

Member Spotlight: Fredrik Nordlöf

Value experience and expertise... but don't forget the Ketchup Effect.



Fredrik Nordlöf is one of the best known and respected practitioners in Labour law.

Fredrik has consulted with the majority of trade unions in order to agree on adequately and specially-made solutions for his clients; often including agreements concerning the applicable order of priority and the establishment of reasons for termination. Fredrik has also taken part in the establishments of various businesses assisting with structures and contract drafting.

Further, Fredrik has great experience in general court proceedings and arbitration. These cases have for example concerned interpretation of contractual wordings, transfers of undertaking and unfair dismissals.

Building a legal career is a little like handling a bottle of ketchup, according to Fredrik Nordlöf, employment partner at full service Swedish firm Advokatfirman Delphi.

Fredrik uses this analogy when he talks to young lawyers about building successful careers. He firmly believes that time served in developing experience and expertise is never time wasted and is a crucial grounding when the time comes to start winning your own business or running your own practice.

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He says, “Rainmaking happens naturally, it’s like the Ketchup Effect. Nothing happens for the first

10 years, then suddenly it all happens at once. It took me 15 years before I felt I was standing on solid ground in my career. It takes all that time to build up the required experience.”

Fredrik began his legal career in his early 20s after completing military service and spending a year working in a store selling TVs and radios. His father was an in-house counsel for IBM and recommended he study a law degree, which he duly did at law school in Stockholm.

After a few years at smaller law firms in the city, he moved to Ernst & Young before joining Delphi 14 years ago. Now 56, and an employment partner, he is perfectly placed to provide career advice, emphasising the need for young lawyers to develop their social skills alongside their legal acumen.

“If you want to progress as a lawyer, it’s about treating your clients well. Be available and honest. Social skills also play a big role as you have to adjust yourself to the specific client you are

meeting, from managing directors in large companies, down to entrepreneurs. Clients are not usually helped by professorial types, or 20 page memos, they want valuable, hands-on advice which is applicable to their business.”

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Much has changed in the sphere of employment law during the last few decades, and Fredrik has seen this happen at close quarters. Termination or redundancy issues, assistance with trade unions, or the transfer of people during an M&A process are all bigger issues in the modern business world that require specialist legal assistance.

He says that, just 20 years ago, employment law was considered strange and niche in the eyes of other lawyers. Only a handful of lawyers specialised in it, while these days every full service law firm of more than 20 lawyers usually has an employment specialist.

“I usually get my hands dirty in litigation, cases of wrongful dismissal or similar. I represent individuals on very rare occasions, and mainly work for corporations. The most common assignments are when a company wants to downsize, or get rid of one specific individual. We will hold the firm’s hand through the process.”

Fredrik believes the maturation of European Union regulation around employment has increased the need for specialist employment advice, he frequently has to explain the changes to foreign clients, especially US corporations with a presence in Sweden.

He says, “We have a very different way of looking at employee protection in Sweden than they do in the US. The biggest surprise for me though was that, however protective our laws are, they aren’t as strong as those in southern Europe (France, Italy and Belgium) where it is far harder still to make someone redundant.”

This enhanced focus on employee rights has led to an increased need for Fredrik’s services in his hometown of Stockholm.

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He says, “Things are hot right now, with a lot of work related to company acquisitions; but also, during bad times, there are downsizing assignments as companies reduce head count. Our firm is constantly growing, and, just last week, employed another 15 people. We are the number six law firm in the country in terms of numbers of lawyers, with 65 lawyers in the Stockholm office.”

Despite the growing size of his practice, Fredrik is successful in maintaining a good work life balance. He lives in an apartment with his wife and dog, in the neighbourhood of Lilla Essingen, just a 15-minute drive from his office. They moved back to the city after his daughters left home and Fredrik says it is a situation he much prefers.

“My two daughters are 26 and 24 and they moved out a couple of years ago. They both live very close and we see them on a regular basis.”

He adds, “I like the city life rather than the country, but when you are a house owner there is always something broken to fix, so I am very happy to live in an apartment where you just pick up the phone and somebody fixes the problem for you.”

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