

Member Spotlight: Lionel Paraire

## A Fresh Perspective on Success



Lionel Paraire has an acknowledged expertise in the area of individual employment relations and (high risk) litigation and dispute resolution. He regularly assists companies with restructuring and the labour and employment law aspects of corporate transactions, extending his activity towards Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), notably as a mediator.

Lionel has lectured at the University of Paris XII in Labour Law and European Labour Law, and is currently Senior lecturer at the University of Montpellier I (DJCE and Certificate of Special Studies in Labour Law), where he teaches employment litigation.

Perspective is a word that rises to the surface of one's mind when talking with Lionel Paraire. You get the sense that here is a man who understands exactly what he needs from life to keep a smile on his face – even during his daily commute by scooter through the notorious rush hour traffic of Paris.

Lionel describes himself as liberal and independent; motivations that have led him to resist several approaches from large law firms while building his boutique employment law practice Galion Avocats.

The firm will celebrate its tenth anniversary this year and there are plans for a grand celebration with clients and friends. For Lionel, this is the culmination of a decade of hard work, maintaining his values and building a life that he cherishes.

His legal career began more than 20 years ago and includes spells in the large international firms Baker McKenzie and Mayer Brown. His interest in employment law comes from a strong desire to help people, which also informed his decision to train as a mediator. Running his own firm has allowed Lionel to indulge those passions and choose the clients he wants to help.

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He says, “Having the choice to say no to a client because you are incompatible is a luxury. In a big firm, when someone asks you to work on a matter, you don't have a great deal of choice. There is also a good chance that someone will not be happy; either the client, or the partner who sent you the case. At Galion, we already know the relationship with our clients will be closer and more personal. Human relationships are paramount in our philosophy.”

Besides the human element, Galion's success has been built on a strategy of remaining nimble enough to take on a wide variety of clients, from large multinationals to small enterprises. The majority of the firm's clients are international and may only have a handful of employees on French soil, but Galion's ability to understand the cross-border perspective is invaluable.

"The international angle is a good tool to use and part of our development. We are more proactive than big law firms, while the other competitors we have are individual lawyers based in the French regions. We plead in jurisdictions right across France and, in this area, the firms we compete with are often not specialised in employment law."

**"Being small in a global world is not a disadvantage, because we can be flexible and control our own client base."**

There can also be challenges with international law firms though, such as explaining the different legislative frameworks applied in employment, particularly between the US and France. Many of Lionel's clients are from the US and they are sometimes spooked by France's erroneous reputation as non-employer friendly.

He says, "It is really important not to say no. I always say, 'yes we can do that, but you must listen to me and learn how things work in France.' We carried out an audit some years ago on a HR organisation in a large US company. We interviewed the HR team, but also the management and some employees. We discovered the HR team was disconnected from the rest of the company because they were so negative, telling their colleagues in the US that it was impossible to implement certain employee initiatives in France."

Lionel hopes that recent reforms to labour law under the Macron administration will change the negative image foreign business owners have

about France, and he is encouraged by the recent language used by government employees on the topic.

Rapid evolution of the employment landscape and the subsequent labour law reforms represent just one of the major challenges for Lionel and his team, particularly during the last few years. Other challenges he is dealing with as a business owner include the phenomenon of clients expecting more for less, and the liberalisation of legal activities. He believes agility, flexibility and acceptance of technological change are key to surviving and thriving in a challenging environment.

Achieving these key survival features is made possible by the small team of five lawyers Lionel employs, of which he is the only man. They are a close-knit family and value work-life balance as much as providing a top class service to clients. In fact, he believes it is crucial to maintaining creativity and enthusiasm for the job.

**"It is important to work hard, but to also love your job. We only live once, so work-life balance is key to remaining reactive and creative."**

"It is important to work hard, but to also love your job. We only live once, so work-life balance is key to remaining reactive and creative. In order to do so, we need other passions and points of interest in life. I like people who don't spend all day from eight to midnight at work, and so I look for extracurricular interests when I recruit new lawyers."

Lionel is certainly a man with plenty of outside interests himself, the most surprising of which is bee-keeping. It is a passion that he also indulges with social cohesion in mind – another example of helping other people.

He says, "I have created a local association of beekeepers with the support of the town of Bois-Colombes, where I live. The idea was, at first, to protect biodiversity and to protect bees, but we also decided to use it as a social tool and recently established two beehives in a residence for the elderly which is close to a leisure centre. We hope to create a link between young and old people who can share an activity around beekeeping.

"So far we have used the honey for our own consumption, but it will be shared with residents of Bois-Colombes and people involved in the project."

Away from his beloved bees, Lionel is a keen cook and smokes his own fish and meat using a homemade smoker. He also brews beer and bakes bread. That word perspective comes to the fore again when he describes his average day.

"Each morning I have breakfast with my wife and two daughters before work. I work all morning until lunch, which, in France, is a time to socialise with colleagues and clients. I continue to work in the afternoon and try to leave the office in time to have dinner with my family, even if I have to work at home afterwards.

"I am the chef of the family and can cook dishes with various influences, whether that's Chinese, French or Spanish. I go to the market every Saturday to buy everything for the week ahead because I know then exactly what we will eat each night."



## Galion Société d'Avocats

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Galion is an independent French business law firm dealing exclusively with labour and employment law and specialising in advice, litigation and dispute resolution.

The firm's approach is based on the fundamental points of technical excellence maintained in a context of increasing legal uncertainty, pragmatic vision and a strong corporate culture to act effectively; and partnership, essential in creating a close working relationship.