended up at Baker as a grad?

Sophie: I actually was really lucky. You guys are probably aware that GLSA and Melbourne University have lots of mentoring programs, and I would encourage everyone listening to make the most of them because they're amazing. So, when I was in my first year, I applied for the mentoring program, and I was matched with a partner at Baker's. She's no longer there, but I had this meeting with her and actually went to meet her at the Baker's office. It would have been like the very start of my second semester of first year. You know, as I said because I hadn't had in my mind for my whole life that I want to be a lawyer, I wasn't really on top of all the clerkship stuff. I mean I was only in first year so it wasn't the end of the world that I wasn't on top of it. But I had these meeting with this former partner at Baker and she basically just said you know you need to get your head in the zone now because for JD, it is only three years so if you do want to go down the path of doing a clerkship and potentially being a grad at a big corporate firm, you need

to really start thinking about it now because before you know it, applications are going to come around. I was really lucky to have that advice so early and I was also lucky to have that insight into the firm. From that point I started doing my research into which firm might be a good fit for me, speaking to friends a year or two above at law school who have applied to clerkship or are going to apply. So it was good to have that friendship in other year level to get that inside information about the different firm. So what I did then from first year is that I worked in a boutique firm to get something on my resume, and to make sure I liked it and that was what I wanted to do. I think it is important to go out and get experience as early as possible. Then I have been working at the firm for a year when clerkship application started. I put in a lot of applications and got a lot of rejection, but I did also get a few clerkships, and one of them was Baker. I did that at the end of 2016, wow that was so long ago when I say it out loud. That was my first clerkship, and it was an amazing experience. Totally different working in a big global firm than a small boutique firm. Everybody was friendly, we got interesting work. After my clerkship I applied to work in the library at Baker. We used to have clerks coming back to work as paralegal or research clerk during the semester, so that was a good experience for me, it meant I have the clerkship experience in December and then basically from I think it was March until July of the following year I was working at Baker once a week, so I was really getting to know people and doing different work across different teams, mainly research, which is perfect when you're a law student. When it came time to do with grad offer, I had decided after doing my other clerkships that Baker is where I wanted to go if I was lucky enough to get an offer, and I was, which was great. So I then started, I took a few months off and went traveling, and I started as a grad in 2018. Once I was a grad, I did three different rotations, so I always thought because of that experience of working in marketing and living in New York, I thought I would want to do either kind of corporate M&A work, or maybe intellectual property kind of work. I had no interest in litigation at all. I thought at law school I didn't love reading cases, I didn't do mootings, and I didn't do any of that stuff. So I just thought I wouldn't be interested in litigation at all. In our grad program, they encourage you to do one litigious rotation and one transactional rotation, so you get the experience in both, and your third rotation, you kind of do whatever you were leaning towards more. I didn't yeah, as I said because I wasn't really that interested in litigation, but I knew I had to expose myself to it, so I did a dispute rotation first, and then I did a construction rotation, and then my last one is corporate M&A. I was very torn right up until the day that we had to put in our preferences of where we wanted to end up after the grad program. I had him giving me an extension on my decision time because I cannot decide between dispute and M&A. I ended up going with my gut and chose dispute and I haven't looked back, it was absolutely the right choice to me. I love it. So yeah, that's how I ended up where I am.

Emmanuel: Thank you for that. It is great hearing from a first-year perspective and hearing how you got to where you are today with all the people and experience you had between. Just back

tracking a little since it is clerkship application soon, a lot of our listeners would like to learn more about your experience as a clerk at Baker. From the sound of it, you had a great time there. Can you tell us more a little about what made you like Baker so much while you clerked there?

Sophie: Like I said, I clerked at the Baker office in the December period. I remember when I was going through this process there is always the discussion about whether you should do the firm you want to end up at or do it last because you got more experience and you've done more subjects and more confidence, or should you do it first since everyone is on an even playing field for the first clerkship as nobody's done one, they don't have other clerks to compare you to. I think people overanalyze this stuff now that I am on the inside, I see that if you are a good candidate, you are a candidate. It doesn't matter what time of year you come or whether you have other experience. The reason that I did December for Baker is because at that point we were only doing two sessions, now we are doing three. Because one of my other clerkships didn't offer a...it sorts of just worked out with the timing that I had to do December. I think that was a brilliant choice for me because Baker is a very social place, everybody is very friendly. We don't have a huge number of lawyers in the Melbourne office, so I think there's about 110 or something, so compared to some of the much bigger firms, where 300 or 400 lawyers, it's a size where you can really get to know each other. In that December period, there were so many events, like we had practice group, end of the year party, the whole firm-wide end of year party, everyone was in a great mood gearing up to Christmas and new year. Everybody was busy trying to get everything done for the end of the year, so I think for me it was a great combination of really busy workwise and busy socially, so I've got to see kind of the firm at its best. So, the way that the clerkship was run when I did it and I believe it's similar now although sometimes depending on lockdown, it might have to be partly online, we did a few days of training, and then you go into your practice group. I've clerked at the employment team, and I think one of the reasons I loved it so much was that I was given a lot of responsibility. Even though I was a clerk, I wasn't being given work that was made up or tasks that were kind of manufactured just to test my writing skills. I was put on matter, doing tasks that needed to be done, and that there's no one else to do them. I felt like I had the opportunity to perform because it was necessary. I think one of the main reasons I loved it so much, I think was the quality of work and kind of the level of responsibility I was given, the social opportunities, and just the great atmosphere around the office, and the opportunity to chat with so many different people and then also that whole collegiate where everyone is putting their hands on deck to get everything done before the end of the year, it just gave me a really great snapshot experience of the firm and what it would be like to work there.

Emmanuel: Thank you for that Sophie, it really sounded like as a clerk at Baker there's really a lot of work and great experience you can get. I'm sure a lot of our students who are interested in

applying would be more so now. As you are in the dispute team now, we know that you work on regulatory enforcement proceedings, as well as class actions and shareholders disputes, maybe can you tell us more about what this entails and perhaps what's your current day-to-day looks like as an associate with the dispute resolution team?

Sophie: I'll start maybe by telling you a little bit about the matters in general. As you said, we do quite a bit of regulatory work. We are a panel firm for the ACCC, so we do quite a bit of work for them from an enforcement perspective. For me, the main kind of area that I do within that subgroup is consumer law enforcement proceedings, so anything really has to do with the ACL. I love that kind of work because you do feel like you're helping protect consumers. The other thing that's great about it is when you are acting for the regulator, they are often not just interested in getting penalties from companies that might be in violation of relevant law, but they are also interested in testing the boundaries of the law. So you do get to do those kinds of interesting cases where you're trying to find out what does this provision mean, we want an answer from the court, and that's not really the kind of work private clients usually push for because this kind of litigation is stressful and expensive. So that's kind of a perk of working for a regulator and combined with that consumer law protection area, and also it's very challenging work because it's quite a technical area of law which I really like. Again, that was as I said, I didn't love that kind of stuff at law school so it was a bit of a shock to me in practice, I loved it, so I would say, keep an open mind about things you study because things are very different when you get into practice. As well as the ACCC work, I also have just started kind of dabbling in class actions which is an interesting area of law. I mean when I say area of law, it's really a type of proceeding and that's been a big learning experience to me because they're just so big. Everything has so many different administrative steps, and it's very procedural but it was a very good learning experience for class action. What I'm doing at the moment is actually for a partner from our Sydney office, but the proceeding has been issued in Victoria, and that's a bit unusual as well because class action, they are issued through the federal court, and this one has been issued through the Supreme Court of Victoria, and I've been lucky enough to be the Victorian associate on the ground, kind of taking charge of that one. So again, that's kind of an example of the real levels of responsibility and autonomy that they've given at a very junior level, I've just kind of been thrown into that and I'm learning as I go, and I like that kind of challenge. I prefer that kind of having my hand held and that suits me. I had a very interesting shareholder dispute last year, where we had to run the whole trial in the middle of the stage 4 lockdown, and that was the first trial that I had ever done instructing on my own, so it's just me and my partner, I didn't have a senior associate in between, and we had to do it all on Zoom. The first day of the trial, I had to get a special letter from the Chief Justice to allow me to leave home to go into the office, but that was a whole drama. That's a little bit of a snapshot into the kind of work that I do. As you can see, it really varies so now because I'm still reasonably junior, I am just testing out the kinds of things that I like, and I really

appreciate that I can have a go at lots of different things. I'm pretty interested in the consumer law and kind of competition stuff so I'm trying to focus my practice a little bit more on that, but I do still like having a variety of doing the class action, doing shareholder disputes, doing other whatever random disputes coming our way. They're all little learning experiences. In terms of what my day looks like, I know this is a cliché, but every day is very different, it really depends on what I have on. For example, next week I've got a huge piece of evidence during one of my regulatory matters, so this week most days I've had a meeting with the client to discuss various points of the evidence, then I will spend two or three hours drafting documents, speaking to my partner about it, she will give me feedback, I will make more amendments, then I might have to do something else on another matter like putting a brief together for counsel. I'm now at the stage where I would get one of the grads in the team to put the brief documents themselves together that I would write the briefing memo. I write a lot of letters, lots of stern letters to the other side asking them to do things, lots of emails with the court and liaising with the court, so that's something I really like about dispute as well is that interaction you get almost every day. The other thing that I'm doing at the moment which is another area of work that I'm trying to incorporate into my practice and get a bit more exposure to is the scheme of the arrangement, so it's not an insolvency kind of scheme of the arrangement, it's like a merger between two public companies and when public companies merge, they have to get approval from ASIC, and the court has to sign the whole thing. I've got a scheme going now, which means there's quite a bit of my day is taken up by like liaising with the corporate team at Baker and reporting back to them about how the court approval process is going for the deal. So yeah, it's a pretty good mixture of meetings, liaising with the court, speaking to counsel, preparing recent documents for counsel, drafting, and preparing evidence. There's a lot of writing and a lot of reading, but I love that, so I find it a very good mix, and as I said, if you're in trial, your day is gone, and then catching up on everything that happened, like analyzing evidence, stuff after court, and getting up and doing it all over again until the trial is over. There's a lot of variety which no day looks the same.

Emmanuel: Thank you Sophie, it's great to hear how there's just a range of things you can do at Baker within your position. So, you have also worked on complex or multi-jurisdictional advisory project, can you also tell us a little bit more about your experience with those at Baker?

Sophie: Yes, so I think one of the interesting things about litigation when you're working in a global firm, so if I was in a transactional team, I will probably have a lot more exposure to our other offices and like doing cross-border deals. But really the nature of disputes, unless you're doing an international arbitration, they are more localized. Well, I do work with international clients every day, so for example a lot of our clients are American, or based in Hong Kong, based in Europe, and if they have any kind of dispute going on in Australia, we will handle that for them. It's we're still dealing with the Australian courts and the Australian law. What's interesting is we

do help other global offices with their bigger advisory projects. So the most recent one I did was about competition law for one of the Middle Eastern competition authorities, I guess like the equivalent of the ACCC, and we basically provide them with an overview of the Australian competition law landscape. You might have seen it on the Baker's website, or if you haven't, I'd encourage your listeners to go and have a look, every year we publish these kinds of guides to doing business in Australia and they're designed for our international clients. This kind of advisory work that I have done in the past, for example, that competition project it's really like setting out the lay of the land in Australia so that other countries can take that into consideration when they might be overhauling their legislation or looking at policy changes. The other thing we do from a multi-jurisdictional perspective in this, more with our competition work, is if our corporate team have a cross-border deal, we will provide competition advice from the administrative perspective. So making sure that the ACCC will sign off on certain elements of the deal or saying this is something that you're actually going to have to apply to the ACCC clearance. So we get their international exposure a little bit different way, but again, it's another thing to shake up the day and do something different, and get your brain into a different, more advisory mode rather than defense litigious mode.

Emmanuel: Yeah thank you. It's always good to have exposure to clients from different places. As you mentioned, you have studied in London and worked in New York in fashion marketing, so how have your experiences studying and working abroad prepared you for your work at Baker?

Sophie: So I did a year away before I started uni, like between high school and uni where I lived in Israel and then I've worked in US like volunteering at a summer camp, and then I just traveled all over the US. Then when I came back to Melbourne, I did my degree, and I did a year of my undergrad in London. I think that was an awesome experience because I've had sort of the year of traveling before I went to uni, and then I was studying in this like very international city. Where London and New York, they're both quite transient cities in the sense that there's so many people who are just living there for two years and then moving on to what people from all over the world. I did a few internships in London in marketing, which is what I wanted to do. Just getting that exposure to work in an international environment, where people do come from different cultural backgrounds and have different ways of communicating has helped prepare me for professional life and particularly in a global firm. When I moved to New York after my undergrad before my law degree, I think I had that sort of the same experience of working with different people from different cultural backgrounds, but also just exposure to a different kind of work mentality. In the UK, it's quite a similar working culture to Australia, but America is very different, there's no handholding, it's work hard play hard, everyone's in it for themselves. New York is a very tough city, and I think that was good for me because it hardened me up a bit and made me realize that a lot of things in professional life are not personal, and you just have to be able to

take feedback, move on, improve based on that feedback, but kind of not get bogged down, in the naiveties and worrying about offending people. Not that Baker's environment is tough like that, but I think it just meant that now when I'm dealing with difficult clients or if I'm working with people from other offices is that just the way they communicate is a little bit different. I had that understanding that not everyone grew up in Melbourne, not everybody has the same way of thinking like me, and they were both very important and formative experiences for me to be working in a firm that's so global.

Emmanuel: Thank you for that Sophie. It's great advice for our student to also understand their exposure and openness to different cultures and just how to navigate working in a professional environment as well as their JD.

Sophie: I will just say to your listeners as well, obviously we're in a different world now with COVID it's not so easy to just jump on a plane and get that global experience, but you can do things you know in Melbourne, in Australia that challenge you, and that kind of pushes outside of your cultural comfort zone, have a look into what you can do to broaden your perspectives and help you understand and interact with people who don't necessarily have the same background as you. Even though the borders are shut, there are still plenty of things you could do. I would say that's something I would encourage people to do if they do want to work in a global firm like Baker.

Emmanuel: Yeah that's great advice especially Melbourne is such a diverse city, there's plenty of opportunities and we got so many different people from everywhere. Thank you for that. We also would like to know that if there's any other advice you would give to students who are interested in applying to be a clerk at Baker McKenzie this year?

Sophie: Yeah of course. Well, I would say firstly just for all your clerkships, make sure you leave enough time to do your applications. I know everybody's probably told you that, but they take so much time to do properly, and when you consider that the people who are reading them are reading hundreds, you really need to put in the time to make sure that yours stand out and convey the message that you were trying to convey. So, the first thing would be just don't underestimate how long they're going to take because they take a long time. Then I would say, I know that we are already in June, but there are still things that you can do the kind of boost your application. So if you've never worked in a firm, maybe see if you can do some volunteer work in a community legal center or something just to give yourself a little bit of exposure to legal work before you put in your application. That's not essential but it's just helpful. I would say be yourself, I know it sounds stupid, but in Baker's application, when I did it, I don't know what the questions will be. There was, and this isn't giving away any of the questions, I haven't seen them,

but when I did it, there was some kind of question like 'what was the most challenging time of your life?' I was very honest and open about my response to that question. I remember submitting my application thinking 'Oh my God, I didn't overshare there like that was so inappropriate' and I got an interview. After the interview, the partner that interviewed me said 'you know, it really showed a lot of courage that you're so open in your application and we were really impressed by that.' I was like wow, but maybe that's what got me over the line, I don't know, but I think it's very important to be yourself. As I said when they're reading hundreds and hundreds of applications, the only way you can stand out is by being who you are, don't want to try and be like everyone else. At least at Baker, this is another thing that I loved about clerking there which I forgot to mention, there's not one type of person. My clerkship group and my grad group, such different personalities, and everyone are very different so being yourself is an asset, and we like hiring people with different personalities in different quirks. I would say, do that, also make sure that if you've met anyone or spoken to anyone from Baker's and you're planning on referring to that in your application, that's a great thing, and you know you should reach out to those people that you've met, but just make sure that you have asked them whether you can put their name in their application. I've had a few people who put my name in their applications where I might have met them at a clerkship event but never spoken to them other than that, and I just found that a bit funny because then when TM, which is our talent management team asked me about them, and I have to say 'I'm sorry I don't know who that person is.' Because they've never followed up with me or anything, so I just think that's a really nice thing to do. It'll help your application because when TM goes to ask that person, 'what do you know about Emanuel?' I can say I did a podcast with him, it just keeps the dialogue a bit more open. I'm sure you've all done a lot of workshops on resume and all of that stuff, so I won't go into those, but I would just say, if you have had some kind of global experience or if you haven't but you're interested in that, really make sure that comes through in your application because we are a global firm, and even our border is shut, it doesn't mean that we're not very connected with all of our colleagues across the world, and particularly those in the Asia Pacific region. If you can highlight that experience or that intention to have an experience like that, or broaden yourself to become a bit more international, try and tie that in and highlight that in your application.

Emmanuel: Thank you for that Sophie. I also think authenticity is very important and we're happy to hear that Baker really values that and for our students throughout their clerkship application, so they feel comfortable as who they are, and to really bring out what they can offer to Baker. Just to finish off this episode, we want to know what are you most excited about your future at Baker?

Sophie: So in my immediate future, hopefully, borders pending, the thing I'm most excited about is our ATP program, which is the associate transfer program. I am looking to going to work

in one of our overseas offices for a year or two, hopefully, I will go around this time next year depending on what's happening with COVID. The moment I'm going through the application process for that, so it's like you guys are doing your clerkship applications, and I am doing my ATP application so I'm very much in the zone of applications. I'm excited, hopefully, about going and working in another office and being exposed to just a totally different culture. One of the reasons that I want to do something in Asia is I've never lived there, so I think it would be a good development experience for me. More importantly, making new friends and meeting my colleagues over there, and then eventually coming back to the Melbourne office and bring those experiences back to Australia with me. Unfortunately, because of COVID, a lot of our training programs that Baker, we do regionally, so we do with Asia Pacific region. Last year, I was supposed to go to Bangkok for an associate training program, not an associate transfer program, but we must do that all by Zoom. Everybody had trips canceled, so that was a bit disappointing, but still got to meet a lot of different people. I'm excited about that, I'm excited to see where the disputes that I have going on at the moment where they take me. Hopefully be able to instruct at my first real-life trial later this year or early next year, and rather than instructing by Zoom. So there are lots to look forward to.

Emmanuel: Thank you for that, they all sound very exciting and we're very happy to hear that you have so much to look forward to with your time at Baker. Thank you so much for coming to speak with us today Sophie, and we really appreciate your time and thank you so much.

Sophie: Thank you, Emmanuel, great to chat with you.

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Emmanuel: Thank you for listening to our sixth episode of the Think Global series brought to you by the GLSA and Baker McKenzie. To learn more about the opportunities that Sophie discussed today, as well as about Baker McKenzie, the clerkship application process, and graduate opportunities, please see our Facebook page for further links to these resources.