



THE **VOICE** OF
THE **CRIMINAL**
DEFENCE BAR

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO:

Member Name: Omar Abou El Hassan

Year of Call: 2019

Twitter Handle: @Omar_AEH

LinkedIn Page: Omar Abou El Hassan

QUESTIONS:

1- How did you get into criminal law?

I was interested in criminal defence work since I was in high school because my friends and I often got “carded” by police despite not doing anything wrong. I wanted to know more about my rights and help people stand up for themselves against the powerful state. I studied criminology during my undergraduate studies because I knew it would give me a good foundation for criminal law before law school. I also mentored children with incarcerated family members and got to see the broader effects of the criminal justice system on families and the community. I knew becoming a criminal defence lawyer was the best way for me to help the people who need it the most.



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2- What type of cases do you enjoy defending the most and why?

My favourite cases are possession offences, especially drugs and firearms. I enjoy them the most because the evidence is almost always circumstantial, and the cases often involve *Charter* applications.

3- How did the practice of criminal law change you?

It has made me develop greater empathy and compassion for people. It has also made me more grateful for the privileges I had growing up.

4- If there is one thing only you would like to see change in criminal law, what would it be?

If there was only one thing I could change in criminal law, it would be to decriminalize the simple possession of all drugs. I believe a mental health approach is more effective than criminal sanctions when it comes to drug users.

5- What advice would you give to your younger self when you first started practising criminal law?

Don't worry. You will figure it out. Don't be shy to ask for help when you need it. It's the quickest way to learn. Focus on eating well and sleeping well and the rest will follow. Don't ever stop believing in yourself. You make a positive difference in people's lives despite all the tough days.



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6- How do you deal with bad workdays?

After a bad workday, I remind myself to be grateful for the important things in life such as my health, family and friends. I tell my partner about my day to get it off my chest then make or order whatever food I am craving and watch a funny show.

7- What do you think of Zoom court?

I like Zoom court for adjournments, and simple guilty pleas and bail hearings. It has allowed me to take on more cases in other jurisdictions. However, I like to be in-person for all trials and for pleas and bail hearings involving serious charges. I think I am most persuasive in-person and its easier for witnesses to lie when they are in the comfort of their own home instead of sitting beside a judge in a witness box.

8- Any embarrassing court story you're willing to share?

Mostly when I am representing other Arabic clients, I've had a few judges accidentally mix up my name (or some butchered form of my name) with the accused's name in their decision. For example, I would hear "Mr. El Hassan has pleaded guilty to ...". This has happened a few times now. The Crown and I would just look at each other and smile or laugh quietly.

9- Who is your role model/inspiration in criminal law?

Leo Russomanno. He took me on as a student intern and articling student and that's where I learnt the most about criminal defence work. I really liked his approach to things and how fiercely he fought to defend his clients.



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10- How do you maintain work life balance and how do you deal with the stress of the job?

At the end of a really stressful workday, I put my phone on silent and try to be as present as possible while spending time with my partner and our dog. I go for walks daily and use the hot tub in my building 3 or 4 times a week to relax and unplug.

11- What is your biggest legal inspiration?

My clients inspire me the most. I am always thinking of them and the best ways to help them. That's what keeps me doing what I do every day.

12- What do you do outside of the law?

Nothing exciting at the moment.

13- What would your defence bar colleagues be surprised to learn about you?

I used to freestyle rap with friends in my teenage years and I've recorded a few songs during high school, undergrad, and law school and wrote a lot of song lyrics, but they will never be released. They were always for personal use only to help me uncover how I was feeling about certain things and was very therapeutic over the years.