

My journey



Interview with Jessica Swannell, Costs Lawyer & Practice Manager of A&M Bacon Limited

A&M Bacon Limited are an award winning firm of Civil and Commercial Litigation Costs Specialists. We have been delivering professional legal costs services to litigation practices throughout England and Wales for over 30 years.

Our highly skilled Costs Lawyers, of whom many are award winners, are committed to establishing and maintaining outstanding relationships with our private practice clients. Our in depth Civil and Commercial litigation knowledge and experience ensures dedicated and bespoke solutions catering to the individual costs needs of our clients. We specialize in Court of Protection, ATE Premium Recovery, Clinical Negligence, Commercial Litigations and Central and Local Government costs work

Our services offered are:

- Adverse Costs
- Advice and Consultancy
- Advocacy
- Cost Budgeting
- Costs Recovery
- Costs Recovery
- In-house CPD Training
- Panel Auditing
- Solicitor & Client Disputes

Q. What's your career background?

I left school when I was 16 and I started working for A&M Bacon Limited when I was 17 as an admin assistant. I soon became really interested in law and trained to be a Costs Lawyer at the age of 18. I qualified at 21 being one of the youngest Costs Lawyers and I also achieved the gold cup for the highest marks in my examination. I went on maternity leave and then returned to work and made practice manager at 23. Since becoming practice manager, I have tripled the turnover and I now specialise in all areas of running a law firm.

Q. What challenges did you face in your journey and what did you learn from these?

I was 8 and half months pregnant when I sat my Costs Lawyer exam, that was certainly a challenge in itself! I also found it incredibly difficult studying for a considerable amount of time whilst I was so young and all my friends were socialising. I learnt that it is ok to not do the norm. I am so pleased that I did put all my effort into training at a young age as I am now reaping the rewards.

I am incredibly privileged that I had such a wonderful and inspiring mentor who was Mr Michael Bacon. I have always been ambitious and I wanted to make a professional name for myself and be someone that my family and children would be proud of.

Q. I heard you are a supporter of Mental Health and wish to write a book on this topic. Tell us more about this idea.

Yes, I have had my fair share of dark times and want to share my experiences on this. One thing I really struggled with was that I had nothing to be upset or low about. I had beautiful children, a loving husband, amazing family, a successful career but dark times can take anyone, at any given time.

I want to write a book based on two sides, one being the person living with depression and the other being the person living with the person who has the depression. I found a lot of coping mechanisms as I wouldn't let it beat me and unfortunately the NHS are severely underfunded so I took matters into my own hands. The book is on my to do list!

Q. What was one of your most defining moments in your career so far?

Qualifying. After basically no personal life for 3 years, I had done it. Not only had I passed, I passed with flying colours. All the tears were worth it in the end and I will also stand by the saying 'you get out what you put in.'

Seeing the proud faces of your employers who had given you this opportunity and your parents, it was priceless and a memory I will forever cherish.

Q. How do you achieve your work life balance of being both - career woman and mother? If the firm champions flexible working arrangements please mention this here.

I didn't bring children in the world to never see them due to work but I knew I was never a stay at home mother. I always have been and continue to be ambitious and that fire in my belly will never burn out (I hope so anyway). I knew I had to make work and children have a balance. A lot of people think it has to be 50/50. Unfortunately, that doesn't work in practice. Sometimes I have to work 80% of the time and dedicate 20% to my children. Sometimes it will be half term and the percentages flip.

My key to having it all is organisation and priorities. At work and home I have a 'necessary' and a 'nice' to do list. At times it can feel overwhelming but by separating the two you have a clear vision.

Q. You have made various changes at the firm to accommodate mothers to retain talent. Why is this important to you?

I felt like the company needed to be a forward thinking firm and for us to be one of the best costs law firms, I needed to attract and retain the best costs lawyers, whether you are a mother/father or not.

I always say that work must work for you, not the other way around. My approach is to allow all members of staff the flexibility to pick their own hours and choose where and when they do them. For example, some mothers find it incredibly difficult with childcare maybe due to lack of support from family members. If someone needs to pick up their child from school, then I fully support that. The time is then made up in the evening when the child has gone to bed. Our personal lives are getting busier and busier and I will continue to do anything I possibly can to help. Now the nights are drawing in, a member of staff takes her dogs for a longer walk during lunchtime and makes the time up that evening (in the warm!)

All of these changes really do have an impact on how we deal with life and it reduces the daily stresses.

Q. Who inspires you and why?

Most people say someone famous but mine is closer to home. It is my mother. From a young age she has always supported me in every decision but also told me where I was going wrong. It is absolutely key to have support and without her support, I wouldn't be where I am and able to do what I do now. Her love is incredibly powerful and it makes me want to succeed every single day for her! She has taught me the art of understanding and it is something I will never forget.

Q. What advice would you give to other women on their journey?

Stock up on wine! In seriousness though, don't be so hard on yourself. Enjoy the process and always, always trust your instinct. You are a long time in work and it is such a shame to see people in jobs that they do not enjoy. What is three or four years hard studying for the rest of your life! Remember that you will never know it all, everything evolves, including ourselves and each day you will learn.

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