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## **MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS**

### **INTRO :**

**Member Name :** Caleesis Telesh

**Year of Call :** 2024

**LinkedIn Page:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/telesh-law-firm/>

### **QUESTIONS :**

#### **1- How did you get into criminal law?**

My journey into criminal law began with a deep passion for justice and advocacy, which started in my teenage years. I volunteered with the Afghan Women's Organization (AWO), where I assisted women who had experienced abuse. Many of them were new to Canada, unfamiliar with the legal system, and afraid to speak up. Helping them navigate their rights and find safety sparked something in me — a strong sense of duty to be a voice for the voiceless.

That early experience was further shaped by my long-time mentor, the late Robert Holland. Mr. Holland was a dedicated Legal Aid lawyer who never turned his back on those in need, no matter how complex or challenging the case. He always reminded me that being a lawyer wasn't just a profession — it was a responsibility. He led by example, combining compassion with fearless advocacy, and fought hard for those society often



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overlooks. His ethical standards and unwavering integrity continue to inspire how I approach every case.

Criminal law gives me the opportunity to make a real difference in people's lives. Many of my clients are not just facing legal consequences, but also struggling with poverty, trauma, immigration challenges, and systemic injustice. I see the law not only as a tool for accountability but as a platform for fairness and redemption.

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

I particularly enjoy defending cases involving DUI, fraud, theft, and assault. These areas of law often reveal deeper personal, psychological, or socio-economic challenges that people are facing—such as addiction, untreated mental health issues, or poverty. Behind each charge, there is usually a complex human story that deserves to be heard. What I find most meaningful is the opportunity to help clients navigate the legal system while also connecting them with rehabilitative support, such as counselling or community programs. In many cases, legal intervention becomes a turning point in a person's life, and I feel privileged to be part of that process.

My approach is rooted in compassionate advocacy—not to excuse wrongdoing, but to seek just outcomes that account for both accountability and personal growth. I believe in second chances, and I value the opportunity to advocate for fair treatment and meaningful resolutions.

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

Practicing criminal law has profoundly humbled me. It taught me that there is always more than one side to every story, and that quick judgments, especially in the legal



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system can often be unfair and harmful. Many of the clients I've worked with were falsely accused or overcharged, and had no one else willing to truly listen. Advocating for them reminded me that the presumption of innocence is not just a legal principle, but a human right that must be fiercely protected.

Criminal law also gave me a deeper understanding of the systemic issues that bring people into contact with the justice system. I've seen firsthand how poverty, addiction, trauma, homelessness, mental health issues, and immigration instability can push people into cycles of criminalization. Many repeat offenders are not inherently "bad people" — they are individuals who have been failed by society, and are simply trying to survive without the right support.

This work made me not just a lawyer, but an advocate. It's about more than defending a case, it's about recognizing humanity, building trust, and working alongside communities and support networks to break cycles of harm. It strengthened my empathy, sharpened my sense of justice, and deepened my commitment to using the law as a tool for fairness, dignity, and second chances.

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

I would like to see a more integrated and consistent approach to addressing mental health and addiction within the criminal justice system. In my experience, many individuals come into contact with the law not out of malicious intent, but because they are dealing with underlying issues such as trauma, addiction, or mental illness—often without adequate support.

Unfortunately, the legal system is still largely reactive rather than preventative. If there were more accessible and properly funded diversion programs and mental health resources available at the early stages—particularly pre-charge or pre-trial—it would



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lead to more constructive outcomes. This approach would not only reduce recidivism but also promote rehabilitation over punishment, while ensuring that court and correctional resources are used more effectively.

Criminal law should evolve to recognize that justice isn't just about accountability—it's also about addressing root causes and creating space for meaningful change.

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

Trust yourself more. It's easy to feel overwhelmed when you're new, especially in a courtroom full of counsel and judges. But everyone starts somewhere, and your perspective matters. I'd also tell myself that boundaries are essential: it's okay not to answer every call at 10 p.m. You can care deeply about your clients while still caring for yourself.

**6- How do you deal with bad work days?**

To reset, I go to the gym, speak with friends, meditate, or read or listen to a motivational book. Those things help me stay grounded and remind me why I chose this work in the first place.



## **7- What do you think of Zoom court?**

Overall, Zoom has been a significant step forward for the justice system. It's made court far more accessible for clients who live outside the city, have mobility or health issues, or can't afford to take time off work. It has streamlined many aspects of the process, reduced delays, and allowed for greater flexibility in scheduling. It also made it easier for lawyers, interpreters, and support workers to participate without the logistical challenges of travel or limited court space.

While there are some limitations like the difficulty of reading a room or building in-person rapport I've found that with time and adaptation, many of those challenges can be managed. With the right safeguards and sensitivity, virtual hearings can still feel respectful and fair. In many ways, Zoom has helped modernize access to justice, and I think it should remain a permanent option for certain types of matters.

## **8- Who is your role model/inspiration in criminal law?**

My role model in criminal law is Marie Henein. What inspires me most is not just her brilliance as a litigator, but her unwavering courage in the face of public scrutiny and complex, high-profile cases. She stands firm in her commitment to the presumption of innocence and the fundamental rights of every person, no matter how unpopular the case. Her poise, clarity, and strength—especially as a woman in a field that still comes with barriers—remind me why I chose this path. She shows that excellence in advocacy is not just about knowing the law, but about having the conviction to defend it, even when it's hard.



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

I care deeply about the work I do—this profession carries real weight, and I never take that for granted. But over time, I've learned that to show up fully for my clients, I need to take care of myself too. I try to maintain balance by setting clear boundaries around my time. That might mean carving out evenings to disconnect, reserving part of the weekend to recharge, or simply being fully present when I'm not working.

**10- What is your biggest legal inspiration?**

R. v. Jordan stands out to me because it puts people—not just process—at the center of justice. It wasn't just about trial delays; it was about the real human toll of waiting years for resolution, whether you're the accused or a victim. The Court sent a powerful message: justice delayed is justice denied. It forced the system to confront uncomfortable truths and reminded us that the law isn't just a set of rules—it's meant to protect lives, dignity, and fairness in real time.

**11- What do you do outside of the law?**

Outside of the law, I serve as Vice President for New Hope Dwellings, a non-profit organization focused on providing safe and affordable housing to those in need. I also volunteer with the Salvation Army food bank, helping support individuals and families facing food insecurity. Giving back to the community is deeply important to me—it keeps



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me grounded and reminds me why I chose a career in law in the first place. When I'm not working or volunteering, I enjoy reading, exploring new hiking trails, and spending time with my family, and my cats.