

The Thing About...

TITUS RAHIRI

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Five years on from its inception, Founder and CEO of KorumLegal, Titus Rahiri, reflects back and looks forward.
In conversation with Patrick Dransfield.

Photographs by Patrick Dransfield

Patrick: What does the name ‘Korum’ signify? Tell us about the KorumLegal story so far - from its founding in 2016.

Titus: KorumLegal was borne out of my frustration as a general counsel and buyer of legal services with what was available. I had been in private practice in New Zealand and London and led in-house legal teams in innovative technology companies in London and Hong Kong that were disrupting traditional business models. And yet - the legal services being delivered to our customers was still very manual and clunky. This had to change – so with KorumLegal I wanted to shake up and inject new life into ‘the what’ and ‘the how’ legal solutions were delivered. I wanted to challenge traditional practice and the problem that legal services were expensive, inaccessible and unnecessarily complex. So, providing an efficient, cost effective yet high quality legal solutions became our mission. And then I needed to find a name to launch this mission. I wanted a name that incorporated things which were important to me. I really liked ‘Korum’, which at its heart is a play on the Latin-derived legal word ‘quorum’ – meaning to bring a number of people together in order to transact business. ‘Korum’ also incorporates the Maori word ‘koru’ symbolising the spiral shape of a new unfurling silver fern frond that signifies new life, growth and strength. I’m very proud of my Maori heritage (New Zealand) and so essentially my two worlds blended together with the name KorumLegal. Our logo reflects the koru shape and the symbolism of new life and growth.

Patrick: You were a General Counsel for an international company during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC): how did that experience colour your conception of KorumLegal’s mission?

Titus: I always talk about the GFC being a catalyst for much needed change in the legal ecosystem. As a commercial lawyer in the London-based in-house team at NASDAQ listed Expedia Inc. in 2008, we were faced with the same challenges that many companies and legal teams will be familiar with and have been exacerbated now with the COVID-19 pandemic. These include: uncertainty and fear, employee well-being and safety, impact on revenues and sales, reduced budgets and spend, legal team rationalisation and optimisation and greater accountability for output and value. The GFC was certainly the start of my thinking around the future of legal services and the opportunity to be a pioneer in shaping tomorrow’s legal solutions today. That became the vision. Then, I needed to tick a few ‘preparation tasks’ off my list, including completing a part-time MBA at Cass Business School in London, followed by moving to Hong Kong with Expedia in 2013. My time at Expedia in London and Hong Kong was an important stepping stone for me – in understanding some key business fundamentals such as the importance of customer centricity, leading with data analysis for decision-making and also how strong leadership is critical for growth, while ensuring the





purpose of the business aligned with my values - who doesn't love travel and holidays? I then did a short stint as APAC GC of a UK technology 'unicorn' with USD\$200M investment that subsequently went into administration, which taught me some other invaluable lessons on what not to do: for example the importance of the 'lean start-up' mentality, the necessity of a laser-like focus on product execution and, finally how poor executive leadership can lead to the demise of a company. I literally helped close the doors of the Hong Kong office and then went to set up on my own in March 2016, outside of my comfort zone, armed with my laptop, a note pad and a vision.

Patrick: Over the past five years you have consistently described KorumLegal as being constituted of “People: Process + Technology and Managed Legal Services – with People first”: what are the main qualities that you look for in

the people you recruit for KorumLegal? What are the qualities that you hope you possess as a leader?

Titus: Absolutely – people have always been at the heart of what we do. Over the past 5 years as a start-up and moving to a scale-up company, we've had over 30 employees, contractors and interns who have contributed to the story of KorumLegal. Most of these people have shared the same frustrations and challenges that I have. They all believed in the vision and the problems we were seeking to solve. Everyone has come to us at different stages of their own careers and with their unique experiences, views and skills – and have contributed in some way whether their stay was for 'a reason, a season or a lifetime'. I'm very grateful to all of our Korum alumni who have helped pave the path. And with those people, we've created a unique culture that sets us apart – which has been an important part of our growth story. As the late Peter Drucker said: “Culture eats strategy for breakfast”.

We have built a strong Consultant community of over 350+ legal consultants over the past 5 years. Our differentiator is that we've walked in our customers' shoes and have a strong understanding of the pain points and solutions that customers may be seeking. And sometimes they don't know, so we're able to have that conversation, find out what's keeping them up at night and co-design solutions that could work.

All of this requires a 'people first' mindset. And that is one of the qualities as a leader that I hope I bring to the table – while also acknowledging that KorumLegal is still a work in progress. We learn by listening to our customers, our consultants, our HQ team and getting their feedback – as well as the wider legal and business community - and then make decisions accordingly. People will always be at the epicentre of the law.

Patrick: What's 'in it' at KorumLegal for an ambitious lawyer looking to enhance her career?

Titus: The way legal services are being delivered is rapidly changing. But there will always be a need for ambitious and smart lawyers. Our People product, where we offer top quality and experienced lawyers at all levels to work with customers on a flexible basis, allows our lawyers to do high calibre work with innovative customers, while also being a part of the exciting and fast growing 'NewLaw' revolution. Our Process + Tech product helps legal teams optimise their legal team processes creating more efficient and effective delivery and operations of the legal team – which requires a range of skills including process improvement and transformation, project management, data analytics, technology development and change management. This can be delivered by a lawyer who has added strings to their bow. But it can also be performed by non-lawyers. That's the future of legal service delivery. And then the combination of our People expertise, with smart Process and value-driven Technology into an integrated one-stop-shop solution is our Managed Legal Services offering. The future of law will be very different and while lawyers will always play an important part – other skills are and will increasingly be essential.



Patrick: The past 'COVID-19 Year' has proved a challenge for us all. For KorumLegal, and for you personally, what has surprised on the 'upside'? What have been the key challenges? What do you see as the key learning points for the future (for example, you have mentioned that post-COVID, you predict that more General Counsels will be increasingly looking at alternative legal solutions – is this happening already?)?

Titus: It certainly has been a tragic and challenging time but thankfully there have been also a few upsides. At a macro level, like the GFC, COVID-19 has provided another catalyst for change. Digital transformation being the biggest benefactor. What may have been on a corporate's 5-year strategic plan – is now being implemented in 3-5 months! That's a 'win' in my eyes as there are still many inefficient legal teams that are crying out for innovation. Also, the way that legal teams operate have come under scrutiny, and it has provided an opportunity for both a 'reset' and a 'refresh' for GC's and the C-suite as they review their legal operating model. Over the past year we have assisted customers to review and optimize their current legal team operations, design technology roadmaps for legal teams, review and design operating models for better efficiency and effectiveness. Another development has been the way people work – and the emphasis on greater flexibility in the modes and

structure of work. From flexible hours, to work from home and office splits, to more online meetings and less travel, to 4-day weeks – this has been a revolutionary change in how people think about work, which has allowed for greater perspective and for businesses like ours.

Patrick: What's on the horizon for KorumLegal? Where do you see yourselves in 5-10 years?

Titus: We've been through a tough and challenging 18 months, but I think we can now see the light! We're currently in our vision and strategy refresh phase and looking ahead to the next 5 years and beyond. Our NewLaw business will continue to be in demand for all the reasons mentioned. Our combined People, Process + Tech and Managed Legal Services will still form a significant core of what we will look like in five years. In the Managed Legal Services space, there are tremendous opportunities and demand for a high quality, specialised, and value and outcomes-focused offering. I see this as a key driver of our future growth. We have a grand ambition: we want to be the McKinsey of NewLaw. As the Asia-Pacific region accelerates to become a key focus for global companies that look to increase their footprint and expansion to capture new customers and markets, we want to be right there alongside them when they do that. We also have plans to expand our footprint across the Asia-Pacific region with new offices and new offerings and also potentially look at robust innovation hubs or 'centres of excellence' that will help us deliver on our exceptional quality service promise to our customers. I'm incredibly excited about what is ahead. The poet and activist Amanda Gorman best sums up my feelings about the present and the future: *"There is always a light. If only we're brave enough to see it. If only we're brave enough to be it."* It's time to be that light.

Patrick: What is your hinterland (i.e. what are your interests outside of KorumLegal)?

Titus: Well, I really enjoy travel – whether business or holidays and obviously that hasn't been possible. My family are not in Hong Kong and so that has been tough not being able to see them as well as friends overseas and missing important occasions. But it has meant that I'm doing things closer to home and with Hong Kong friends. Hong Kong is small – so we're having to get creative! I like any kind of sport (participating or watching), keep myself busy with gym or outdoor workouts, hiking and getting out in nature, started wake surfing last year, getting better at yoga, meditation and journalling, even taken my guitar out of storage to try to play a bit more (!) and doing more reading and reflection – this has kept me grounded and sane. My partner and I also have two dogs (Hugo & Blu) so they get a lot more attention and walks! But I'm really looking forward to travelling again, whenever that may be.

Biography - Titus Rahiri

Titus is a founder, legal innovator and experienced general counsel with more than 20 years' experience in private practice, in-house at listed companies (NASDAQ, FTSE and NZX) as well as start-up companies. Titus previously held a senior legal leadership role at Expedia Inc. and has led legal teams globally. Having worked in his native New Zealand, London and Hong Kong and across many countries, Titus became increasingly frustrated by the lack of innovation in the legal sector and recognised the need for transformation in the way legal services are delivered. He decided to be the change he wanted to see with the launch of KorumLegal exactly five years ago in March 2016 – a legal solutions company providing a platform for bespoke People, Process and Technology and Managed Legal Services solutions across AsiaPacific region and beyond.