

# Rebecca Sandel

SVP, Legal And Business Affairs,  
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**Emma Johnsen** and **Laksha Prasad**, Marque Lawyers, sit down with **Rebecca Sandel**, Senior Vice President, Legal and Business Affairs at Universal Music Australia to chat about music and legal careers as part of International Women's Day. Bec is an experienced commercial and IP lawyer, who leads the Legal and Business Affairs function across Universal Music in Australia and New Zealand.

**EMMA JOHNSEN and LAKSHA PRASAD:** Thanks for chatting with us, Bec. Tell us a bit about your role and how long you have been at Universal Music.

**REBECCA SANDEL:** I am the Senior Vice President, Legal & Business Affairs at Universal Music Australia, looking after both Australia and New Zealand. I've been at Universal for 12 years, starting as a junior lawyer and working my way up to lead the legal function and sit on the Executive team. I also lead the Diversity and Inclusion Team at UMA and am an ARIA (Australia Recording Industry Association) Board member.

**LAKSHA:** What is the biggest misconception about being "music lawyer?"

**BEC:** That it is all hanging out with famous people and going to gigs! We operate as a small in-house team, with tight budgets, in an extremely fast-paced business. We work within a very creative environment with passionate colleagues who want to see their ideas come to life, so we work hard to facilitate that.

**EMMA:** What does a typical day look like for you?

**BEC:** Our core business is signing and developing recording artists, so I spend a lot of time helping structure artist signings or assisting with issues or questions once they are signed to us. I have three excellent lawyers in my team who look after various business units – labels, licensing, marketing, digital, merchandising, and a brand agency, to name a few. We catch up regularly to discuss issues and workshop ideas. While I still do considerable amounts of legal work, my role has evolved into a lot of strategy discussions, big picture planning and problem solving.

I split my time between Melbourne (where I live) and Sydney (where our head office is.) If I'm in Melbourne, it is usually a little calmer. I have lots of Zoom meetings but, when I'm not on a call, I try to use my time to do quiet, focused work.

When I'm in Sydney, I find myself in meetings 90% of the time – planned or otherwise! The music industry is a very relationship-driven business, so I put a lot of effort into building and maintaining relationships, internally and externally.

**LAKSHA:** What is the most difficult thing about your role? Conversely, what is the best thing about your job?

**BEC:** The speed of change in the industry means I need to be across a lot of "new" – new

music, new technology, new opportunities, new challenges. It is the reason I love my job and will never get bored, but it can be challenging to stay on top of everything.

The best thing is working with a product – music – that I'm deeply passionate about. Signing artists when they are unknown, helping them to create art and then seeing them connect with an audience is very rewarding.

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

**BEC:** "Enjoy the journey." I had a very singular focus in my career. Early on someone said to me that, along the way, I should also enjoy the journey and perhaps I would find a different, but equally enjoyable path. I think that's important for people who are trying to break into niche industries. You may not make it and that's ok. But you might find something you enjoy just as much, or more, along the way.

**LAKSHA:** Who are your favourite musicians?

**BEC:** Like a lot of people, my favourite musicians are predominately from my late teens, early 20s. I love Arcade Fire, The Postal Service, Mumford & Sons. It's been a privilege to watch artists develop from first signing to global superstars, like Lorde and Troye Sivan. I'm a big fan of their music. I also love country and I'm loving seeing country moving to the mainstream; artists like Kacey Musgraves and Zach Bryan, and I will always have a special place for Dolly Parton!

**EMMA:** What were your career aspirations as a child? How do they differ/are they similar to where you are now?

**BEC:** I was one of those children who always wanted to be a lawyer – I grew up around a lot of lawyers and was probably fairly good at framing a convincing argument!

In my first year of law school, I decided I wanted to work in-house at a record label – I don't think I knew exactly what that meant but I loved music and thought that if I could combine those two things, I would enjoy my career. I spent my university years and about four years post-university networking with people in the local industry and completing a Masters in copyright law. Eventually I was offered a job at Universal, and I've never looked back!

**LAKSHA:** What were some unexpected career challenges that you have faced over your career? And how did you handle them?



**BEC:** Securing a role in the music industry, when there are probably only a dozen in-house lawyers at record labels across Australia, was challenging. It required literally years of networking, patience, and persistence. It's only with hindsight that I realise how much time and effort went into it. But, at the time, it didn't feel challenging because I was meeting people and talking to them about an area I was extremely interested in.

I also learned that people are really open to giving advice and assistance if you ask politely and show a genuine interest. I now make sure to offer the same help and guidance to anyone who reaches out to me.

**EMMA:** How do you switch off during a particularly busy period at work?

**BEC:** It is difficult, particularly when so much of my down time is often focused around listening to music or going to gigs. But I'm a big fan of my Peloton exercise bike and my husband and I have a pretty consistent Mario Kart tournament happening on our Nintendo Switch so that's always good for a mental break.

**LAKSHA:** Tell us about a woman you admire, and why.

**BEC:** There are so many! I am at the age where I'm surrounded by women who are juggling massive careers and very busy home lives. I am always in awe about how they do it all.

I admire authentic, compassionate leaders and effective communicators – I look at someone like Jacinda Ardern who is such an amazing example of this.

And then there is Dolly Parton – an incredible career, an amazing musician and songwriter and someone who has always forged her own path.

**EMMA and LAKSHA:** Thanks so much for your time Bec. We've loved chatting with you. Happy International Women's Day!