



ENTREPRENEUR & ALTERNATIVE CAREERISTS

Dr. Milind Antani, Leader-PharmaHealthcare and Social Sector, Nishith Desai Associates, on switching from medicine to law, managing healthcare practice, and his diverse experience



This interview was taken by Rounak Biswas, Associate Outreach

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Dr. Milind Antani graduated in law from SP University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, in 2004. Dr. Antani

has been a practising ENT surgeon prior to that. He currently leads Pharma & Healthcare Practice and Social Sector Practice at Nishith Desai Associates. He represents clients in matters including mergers and acquisitions, investments, regulatory and transactional matters, intellectual property prosecution and litigation, joint ventures and new companies.

In this interview, we speak to him about:

- Making the shift from medicine to law
- Working with Nishith Desai
- Developing the pharmaceutical and healthcare practice

WHAT MOTIVATED THE SHIFT FROM MEDICINE TO LAW?

After my MBBS, I did my Masters (MS) in ENT Surgery. Post that, I practiced for fourteen years as an ENT surgeon in Gujarat. I would rephrase that question and ask *who* motivated the shift, and not *what*. Nishith Desai motivated me to consider taking up the legal profession in order to start, develop and groom the pharmaceutical and healthcare practice. He encouraged me to make the difference with the domain knowledge that is so crucial for any profession. And post that what kept motivating me was the challenge to develop this practice. The challenge for the transition was to change mind-set from being a doctor to being a lawyer, being from a small place like Anand in Gujarat to a big place like Mumbai, and understanding the whole domain from the legal perspective.



TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR TIME STUDYING LAW AS AN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT.

Studying law was not easy as I did that along with my active practice. Working out schedules of surgery and classes was a challenge but with good support of college and teachers I could manage the same. I was very focused while pursuing law that would be relevant to the pharma and healthcare practice.

HOW HAS YOUR EDUCATION IN MEDICINE AND MEDICAL PRACTICE OF OVER FOURTEEN YEARS HELPED YOU IN YOUR CAREER AS A LAWYER TODAY?

Significantly. Having knowledge of the domain in which you are working always helps. It has helped me understand client issues easily and then explain it to my colleagues in a better way. Understanding medicine as well as law has helped me work out relevant solutions to problems. Client gets comfortable when lawyer understands his language and speaks the same language too.

COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THE INTERNSHIPS YOU TOOK UP, AND WHAT YOU LEARNT FROM THOSE EXPERIENCES?

Unfortunately, due to the professional schedules, I could not do internships during studies. But I must say that internships provide an excellent opportunity to students to gain practical knowledge and application of mind.

WHAT ARE THE PARAMETERS THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED IN DECIDING WHAT THE NEXT STEP SHOULD BE AFTER GRADUATION?

According to me, decision paralysis is never by default but by choice. I firmly believe in the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey. Habit 2, "Begin with the End in Mind" and Habit 3, "Put First Things First" give you the correct perspective on deciding and then managing career. Every law student must keep these in mind and work on their career. I suggest only one parameter and that is "Believe in Yourself" and things will follow. Money should never be the parameter as I strongly believe money is the by-product of good efforts.

COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THE SIXTH SENSE ACADEMY FOR HUMAN EXCELLENCE?

Soft skill training has always been a passion for me and I am a certified trainer of Indian Junior Chamber (Jaycees). I started this academy to train students of schools and colleges in Anand. I still do such programs whenever the opportunity arises.



ON WHAT PARAMETERS DO YOU CHOOSE THE PROJECTS YOU WORK ON?

Sometimes you don't have a choice to choose the project to work on but we need to work on for clients. But yes, projects in which we can make the difference to clients definitely give that kick to work and deliver the best. And to build as specific body is very crucial as we need to tap in the best resource for the work.

HOW DID YOU COME TO WORK WITH NISHITH DESAI ASSOCIATES?

As mentioned in my first response it was Nishith Desai who motivated and encouraged me to change career and I haven't regretted it. It is the ease, the simplicity, the culture, amazing

colleagues, the autonomy to work makes it most enjoyable for me.

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL WORKING DAY AT PHARMA & HEALTHCARE PRACTICE LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

Our firm has consciously moved to “Networked Leadership” from “Partnership” model. Hence no one is partner in the firm and this has led to cultivation of leadership mind-set in every firm member. The firm strongly believes in work-life balance and hence working hours don't get stressful unless a transaction or a matter demands so. The culture and the processes do not make learning challenging at all at NDA. Personally I have not come across any major challenges to work at NDA that provides ample opportunities to learn at every level from most junior to the most senior.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO LAWYERS WHO ASPIRE TO DEVELOP A PROFICIENCY IN MULTIPLE FIELDS OF LAW?

“LOOK up, GO for it. You will GET it.” The challenge is where to look up. So it is important to work hard towards what you want to achieve. Decide what you want, work on the same. I believe it is important for a lawyer to become a visible expert. Hence the lawyer must continue to focus on one specific area and develop expertise of the same that will make him visible in the market.

DID YOU HAVE A MENTOR OR GUIDE DURING THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF YOUR CAREER?

It is very important to have someone to whom you can look up to not only during your formative years but during entire career. And for me Nishith Desai was that person to whom I always look up to. Another person to whom I look up to now for last four years is my son, Kavan, who is twenty years and is an entrepreneur. He has been my greatest guiding force for everything.



COULD YOU SHARE WITH US SOME OF YOUR EXPERIENCES FROM WORKING ON HIGH PROFILE CASES WHILE AT NISHITH DESAI ASSOCIATES?

Can't put a finger to anything in particular but it has always been challenging with fun and more unlearning than learning at NDA. And this is vital for development as a professional

COULD YOU TAKE US THROUGH THE PROCESS YOU ADOPT WHILE WRITING A PAPER OR BOOK?

(Dr. Antani has co-authored a book on Contract Research and Manufacturing Services in relation

to the regulation of the pharmaceutical and biotechnology.)

Research, team work and application of mind with practical approach. Whatever you write, should be easily readable, understandable, applicable and useful to the reader.

WHAT BOOKS, JUDGEMENTS THAT YOU HAVE READ WOULD YOU SAY HAVE PLAYED AN INTEGRAL ROLE IN SHAPING YOUR LEGAL PHILOSOPHY?

Rather than books/judgement I would say input from all the colleagues specifically Nishith Desai, Gowree Gokhale, Vaibhav Parikh and Anay Shukla have played a big role in developing my legal philosophy. So my advice to everyone is to develop a capability to listen well and understand feedback and changing accordingly. And of course one needs to go through specific books on law.

WHAT ARE THE KEY ATTRIBUTES THAT ONE MUST DEVELOP IN ORDER TO EXCEL IN THIS INDUSTRY?

Believe in yourself, set goals (short to mid to long term), decide priorities, unlearn a lot, listen carefully, change when required and act on what you believe is right

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR TIME BETWEEN YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL INTERESTS?

I always believe that everyone has time what is required is managing time. I enjoy reading books, watching movies and Gujarati plays, watching sports and soft skill training.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES YOU HAVE FACED IN BUILDING UP YOUR CAREER AS IT STANDS TODAY?

The biggest challenge was to disengage myself from the 'small town' tag, understand hard core legal nuances, and convince myself and others that a doctor can be a good lawyer too. For next

seven to eight years I will keep doing what I have been doing here at NDA, take the practice to next level and give it in the hands of my successor when I retire.



GIVEN THE DYNAMIC NATURE OF THE FIELD YOU PRACTICE IN, HOW DO YOU KEEP YOURSELF UPDATED ABOUT THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LAW?

Read Read Read; Listen Listen Listen; Talk Talk Talk; Discuss Discuss Discuss .Always remain in a playfield attending key events.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GIVE OUR READERS, WHO ARE MOSTLY LAW STUDENTS AND YOUNG LAWYERS?

Set specific goals, stay focused, develop domain expertise and become Visible Expert. And most important believe in yourself.