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Millennials demand start-up skills

Jonathan Moules

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Matan Ganani: no regrets

Any twenty-something who quits a legal career to join a start-up might be worried about his or her parents' reaction. But for Romeen Sheth — whose mother and father run their own businesses and have nurtured their children's entrepreneurial genes — making the leap was not a problem.

“Our dinner conversations were about business ideas and how industries were evolving,” the class of 2015 at Harvard Law School member explains. “Maybe not the most typical childhood.”

It helped that Mr Sheth's employer operates in the legal sector. He is head of business development at Ravel Law, a San Francisco-based start-up that recently raised just under \$10m and has entered a partnership with Harvard Law School to digitise the school's entire

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case law collection.

“For the first time in history, US case law will be fully free and available to the public, and we are playing an integral role in that effort,” says Mr Sheth.

His parents might not be typical of baby boomers, who aspired to job security over going it alone, but he is typical of the millennials graduating from law school, for whom entrepreneurship is *de rigueur*.

Across the Atlantic in Madrid, Matan Ganani moved from law school graduate and MBA student to co-founding Never Empty, an online auction site enabling Spanish football clubs to fill unsold match seats.

He claims to have always known his future lay in start-ups. But he does not regret completing formal education, and appreciates the knowledge acquired through his law degree.

“My legal education was phenomenal in helping set up the company when we needed to draw up agreements for shareholders, investors, my co-founder and suppliers,” he says.

“When you know what you are talking about, particularly in the early stages when you are pitching your business to investors, when you can talk about things like the right of first refusal, that is a huge validation of you as a business person.”

Mr Ganani spent much of his childhood in Israel, now recognised as one of the world’s most dynamic start-up cultures. But his enthusiasm was ignited after he left law school, when he moved to Spain to study for an MBA at IE Business School.

Both Mr Sheth and Mr Ganani were supported in their endeavours by Law Without Walls (LWOW), an educational model backed by the University of Miami, which connects students from 30 law and business schools around the world with academic, business, entrepreneurial and legal mentors.

“The number one way to teach entrepreneurialism is to get people to do it,” says Michele DeStefano, LWOW co-founder and a professor of law at the University of Miami, where she researches and writes about growing relationships between law, business and legal innovation.

This year, the university opened an entrepreneurship law clinic, providing free legal advice as well as providing an insight for law students at the university into how start-ups operate.

Daniel Ravicher, who runs the clinic, started providing free legal work for technology company founders when he was in law school in the 1990s. “Miami has a booming start-up community and one missing piece of the puzzle is legal services for the earliest of start-ups who can’t otherwise get the legal assistance they need,” he says.

But not everyone is convinced about the wisdom of law schools adding entrepreneurship modules to the teaching schedule.

Fatos Selita trained as barrister and attorney, and as such has been able to practise law in the US as well as England and Wales. He is president of the UK Law Students' Association, whose membership consists of more than 25 British university law societies.

Mr Selita acknowledges entrepreneurship is a useful skill, but does not think it would help aspiring law students in England and Wales, because, unlike in the US, a law graduate is not allowed to practise unless he or she is hired by a law firm, a set of chambers or other authorised training organisation.

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