

THE LEGAL TRAILBLAZER

Lawyers Uncovered: The Faces Behind Silvester Legal

In the realm of law, Siraj Shaikh Aziz stands as a resolute and dynamic presence within the Silvester Legal team. His legal journey commenced at Singapore Management University (SMU) in 2015, where he honed his expertise in Criminal Defence, eventually leaving an indelible mark on the field of law. Siraj's story is one of passion, dedication, and an unyielding commitment to the pursuit of justice.

From the Beginning and Beyond

Siraj's desire to pursue a career in law was shaped by a combination of personal interests and inspiring role models. Even in his formative years, Siraj displayed a deep-rooted interest in philosophy, literature, and drama. It was this intellectual curiosity that laid the foundation for his future in the legal arena.

However, it was a life-changing moment at the Singapore Management University Open House where a professor illustrated how the law touched every aspect of an item as simple as an apple - from growth and harvest to packaging, export, and sale. This compelling explanation made Siraj realise that a career in law was not just intellectually stimulating but also held the potential to make a significant impact on people's lives.

“If the law was ubiquitous and unavoidable, then a career in helping people navigate it seemed a worthwhile pursuit to me.”



Siraj Shaikh Aziz
Defence & Disputes Lawyer

An All-Around Advocate

Siraj's legal journey commenced with a focus on criminal defence. He served as a Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS) Fellow, representing nearly 100 clients across a spectrum of Penal and non-Penal Code offences. His dedication led to securing conditional warnings, community-based sentences, and acquittals for clients at both pre- and post-trial stages.

His commitment to criminal law extended beyond the courtroom as he actively participated in the Law Society's Criminal Practice Committee and Criminal Legal Aid Scheme Committee, dedicating his time to the betterment of the community.

Venturing into Uncharted Territories

One of the significant turning points in Siraj's career was his transition into civil and commercial litigation after joining Silvester Legal.

Naturally inclined towards disputes work, Siraj was drawn to the thrill of oral and written advocacy. His involvement in competitive university debating and mooted provided a glimpse of his persuasive abilities, which would later become a cornerstone of his legal career. This innate interest in the art of argumentation paved the way for his journey into disputes law.

In addition to his personal affinity for advocacy, Siraj found inspiration in the experiences of seasoned disputes lawyers. These legal professionals not only shared their vast knowledge but also recounted their real-world encounters with disputes, both in the commercial and criminal domains. It was through their insights and stories that Siraj's determination to pursue a career in disputes law was further solidified.

This expansion allowed him to advise and act as lead counsel for clients in contractual disputes, shareholder and director disputes, intellectual property infringement, and tortious claims. One of the early achievements that underscored his commitment was winning a High Court trial for a minority oppression suit within a year of joining Silvester Legal, even against a more experienced senior litigator.

Overcoming Challenges with Adaptability

Siraj's journey to becoming the legal trailblazer he is today was not without its trials.

"Both these challenges entailed navigating a steep learning curve in a short period of time while ensuring that the best was being done for clients," he recounted.



The initial hurdle arose at the start of his career when he assumed the role of a Criminal Legal Aid Fellow under the employment of the Law Society Pro Bono Services. This position tasked him with representing legally aided individuals in criminal matters on a full-time basis. As a fresh-faced junior lawyer, he found himself in the daunting position of running his own legal cases and presenting oral and written arguments directly before the Court. This level of responsibility is typically entrusted to junior lawyers in private practice after several years.

In response to the daunting challenges he faced early in his career, Siraj adopted a multifaceted approach, marked by dedication and adaptability. His strategy involved diligent research and a deep dive into the respective areas of law relevant to his cases. He consulted not only with fellow junior lawyers but also sought guidance from seasoned seniors both within and outside the firm.

"Observing other lawyers' written and oral advocacy, whether they were opposing counsel in my own cases or lawyers involved in unrelated matters, provided invaluable insights and lessons," he shared. Through this continuous learning process, Siraj honed his skills and grew in confidence, allowing him to competently represent his clients in both commercial and criminal matters.

One crucial lesson he derived from these challenges was the unchanging imperative to assist clients in navigating the legal process to access justice.

Whether it was advocating for an oppressed minority shareholder, vindicating a misled investor, or defending the rights of an aggrieved employer or employee, Siraj realised that the essence of his role remained constant. This realisation fortified his dedication and fuelled his pursuit of justice, regardless of the nature of the case.



Life-Changing Impacts

In his illustrious career as a Defence and Disputes Lawyer, Siraj has encountered cases that have left a profound mark on his heart. These memorable success stories reflect not only his legal acumen but also his deep empathy and commitment to making a positive difference in the lives of those he represents.

One such case involved a 25-year-old client facing a daunting 9-10-month jail sentence for his involvement with a criminal syndicate engaged in money laundering. Siraj embarked on an arduous journey to advocate for his client's leniency. Through compelling arguments, he convinced the Court and prosecution to grant his client probation instead of imprisonment. This pivotal decision was driven by the client's good character, dedication to further education, and his vital role as the sole caretaker of his mother. As a result of Siraj's efforts, the young man was given a second chance. He found employment in a reputable security company, fulfilling his aspirations and securing a brighter future - a dream unattainable had he been burdened with a criminal record.

In another deeply affecting case, a 33-year-old man faced charges of housebreaking. He had previously committed similar offenses, receiving fines as punishment. However, the situation didn't seem typical to Siraj. His client's behaviour raised questions, leading him to delve deeper into the man's mental condition. Through this meticulous inquiry, Siraj discovered that his client suffered from cyclothymic disorder, causing severe mood swings between depression and hypomania. This revelation explained the unique nature of his housebreaking incidents, unlike typical burglaries. The disorder had remained undiagnosed in previous legal encounters. Siraj's dedication was evident as he advocated for his client to receive probation with psychiatric treatment and close monitoring by his family. The Court agreed with Siraj's submissions, recognising that this approach offered a better chance for the client's recovery, rather than a jail term that could exacerbate his condition.

Additionally, Siraj encountered a middle-aged father of three facing a devastating 10-12-month jail sentence for motor insurance fraud. The client was prepared to plead guilty and accept this dire punishment until Siraj entered the picture. It was then revealed that the client had resorted to this desperate act out of necessity to fund a life-saving operation for his two-year-old daughter, who had a life-threatening heart condition. The dire context of the case was unknown to the police and prosecution. Siraj stepped in, penning a heartfelt plea to the prosecution, requesting a compassionate 3-month jail sentence. He cited the extreme circumstances under which the crime had been committed and highlighted the crucial medical need for the client's daughter. Both the prosecution and the Court eventually acceded to his powerful submissions, showing leniency due to the extraordinary circumstances.

These experiences left a lasting mark on Siraj, highlighting the pivotal role of legal proceedings in the lives of clients.

"The legal process is akin to the River Styx of Greek mythology, and lawyers are the Charon, guiding clients through these turbulent waters", he added.

Beyond the Courtroom

Siraj's dedication to giving back to the community and promoting access to justice has left a profound impact on both his personal and professional growth. Notably, some of the most significant and memorable cases he has handled are pro bono cases, where the stakes are remarkably high, and the positive impact a lawyer can make is particularly profound.

"It is no accident that the cases I have referred to above as particularly memorable are pro bono cases. It is in those kinds of cases, particularly pro bono cases, where the stakes are at their highest and the difference a lawyer can make the most acute. These cases remind me why I practice law to help my clients navigate the law when they are forced to encounter it. They galvanise me to press on in the practice of law," Siraj reflects.



To maintain a healthy work-life balance while juggling the demands of being recognised as a rising star in the industry, Siraj incorporates various self-care practices and hobbies into his routine. These activities help him recharge and stay focused. His approach to work-life balance includes both passive and active interests.

Siraj enjoys passive activities like watching movies, series, and documentaries, as well as playing video games to unwind. On the other hand, he actively engages in community and volunteer work, indulges in reading, takes leisurely walks in the park, visits attractions, spends quality time with friends, and reconnects with family.

Notably, he finds that sometimes there are overlaps between his leisure and work, especially when he reads books or watches videos to enhance his domain knowledge in specific areas of law or to learn how to improve his oral and written advocacy.

To handle the demands of a disputes lawyer's career effectively, Siraj focuses on being grounded and maintaining realistic expectations. He acknowledges that work-life balance in disputes work does not always mean a strict 50-50 balance. Instead, he accepts that the amount of time allocated to work may vary, with some periods requiring more commitment while others allow for more personal time to recharge. Above all, he remains committed to delivering the best service to his clients, recognising that quality work necessitates dedicated effort and time.

From Mentorship to Leadership

When reflecting on his career and personal development, Siraj acknowledges the pivotal role played by mentors and role models. His journey has been enriched by the guidance and support provided by individuals from institutions like Singapore Management University, Law Society Pro Bono Services (now known as Pro Bono SG), and Silvester Legal. Among these figures, Mr. Walter Silvester stands out as a mentor who extended opportunities and consistently offered advice and direction, expanding Siraj's practice into the realm of commercial disputes.

In addition to drawing inspiration from mentors, Siraj has been an active participant in mentoring and supporting aspiring legal professionals.

Whether they approach him for briefed cases or pro bono work, Siraj is dedicated to nurturing the next generation of legal talent. His commitment extends to advocating for young lawyers to become volunteers in the criminal legal aid system, recognising the dual benefit of assisting those in need and allowing these lawyers to gain early exposure to running their cases and presenting arguments before the Court.

Championing Justice & Charting a Legal Odyssey

When contemplating his long-term aspirations as a disputes lawyer, Siraj has a clear goal. He envisions a future where he continues to competently assist clients in navigating the complex landscape of commercial and criminal disputes. Furthermore, he is committed to perpetual self-improvement, year after year, ensuring that he hones his skills and expertise. With each passing day, Siraj strives to fortify his reputation, aiming to be renowned for his competence and reliability as a disputes lawyer.

Siraj's passion for his profession extends beyond the confines of the courtroom. He is fervently dedicated to causes that augment access to justice. This dedication is manifest in his active involvement in offering pro-bono and low-bono services, spanning both civil and criminal matters. Additionally, he generously shares his insights and knowledge through community talks aimed at enlightening various stakeholders about the intricacies of the legal world. His commitment also extends to participating in legal clinics, providing vital assistance to those in need.

As a testament to his dedication and excellence, Siraj's journey as a legal professional has not gone unnoticed. In 2023, he was awarded with the prestigious title of "Rising Star" by Asian Legal Business, signifying his outstanding contributions to the field. Furthermore, he achieved recognition as one of the Top 5 winners in the LexisNexis National Awards 2023, cementing his position as an influential and accomplished figure in Singapore's legal landscape.

