

Rachel Launders

General Counsel and Company Secretary at Nine Entertainment Co

Marina Olsen, Partner at Banki Haddock Fiora, talks with **Rachel Launders**, General Counsel and Company Secretary at Nine Entertainment Co, about International Women's Day and Rachel's illustrious career in media law to date. Rachel's early career included being a lawyer at ASIC before moving to Gilbert + Tobin, where she worked for more than 16 years including 13 as a partner. During her time at G + T, Rachel was also the Acting General Counsel at PBL Media. At the end of 2014, Rachel left the G+T partnership to take on her current role as General Counsel and Company Secretary of Nine Entertainment. She continues to support various community organisations, including City Recital Hall and Giant Steps School, with directorships on their Boards, and was previously a Chairman of Sancta Sophia College, a residential college for undergraduate and postgraduate women and men at the University of Sydney.



Rachel Launders

MARINA OLSEN: What does a typical day look like for you?

RACHEL LAUNDERS: My typical day involves lots of juggling and variety. Depending on what's going on in the business, my day can be internally focussed or externally focussed, reactive or proactive. It can be anything from working on sports rights or joint ventures, helping someone in the Nine legal team work through a problem (although they generally know a lot more law than I do) or working with the Nine exec team on tricky issues that can crop up on any part of the business. That's often the fun part – being asked to contribute my thoughts on diverse issues, even if they're not necessarily legal problems. My varied experiences as a lawyer hopefully mean I've got something useful to contribute.

MARINA: Did you always want this job? If so, what did you do to position yourself to get it? If not, how did your career path lead you here?

RACHEL: My career path is an excellent demonstration of no career planning at all. Like many people who graduated when I did (last century), partnership in a large law firm was really the only career option that I knew about and that's where I thought I'd go from law school, but I took a detour. I've worked in the courts, for government bodies, for an energy company, in private practice (where I did become a partner), and I've been at Nine for seven years now. I was asked to go on secondment from Gilbert + Tobin to Nine in 2007, even though I wasn't in any way an expert on the media industry. Over the years that followed, I did a lot of work for Nine (including a second secondment), and that led to Nine offering me a role when the then GC, Amanda Laing, was moving into a commercial role. I was in the right place to take the secondment opportunity in 2007, and that, with a lot of hard work for Nine, put me in the frame for the role I have now.

MARINA: What recent events in the Australian media law landscape most affect Nine and your role as its GC?

RACHEL: The ACCC's work on digital platforms, leading to the creation of the News Media Bargaining Code, has been a critical development for Nine, and for the news media industry more generally. It's enabled us to receive payment from the platforms, who have benefited from use of news content for many years to build their own businesses. Those payments will go some way to ensuring that news organisations can continue to invest in quality journalism. And if the last couple of years haven't shown the benefits of having access to quality journalism (rather than vast amounts of misinformation or disinformation), I don't know what will.

MARINA: Are there any law reforms in the broadcasting / publishing sector that you think are desperately needed? If so, what are they?

RACHEL: I've got quite a list. The ACCC's Digital Platform Enquiry and the work that has followed it, including the News Media Bargaining Code, were ground-breaking, in terms of addressing the dominance that digital platforms have in so many areas relevant to the broadcasting/publishing sector. There is so much more to be done though to ensure the continuation of a strong, financially viable Australian media sector. Defamation reform, to make investigative reporting less risky for publishers, is a perennial need. One of the other big issues is prominence – we risk losing ready access to radio stations in your car or free to air television channels on your smart TV disappear, because manufacturers preference global players for priority placement. Finding a solution to ensure services, which employ Australian talent and tell Australian solutions, are easily discoverable should be a high priority for Government.

MARINA: What advice would you give to your younger self?

RACHEL: Relax, look after yourself and get more sleep. I was in a great hurry in my late 20s and early 30s, and that wasn't necessarily the healthiest time of my life.

MARINA: What's the best work-related advice you've ever received?

RACHEL: Regret is a wasted emotion. We all make mistakes. Dwelling on a past mistake isn't a good use of energy – learn from it and move on!

MARINA: What developments do you see on the horizon in 2022 for the communications and media legal landscape?

RACHEL: There have been a lot of consultation papers put out in recent months on issues from privacy, digital platforms, the Anti-Trolling Bill (to reverse the Voller decision), SVOD quotas, and use of spectrum, so if the current Government is returned in May, there's a wide range of options. While there are numerous defamation law reforms which could be passed, and the Anti-Trolling Bill wasn't perfect, it would be a good start to implement that. If we have a change of Government, we'll need to see what the priorities are for the new Minister for Communications.

MARINA: What energises you about work?

RACHEL: Working with people who are passionate about what they do – whether it's making The Block or Travel Guides, breaking big news stories, broadcasting premium sport like the Australian Open, or all the behind the scenes people who make a big complex media organisation hum.

MARINA: What's the greatest risk you've taken as a professional?

RACHEL: Taking the secondment at Nine that has led to my current role was quite a gamble as I knew very little about the industry at the time but I'm glad I took the risk (and that Nine took the risk on me).

MARINA: How do you unplug from work?

RACHEL: Is it too embarrassing to say going to meetings? I'm on the board of a couple of not for profits, Giant Steps (which runs schools and post-school programs for people with autism) and the City Recital Hall. Over the last couple of years, they've had some big challenges so helping them work through a variety of issues is a great way of getting perspective on life and doing something outside work. Apart from that, I go to shows and concerts, sing in a community choir when I can get there, go to the gym a few times a week, and am bossed around by Maddy the family chihuahua – she's quite good at sitting on keyboards and papers so effectively mandates being unplugged from work.

MARINA: The 2022 International Women's Day campaign theme is #BreakTheBias. What does this mean to you and how would you suggest this is implemented in our readers' work and personal lives?

RACHEL: To me, #BreakTheBias means being aware of the myriad ways in which

conscious or unconscious biases can impact on the advancement of women (and other groups), and actively doing what you can to avoid or redress the impact of that bias.

The first step to implementing #BreakTheBias is simply thinking about the people you engage with and what they need to succeed, and then taking the steps you can to address the impact of any bias. This could be about how responsibility for looking after children is allocated between parents – is there an assumption that one parent will take primary responsibility for anything child related, and so isn't as available for work? In the workplace, are you scheduling meetings at times that suit everyone's life circumstances? Is work allocated in a way that gives everyone a fair opportunity to do the high profile, high value work that will get noticed? Do you nominate people for opportunities, if they might not put themselves forward? Can you remember to call on the quiet person to contribute something at a meeting so they

can show what they know, without having to talk over the noisy people to be heard. Of course, all that can apply to what you need to do for yourself.

MARINA: Who is one woman in the industry whom you really admire, and why? And who is one woman outside media and the law whom you really admire, and why?

RACHEL: Within the industry, Gina Cass-Gottlieb who I had the pleasure and privilege of working with when I was at Gilbert + Tobin. She's always calm and considered, super smart and creative. Gina has been a great help to me and to Nine over the years. The ACCC is in very good hands with Gina stepping in as Chair shortly. For someone outside the media and law, I nominate Mary Shanahan (who will not be known to any or many readers) – she was the principal at Sancta Sophia College at the University of Sydney when I was there. She's encouraged generations of young women to be their best selves and, in her early 90s, she's still going strong.

Louisa Vickers

Senior Legal Counsel at NBCUniversal

Jess Millner, Associate at MinterEllison, chats to **Louisa Vickers**, Senior Legal Counsel, Networks and Distribution at NBCUniversal, to get her thoughts on International Women's Day and some valuable career tips on working in the media law industry. Prior to her current role at NBCUniversal, Louisa was a Business and Legal Affairs Executive at Beyond Distribution and before that, Louisa was part of the IP practice at Piper Alderman. Louisa is also a new mum and has managed to find a spare moment to do this interview with a 12-week old bub at home.

JESS MILLNER: Let's start with how you got to where you are now. Did you always hope to end up in a job like your current role at NBCUniversal? If so, what did you do to position yourself to get it? If not, how did your career path lead you here?

LOUISA VICKERS: I always wanted to work in film and television, although I had no idea I would end up working in this industry as a lawyer. Before studying law, I studied Arts (Media) and worked as a photographer and editor for a number of years. It wasn't until I moved to London and started to work in television production that I became really interested in the business of film and television and not just the creative side of it. That's when I decided to study law with the sole focus of eventually working in a role like my current role at NBCUniversal.

In order to get here I loaded my undergrad with every subject relating to IP and Media and ended up working in a fantastic IP practice as my first role as a lawyer. It wasn't until I left private practice to work for my first television production and

distribution company that I realised that I had somewhat limited my studies a bit too much for in-house counsel. So I went back and completed a Masters in Laws with a much more general focus as is required by most in-house roles.

JESS: What's the best work-related advice you've ever received?

LOUISA: Pick your battles! Take it as you will but for me this advice helped me focus on what really matters and what doesn't.

JESS: What energises you about work?

LOUISA: The people and the diversity of my role. I'm fortunate to work with some truly amazing people from all over the world and to be able to work within many different areas of the business.

JESS: When you're working in a busy and demanding role how do you unplug from work?

LOUISA: Sometimes I'm not sure I do 'unplug' very well although a good session at the gym helps me shake off the work day and gain a bit of clarity.



Louisa Vickers

JESS: If you could have dinner with any woman – living or passed, real or fictional, who would it be and why?

LOUISA: Oh that would have to be Madame Bollinger (the Great Lady of Champagne). She ran the Bollinger empire from 1941 (from the age of 42) until 1977 after her husband's sudden death. It would be fascinating to dine with her both for her knowledge of, and ability to provide, a good drop of Champagne and because she garnished such a huge amount of respect for the way she conducted herself at the helm of the Bollinger empire. She also provided one of my favourite quotes. If you don't know it, look it up!

JESS: If there is one thing you would celebrate about International Women's Day in this industry, specifically, what would it be?

LOUISA: I would simply celebrate the fact that this industry has so many amazing women in it. Keep up the great work ladies, you're all fabulous!