



THOMAS PHILIP

ADVOCATES & SOLICITORS

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Litigation

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Arbitration

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Mediation

PRAXIS Interviews Mathew Thomas Philip, Founder and Managing Partner of THOMAS PHILIP

1. Why has Thomas Philip decided to focus solely on dispute resolution?

Shortly after I founded the firm in 2004, I decided that for us to grow, it was best that we stuck to doing what we knew best. Luckily, that strategy worked out well for us. We have now grown to a 13-lawyer law firm focusing solely on dispute resolution.

2. What has influenced the way that you have managed Thomas Philip?

I am a strong believer in the concept of a quadruple bottom line with the "4 Ps": People, Purpose, Planet and Profit.

3. How is this reflected in the lives of the lawyers at Thomas Philip?

We invest in the growth of our people. We expect our lawyers to have a higher purpose than just money-making in their practice of the law. We set aside 10 per cent of our time and one per cent of our gross income for *pro bono* and CSR work so that we may make a difference to the planet in some meaningful way. We strive for profit optimisation not profit maximisation. These are the cornerstones of our 4 Ps practice.

4. What are your aspirations for people who join Thomas Philip?

I would like for them to find their true purpose and calling in life.

5. What is the firm's philosophy on partnership?

When we recruit, we recruit for partnership potential and try our best to give our people the best opportunities for partnership.

6. What do you do to fulfil your corporate social responsibilities (CSR)?

There are four areas. First, for the next five years we are the main sponsor for the MLTIC web portal, a portal providing free access to legal information to the public; Second, we strongly support the development of our future lawyers, particularly law students in our local law schools. We sponsor book prizes, moot clubs, moot competitions, and other advocacy related activities – we have just agreed to sponsor the UiTM Moot Team over the next five years. Third, we support our Bar, providing sponsorship for the Malaysian Bench and Bar games. Fourth, we organise various charitable outreach events and target one organisation each year to provide tangible help. We were pleasantly surprised to be nominated for the 2014 Asian Legal Business Awards for "CSR Law Firm of the Year" in a field of much larger firms.

7. What kind of *pro bono* work do you do?

We have a varied portfolio of *pro bono* work, current examples being a right to information case which went all the way up to the Federal Court, a wrongful death claim against the authorities, and an accident claim for a low-income family. Our lawyers are expected to spend 10 per cent of their time in *pro bono* and CSR work and they also have flexibility in their choice of *pro bono* work.

8. Let's talk about money. Why do you pay above-average rates for your pupils (RM3,500.00) and first year associates (RM5,000.00)?

That appears to me a fair proposition for the results we are expecting from them.

9. So what kind of lawyers are you looking for?

All kinds! What we are after is diversity. At different times and different situations, we will be looking for people with different skill sets and strengths.

10. What types of training do you provide for your lawyers?

All lawyers have a training budget which they utilise for off-site training. On-site, every Thursday at 7 pm, our lawyers, pupils and paralegals are required to give presentations on their selected areas of law to the firm. This helps them hone their advocacy and public speaking skills. Apart from technical skills, we emphasise the importance of business development, which is everyone's business at Thomas Philip, not just the partners. So the firm organises weekly events, usually on Thursdays at 8 pm, at which our lawyers can network with invited guests as part of our business development initiative.

11. What is the average timeframe for a fresh graduate to be offered partnership at the firm?

Partnership requires maturity in thinking, not just technical skill sets. This level of maturity and a genuine belief in the philosophy and values of the firm can only truly be realised by being "tried and tested" over time, perhaps after the fresh graduate has been with the firm for about four to five years.

12. From the perspective of recruitment of pupils, how do you differentiate your firm from other litigation firms?

I can think of four things. First, our pupils are allowed and expected to conduct trials in the Magistrates Court. We believe that the best way to learn is by doing. Second, they have to be in the Appellate courts once a week to observe the best advocates at work as part of their advocacy training. Third, they are expected to do moot trials regularly based on upcoming real cases. Fourth, our pupils are offered a one-week all expenses paid internship with a law firm in an Asean Country to broaden their experience at the end of their pupillage.