

Sophie Jackson

Principal Legal Counsel at Foxtel

Sophie Jackson is Principal Legal Counsel of Foxtel group and an inspiring woman with considerable experience in the media & telecommunications industry. **Tabassum Athoe**, Privacy Advisor & Lawyer at the ABC, interviews Sophie Jackson in the lead up to International Women's Day.

Sophie has taken time from her busy schedule to talk about who inspires her, the future of her industry, her love of baking, and how she balances personal and professional life. She also takes this opportunity to provide some lasting words of advice for other females in the industry.

TABASSUM ATHOEY: What does a typical day look like for you?

SOPHIE JACKSON: Most mornings start with an early sport drop off (6.45am) for at least one of my children. While working from home, it's a coffee run on the way back, a quick check of emails for anything urgent, and a hustle to get the rest of them out the door and off to school. An average day includes a daily stand up with my team to check in on the day, connect and collaborate. Since COVID, this daily time helps keep us grounded. It can just be a 5 minute chat about the latest binge-worthy show. There is no particular order to the rest of the day which is interspersed with meetings, legal advice, drafting, negotiating, and triaging problems or strategy with business stakeholders. My focus for the day will depend on the transactions I am supporting, and the regulatory or industry issues of the moment. Keeping myself across industry issues relevant to my business stakeholders is key so I keep abreast of the news headlines, try to read a publication or two, and keep up to date with relevant draft legislation and consultations. The day generally ends with a pick up or two, cooking and some decompression time – a run, or a good TV show. It's never been easier to support the Foxtel Group products!

TABASSUM: What recent events in the Australian media law landscape most affect your organisation/role?

SOPHIE: Clearly media reform has a significant impact. The latest Media Policy Statement includes a number of recommendations in relation to Australian content including an SVOD reporting and spend framework, and a reduction in subscription television's spend obligation. Other issues of significance for Foxtel include anti-siphoning, captioning reform which the subscription television industry continues to seek, the changes to the Privacy Act (including the Online Platform Bill and the CDR designation for telecommunications), and copyright and defamation reform.

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

SOPHIE: Much will ultimately depend on the election. I am dubious about the extent to which we will see significant reform during 2022. I see the aggregation of content distribution through platforms as a growing trend, and with that there are likely to be new regulatory and competition challenges.

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

SOPHIE: I'll name two that felt risky at the time but ended up proving to be fantastic opportunities. As a young lawyer in the UK working for Allen & Overy, I was offered a secondment to the UK telecommunications regulator in a policy role. It was the late 1990s and no-one could have known the extent to which the media, telecommunications and technology sector would converge. The iPhone was still a decade away. I baulked at the thought of leaving my IP / media focussed role to go learn about "telephones" but my very wise boss of the time encouraged me to make the move, stressing that a deep understanding of the telco and technology sector, and exposure at a strong industry regulator, would stand me in good stead for any future role in media. How right she was. Although I returned to A&O, my passion for media distribution remained. A couple of years later, I made the decision to leave the stability, and seemingly guaranteed, future, of my role at A&O and join a digital start-up as their first in-house counsel. The start-up, a joint venture between BSkyB, BT, HSBC and Panasonic, was leading the roll out of digital television in the UK. I never looked back.

TABASSUM: How do you unplug from work?

SOPHIE: Down time with my partner, three children and the dog. A run, a swim and the obligatory Foxtel online HIIT class. Foxtel launched free online exercise classes for its employees during COVID, which has been a great way to unwind and stay healthy. A necessary counter-balance to the fact that lockdowns have fuelled my already over-obsessive love of food and cooking. I discovered the art of sourdough bread making, whilst the pasta machine and ice cream maker have never had such a good workout.



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

SOPHIE: I'll have to name two. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for her intellect and amazing achievements in fighting against sex-based discrimination, and for the rights of others. She has been a role model for a whole generation of female lawyers and is such an inspiration - as she said, "real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time". And if the catch up is a dinner, I would have to say Kylie Kwong... for her delicious food, and her never ending commitment to sustainability.

TABASSUM: 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?

SOPHIE: #breakthebias means more than a personal call to action. Yes I need to ensure that I am aware of my own biases but more importantly it is a challenge to us all to call out bias when we see it. The easy route is to stay quiet. However, if we can tackle bias as it arises in our day to day working and personal lives, we can break the cycle and help others recognise their own bias and the debilitating impact it has. Sometimes the smallest comment, kindly given, can make the difference.. Speak out when you see something that feels wrong. Be brave.

TABASSUM: What advice would you give to the next generation of female leaders in the industry?

SOPHIE: Be yourself, embrace opportunity and be kind, to yourself and others. On a more practical level, keep networking and seek out mentors who can support you as you navigate the ups and downs of your career.