Day in the Life: Michelle Smyth

Interviews and Profiles

Michelle Smyth

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6:00 am: The quiet tinkling alarm on my Apple watch goes off. I have to have a gentle alarm; I don't need the adrenaline rush at that time of the morning. I have a ten-second look at my phone, to ensure there have been no overnight emergencies from global that need to be attended to, then it's a cup of tea while reading the AFR and a pat for my two brown Burmese cats, Milo and Brownie.

6:30 am: I say good morning to my son, who is in third-year uni and doing a summer internship with an investment manager. He tells me he will be home late as he is coaching sailing after work. My daughter, who has just finished the HSC, is still in bed. I make lunches, then get ready for work. An espresso from our coffee machine, in the car and off to the office. My partner is working from home today, so he will be here when we get a rug delivered. We have just moved to a new house, and there are a few things we need to do to this old place.

8:30 am: I am excited to be in the office today, our team has been slowly returning to work after our COVID lockdown year in 2020 when most of us worked from home full time for nine months. Most of the team are in today. How fabulous to see everyone this morning, say hello in person, and catch up face-to-face. We work in an agile working environment, although the General Counsel's Office (GCO) has its own space, which makes it easier to have phone calls and discussions on confidential matters. I grab a desk and set up my laptop for the day. I chat to one of the team sitting next to me, and we agree that we are so lucky to have the opportunity to come into work in our magnificent building in George St, Sydney, after so long at home. On my way to make a tea in the kitchen, I have a quick corridor chat with one of the lawyers concerning one of our current matters, and we agree to meet later in the day to discuss.

8:45 am: I spend 15 minutes at the start of the day reviewing and writing my to do list in my diary. Yes, I still have a paper diary, which I use to prioritize my day. I write down my top three "must do's" (one of them is a carryover from yesterday), and jot down a few things in my longer to do list for today and tomorrow. As part of our "COVID normal" work routine, the legal team has agreed to a set of guidelines on working, with days in the office set aside for face-to-face meetings, and days working from home for focused work. That means I have a lot of meetings today.

9:00 am: A call with global in the United States to discuss a refresh of the EY global terms and conditions. We'll localize them and then socialize them with the business over the next few months. There have been quite a few changes, so it will be important to get the communications right. My head of commercial will lead this project. We get off the call and discuss our plan of attack.

10:00 am: It's 10@10 time. Every Tuesday at 10, the team gathers around in our space (and on Teams video), and we have a standing meeting for 10 minutes. It's usually an update from me, some team recognition, and other team news. Today, I remind everyone to get their feedback providers into

our performance system, as the cycle closes in a few weeks. There are some admin announcements from our legal operations associate, including reminding everyone to record all their matters into our matter system so she can generate her monthly report. We have been reporting for six months now, and it's been really interesting to see data on the volume, range, and scale of legal work we do in this team.

10:30 am: It's quiet on the floor as most of the teams are having their team meeting today. I take time to file some of my emails and check in with my colleague on the matter we discussed this morning. I receive a call from a partner keen to work through a complex engagement that we are doing with a key government client. I grab my morning piccolo from the EY café.

11:30 am: I join the legal stream call on one of our current acquisitions. Things are going well, and the project is on track, including external legal costs. Our stakeholders are happy with the progress so far, and we are looking forward to the next stage in the deal.

12:00 pm: Time to grab some lunch. I generally make my lunch in the morning and eat at my desk. Today, it's my go-to salad of brown rice, tuna, avocado and tomato, with heaps of chili, salt, pepper, and lemon juice. I munch at my desk while catching up on and filing emails.

12:30 pm: We have a monthly hour-long call with one of our external law firms for one of our big litigation matters. We unpack several issues, both legal and procedural. I catch up with my head of disputes afterwards for a debrief and we agree to update the CEO and COO this week.

1:45 pm: A quick walk down to Circular Quay and back for some air and to clear my head. My daughter texts me to let me know that she is heading off to work now.

2:00pm: It's the weekly acquisitions team meeting. We run through the current deal, and progress on a couple of other matters and issues. We check in on recruitment; we have a couple of vacant roles, and it's good to hear that we've had some good applications and interviews are progressing well.

2:30pm: Time for another weekly meeting, this time for legal operations. I meet weekly with our legal operations associate to catch up on the legal operations strategy for GCO. Today, we are focused on a customer satisfaction survey we just closed. We have asked for feedback on GCO experience levels of satisfaction and suggestions for improvement. The results are pleasing, and the feedback has been constructive and useful. I'll do a presentation to the team on the results in a few weeks.

3:00 pm: Time to chug a glass of water and check my emails again. I check the GCO monthly training schedule. We have a gap, so we'll need to find something for that slot.

3:30 pm: Time for the APAC region GC monthly call. Today, we talk about a return to the office (or not) and unpack a few pressing issues for the area, including the EY's global terms and conditions refresh, and some proposed developments in the managed services space.

4:30 pm: Second interview with a candidate for a role in our commercial team. It goes well, my team lead, and I decide to make an offer. We chat with the recruitment team about the next steps.

5:00pm: The day winds down, and the team trickle off home. The day of meetings is not quite over for me. I start to read a draft advice one of my team has sent me for review while waiting for a 6:00 pm call.

6:00 pm: Regular call with our captive insurer to discuss our key notified litigation matters. As it's the first call for the year, we talk for an hour.

7:00 pm: I head home in the car. No traffic at this time of the evening!

8:00 pm: Dinner at home with my partner. We chat about a few things we need to do around the house on the weekend. My kids are both still working, so it's a peaceful evening at home. We roll out the new rug in the dining room. Looks great.

9:00 pm: Check a few emails and decide that it is a Netflix night. We sit back and watch another episode of *Lupin* and, sticking to the French theme, a recording of Rick Stein's Secret France and lament the lack of travel in the foreseeable future. I order a box of fruit and veg to be delivered tomorrow morning when I am working from home.

11:00 pm: Set up my home office ready for tomorrow. I have some printed documents and advices to review. After a day of meetings, it's a day of reviewing advices and expert reports tomorrow.

1:00 am: The global team are presenting a session on governing law, jurisdiction and enforcement. Luckily, these sessions are recorded, so we will watch this session as a team during our monthly training session in March. Problem solved.

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As the regional general counsel for EY Oceania, Smyth’s team of 20 lawyers manages the legal needs of EY across Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, and PNG. Prior to EY, she spent over 16 years working in senior legal and general counsel roles with AMP. Smyth has lived in Sydney all her life and is often seen early on Saturday morning's kayaking near Balmoral Beach.