

INTERVIEWS

## It becomes easier when I allow some aspects of work-life slip into my non-work life and vice-versa, i.e. integrate the two, rather than making rigid efforts to keep them segregated- Leader, Investment Funds Practice at Nishith Desai Associates



This interview was taken by [SuperLawyerTeam](#)  
Priyanka Karwa | September 11, 2023



This interview has been published by [Priyanka Karwa](#) and [The SuperLawyer Team](#)

Can you tell us about your journey into the field of law? How did you end up pursuing a career in law, and what inspired you to choose this path?

I was allegedly a rulebreaker as a child. Therefore, I was repeatedly taught the importance of rules and order. I was keen to learn who makes these rules, and why should I abide by them. This took me to the field of law. I also had the opportunity to often visit my parents' friend who was a district court judge. She commanded a lot of respect, and that inspired me. More than anything else, I was looking for a field of work where I could do well enough to create my own space in a city of my choice. Law fit the bill.

You've had a remarkable 9-year journey at Nishith Desai Associates as a Legal Associate and now as the Leader of the Investment Funds Practice. Could you share some highlights and turning points in your career during this time?

I joined as a disputes intern at NDA in 2013. Incidentally, my desk was in the middle of the Investment Funds team. I got most of the work from this team and I developed a liking for the practice. It was different. It touched upon different legal subjects, and I was keen to learn more about the industry. Finance had always eluded me. This practice area introduced me to finance from a legal perspective. The turning point in my career was having to take up a position of leadership quite early due to the dearth of lawyers specialising in this practice area. Under appropriate guidance and encouragement, I have been able to deal with the overwhelming expectations from a leader.

As a seasoned professional in the legal industry, what challenges did you face during your journey, and how did you overcome them?

I prefer a conversation over a squabble. If the other side preferred a squabble, then I often felt withdrawn from the discussion. However, over the years, I have learned that a squabble can be turned into a conversation. It just takes a lot of skill and grace to do so.

In your current role as the Leader of the Investment Funds Practice, what are the key responsibilities and areas of focus?

There are three main focus areas that I try to focus on:

- (i) client acquisition and servicing;
- (ii) mentoring and bringing up the next league of leaders; and
- (iii) continuing self-education and using that to assist policy makers and regulators.

The legal industry is constantly evolving. How do you stay up-to-date with the latest developments and trends in the field of law?

I have subscribed to many newsletters prevalent in the industry. I regularly attend webinars and conferences on topics of interest. We conduct focused research across different platforms to improve specialised knowledge. We write a monthly newsletter ourselves which is well resourced. The entire team brainstorms on every update in law in our practice area and reading the newspaper always helps.

Could you share a memorable or impactful case or project you've worked on during your career that left a lasting impression on you?

I worked and led many efforts on the formation, raising and each of the closings of the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund, which is the largest infrastructure fund sponsored by the Government of India (49%). We had the opportunity to negotiate with the most leading sovereign wealth funds across jurisdictions, learn about local laws and restrictions applicable to such investors, their expectations from Indian funds which are sponsored by the Government. We honed our skills to manage multiple investors and conflicting expectations at the same time. We developed endurance to work through late nights and weekends in a manner that no amount of workflow could scare us afterwards. Each document drafted by us underwent many rounds of review by the best law firms across the globe, giving us insights and opportunity to exchange notes across borders. This particular project definitely left a lasting impression on me.

What motivates you to continue pursuing a career in law, and what aspects of your work do you find most fulfilling?

I am good at this, and I enjoy getting better at this. I think I am mostly self-motivated. We assist either fund managers, or fund investors in mobilising capital which is then invested across different businesses, giving rise to employment, innovation, development and economic progress. We play a small but significant role in getting the deal through and that is quite fulfilling.

As a leader in your practice area, how do you maintain a work-life balance and ensure the well-being of your team?

The meaning of 'work-life balance' is not universal. It is dynamic and it evolves over time. For me, it becomes easier when I allow some aspects of work-life slip into my non-work life and vice-versa, i.e. integrate the two, rather than making rigid efforts to keep them segregated. I try to remain emotionally connected with my team members so that they trust me and feel comfortable in

confiding in me when things get too overwhelming. I am apologetic if (in rare circumstances) I take up their weekend time. I mostly encourage my team-members to decide timelines rather than dictating timelines unless clients are getting adversely impacted. I try to ensure that my team-members are not bothered with calls and work when they take vacations.

**Finally, what advice would you like to give to fresh law graduates who are about to enter the legal profession? What key qualities and skills do you believe are essential for success in this field?**

Try not to restrict your wardrobe to black and white. There will be days when you will get to wear colours. Every lawyer is different despite what people may tell you or the jokes you may hear. There are no defined rules to be a 'good lawyer' or a 'bad lawyer'. Try not to put yourselves in boxes, try to explore and innovate, and try to remain keen. You will possibly find it easier to work as a lawyer if you are able to (i) translate your thoughts (and your clients' thoughts) into appropriate and impactful words, (ii) break sentences or statements down into smaller phrases and make sense out of each phrase independently, (iii) get to a point or bring the other side to a point in an unsuspecting manner; (iv) be tolerant and inclusive, be prepared rather than being shocked at your arguments or points of view being defeated.

Get in touch with Nandini Pathak-



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