



TRAINEE INSIGHTS MATT MARTINDALE | PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



Kwasi Yeboah



Emilio Fabrizi



Matt Martindale

Kwasi Yeboah: Welcome to another episode of *RopesTalk* London, the new podcast about life as a trainee at Ropes & Gray London.

Emilio Fabrizi: This podcast is for everybody who has an interest in building a successful career at the firm's London office.

Kwasi Yeboah: We're delighted today to be joined by none other than Matt Martindale.

Emilio Fabrizi: Matt is an associate in the firm's leading London private equity team and also a trainee supervisor. He's advised many notable key firms in corporate on acquisitions, disposals, co-investments and incentive arrangements, and is renowned among the trainees, including ourselves, and the firm for his positive approach to training and adding value to juniors.

Kwasi Yeboah: Thank you very much for joining us today, Matt. How are you?

Matt Martindale: Very well, thank you. And thank you both for the introduction. I'm very pleased to be here and looking forward to our discussion.

Kwasi Yeboah: It's great to have you—looking forward to this one. So, Matt was my supervisor during my first seat and he's definitely a fountain of wisdom. Thank you again for your time.

Emilio Fabrizi: We're conscious that you have a lot of matters on, so we'll get straight into the episode. Today really is an opportunity to get an insight from you, Matt, into the training program at Ropes & Gray, as someone who plays a pivotal role in that process in terms of guiding and supervising trainees. We'd also like to get some tips from you on how to succeed as a trainee at a firm like Ropes.

Kwasi Yeboah: Having been at previous firms before you joined Ropes, what do you think makes the training program at this firm distinct from other firms you have been with?

Matt Martindale: Thanks, Kwasi. The first thing I would say is that the firm, and the London office specifically, has a really good balance of providing trainees with exposure to a world-class client base and transactions, and really interesting work. Also, you're part of an office where people really genuinely get to know each other. It's a relatively small group of trainees and everybody wants to do well, and it's always good to have that really solid support network. I remember that when I was a trainee, I was part of a slightly larger intake, but there was a really good camaraderie amongst the trainees. And I think the people that do best throughout their training contracts and enjoy it the most are the people that really lean on their colleagues in the training and take their support, because you never know when you're going to need access to something or to call on the experience of another trainee. So, I think being part of that smaller group really helps.

I think the other important thing is that the makeup of Ropes in London. There's a variety of people from different firms—the office had a lot of lateral hires that joined when it was formed. Then in more recent years, there's been a really great stream of trainees coming into the firm and qualifying into the teams and progressing through the ranks of associates. And that gives a really good mix of people who have come through the firm and come in as lateral hires, bringing different perspectives, and everybody can offer a different way of doing things.

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One final point that links back to the size of the office is that there is a really good balance, for trainees in London, in terms of the support that you can receive with being part of that kind of tight-knit, slightly smaller setup of trainees. And also, the opportunities available to you are really endless. So, you'll be working on fantastic deals and be given a really good level of responsibility, and the team is kind of a size that you can still get that great support and be exposed to those learning opportunities in a really managed way, and broaden your experience over the two years.

Kwasi Yeboah: Yes, I definitely agree with that—I think that's been my experience as well. I definitely leaned on Emilio a few times during our finance seat when things got super busy. And that diversity of thought and experience also really resonates because I think every supervisor, whether it's my main supervisor during my seats or someone who's supervising generally for work, I tend to learn something different about general practice from each one. So, what are some of the things, then, that trainees can do in the context of deal work, especially at a firm where they're part of a smaller intake? Do you get that bit more responsibility to begin to develop into effective legal advisors from an early stage? And how does the training at Ropes facilitate those kind of steps?

Matt Martindale: The answer to this question in some ways is quite simple—and it's just that, you will come onto the opportunities the firm provides, and the training and other things, but you just have to really want to learn and make the best of the opportunity. One thing that I found really useful when I was training, and I still find it useful now when I'm working with different people, is to listen and observe what those people do, because you might pick up things from your supervisors and your colleagues. As well as learning from your own experiences, you have to observe others and try and learn from them, because that really helps you fast track your learning. It comes back a little bit to my answer from the first question, which is, you have an incredible opportu-

nity—a firm like Ropes, just an unbelievable client base, the exposure to complex transactions, and very intelligent, great colleagues who are really willing to help you.

The other really important thing is to lean on that support and ask questions, and don't be afraid to put yourself forward or think that you're asking a question that isn't appropriate, because nine times out of ten, it will be something that has been asked before and it's a perfectly legitimate question, and people really like to have those discussions. People like to see trainees that they work with questioning why certain things are happening, because sometimes your supervisor may well have missed something and they will really appreciate your perspective on it. I think you have a really good opportunity at Ropes when you're training, because you are very visible. There are fewer trainees, and you have the opportunity both on a personal level and on a professional level to form relationships with partners and associates, and that helps you develop your skills as a lawyer. However informal you think a discussion might be, you'll inevitably be learning from somebody who has kind of been in your shoes not that long ago, so it's just very good to lean on those types of experiences.

What the firm can offer on a more formal basis is obviously the training program, which you've both been a part of. I give one of those sessions every six months on an area that's specific to my department, on key learning points. One piece of advice that's important to give trainees is advice in practical terms of how they can assist. Often there can be very complex areas to some of these trainings, and it's important to understand those as a trainee and try and grapple with the complex areas. But also, it's really useful just to know, “If you're a trainee and you happen to come across a share sale, here's likely what you might be doing in practice, and here's how you can assist the team, and here's some practical tips.” A lot of the work is really learning on the job. As I say, observing what's going on and just trying to get to grips with the process of the transaction and

understanding the key terms as you go. I think that's really the best way to learn.

Someone told me this when I was training—I still take it on board now: It's important to take a step back from the paperwork, because so often you can be involved in a transaction and there's so many bits of paper flying around, and you're just trying to get to grips of what's going on. It's really useful if you can to take a step back and think about, "What is the purpose of this document that you've been asked to check?" or "What is the client trying to do here, and what's the aim of the client?" Then you can understand the context in which you're operating. Also it makes the job really interesting, because to understand why you're doing something always gives the job slightly more satisfaction than just to be following instructions. So that's one of the ways that you can really differentiate yourself and develop—partaking in that step back and really thinking about what you're doing and why you're doing it.

Emilio Fabrizi: Yes, I think I would agree with all of those points. If you show that eagerness to learn, you're definitely granted more opportunity, as you touched upon earlier in relation to the actual hires. And I think the diversity in terms of the makeup of our firm and particularly within our department (notably the private equity department) really does help when you are working on a transaction because you have insights from people of all different ages, backgrounds, and of course experience given that the way of doing things at firm B could be substantially different to the way of doing things at firm A. Sometimes those differences are better and sometimes they're worse, but it's all about the learning experience, as you said. You touched on when you give training, giving practical tips to what a trainee can do from a share sale—on that point, how would you describe the role of a trainee in the context of a PE transaction, and more generally, in a law firm like Ropes & Gray?

Matt Martindale: Yes, I think it's a wide variety of roles for a trainee. It very much depends on the type of deal that you're doing, and timetable, the size of the team, and how things are being set up. Often as a trainee you're tasked with maintaining a documents checklist and reviewing key contracts or documentation relating to the business that your client is interested in acquiring, for example. And I think both of those tasks, particularly documents checklist, is one

where as a trainee it's a really good area to try and stand out, because what you'll find is that there will be lots of different worksheets going on, you'll be working with different people in the team, and if you can just keep on top of keeping the checklist up to date, checking in with people about the status of things, and just keeping that moving in the background, not only do you get the exposure to what's going on and all of the different processes of the transaction (and you get to meet those people), but it really helps you to form a really good knowledge of what's going to happen next, what you might be anticipating and how you might add extra value to the team. Sometimes these tasks can make you feel the role that you're playing is not as important in the team as the role that the partner's playing or the senior associate's playing, but actually, if you asked the partner or the senior associate, they would probably say it in reverse, because people really value a trainee who can really throw themselves in and understand the processes and organize things in a way that allows other people to do their jobs as well. The key thing is to really immerse yourself and become part of the team.

Coming back to what you can do to excel, you just have to ask the questions—it's just so important. I say this to everybody. I'm sure Kwasi was bored of me saying it to him, but he was very good at it. And you do find that people who do ask the questions, they do learn, and it's really a pleasure working with those people. I think sometimes when you're a trainee you can be a bit nervous about asking questions because it might look as if you don't know what you're doing. You have no need to worry about that, because people don't expect you to know exactly what you're doing in every single scenario when you're a trainee—that's the nature of the job. You're training and you're learning, and people at Ropes really want to help you to do that. I don't think I've ever witnessed a conversation where a trainee has asked a question and it hasn't resulted in a discussion. And undoubtedly, a lot of the times it will be the associate as well has learned from that discussion and developed their knowledge and enjoyed the discussion.

Emilio Fabrizi: Definitely. I think that's really sound advice, especially at the trainee level from my experience. I think some of the best things you can do early on is be organized and show that proactiveness, whether it's in terms of chasing up a document or emailing a counter-party or checking in with people and saying, "Who's holding the pen on this?"

And where are we? So, when do you think you'll be able to get comments back?" All of those things can really help, and they're easy steps which you can do as a trainee when, as you said, you're in this environment where you're asking loads of questions. You don't know a great deal about what's going on, but you're trying to learn and constantly find out more. But taking those sort of measures about being organized and being proactive, as small as they may seem, can really go a long way in benefiting you in your training, but also supporting your wider network and colleagues.

Matt Martindale: Yes, I think that's exactly right, Emilio. One piece of advice I was given when I was a trainee that's stuck with me is "Always try and make your supervisor's job easier." And that goes all the way through—that the trainee can help the supervisor, and the supervisor can help the more senior associates or the partners. By doing that, you know that you're playing your role in the team. People really value the kind of energy and the kind of enthusiasm that trainees bring to the firm. I can certainly say that I do personally, and people do really value being a good team player and a good colleague.

Emilio Fabrizi: Definitely. I think all of those tips and the points that you've given today have been really helpful, hopefully, incredibly helpful to candidates looking to apply to Ropes.

Kwasi Yeboah: Before we let you leave, we'd like to give our audience a holistic view of Ropes & Gray and our people. So, could you give us one interesting fact that we might not expect about you (maybe a favorite holiday destination, or a song or activity)?

Matt Martindale: I think if you want an interesting fact, you probably picked the wrong guy—so, sorry to disappoint you both there. But I guess we're probably all craving a holiday at the moment, given the last 18 months or so. So why don't I talk about my favorite holiday destination, which is a small village in the Western Algarve in Portugal? It's an ex-fishing village, and I've been going there since I was 11. I first went with a friend from school—his family was going on holiday there and they asked me along. I had a great time there. And it just so happens that I've been back every year since, and obviously save from last year. Actually, I think that's the first year I haven't been. It's just a very relaxed atmosphere there—great beaches, jaunts, and good weather. So that's my favorite holiday spot. I think if Ropes opened an office there, I'd certainly be applying for a transfer. But obviously, I'd miss you guys, so I'd probably come back to London to visit. But yes, that's my favorite spot.

So, hopefully not too long until we can get back to doing that and enjoying some good weather outside of the UK.

Emilio Fabrizi: Definitely. Everyone, we hope you enjoyed this discussion. Thank you very much to Matt for his time. Please follow us on Twitter and Instagram, both @Ropes-GrayGrads. And feel free to get in touch with us by those social media handles if you have any questions or thoughts for future episodes.

Kwasi Yeboah: Yes, and hopefully we've given you some stuff to think about. You can also follow us on social media as discussed. But that's it for today. See you for our next episode, where we'll be talking to more inspirational figures at Ropes & Gray, to provide you insight into the firm's culture and how you can succeed as a trainee or junior lawyer.

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