

Member Spotlight: Shai Kuttner

“Of Blood and Hope... and Spiritual Growth.”



Shai is the international practice coordinator at BWK Partners and he is also managing partner of the firm's branch office in Israel. Shai's practice mainly concentrates on international structuring, mergers & acquisitions, and legal matters in Israel and the United States. He has extensive experience in cross-border transactions and international fund raising.

Shai has close ties with listed companies in Israel and the United States and with large private companies and investors operating in a number of sectors including high-tech and medical equipment, various industries and immovable property. He divides his time between Amsterdam and the branch office in Israel.

Shai speaks fluent Hebrew and English, and he is a member of the New York Bar Association and the Israeli Bar Association.

The one thing that comes across when Shai Kuttner speaks is his enthusiasm for other people. This is true whether he is talking about his latest international M&A deal or his volunteer work with Ethiopian immigrants in Tel Aviv.

This facet of Shai's personality has been invaluable throughout his career as an international M&A lawyer; working with clients in places as diverse as Russia, Chile, Singapore, China, Japan and Africa.

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He says: “In each country I have had serious dealings with local people and local cultures, while managing deals for my clients. Bridging between cultures is the biggest challenge in doing these deals, and over the years I've learnt that listening and respecting other points of view is the best way to solve problems.”

Shai was born in Israel and studied law at the University of Jerusalem, before moving to New York as a young man. He passed the New York Bar and practised in the city for five years before taking up the challenge of setting up a European office for his firm BWK Partners. He chose Amsterdam as the location for that office 25 years ago and now splits his time between The Netherlands and Israel, where his wife and two grown-up children live.

He says: "I wanted to live somewhere quieter. I was thinking of going back home, but my law firm already had offices in Israel and made me an offer to move to Europe to establish a new office. It was a great challenge as I didn't know anything about Dutch society or its people. Starting from scratch with no assistance was tough on both a personal and professional level, but I don't regret it at all. I loved every minute of it."

"I have a high regard for the quality of New York lawyering; it's the best in the world, but there is a certain price you pay in your private life and that became too much for me."

Shai was inspired to become a lawyer in his early twenties when he read a book by the French-Polish lawyer and Holocaust survivor, Samuel Pisar, called 'Of Blood and Hope.' The book gave him the desire to travel and work across different cultures, and its influence remains with him.

"I love deal making and negotiation. I like to identify problems in the negotiations and then find solutions. Some lawyers are dealmakers and some are deal breakers, but I never tell a client we can't do a deal. If there is a problem we must come up with solutions, that is part of the excitement of doing business with people from different parts of the world."

Experience has also taught him that deals must be approached from a win-win perspective.

Listening to the other side is an art you need to master in order to find creative solutions.

He adds: "You have to get into the shoes of the other side, listen to them and their worries in addition to listening to your own client. If a lawyer is too aggressive in pursuit of their client's interests, it creates a lot of hurdles and challenges. Listening to the other side is an art you need to master in order to find creative solutions. Many lawyers fall down on that point."

Away from the cut and thrust of deal making, Shai is a student of Buddhism and always tries to find time in his schedule to help others. He believes that opening his mind and heart to others less fortunate than himself is crucial in helping him to remain balanced, regardless of the stresses that come with a high profile deal.

He says: "Time is a resource and we can prioritise how we use it. I carve out three or four hours a week for volunteer work. I could squeeze another client into that time, but I have gained much more on a personal level from using it to help others. It is not just about aiding someone else, but putting yourself in touch with reality. For me it has been a blessing."

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Shai also practises yoga and meditation on a daily basis and says this has helped him to understand himself better, while allowing him to appreciate every aspect of his life.

"If we bring mindfulness into our lives then every task can be joyful, even the less fun things we all have to do, such as office administration. I even do that with joy these days!"



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