

Closing argument: Innovation, teamwork drive Romeen Sheth '15

By MICHELLE DEAKIN, May 21, 2015

Theme: **Student Spotlights**

Romeen Sheth '15 is a team player.

For Sheth, that doesn't just mean that he works well with others — it means he prefers to. And he wishes more lawyers felt the same way.

“There's no way you can make an impact in our increasingly

globalized world without working in teams,” says Sheth, who has been pursuing teamwork and innovation throughout his law school career.

In April, Sheth won the international **Law Without Walls**¹ competition — a team-based contest that recognizes innovative ideas to be applied in legal practice. His winning idea was a cloud-based system to help law firms and in-house law departments easily monitor and manage the work they assign to outside vendors.



Credit: Lorin Granger
Romeen Sheth '15

During his 2L year, he led a team through the Harvard Innovation Lab to develop a product to improve the efficiency of corporate legal departments – a project inspired by his IL summer in the M&A department of an Atlanta law firm. And after graduation and before starting as an Associate at Cleary Gottlieb, Sheth will intern as a Product Manager at Ravel Law, a Silicon Valley start-up that has raised \$9.2 million to improve the visualization and analytics behind legal research.

Sheth's entrepreneurial law school career reflects his belief that the legal profession is ripe for innovation and disruption. And by extension, so are the opportunities available to law students and young lawyers. "With a little hustle and a little intellectual honesty about what you're interested in, a lot is open to you," says Sheth. "The first institutional challenge is in your own head."

Despite his innovative bent and entrepreneurial successes, Sheth doesn't think he is that unusual. He has done what any tennis playing, bhangra-dancing, champion debater would do: work on a team to find creative solutions to long-standing problems and find a way to come out on top.

A graduate of Duke University with a degree in philosophy and a certificate in markets and management studies, Sheth came to HLS after a year working for Gerson Lehrman Group, a technology marketplace connecting institutional investors with industry experts; GLG is commonly referred to as the "Match.com for Wall Street." At HLS, he has served on the Executive Board of the Harvard Business Law Review and was Co-President of the Harvard Association for Law and Business.

After his 1L summer at an Atlanta law firm, he could not get over the many inefficiencies of M&A work – a process that frustrated clients and lawyers, alike. Sheth thought it was overdue for repair. When he returned to Harvard, he applied to enter the Venture Incubation Program at the **Harvard Innovation Lab**². Armed with \$40,000 worth of technical resources, Sheth began to talk to law firms about a new project management platform that could streamline M&A work and help relevant stakeholders communicate more effectively.

Sheth said the process taught him a lot about the challenge of selling to law firms. He didn't develop the project further, but at the urging of his Legal Profession Professor, David Wilkins '80, the Lester Kissel Professor of Law and the Director of the Center on

the Legal Profession (CLP) at HLS, Sheth wrote an article about the key challenges startups face in selling to law firms and offered mitigation strategies for these challenges. “**The Practice**³,” CLP’s magazine, published his piece in January 2015. At Wilkins’s request, Sheth also lectured to Wilkin’s Legal Profession class about disruptive innovation in law firms.

Wilkins next encouraged Sheth to compete in Law Without Walls (LWOW), a five-year old class and competition created by Michele DeStefano ’02, professor at the University of Miami School of Law. (DeStefano will be a visiting professor at HLS during the 2015-16 academic year.)

LWOW 2015 kicked off in January, with 50 students from 27 law schools and more than 50 practitioners from around the world gathering in Dublin, Ireland, for two days of training and team building. Students were randomly assigned to teams and given a broad topic to address in a semester-long project. Sheth was paired with Max Viski-Hanka, a 3L at the University of Miami School of Law, and they were assigned to create a project on e-discovery and legal process outsourcing (LPOs). Two other HLS 3Ls also participated, Iram Huq and Lolita Sosa.

For the next three months, the class met online once a week, with DeStefano bringing in experts with backgrounds in law, venture capital, marketing, and finance. Students, faculty and judges came together again in Miami in April for the final competition – a 15-minute pitch of their innovative idea followed by a 25-minute Q and A by a panel of judges. Sheth’s panel of judges included Daniel Reed, CEO of UnitedLex, one of the largest LPOs in the world backed by Sequoia Capital, Canaan Partners, and Helion Ventures Partners.

Sheth and Viski-Hanka decided to tackle the difficulty law firms and in-house counsel have in communicating with their LPO vendors. “Though there are a number of strategic advantages LPOs offer,” says Sheth “the increased operational overhead costs associated with managing them often mitigates these advantages.” Sheth and Viski-Hanka won first place for their proposed venture, CORE, a cloud-based system that helped tackle this exact problem. The product’s vision was to enable law firms and in-house law departments to facilitate better day-to-day management of their LPOs while simultaneously gaining better analytic insight into their usage of LPOs. Through CORE,

they can all see the same information in the same place.

“Several long-time LWOW judges and observers told me afterwards that Romeen’s team gave one of the best presentations they had ever seen at LWOW,” said Scott Westfahl ’88, Professor of Practice and Director of the HLS Executive Education Program, who has been a Law Without Walls judge since the competition’s inception.

As winners of LWOW, Sheth and his partner will receive an all-expenses paid trip to next year’s kick-off conference in Madrid. They also win \$25,000 in seed capital to develop their CORE project through the University of Miami’s Launchpad accelerator.

The inefficiencies in law firms, his problem-solving nature, and the consistent thought lurking in his head “that there has to be a better way to practice law than the status quo” encouraged Sheth to pursue his interest in entrepreneurship during his time at HLS. Over this past year Sheth contacted CEOs of companies that interested him just to talk. One of those CEOs was at Ravel, and the company was so impressed by his background, ability and passion they invited him to come out and help kick the tires of its growing start-up. Sheth is excited to bring the same energy and emphasis on teamwork that he brought to the Harvard Innovation Lab and the LWOW competition to Ravel.

“My journey has been the culmination of a lot of different things,” says Sheth, saying his entrepreneurial spirit has drawn on his background as a debater, a tennis player, and a competitive dancer in bhangra, a genre of music and dance from the Punjabi region of India. Strong interpersonal skills, he believes, combined with his HLS education are a recipe for innovation. “Today lawyers understand the pain points of their industry better than anyone else, but are either disinterested in or unable to craft a solution. On the flipside, there are a number of business people that would love to craft a solution but are often reticent given their lack of knowledge on the space. If you’re someone with a legal background with the ability to think through a solution and craft a concept, you have the potential to be a pretty interesting player,” he says.

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Links

1. <http://www.lawwithoutwalls.org/>
2. <https://i-lab.harvard.edu/>

