

TRAINEE INSIGHTS

London Antitrust Partner | Annie Herdman



Yasmin Anwar



Will Allen



Annie Herdman

Yasmin Anwar: Hi, I'm Yasmin Anwar.

Will Allen: Hello, my name's Will Allen.

Yasmin Anwar: And welcome to the *Trainee Insights* podcast, the home of discussions about life as a trainee, or junior lawyer, at Ropes & Gray in London.

Will Allen: A little introduction about me: I'm a fourth-seat trainee in our London office, currently sitting in data protection, privacy and cybersecurity. I previously sat in our firm's finance, tax and private equity transaction teams.

Yasmin Anwar: I'm a third-seat trainee, currently sitting in our private equity team. My first seat was in the firm's antitrust team, and second seat was in asset management. In this podcast series, we seek to provide you with insights into the culture of our firm, and practical advice about how to excel as a trainee, or make an application to the firm.

Will Allen: The podcast is for everybody who has an interest in building a successful career at the firm's London office.

Yasmin Anwar: On today's episode, we are joined by the one and only Annie Herdman, a newly joined partner in the antitrust team in London. Annie's practice covers all aspects of EU and UK competition law, representing clients before the European Commission, UK Competition and Markets Authority, and global antitrust regulators. Annie has been recognised by *The Legal 500* as a 'Next Generation Partner' and a 'Rising Star'. Annie was also featured in *Management Today's 35 Women Under 35*, which celebrates the top 35 female business talent in the UK under the age of 35.

Will Allen: Annie, how are you doing?

Annie Herdman: Very well, thank you. It's great to be talking with you both today.

Yasmin Anwar: Excellent. So, let's get into what is coming up on this episode. We'll be speaking to Annie about her journey to the top, balancing work and life in a high-pressured environment, and we will get advice from Annie on how we can hopefully follow in her footsteps to build a successful career.

Will Allen: Annie will also be sharing tips on how to stand out as a prospective applicant in a competitive market, based on her experiences. So, I think without further ado, Yas, should we get into the questions?

Yasmin Anwar: Yes. So, a bit about your background, Annie, if you don't mind: Were you someone who developed a passion for law quite early on?

Annie Herdman: No, not really. I have to say, I always find it amazing when I hear of people who wanted to be lawyers as children. That certainly wasn't me. I was always academic, but my great passion was outside of the classroom, so I loved sports, I was quite arty, and threw myself into extracurricular activities. And I remember at one point even saying to my parents that I didn't mind what I did when I grew up as long as I didn't work in an office. So, I actually wanted to be a journalist, but convinced myself that a law degree would open lots of doors. But to be honest, it hadn't really occurred to me that I might end up being a lawyer—I was in my second year of university at the time of the 2008 crash, and I had been fortunate enough to have been offered training contracts after a series of summer vacation schemes that I would've been mad to turn down, and so I sort of fell into it.

Will Allen: Annie, that's really interesting. What was the light bulb moment where you go, 'Yes, this is what I want to do', as opposed to, for example, pursuing your passion as a journalist?

Annie Herdman: I really enjoyed my law degree, and reading law, but I think, really, when I got my passion for law, if you

like, is when I was a fourth-seat trainee and I was in my antitrust seat. I was flown to Tokyo to interview witnesses and prepare witness statements for a big international cartel investigation. And I ended up drafting submissions to the European Commission, meeting clients, and attending the offices at the European Commission to advocate on behalf of clients. I think that's when I really fell in love with it and could see a long-term career in law.

Yasmin Anwar: Wow—that's an amazing experience as a fourth-seat trainee. So, if you weren't a lawyer, what would you have been, then?

Annie Herdman: I would've loved to have read the 6:00 news. It is perhaps not something that you might expect, but I think it still plays into my arty side, I guess, but also my interest in current affairs. But no, if you gave me a chance, I'd definitely have a go at reading the 6:00 news.

Will Allen: I suppose you've already touched on this with your trip to Tokyo, but were there any other factors that helped solidify your desire to become a competition lawyer? Were there any other factors or experiences you had that helped you decide?

Annie Herdman: Yes—I think for me, antitrust was the perfect mix of transactional and litigious work, because whilst I'm mostly focused on merger control and FDI aspects of antitrust as opposed to cartel investigations and follow-on damages actions, my job is to draft submissions to convince a regulator to clear a transaction, and in that way, there's a lot of advocacy involved. So, I get to do all of the difficult and complex thinking, drafting and advocating on behalf of my clients, but then I quickly get to move on to the next thing, so I'm not drowning in the same litigation for three to four years of my career, which is something that you sometimes hear horror stories about.

Will Allen: Yes, completely.

Yasmin Anwar: Annie, what makes a good lawyer, in your opinion, and especially in your practice area? What are the key skills that you think you need?

Annie Herdman: I think enthusiasm, good communication skills, and being able to translate difficult concepts into something that's easy to understand, and organisation. I think it goes without saying that it's important to hone your technical skills, but I think where you really add value and

what makes you stand out from peers is the service that you provide to clients. And ultimately, this is the service industry and it's really important to never lose sight of that.

Will Allen: That's really interesting. I suppose seeing that from a partner's perspective, it's something certainly that trainees don't really get an opportunity to hear that much. I suppose for our listeners out there who are either trainees themselves or applying for trainee contracts, what would you say are the qualities that make a good trainee? And, I suppose on the flip side, what are some of the things you don't like trainees to do or you wish they would do less of?

Annie Herdman: I think the best trainees are those that are proactive and don't wait to be asked. So, I think there's one thing in doing a job that you've been asked or doing a task that you've been asked, and executing it to the best of your ability and to time, but the best trainees are those that take it that step further. And so when they take notes on a call, they circulate them without being asked. If one of the tasks on the call is to set up another meeting, they go ahead and they circulate the calendar invite. They just go out of their way to make life easier, which is fundamentally, I think, the job of any lawyer, and that was something that I learned very early on in my career. One of my supervisors said, 'Fundamentally, the job of any junior lawyer is to make their superiors' lives easier'. And the same goes when you're a senior lawyer, making a partner's life easier. Certainly, my job—I see very much my job as a partner in making my clients' lives easier and making them look good, and I go out of my way to do that. So, I think people that have that instinct to go the extra mile and take the extra step always stand out for me. And I guess on the flip side, the trainees that don't do so well are the ones that don't seem to learn from their mistakes or do the bare minimum. I think team play is so important in law. We're all in it together, and it's important to work with one another to bring out the best in each other, so I always look for good team players.

Will Allen: In relation to the first part you mentioned as being proactive, if you're, for example, a first-seat trainee who's just started the job, is it a good idea to see how things operate for the first couple of weeks or months, and then take the step to being proactive and being able to follow up with various work streams? Or do you think that's something that you should be doing from day one?

Annie Herdman: It's a really good point. I think one of the great skills as trainees is being able to adapt to the people that they work with, and getting to know that person's style, their quirks and the way in which they like to do things. And so I think observing that, and having open dialogue with people about the way in which they like to work, how they like to receive information, whether that's orally in a call, face-to-face or in a short email bullet point memo, that sort of thing, that's actually a really important first step to working with anybody. And it's the same conversation, as I say, that I have with my clients in how they like me to deliver work product to them, and what's most useful for them. So, I think that's a really good point—I think that's really important.

Yasmin Anwar: Annie, what's the biggest success and challenge you faced along the way? Do you have any horror stories for us?

Annie Herdman: I think the biggest success is just having had a varied and challenging career—and that might sound a little bit trite but having a career that I've genuinely enjoyed. Making partner is obviously an added bonus, but fundamentally, I've found a career that I find really rewarding and fulfilling, which is great. The biggest challenge is definitely still navigating my career as a mother. But horror stories, I've certainly got a number of horror stories where I've made mistakes, and I think that's a really important thing that people don't talk about, but actually what's crucial to being able to become a better lawyer is owning your mistakes and being able to move past them.

Will Allen: Law is famously a marathon and not a sprint. How would you say you've sustained success throughout your career and kept that motivation to always improve and always bring your A game?

Annie Herdman: It's an interesting question. I once heard someone say that partners aren't necessarily the best lawyers, but the people with the most stamina—and in some ways, they weren't wrong. But there's no doubt that this job requires a huge amount of resilience. I think having wonderful colleagues and a supportive team is crucial to any individual success—surrounding yourself with people who are better than you forces you to want to do better. And I've always been really lucky to have surrounded myself with phenomenal people, and you certainly don't get there alone.

Yasmin Anwar: Is there anything specific, just off the back of that, Annie, in terms of your success at such a young age—is there anything that meant that your success happened quicker? Or is there anything that you can say for us that you did that separated you from just being a good lawyer to being renowned in the industry and having such high accolades?

Annie Herdman: I think, honestly, being very focused. It's very easy to think of the time that we spend as lawyers away from our families as this huge sacrifice, when actually, I saw it as an investment in myself and my career. And actually, I just made it my mission to be more experienced than anybody else at my level. So, my peers in other firms, I knew that for every year's worth of work they were doing, I was doing two. And whilst it was a huge amount of hard work, it meant that I have a lot more experience relative to my qualification level, which has just stood me in good stead, I think, to manage a wider range of issues, for a wider range of clients, at a much earlier age than I might otherwise have expected. And so fundamentally, hard work is everything. You often hear sports people talking about talent versus hard work and how you can be the most talented footballer in the world, but if you don't put the hard work in, it's meaningless. And really, law is no different. Not that I'd start comparing myself to a professional footballer.

Will Allen: When we were starting out as trainees, there's often, obviously, lots of talk of the long hours, and there's the inevitable stress that can come with the job. Annie, we're interested in how you've managed to maintain a healthy balance of life. Do you have any tips for our listeners?

Annie Herdman: Yes, I think exercise and boundary setting are crucial. It's something that I only learned late in my career, and to be honest, it's still a work in progress. But having firm boundaries to carve out things in life that are important to you is what makes the job sustainable. So, before I had children, it was my Friday mornings with my personal trainer, and I held them absolutely sacred. I also used to try and make the theatre once a month, which is one of my other great joys in life. And I remember, I would always warn the people that I was working with a week in advance saying, 'Just to remind you, I've got theatre tickets next Thursday'. And I'd do the same thing in the run up. 'Just to remind you, in two days, I've got theatre tickets'. I'd really go out of my way to make sure that I carved out that time and didn't leave any bit of my team

members in the lurch, and made sure that all of my work was up to date to make sure that I could go to those things. Now that I have children, it's the time I take in the evenings to put them to bed and read them a bedtime story, and I wouldn't do my job if I couldn't carve out that time. So, I think it's really, really important to understand what's most important to you and be sensible about the goals that you try to set yourself. Trying to go for dinner every night at 6:00 is not necessarily something that is going to be achievable, but having something that's tangible and achievable, and that you hold sacred, makes those late nights in the office a bit less painful.

Yasmin Anwar: You mentioned stamina. Have you got any sports that you like doing? Or is it a personal trainer? I know you mentioned you're not a footballer.

Annie Herdman: I'm not a footballer. Now it's much more gym going and, frankly, whatever I can do around my children's schedules.

Yasmin Anwar: We're all a trainee once, so we're starting a new tradition on the podcast. Before we let our guests go, we ask them: If there was one thing that you could tell yourself back when you were a trainee, what would it be?

Annie Herdman: I think it would be to be yourself. I think there's a temptation to absorb what's around you when you're more junior—the good and the bad. And actually, this job is

most enjoyable when you start building your own brand and realise that there's more than one way of getting the job done. So, I would encourage everyone to just be themselves.

Yasmin Anwar: That's great advice, Annie. Thank you so much for joining us today.

Will Allen: Yes, thank you very much, Annie, you've been great.

Annie Herdman: Thank you so much for having me.

Yasmin Anwar: We hope you enjoyed today's discussion. Thank you, everyone, for listening, and we really appreciate your support.

Will Allen: One of the ways you can support us is by following us on [Twitter](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#). This podcast episode will also be available on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#). If you can give us a five-star review by tweeting us, that would be great. And for anyone that leaves us a review, we will read it out on our next episode.

Yasmin Anwar: If there's anything in particular you would like us to discuss on the podcast, please leave us feedback or send us a message on social media.

Will Allen: That's it for today. Stay tuned for the next episode, and we'll see you soon.