

This transcript was exported on Nov 10, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Lana Fried ([00:20](#)):

My name's Lana and I'm the host of Get Hungry. I was born and grew up on Boonwurrung country and also have a very personal connection to my own Jewish culture and heritage. On behalf of the team producing this podcast, we pay our respects to the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation, the traditional owners of the land the Australian Swinburne campuses are located on, and where this podcast was recorded. We also pay respect to elders past, present, and emerging for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and aspirations of Aboriginal Australia. We must remember that under the concrete and the asphalt, this land is, was and always will be traditional Aboriginal land. The rich storytelling history of the world's oldest living culture is what we proudly pay homage to when we share stories on this podcast.

([00:50](#)):

This is Get Hungry, a show where we give you a taste of what career success looks like by talking to some of the most successful people in different industries and learn how they got to where they are today. I'm your host Lana Fried, and I'm a psych student at Swinburne University of Technology. And like a lot of you, I often wonder what it is that makes a person successful. In this show, I'm going to talk to people from different industries who've asked themselves the same questions as you and I. Where am I going and how do I get there? We'll grab a bite of food or even a coffee from somewhere near Swinburne. Then we'll find a spot on campus to have a chat. We'll talk about everything. We'll explore the successes that they've had, and just as important, the mistakes and missteps that they've learned from. So let's get into it.

([01:41](#)):

Today I'm catching up with Alex Giannopoulos. He's head of industry engagement and partnerships at the Leo Cussen Centre for Law. It's a hub of learning and innovation where lawyers can stay ahead of the curve in the legal profession. Alex studied law before becoming a practising lawyer and eventually pivoting into the legal recruitment world. In today's episode, you'll hear how sometimes your qualifications can allow you to succeed in unexpected places. Alex will talk about the many different roles you can take on after studying law, he'll share his tips on how to tackle a career change and Alex will tell us the fascinating story of how he made his own career transition. We're meeting at Mr & Mrs Banhmi on Glenferrie Road, because today I'm hungry. So, let's go.

([02:36](#)):

I am here at Mr & Mrs Banhmi on Glenferrie Road. This place is so cool. Definitely I'm excited to get my Banhmi fix for the day, so why don't we head on in? Hi, are you Alex?

Alex Giannopoulos ([02:53](#)):

Hi, yes.

Lana Fried ([02:54](#)):

Hi, lovely to meet you. I'm Lana.

Alex Giannopoulos ([02:56](#)):

Hi, Lana. Nice to meet you too.

Lana Fried ([02:58](#)):

Have you had a look to see what you wanted to order today?

This transcript was exported on Nov 10, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Alex Giannopoulos (03:00):

I have. There's so much to choose from.

Lana Fried (03:03):

All right, well let's order. So, Alex, we're here at Mr. & Mrs. Banhmi, one of the best Banhmi me places near campus. Banhmi is definitely a bit of a guilty pleasure of mine. So what would your guilty pleasure food be?

Alex Giannopoulos (03:19):

God, there are just too many, but I have to say that I'm a sucker for a great dumpling.

Lana Fried (03:24):

Sounds delicious.

Alex Giannopoulos (03:27):

Could I please get a Banhmi with grilled chicken?

Cafe Staff (03:29):

Chilli or no chilli?

Alex Giannopoulos (03:30):

Oh, definitely chilli.

Lana Fried (03:32):

Could we also grab a grilled pork Banhmi with no chilli?

Cafe Staff (03:36):

Grilled pork and a Banhmi with no chilli?

Lana Fried (03:39):

Yes, thank you. Well, now that we have our Banhmis, why don't we head back onto campus and get into it?

Alex Giannopoulos (03:47):

Sounds great. Let's do it.

Lana Fried (03:50):

So, with our Banhmi calling to us, we made our way quickly back to campus. For today's chat we went to the AMDC Sky Lounge. AMDC is the same building with the amazing wooden dome that we spoke to Rachel in, but the Sky Lounge has a very different view. It overlooks the ATC building, which if you're familiar with campus, you'll know has a strong resemblance to a cheese grater. So, to start our chat, I had to ask Alex what he thought about it. Alex, we're here today in the AMDC Sky Lounge and we've got the iconic cheese grater building behind us. What are your thoughts on this location?

Alex Giannopoulos ([04:28](#)):

It feels like we're in an airport lounge. I absolutely love it, the lighting, the acoustics. Brilliant.

Lana Fried ([04:33](#)):

It does feel a bit like that. We should be swept off into a fun flight soon. Now, I want to go back to the beginning of your journey. So you studied a degree in law and commerce, which landed you a role as a lawyer, but what you're doing now is really different. How did you end up getting to where you are now?

Alex Giannopoulos ([04:48](#)):

Yeah, look, it's a very interesting journey that I took and there are a lot of twists and turns in my career, which I think a really good example of how you can actually make change even if you start off in a traditional role. So, for me, I did start off as a lawyer working in a commercial dispute resolution setting in one of the large national firms. But I think everyone's personality is different and what I realised very quickly was that although there were elements of being a lawyer that I really enjoyed, I wasn't quite nailing it in terms of what was going to fulfil me.

([05:22](#)):

And I think for me, what I realised is that I wanted to move into a role where I was perhaps going to spend more time engaging with people. And so for me it meant a change into legal recruitment where I spent a lot of time meeting people, building relationships, and helping employers find lawyers for their teams and of course, having been a lawyer already meant that I was able to leverage my background and my knowledge of the industry to help in that role.

([05:54](#)):

Ultimately, I then moved into my current role where obviously I'm still working in a relationship-based context, but more in a legal training and education setting. So, I think for me it was just about identifying what makes me tick, what fulfils me, and then making tweaks to my career to still leverage what I've done in my previous roles, but then to move into different areas that perhaps leveraged my interests and skillsets more.

Lana Fried ([06:20](#)):

Wow. So, that's a really interesting path that you've taken. What do you think inspired you to take a leap and make that career change?

Alex Giannopoulos ([06:26](#)):

It is an interesting path, because I don't think anyone wakes up one day and says, "I'm going to be a lawyer, then I'm going to become a legal recruiter and then I'm going to work in relationships and partnerships at a legal training company." And yet that's the path that I took and I think it's a really interesting lesson in the fact that you just don't know what your career future holds and you need to be open to all possibilities. So, what inspired me in the end was really just taking time to really reflect on what matters to me and what interests me and where my strengths lie. So, while I was a lawyer, I took the time to think to myself, "What are the elements of this job that I really like and that I'm good at? And what are the bits that maybe don't really suit me?" And through that process I was able to work out what the next steps could look like and that inspired me to take a leap of faith into a slightly different direction.

[\(07:15\)](#):

But as I mentioned, it was still leveraging my knowledge of the legal space. So, there is nothing that I've done in my career that hasn't built upon or utilised or what I've done before it, and I think that was the trick. So, I was inspired to use what I had, but then to tweak it and build on it and improve on it.

Lana Fried [\(07:34\)](#):

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And then once you've taken that leap and found yourself going down that different path, how did you feel about the decision that you'd made?

Alex Giannopoulos [\(07:42\)](#):

I can genuinely say I have no regrets about any of those decisions. I often get asked the question, "Do you regret that you did a law degree and that you worked as a lawyer, but now you're not working as a lawyer anymore?" It's interesting, because I think for the first few months after any lawyer decides that they're not going to be a traditional practising lawyer, you spend at least the first few months telling people that you used to be a lawyer, because it's this thing that you feel it's hard to let go of. But with time you actually really start to let go of that. And you realise that pursuing a fulfilling career isn't about a title, it isn't about prestige. It's about what actually gives you the motivation to get up in the morning and want to go to work and enjoy what you do and who you do it with.

[\(08:27\)](#):

So, the reason why I feel good about the decisions I made is because I ended up doing something which fulfils me more. And I'm still using everything that I studied at uni and I'm still using everything that I've learned as a lawyer, but I'm just using it in a way that makes me feel so much better about what I do each day.

Lana Fried [\(08:45\)](#):

I mean, given what you've just said, it's pretty common for people to see a law degree and then think that the only option to take from that is to become a lawyer. So, how often do you think lawyers change into something related to the law or even a completely separate field?

Alex Giannopoulos [\(08:59\)](#):

While I was working as a legal recruiter, one of the great things about that role is that I got to see lawyers and ex-law from all walks of life move into all sorts of different roles. So, over the years I've really seen that people with law degrees are doing very different things. I'm increasingly seeing so many people utilising their legal qualifications to move into completely different areas and in different industries. So, they're either working in government or they're working in the commercial sectors outside of a law firm. And some of them aren't necessarily working as lawyers, they're perhaps working in dispute resolution more generally, or regulation or they're using their legal backgrounds in things like relationship management or insurance or there are literally so many ways you can take your legal background and use them in different contexts.

Lana Fried [\(09:51\)](#):

Yeah, like taking the skills as opposed to the specific degree with you.

Alex Giannopoulos [\(09:55\)](#):

Exactly right, and I think that's why law is so appealing to employers even if you are not working as a lawyer per se. Law teaches you a way of thinking, it teaches you to be critical in the way that you think. It teaches you to be analytical, it teaches you to be measured, and it teaches you how to, I think, approach a problem from a different angle. They're all skillsets which are clearly extremely useful in all sorts of roles and industries.

Lana Fried ([10:28](#)):

And then for anyone studying now who might be thinking that the only way to be successful is to be a traditional lawyer, can you tell us some of the other things that you can do with a law background?

Alex Giannopoulos ([10:37](#)):

Absolutely. So, you can use your legal background, first of all, even in the traditional context, there are ways of using your law degree, which not everyone knows about. So, everyone hears about law firms, but a lot of people are unaware that you can work as a lawyer in government or that you can work as a lawyer in an in-house team with a company, advising that company or working as a barrister at the bar or working in sort of quasi-legal environments such as alternative dispute resolution. So, there's that side, but then there's also, I guess people who are using their law degree in things like consulting, sales, I mentioned I was a legal recruiter.

([11:13](#)):

The fact that I was able to recruit lawyers, what really helped is that I had a legal background and that I understood what my clients needed. Being able to speak your client's language is really important, so having a legal background and having that mindset really helps no matter what you do. And I've seen lawyers go into all sorts of other things, politics, I've seen them go into regulations, so compliance in financial services sectors. I've seen people become claims managers in insurance companies. Obviously some people go into education and academia. There are so many ways you can leverage that legal background.

Lana Fried ([11:47](#)):

Alex, you've made some pretty bold moves in your career and that can't have been easy. What do you think made all of that possible for you?

Alex Giannopoulos ([11:54](#)):

The decision initially to move out of being a traditional lawyer, as a practising lawyer, was probably the most difficult and boldest move that I made. And I think what made that possible was that deep introspection of what fulfils me and what my strengths are. It was a combination of being really honest with myself about why I wanted to work in a particular career, what was it about working as a lawyer that I liked, and what was it about it that didn't suit me, and what were the things that I could take with me elsewhere? I think what also made it really possible was having a support network.

([12:33](#)):

I think you can't underestimate how important it is to have a strong support network, whether it be your friends, your family, mentors, who you can actually bounce ideas off. Because when you're making big and bold decisions, it's important to have people around you who can support you in those decisions, who you can bounce ideas off and speaking to people who are already in the roles that you are contemplating. So, before I moved into legal recruitment, I made sure that I spoke to a lot of legal

This transcript was exported on Nov 10, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

recruiters about what their role looked like, and that really helped me to form an opinion of whether it was actually going to be something that I was willing to take a leap of faith on.

Lana Fried ([13:10](#)):

That's really fantastic advice to take on. So, you're head of industry engagement and partnerships for the Leo Cussen Centre for Law. What's an average day in the life look like for you?

Alex Giannopoulos ([13:20](#)):

Every day is different, and what I love about the role that I'm in is that it's all about building relationships. So, a day for me will vary. Some days I'll be meeting with university faculty members, other days I'll be meeting with law students, then I might be attending careers fairs, then I might be talking to organisations about building partnerships with them between Leo Cussen and their organisation. So, it's really all about meeting people, building relationships, developing rapport, and utilising those partnerships and relationships to further the objectives of our training organisation.

Lana Fried ([13:59](#)):

So, Alex, I already asked what a day in the life looks like for you in your role, but what about people who may be getting their first job out of uni? What's a day in the life look like for an entry-level lawyer?

Alex Giannopoulos ([14:10](#)):

So, an entry-level lawyer, it's going to depend significantly on what kind of organisation they're in, what the culture is, what the nature of the work is. But generally speaking, an entry-level lawyer can expect in their first year to be doing a variety of tasks that centre around things like legal research, drafting memos, drafting legal documents such as letters of advice, possibly attending court if they're in an area of law that involves that, which might be to either observe court outcomes. As a junior lawyer becomes a little bit more experienced, they might also expect to be doing some basic hearings, even if they're just interlocutory or minor hearings. There's also going to be a lot of dealing with clients. A big part of working as a lawyer, even in your first year is understanding your client's needs. So, a big part of being an entry-level lawyer is learning the ropes around how do you interview a client? How do you make sure that you tailor your advice to their needs?

Lana Fried ([15:09](#)):

And then for all of those students who are just starting out in the industry, what do you think the legal sector is going to look like in the next five to 10 years?

Alex Giannopoulos ([15:17](#)):

This is a topic which I'm really passionate about, because one of the really exciting things about the legal profession is the enormous disruption that it's going through at the moment. I like to call it the uberization of the legal profession. The legal profession traditionally has not really been known as a progressive industry, but that is really changing and I think that the lawyer of the future is going to have to really adapt and is already having to in many respects. So, billing structures are changing. Anyone who's been involved in the legal profession will know that you traditionally bill your time in six minute increments. It's becoming a bit of an antiquated notion and clients are starting to demand value over how long it takes you to do something. I often use the example of, imagine if you went to a McDonald's in one suburb and you ordered a Big Mac and it cost you \$5, but then you went to a McDonald's in

another suburb and they charged you \$7 for the same Big Mac, and their excuse was that it took them longer to make it.

[\(16:19\)](#):

Okay. It's a crude example, but it's kind of the same thing, which is you should be paying for the outcome. The legal profession is really starting to adapt to meet the needs of clients who are saying, we want value-based pricing. And the other really big thing that I think is going to be particularly important in the future is the value of relationships.

[\(16:40\)](#):

Knowledge is no longer the key element of what makes someone a good lawyer. In the era of Google and ChatGPT, we are basically finding that the law can be found pretty quickly in terms of actual technical legal knowledge. So, what is your value as a lawyer in that context? Your value in that context is not so much the knowledge that you can access, it's the way that you can use it to actually add value to your client.

[\(17:08\)](#):

So, that means how you communicate with your client, how you listen to them, how you take on the nuances of their particular issue, understanding their particular industry and the lingo that they use, and being able to tailor your advice to apply that law in a way that actually makes sense to them. So, relationships is really the secret source, I think, when it comes to anything connected with being a sought after lawyer, especially in the next five to 10 years.

Lana Fried [\(17:37\)](#):

Alex, as someone who worked in the recruiting world, do you have any tips for new graduates looking for those first roles?

Alex Giannopoulos [\(17:43\)](#):

One of my key tips if you're a grad and you're looking for a new role, is do not rely entirely on job boards. There's, I think, a misunderstanding that every job exists on Seek, or Indeed. It might interest a lot of grads to know that the statistics show that it's only something like 20% of jobs that ever end up on a job board across the board. That means that 80% of vacancies out there will never be advertised. So, my advice to grads is do not just use job boards. Absolutely use them, they are still valuable, but your strategy needs to also incorporate something which might actually feel like you're exiting your comfort zone a bit and that is making some approaches to places that you want to work with expressions of interest, even if they're not advertising. So, that means sending some emails, it means networking, and I know that they are things which can sometimes appear a bit daunting to a grad, but it's a skillset that's valuable and that will help you access the other 80% of the job market.

Lana Fried [\(18:44\)](#):

From personal experience as a student, I've actually noticed that I've gotten a job from networking that wasn't advertised anywhere, and that was the first experience I had of not just going for what was given to you as where to apply to. And it is really fascinating to see it from that point of view and see that you can unlock this world of potential jobs that might not be easily accessible if you're not looking anywhere other than the job boards.

Alex Giannopoulos [\(19:07\)](#):

This transcript was exported on Nov 10, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Absolutely, and often the jobs will come from the least likely places. So, networking doesn't mean you have to walk up to someone and say, "Do you have a job?" Networking often just means that you're meeting people and having genuine and authentic conversations. And often you'll find that those interactions will naturally progress to opportunities without you necessarily realising that that's happening. So, my advice on that front is don't necessarily go into networking thinking about it purely from the perspective of, "Can I get a job out of this?" Go in there with a sense of curiosity and authenticity and just have some genuine conversations, because you'll find that the opportunities flow from that.

Lana Fried ([19:44](#)):

100% and then personally, Alex, what's your number one tip for people who are studying to be lawyers right now?

Alex Giannopoulos ([19:50](#)):

So, my number one tip is don't wait too long to get some work experience. One of the great things at Swinburne of course, is that anyone who does a law degree at Swinburne gets industry experience as part of that degree. Really utilise that, because there is nothing more valuable than getting a feel for what it's like to apply what you're doing in your law degree in the real world. Soak it up, but also don't just stop there. If you can get additional experience, take it. A lot of grads do tell me, a lot of students say, "Well, okay, it's a bit tough out there to get some work experience." Absolutely. If you're finding that it is a bit difficult to get real work experience straight away, maybe start by doing some virtual internships.

([20:30](#)):

There are a number of virtual internships available, which give you an opportunity to do some simulated work experience online from your comfort of your couch. They only take a few hours, they're usually free, and you can put them on your CV. So, start small, start with some virtual experiences, and then see if you can use them to leverage into some real life experiences and make the most of those workplace experiences that you get at a place like Swinburne, where you'll actually get to go out into industry and soak up the real environment.

Lana Fried ([21:01](#)):

That's really fantastic advice. So, now it's time for our quickfire round. I've got a few food related questions that I'm going to ask you in rapid succession. The rules are you have 10 seconds to answer each question and you have to answer with the first thing that comes to your mind. Are you ready?

Alex Giannopoulos ([21:17](#)):

Scared, but ready.

Lana Fried ([21:19](#)):

All right, let's go. If law was a food, what would it be?

Alex Giannopoulos ([21:24](#)):

If law was a food, what would it be? Oh my God. If law was a food, I think it would be something very hot and spicy, maybe like a chicken wing.



This transcript was exported on Nov 10, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

Lana Fried ([21:33](#)):

Okay, amazing. What is your favourite condiment?

Alex Giannopoulos ([21:36](#)):

Favourite condiment? Ooh, sweet chilli sauce.

Lana Fried ([21:39](#)):

Good answer. What is the most unique or exotic dish you've ever tried? And did you like it?

Alex Giannopoulos ([21:45](#)):

Ooh, most unique and exotic dish I've ever tried. Chicken feet and it was not my bag.

Lana Fried ([21:52](#)):

Very fair. What is the secret sauce to your success?

Alex Giannopoulos ([21:56](#)):

So, it may not surprise you to hear that it's relationships, building relationships and rapport.

Lana Fried ([22:01](#)):

And finally, does pineapple belong on pizza?

Alex Giannopoulos ([22:05](#)):

I know I'm going to cop a lot of flak for this, but yes, it does.

Lana Fried ([22:09](#)):

Yeah. Not my answer, but good answer for you. Well, thank you so much for being here today. I've really loved getting to chat with you.

Alex Giannopoulos ([22:16](#)):

Thank you so much, it's been my pleasure.

Lana Fried ([22:24](#)):

Thanks for listening to Get Hungry, a podcast from Swinburne University of Technology where you get a taste of what career success looks like. If you like what you heard and you're keen to study at Swinburne where you can get your own real industry experience, then head to the website [swinburn.edu.au](http://swinburn.edu.au). To make sure you don't miss an episode of Get Hungry, be sure to subscribe to or follow the show in your podcast app. And while you're there, leave us a five star review. It really helps others to find the show. This show was recorded in and around the Swinburne campus in Hawthorne, on Wurundjeri land, featuring some of the great cafes and most interesting buildings. The show was produced with strategy and production support by Wavelength Creative. I'm your host, Lana Fried. And thanks for listening to Get Hungry.