

# TIMES ONLINE

From The Times

October 30, 2007

## Lawyer of the Week: Michael Burd

**The solicitor who acted for Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer in their fight against a £4.5 million age discrimination claim**

Linda Tsang

Michael Burd, head of employment at Lewis Silkin, acted for Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, which was sued for £4.5 million by Peter Bloxham, a former insolvency partner claiming age discrimination. The Central London employment tribunal found that the firm pursued a legitimate aim in seeking to achieve greater inter-generational fairness between partners and had done so proportionately so there was no discrimination.

### **What were the main challenges in the Bloxham case and the possible implications?**

This was the first big test of the age discrimination laws, so we were to some extent in virgin territory and knew it would set an important precedent. The background was complex, the documentation before the tribunal running to 4,000 pages, so presenting the issues clearly and concisely was crucial. That the case had a high profile in my own profession and has important implications for law firms generally added to the challenge.

### **What was your worst day as a lawyer?**

Very soon after qualifying I was asked to attend a High Court trial with counsel. After the court clerk said "All rise" and the judge had entered, all present sat back down in silence. At which moment my trousers very audibly split. After a draughty morning taking notes, I rushed to buy a new pair at the lunch break.

### **That was your most memorable experience as a lawyer?**

A pro bono case I did when training. My client, a nurse, was delayed on her shift so I had to present her case without her. To my surprise, I won. As I emerged from the hearing she came sprinting down the hallway and when I showed her the thumbs up she launched herself at me screaming with tears of joy. I and my papers went flying through the waiting room filled with other lawyers and litigants, who then burst into spontaneous applause. Usually it's just a handshake.

### **Who has been the most influential person in your life and why?**

I would have to say Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Indirectly. Having read The Complete Sherlock Holmes three times by the age 14 is, I suspect, what made me such an Anglophile, which in turn is what made me so keen to come to London to study (from the United States).

### **Why did you become a lawyer?**

Inspired in childhood by the likes of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and disillusioned by Vietnam and Watergate, I was going to right the wrongs of the world. Not sure I quite had Mr Bloxham in mind back then...

### **What would your advice be to anyone wanting a career in law?**

Legal systems are ultimately about regulating relationships between people. Understand what makes people tick and you'll be a better lawyer. Also, practising law is much more fun than studying it.

**Where do you see yourself in ten years?** On my desert island, with some wonderful music and The Complete Sherlock Holmes.

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