Fountain Court

I did not read Law at university and planned to have a career in business. To that end I trained as an accountant with one of the major accountancy firms, so that I would know which way up to hold a balance sheet before heading off to work for a large corporation. The first three years of my working life were thus spent under the umbrella of a large and protective global firm. But on qualification, while most of my contemporaries took jobs in banks, I decided to retrain as a barrister, having done some time in litigation support and seen how much fun it looked to be. I was helped by a generous scholarship from one of the Inns of Court for the conversion course and the vocational training year, and by Fountain Court's well-paid pupillage.

Coming to the Bar from a professional firm, I was immediately struck by two things. First, that the atmosphere is much more egalitarian than I was used to. Each of us owns our own practice and is the proprietor of it. That not only gives instant responsibility, but to a greater degree than I had anticipated, it really means we are each answerable to no one else. We do have to make collective decisions, but when we do so, the vote of each of us is equal. Secondly, chambers is far more collegiate than I had anticipated. I had feared that being a sole practitioner would mean that my professional life would be a lonely one. Absolutely not: not only are we routinely in teams with (and against) each other, but we turn to each other for advice and guidance. And, unlike a firm, once you have become a tenant at the outset, there is no inner circle of power to aspire to or jostle for.

Of course, there are advantages to being an employee, not least someone else providing for your pension and paying you if you take a day's sick leave. But I have found the rewards of being self-employed are not just financial: it is great fun being your own boss and having your own business, even if the business is not quite the one I expected to be doing when I left university.

Henry King KC

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