



Yushanta Rungasammy

Director | Co-Head | Corporate & Commercial



From reluctant law student to M&A expert: Meet CMS' Yushanta Rungasammy

How do you become a director and co-head of the corporate and commercial team at a major international law firm? Most people would assume that you start with a passion for law, and build on it. For Yushanta Rungasammy, who holds that position at CMS South Africa, the path to success wasn't that simple.

Q *What was your journey into corporate law and the world of M&A?*

A To be honest, being a lawyer was not on my radar. In fact, it was the one thing I said I wouldn't do. I actually began studying dentistry before I pursued a legal career, and I thought that was just going to be a short-term pivot while I figured out what it was that I really wanted to do. However, the more I studied law, the more I enjoyed it. It's quite funny how you can be so certain that something is not for you until you try it. You then figure out that it is indeed the one thing you want to do, and which excites you.

I've also been lucky enough to have an incredible mentor, who's helped guide me through my career. At first, it was a formal mentorship, with him being my sponsor in a directorship academy. Since then, it's become a lot more informal, with him regularly offering guidance and advice from a career development and overall business perspective. He has been crucial to the growth and development in my career.

Q *What's the toughest part of an M&A deal, and can you give an example of a deal that really stretched you?*

A Each M&A deal is so different that it's difficult to pinpoint the toughest thing; it's one of the things I love most about practising this kind of law. However, the due diligence process certainly requires the most care and attention. That's especially true for deals where

there are a lot of due diligence focus points. In any one deal, there could be several different areas of law which are applicable, and you will be required to have knowledge of all of them, despite not being your area of expertise (such as tax, employment and labour law).

From a personal perspective, a deal that really stretched me recently involved the acquisition of 2,000 white rhinos by the African Parks Network for a rewilding project. It wasn't unusually difficult from a legal standpoint, but I became incredibly emotionally attached to the deal because of its purpose and ultimate impact of rescuing these endangered animals and translocating them to well-managed protected areas across the continent. It was one of the largest continent-wide rewilding endeavours to occur for any species; and the rhinos represented almost 15% of the world's remaining wild rhino population. In some ways, the emotional attachment around deals like that can provide extra motivation, but it can also be quite stressful because you know how high the stakes are, particularly when timing is so critical.

Q *What's your M&A outlook for the next two to three years?*

A We've seen a definite downward trend in M&A activity in South Africa over the past couple of years. That was partly down to global pressures around inflation and rising interest rates, but a lot of local companies also took a "wait and see" approach in the run-up to the national elections. If the government of national unity (GNU) is stable and enables economic growth, I expect to see an increase in M&A activity, especially if interest rate cuts make funding more accessible again, and emerging markets like South Africa more attractive to international investors.

Q *What advice would you give a young woman working on her first deal?*

A My first piece of advice for any young woman working on her first deal would

be to have confidence in herself and her abilities. She must not underestimate her value and contribution. Also, there is never a wrong or silly question. No one knows everything – don't be shy to ask questions.

Q *What is one thing that makes your life easier and which you wouldn't want to live without?*

A At CMS, I'm fortunate to have an employer that values flexibility. This flexibility means that I'm able to go to my son's cricket, hockey, and soccer games, and fetch him from school. At the start of my career, those were all things I thought someone only achieved if they were stay-at-home parents. I believe that having this kind of flexibility and balance makes me both a better lawyer and a better mom, and I'd hate to ever have to give that up.

Q *Outside of work, what are some things that people might not know about you?*

A I love flowers and often find myself spending time at nurseries. People would probably be surprised to know that I (hopelessly) play cricket and soccer. They're great activities for staying active, but they also allow me to be fully present with my 11-year-old son without the distraction of screens.

I also love travel, especially with my son. I love travelling to countries with unique architecture and food, where I can experience the culture in a different place. I love seeing all these things through my son's eyes. Over the years, we've been to the UK, Vietnam, and the Maldives, and Singapore is next on our itinerary.

Q *What are three words your colleagues would use to describe you?*

A I had to ask my colleagues about this one, and three of the most common words and phrases that came up were: leader, spontaneous, and elegant. It's humbling that such good people think of me that way. 🙌