

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

YSIAC Conference Recap: ARBXTalk by Christopher Chan of Lazada Singapore

Margaret Huang (WongPartnership LLP) · Friday, November 22nd, 2019 · YSIAC

For the first time, YSIAC Conference this year featured an ARBXTalk where the speaker was given 18 minutes to present a topic of his or her choice in an inspirational or thought-provoking way.

Mr. Christopher Y. Chan, the General Counsel and Head of Government Affairs at Lazada Singapore, was the speaker at the inaugural event. What started out as a light-hearted talk from him on how to achieve your dreams (like buying that coveted yacht of his) soon descended into a deeper discussion on what it means to be a lawyer today.

What it means to be a lawyer today

Mr Chan had 3 tips to offer:

1. Do not pigeonhole yourself.

With disputes becoming more international and cross-border, lawyers can no longer afford to pigeonhole themselves. They need to learn to be able to manoeuvre through sectors or areas which they never have had any experience in and to expand their horizons into the unfamiliar.

He took the rise of the e-commerce as an example. According to Mr Chan, on 11 November this year, Alibaba sold a record of \$38 billion worth of goods worldwide in just 1 day and that's a sharp increase from its sale of \$25 billion last year on the same day. The way people are buying things have changed drastically over the years. While most of us would know how to use the online payment functions, how many of us actually take the time to understand how these systems work and the common issues that these operators face? Yet, as problem fixers, lawyers need to constantly keep a curious mind in order to navigate through the latest evolution.

In the same vein, Mr Chan also noted that the practice of law is changing, and in particular, a lot of technologies are now involved in the work of a lawyer. Indeed, lawyers these days have no lack of artificial intelligence that can assist in their daily research and discovery processes. However, what that also means is that lawyers need to re-brand themselves to be able to provide that human touch and intelligence which machines are not yet capable of doing so (e.g. the ability to make a judgment call when there is no data, the ability to stand up in negotiations and "pound the table")

when needed, and the ability to command a room).

2. *Do your homework.*

Mr Chan shared his experience going into the technology sector without any former experience. His advice: do a lot of research on the business and the audience, and prepare as if you are going for trial.

He also disclosed that his first interview question to any lawyer who wishes to work in his company would be “What is the last thing you bought on Lazada?”, and he expects the candidate to, at least, have downloaded and tried the Lazada application. His motto: If you want to work in a ‘tech’ space, you ought to be comfortable with it and curious about it.

Mr Chan emphasised the importance of knowing who your audience is, and before every meeting that he attends, he will do a due diligence search on the Internet on the people he is meeting and try to understand in advance who they are. Similarly, I think that lawyers would do well to find out more about each of the arbitrators’ style before going for any hearing, and keep those in mind when presenting their client’s case.

3. *Network, network and network.*

In the midst of all the lawyering and hard work, Mr Chan reminded young lawyers to take time to build a brand for themselves and to keep expanding their network of contacts. In his words, young lawyers should “*dig a well before you are thirsty*” so that when an opportunity comes up, you will be the first that comes to mind.

This is not just about building network among fellow lawyers but also with people from different fields. These days, arbitral disputes have become more cross-border and often, in large commercial disputes, parties are always on the lookout for experts to assist them. In my view, lawyers who have the reputation of becoming a “one stop shop” and who can assist to connect people would certainly be favourably looked upon by their clients.

Mr Chan also reminded the audience that in this day and age, the best way to reach out to people is by the use of technologies such as social media and, of course, not forgetting that all of us were at a conference where there is easily 100 of new people around us!

Concluding comments

Mr Chan’s injection of his personal experience kept the discussion light-hearted and engaging yet at the same time the short discussion left the young lawyers with much thoughts as to where they want to go next and how best to navigate the new frontiers in arbitration 2.0. His point on having an interest in learning is an important message for young lawyers who aspire to practice across a wide range of sectors. Lawyers cannot be an expert in all fields; yet they are expected to be problem solvers for any and all legal issues that arise. The only way to do that is to build an

interest in learning and to research rigorously in order to thoroughly appreciate the nuances and intricacies in the issues that arise.

This post concludes our coverage of YSIAC Conference 2019. More coverage from YSIAC Conference is available [here](#).


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