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FEATURES



From Big Law to Big Coffee: How a Former Debevoise Lawyer Brewed a New Venture



Ted Rosner. Courtesy photo

In a touchingly honest interview, Ted Rosner describes being let go by a major firm but then launching a company that helps reduce reoffending by providing jobs to prison leavers.

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Reporter

Career Development

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In 2015, trainee lawyer Ted Rosner seemingly had it all. He was wrapping up his training contract at the London office of Debevoise & Plimpton, and was away in Hong Kong when he received a call that changed the course of his career.

It was HR: regrettably, he wouldn't be staying on at the firm at the end of his two years.

While at the time it was devastating, it marked out a path Rosner would not have taken otherwise.

"A sense of rejection is always a horrible thing – so that wasn't nice", he explains. "But then I thought about it for the next few days, and you only realise that maybe it didn't make you happy when you think about the possibility that it might not be there anymore."

Fast forward to today, and Rosner's work still has a major legal element – but just not one that aligns with the corporate department of a major law firm.

He is now co-founder of Redemption Roasters, the first "behind bars" coffee company, which aims to reduce reoffending by providing training and jobs to prison leavers.

It all began when Rosner and business partner Max Dubiel were approached by the U.K. Ministry of Justice in 2016 to develop training programmes across prisons in England and Wales.

The company now operates a roastery at Aylesbury Prison as well as a string of coffee shops across London, with four more set to open in the next year.

However, Rosner confesses that this wasn't always the plan. "It would be disingenuous for me to tell you that this whole thing came out of lifelong ambition to try to help people in the criminal justice system", he explains.

He says that after learning more about reoffending rates and the limited opportunities for ex-offenders, both himself and Dubiel "started to understand the need" for something like Redemption Roasters.

The pressure of the legal industry has never been more omnipresent, with associates leaving in droves owing to stress and mental health issues. In particular, the past year's dealmaking spree has left associates, particularly in corporate teams, exhausted.

Rosner echoes these feelings during his private practice stint:

"I found it stressful because I don't like being put under pressure by other people – I put enough on myself – and I felt, frankly, intellectually fairly diminutive compared to some of the people there as well."

While he describes his current role as infinitely more stressful, he still doesn't envy his lawyer friends, but does sometimes covet the "certain stability" that comes with a private practice career.

Despite everything, Rosner doesn't view his time at Debevoise as a waste. In fact, among many learnings, he says it is "really useful to know how agreements work".

"Obviously I was incredibly junior in terms of knowledge [as a lawyer], but that puts you in the treetops when it comes to the rest of the population", he adds.

Given the nature of his work, it is fair to say the same gratification couldn't be found in private practice. When asked about the most rewarding part of his role, Rosner describes the success of the graduates and seeing employees doing well as "a nice feeling".

"It's nice when you know you've hired a good team and have made a good decision about a shop", he says, adding that the long-term prospects for his employees is also rewarding.

"If and when this business got sold, if we were able to reward our staff financially, and I knew 10 members of our staff will have a deposit on a house because they work for us, that would be cool."

And although the call from Debevoise's HR team may have thrown him off course temporarily, he insists he has no regrets.

"I never regret, I don't like the idea of regrets."

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