Criminal Lawyers' Association

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

Member Name : Rick Patel

Year of Call : 2014

Region/City : Halton (Milton)

Board Position : CLA Member

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QUESTIONS :

1- How did you get into criminal law?

Before law school, I wanted to see what criminal practice actually looked like, so someone introduced me to a lawyer named Robert "Bobby" Burke. I showed up at his office, which was an absolute mess, and met Bobby, who was about 75 at the time. He didn't bother with much of an interview. He just told me to meet him at court the next day. So I did. He handed me his bags, and I became his pack mule for a dangerous driving causing death trial in Orangeville. I knew nothing about law. I sat there taking notes for him through the trial, completely hooked. The rest is history.

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

Anything on four wheels. Driving cases, collisions, crashes: that's my sweet spot. I've been a car guy my whole life. I know how vehicles work, how they behave, and what actually happens in a crash. When a case turns on speed, braking, road conditions or mechanical failure, I'm not just reading the reconstruction report. I understand it, and I know where to push.

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

It taught me that there are usually three sides to every story. It also taught me patience, which did not come naturally. Early on, I wanted everything done yesterday. The justice system has other plans. I've learned to take a breath, play the long game, and trust your hard work and persistence will pay off.

4- If you could change one thing about criminal law, what would it be?

Efficiency. Some days it's painful to watch how we do things. I've seen email chains with the Crown drag on for weeks over issues that could be settled with a ten-minute conversation in the hallway.And when those emails go unanswered entirely, there should be consequences. Defence counsel are held to deadlines and expectations at every turn, so the same accountability should apply on the other side. Being left waiting on a reply isn't just frustrating, it's disrespectful to counsel and to the clients whose lives are on hold.

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

Do more pro bono work. Do more for underprivileged communities. It's a lot harder to find the time now with a young family, but it's still on my list. Once my kids are a little older, I plan to get back to it.

6- How do you deal with bad work days?

I leave. Early in my career, I'd grind through a bad day trying to fix everything at once, and usually just made it worse. Now I walk away, reset, and do something positive. The work will still be there tomorrow, and I'll be better at it.

7- What do you think of Zoom Court?

It's great for adjournments, JPTs and quick bail hearings, and it's a valuable fallback when things can't happen in person. It has earned its place, but it doesn't replace being in the room.

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

Fresh out of the gate (I'd been a lawyer for about twenty minutes), I had a sexual assault file at the lower end of the scale where the Crown was offering a conditional discharge. For reasons I still can't explain, I decided to ask for an absolute discharge. No case law. No prep. No real justification. Just confidence.
The matter was before Justice Atwood. To his credit, he was a very reasonable judge, and he gave me every chance. He simply asked why he should consider an absolute

discharge. It was a fair question, and I had no answer. I stood there bumbling like a complete moron while the silence got longer and longer.

Afterward, a senior counsel walked over, looked at me, and said, "That was brave." I've never forgotten it. Never again have I walked into court without having done the work.

9- What's your favourite song?

Whatever's on the radio. Yes, I still listen to the radio. And CDs. I like CDs. No apologies. Country music isn't bad either.

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

Boundaries. I don't text clients or use WhatsApp or other messaging apps. Communication is by phone or email, and calls are scheduled rather than taken at all hours.

Managing my schedule has been the bigger lesson. In criminal law, pressures like section 11(b) and the push to get matters moving have always had me stacking my calendar to the brim. I've recently realized that approach isn't good for the quality of my work or for my mental health. So now I build in time to properly work on my cases, time to build my practice, time for myself and, most importantly, time for my family. The "Practice Memorandums" can wait.

Profits matter, but when was the last time you saw a Brinks truck at a funeral?

11- What is your biggest legal inspiration?

It's less a person than a responsibility. When people walk into my office, they're trusting me with one of the biggest, and often most traumatic, moments of their lives. That deserves everything I've got, on every file, every time.

12- What do you do outside of the law?

I spend as much time as I can with my two kids, ages 4 and 7. I've been fortunate to have some great mentors who keep reminding me that my kids won't be kids forever, and that I'd regret not being there when they need me most. That advice has stuck. I must admit, I have a great work life balance.

When I'm not with them, you'll probably find me under the hood of one of my old cars. I've got one from every decade, from the '50s through the '90s. I like unique vintage vehicles that you wouldn't normally see on the road.