

Beware of burnout, new Senior Counsel tells junior lawyers

Fabian Koh

Junior lawyers should be aware of potential burnout by constantly taking stock of their work and purpose, said Mr Foo Chee Hock, dean of the Singapore Judicial College.

This is because they can expect to invest a lot of time and energy in their legal career at the expense of other aspects of life, he added.

"If you are pushing yourself very hard, you need to question whether that lifestyle is sustainable. If you're working 14 to 18 hours a day, how long before you lose your edge?" said Mr Foo, 58.

One of four new Senior Counsels appointed yesterday, Mr Foo cited the workload and the learning

DO THE RIGHT THING

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MR FOO CHEE HOCK, dean of the Singapore Judicial College, who was appointed as an Honorary Senior Counsel yesterday.

curve as challenges, adding that the pressure on the job "is real".

He said junior lawyers should thus take stock of the situation from time to time, to reflect and decide if working such long hours is really what they want.

Ultimately, work should be something that brings meaning and fulfilment, he said.

"You need to know you're doing the right thing and doing it right, that this is what you want for yourself," he added.

Mr Foo was appointed as a Honorary Senior Counsel on the opening day of the 2019 legal year, along with Ms Foo Tuat Yien, 65, former judicial commissioner on the Supreme Court Bench.

Honorary Senior Counsels are non-lawyers recognised for their special knowledge in law and contributions to the development of the law and legal profession, said Ms Serene Wee, chief executive of the Singapore Law Academy.

Alongside Mr Foo and Ms Foo; Law Society president and Rajah & Tann partner Gregory Vijayendran, 50, and Mr Siraj Omar, 46, who heads the commercial disputes practice at Premier Law LLC, were appointed Senior Counsels.

Started in 1997, the Senior Counsel scheme recognises the best and most skilful advocates in the legal



(From left) Mr Gregory Vijayendran, Mr Foo Chee Hock and Mr Siraj Omar were among those appointed Senior Counsels yesterday. They advise junior lawyers to keep believing in their dreams, use their knowledge of the law to help their clients and to constantly take stock of their work and purpose. ST PHOTO: DESMOND FOO

profession. The four additions bring the total number of Senior Counsels to 85.

Mr Siraj also weighed in with some advice for junior lawyers, emphasising that the role of lawyers is not to educate their clients on the

law, but to use their knowledge of the law to help their clients.

"Put yourself in the shoes of the client. Imagine this was a problem you were facing. What would you expect from your lawyer? Then give your client that same degree

of importance," he said.

For Mr Vijayendran, it is crucial for junior lawyers to have mentors, and to learn the very best from them. But, more importantly, he urged junior lawyers to keep believing in their dreams and to never

give up despite failures.

"For junior lawyers, I would say this: Fail forward. Second, keep believing in your dreams, persevere and practise," he said.

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