

# Rebecca Comerford

## Senior Legal Counsel

**Royal  
Geographical  
Society**

with IBG

Advancing geography  
and geographical learning



**Job title:** Senior Legal Counsel

**Organisation:** Utility Company

**Location:** London, UK

### How did you get to where you are now?

I'd always been inspired hearing about the world, and had supportive geography teachers at my comprehensive secondary school.

I studied for the Geographical Tripos at Downing College, Cambridge University, tapping into many travel grants and scholarships, as well as working for the university's international summer schools for extra income in the holidays. I explored my passion of sustainable development in Sub-Saharan Africa, and became President of the Cambridge University branch of a grass roots charity alongside my studies. At the start of my third year of university, I wasn't sure where I wanted geography to take me and I decided to explore a career in law during my final year. A leading magic circle law firm rather took to my worldly geographical outlook and can-do attitude and they offered me a training contract and funding for graduate law school after my geography studies. Within my contract, I'd decided to factor in a break after law school and starting

**W:** [www.rgs.org/iamageographer](http://www.rgs.org/iamageographer)

work - a mini gap year - which I decided to spend studying Mandarin in Taiwan at a post-war language university, National Taiwan Normal University's Mandarin Training Centre, followed by travels across mainland China.

London city life then ensued for many years. I worked very hard and had interesting exposure to multi-billion dollar deals, renewable energy projects, mergers and acquisitions and land and environmental matters. But I quickly realised that big law life wasn't a sustainable pathway for me. Since then I've chopped and changed, working for a renewable energy developer (very geography), and ending up at another magic circle law firm in the Middle East (again, my geographical urge to experience new cultures). Now I work for a UK utility company as a part-time lawyer and also as a freelance legal consultant - each putting geography into practice.

### What do you do as part of your role?

I've recently embraced flexible working to diversify and maintain a solid base in times of uncertainty, alongside reinvigorating my travels, focusing on my health and setting up a consulting arrangement to keep up the goodwill from my past professional life.

In my current day job, I advise on legal risks across the business and major projects of an essential services, utility company. In my freelance work, I explore complex areas of laws in international jurisdictions, drawing on my academic and commercial experiences abroad. I'm also exploring my creative side starting up a travel blog of my geography experiences as *Flying Fyllis I Geo Traveller*. I've even managed to have a picture published in the *Lonely Planet Magazine* - of an Argan oil producer in Morocco's Atlas Mountains that I shot in 2011 - in my first month since going live with my personal blog this year.

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### **What skills and characteristics do you need for this role, apart from geographical knowledge?**

To work in commercial law, intellectual rigour, curiosity, commercial acumen and attention to detail are all essential. You also need good problem solving skills; you don't always need to know the answer, but you need to know how to work it out. Practicality also goes a long way to delivering useful advice. You also need to be resilient and tough, either with the demands of the job or in negotiations.

Over the years, I've also learnt that client relationships are fundamental to doing well in business, and make the job much more personable and enjoyable.

I also have a bit of a visual or photographic memory, which helps with remembering lots of data for big projects, and for sorting through my portfolio of travel photography for my blog!

### **What is the most interesting or enjoyable project you've worked on, and why?**

In 2016 I moved to Dubai to work for another law firm, and I quickly became knowledgeable in the region, working for some of the richest sovereign wealth funds in the world and gained global exposure working on government-to-government funds. I built sustainable cities, sold businesses and companies, constituted global investment funds and sponsored major projects in the region and pioneering new ventures.

I travelled across Arabia and the Gulf and became one of the first foreign, unmarried, unescorted females under 30 at the time to be granted a visa to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for more than a year, travelling and running meetings alone on major projects in the wake of diversification from oil and the opening up of the capital markets to foreign investors.

### **What advice would you give to someone wanting to go in to this career?**

Above all, enjoy what you do. You'll spend a lot of hours doing it, and you must enjoy it. It can be very rewarding - I've earned more in ten years than most do in a lifetime - but it can also be very demanding at the same time. You will need to make certain sacrifices and difficult choices early

on in your career, and it's OK if big law isn't for you in the end. Embrace the training and skills-development of a leading profession and see where it takes you in life.

Secondly, don't lose sight of your interests outside of work, make time for what makes you tick, and find a mentor to help support you in your journey and career progression.

Also, don't pigeon-hole yourself into a specialist area too early; I've enjoyed a diverse set of roles because of the broad training that I received early on in my career and in geography, which has enabled me to travel and diversify my work later on.

Finally, be proactive. Opportunities don't fall in your lap. You need to seek them out and find your unique selling point in a very comparative market.

### **Why did you choose geography? Why should others choose geography?**

In short, after living in numerous countries, I tell people that Kenya has my heart, China my mind, and the Middle East my tolerance. But geography is my life and lens for seeing the world.

While I'm not a big time explorer, nor a board executive, and I'm not the best geographer (or photographer) in the world, I'm the everyday geographer seeking time over money, with geography and all its opportunities shaping my world and my global (and local) pursuits.

For me, rich cultural experiences is my measure of success, and my seeing of the world through my own eyes. And that is why I'm glad that I chose geography (or geography chose me) - which I'm forever indebted to for my myriad experiences - and that's why I continue to #ChooseGeography every day.