

# 241105 - Talking Law - Sam Cottman - WillEdit

[00:00:00] **Sam:** So I didn't have any law in the family as such. Um, I studied at a grammar school in Buckinghamshire and went on to university to study languages. So French and Spanish was my first degree. Um, and then after that, I thought I [00:00:15] might like to get into law. So I did some work experience at a few firms, uh, and then did the conversion course.

[00:00:20] **Sam:** Uh, and I trained at Travers Smith and have been here ever since.

[00:00:23] **Sally:** Wow. So I think you will probably You know, this podcast has had numerous people on it, uh, of [00:00:30] all sorts of distinction, including you. But I think you're my second guess out of about 90 who's never left their law firm.

[00:00:37] **Sam:** It's either incredible lack of imagination, or I'd like to say it's because I found somewhere, [00:00:45] um, that was really nurturing for the career.

[00:00:47] **Sam:** And there were lots of twists and turns along the road as you, as you were here. But I've, I've been here my whole career, but I've been here in many, many different guises.

[00:00:56] **Sally:** Well, I love, I just love that. So tell me then, um, [00:01:00] what, what is the pro bono partner? Well, firstly, what's pro bono work? Um, this podcast is listened to in over 12 countries.

[00:01:07] **Sally:** It's got 4 million listeners. Um, and they may not know what pro bono is. Can you just explain what is pro bono work and what [00:01:15] your role includes in a commercial firm?

[00:01:19] **Sam:** Yeah, so I think, um, should start with probably, uh, what Travis Smith is. So Travis Smith is, uh, a commercial city law firm, um, that does national and international work.

[00:01:29] **Sam:** We're over [00:01:30] 200 years old, um, and commercially we focus on, um, Um, asset management, uh, M& A disputes and regulatory investigations and the like. But within that, uh, we have 500 lawyers, uh, of

[00:01:45] every different specialty that you would want as a commercial entity, and those lawyers Also at pro bono on many different causes so pro bono means we do not pay we do not charge We do the work because it's work we think [00:02:00] Merits our attention, and we think our legal expertise can have an impact in regards to it, but it's not necessarily the traditional type of work you'd expect from a city law firm.

[00:02:11] **Sam:** So it may be directly within our expertise. It may be [00:02:15] quite a long way outside of it, but we'll be trained up and, and, and do a good job in that regard as well. So pro bono is, is helping charities, individuals, and entities for the betterment of society or, um, an individual or a cause that, [00:02:30] that requires our help.

[00:02:32] **Sally:** It's just, it's so fascinating because you just would never put in it. Normally, the two together, of course, but can I just come to then about some of the types of cases, [00:02:45] um, that you do? And then I want to talk about DARA, you know, the alliance and some of the, your work with justice. Um, so what are some of the cases, um, that your work has involved under that umbrella?

[00:02:59] **Sam:** So I'm a [00:03:00] litigator by trade, so I qualified into our disputes team in 2008. Yeah, ancient, ancient. I am relatively ancient. And, um, And so a lot of the pro bono work that we [00:03:15] originate, um, takes place in the disputes arena. So, in particular, we focus around helping, uh, survivors of domestic abuse and human trafficking.

[00:03:24] **Sam:** So a lot of the work, the court based work that we do, um, involves going to the family courts to [00:03:30] get, uh, non molestation orders and protective injunctions for survivors of domestic abuse. And we also, um, take on a number of cases where we seek compensation. Uh, for modern slavery or human trafficking survivors.

[00:03:43] **Sam:** So, um, the [00:03:45] caseload is not, uh, as it was when I was a commercial lawyer. So not banks and governments and multi billion pound disputes, which we do, um, in the day job, if you like, but we can also turn those skills to, um, protecting vulnerable clients and [00:04:00] taking on causes that require court intervention.

[00:04:03] **Sally:** It's really, it's really interesting work. I do pro bono work, obviously from the bar side. And it's, it is fulfilling, but of course we need lawyers and firms like yours to bring the cases. Um, so [00:04:15] that, you know, they can instruct those like me who are doing, um. Can you tell me a bit

about DARA then? And then I want to talk a bit about, you know, um, some of the cases because they're quite profound.

[00:04:28] **Sally:** So for example, [00:04:30] um, you've been, well, you dealt with one of the larger domestic abuse pro bono cases. programs ever assembles, which is now running nationwide. You know, that's pretty big and some of the major cases. So just talk me through some of those.

[00:04:43] **Sam:** Yeah. So DARA is kind [00:04:45] of the combination of quite a long journey.

[00:04:47] **Sam:** So it started back in 2009, um, when I was, uh, A very junior, probably one year qualified, uh, litigator and I took on a domestic abuse case that had been referred to the firm [00:05:00] in the family court and, um, It, it was immediately very different and impactful. So rather than, as I say, acting for banks or, or governments, I was sat in meeting rooms at night with, uh, A wife and a mother, she was a [00:05:15] teacher and she had suffered abuse at the hands of her husband for about eight years at that time.

[00:05:20] **Sam:** And I was taking witness statements with her crying, and trying to look after her as well as trying to extract the information we needed. And it was a very, very different experience. Um, [00:05:30] we went to court and, forward the evidence and I remember sitting next to her when we were waiting for judgment and I vividly remember her, her hand shaking so violently on the table that it was sort of making a tapping noise [00:05:45] and, and then that was the moment when I realized this, this is not like the day job.

[00:05:49] **Sam:** Um, but the skill set is the same. Um, and the client requires attention and, and quality lawyering to get, that she deserves, which we did get. [00:06:00] Um, so that was the start of it. Um, I then came back to work and, and told people about, you know, the case. Other people got interested. And, um, I took on, or tried to take on, another one relatively [00:06:15] soon after that.

[00:06:16] **Sam:** And this was a totally different fact set. This was an 18 year old, um, girl. And I remember being sat on one of these, um, Old spyderphones on speakerphone listening to her case. And, um, she told me that the night before she called, [00:06:30] her boyfriend had covered her in petrol and tried to set her alight. And that she needed some court protection.

[00:06:37] **Sam:** So I took the statement and I said to her, look, don't worry about this, don't worry about the court. There's more than enough here to get

this [00:06:45] injunction. But once we have it, We'll have to serve it, uh, on the perpetrator, so you have some legal protection. And she went silent, um, it probably wasn't for very long, it felt like a long time.

[00:06:58] **Sam:** And, and when she came back on [00:07:00] the call, she apologized and said, I'm sorry for wasting your time, I don't have a hundred pounds, and she hung up. And, and so that, I can point very clearly to the moment I realized more needed to be done. Yeah. That was the moment that I realized there were some real problems.

[00:07:14] **Sam:** Um, [00:07:15] structural problems and actually that was what led to, to me starting my charity years later, but um, sticking with the domestic abuse journey, we then a few years after that took on the running of a domestic abuse clinic in East London, [00:07:30] uh, with five or six other firms. And that was around about 2015, 2016.

[00:07:35] **Sam:** So then we started to see more, it's not just the injunctions, it's the property interests, it's the child arrangement orders, it's the cultural, um, pressures [00:07:45] to stay with an abusive partner. There was a lot to unpick. And then, um, and this was all alongside the day job, if you like. I wasn't a director of Pro Bono or anything like that.

[00:07:55] **Sam:** The role didn't exist. And so a few years later, when the [00:08:00] role, And I did become the director of Pro Bono. I was able to then launch a specialist advocacy team at Travis Smith and that launched simultaneously really with the pandemic and when the pandemic hits, all of a sudden everyone was [00:08:15] talking about domestic abuse.

[00:08:16] **Sam:** Everyone was aware that being trapped with someone who was abusive was particularly challenging. And we launched, um, in 2020, And the idea of that team was expressly to go to [00:08:30] court to do the advocacy for survivors because that was the moment at which, um, they often dropped out the thought of going to court and, and trying to explain your case, um, against the perpetrator in your own words is so intimidating.

[00:08:44] **Sam:** It's so difficult, [00:08:45] but that's where we wanted to intervene. And I've got lots of cases I could talk about in that regard, but just to give you the very first one, uh, as an example. So, um, This was an older lady, um, [00:09:00] who had been subject to 40 years of abuse at the hands of her partner and then ex husband.

[00:09:07] **Sam:** And she talked us through, um, that journey, if you like, and it had the full spectrum. We had physical abuse, we had controlling, [00:09:15] um, And coercive behavior through the children financial exploitation. At one point she was attacked with a hammer in a park in East London and she, she sort of printed out the BBC article covering it.

[00:09:27] **Sam:** And now we'd got to the stage where [00:09:30] he was sending her what appeared to be Pretty mundane cards, but just things like saying I've noticed you've got a new car looking forward to seeing you at Christmas I like your new hairdo things like that Which for her were absolutely [00:09:45] terrifying, but she was unable to explain to the court why this was threatening Yes, and she'd been to court and failed To get any protection.

[00:09:52] **Sam:** So we took that on and um, you know, you couldn't script this really but he Was a, um, [00:10:00] bouncer who had lost an eye in a fight and liked to carry around acid, uh, in his youth to throw on people he didn't agree with. So it was quite a disagreeable character. And, um, and when we went to court, uh, he didn't [00:10:15] like me very much either and said lots of, uh, quite unpleasant things, uh, about me during the process.

[00:10:20] **Sam:** But that was our first case with the advocacy team. And it was a very clear example of why someone like me needed to be there to explain to the court that [00:10:30] these letters weren't pleasant. They were threats. Um, and we needed to explain the backstory and lawyer it if you like, so the court could see it.

[00:10:38] **Sam:** And she got her injunction and, you know, first time that she sort of felt any kind of relief or protection, [00:10:45] uh, uh, for decades. Yeah. So it was pretty sobering starter.

[00:10:49] **Sally:** Yeah. Well, quite. And actually some of these examples of some of the cases that I'm asking you to talk about are, can be triggering for people.

[00:10:56] **Sally:** And from my perspective, you know, I see it in the courts where I'm [00:11:00] prosecuting often, um, these types of cases and coercive, coercive behaviors and, and it's important work that, and it's important work that, that. People need support for, um, beyond it. Sam, I wonder if we could just move [00:11:15] on a little bit, because I want to ask you about some of the other work that you've been doing.

[00:11:19] **Sally:** So you've been doing some work with Justice, um, and you, you know, other projects, um, because we were talking really about what is a pro bono partner, but in the context of a, you know, [00:11:30] Um, you know, a commercial litigator. Can you tell me a little bit about, um, that? What are some of the, you know, um, for example, the racial justice investigations you, with justice.

[00:11:41] **Sally:** What, how did you get involved into, in that and why?

[00:11:44] **Sam:** Yeah, so I [00:11:45] think that the first thing to say is that my role, although I do do case work and, um, you know, I am in court, relatively frequently. My role really is to facilitate the 500 or so lawyers at Travis Smith to do pro bono [00:12:00] work and to bring in and structure projects and to get the firm as a whole involved.

[00:12:05] **Sam:** Um, that is the focus of the program. Um, and so we have been working with justice since the summer of 2019. Um, and [00:12:15] that was, Uh, an introduction that came in through Kath Russ, who was our then, uh, relatively newly appointed senior partner. And we were asked if we would quarterback their next report, which was looking into [00:12:30] the over representation of, um, BAME youth, as the term was then, in the criminal youth justice system.

[00:12:35] **Sam:** Yeah. And to set that in context, um, in 2017, when LAMI, Uh, put out his report. I think the stats were something like 47 [00:12:45] percent of the youth custodial, uh, population was BAME. Um, and by the time we started to look at it two or three years later, it was up to 52%. So it was going in the wrong direction. Yeah.

[00:12:57] **Sam:** And this is in a country where that [00:13:00] youth reflects 18%. of the general population. So 18 percent in the general population and 52 percent in custody. It's a, it's a ongoing tragedy. Um, so we said, yes, we would love to support it. And I remember [00:13:15] being told, well, your support can look, you know, you can write a check and offer up some meeting rooms or you can get as involved as you like.

[00:13:22] **Sam:** And I was very clear that I wanted to attend every single meeting. I wanted teams doing research. And while we would be learning, we would [00:13:30] be giving as much as we could. Uh, throughout the whole life of the thing. And the project lasted 18 months, um, and resulted in the justice report being issued in February 21 and, um, David Lamy actually launched it, um, with justice.

[00:13:44] **Sam:** And it [00:13:45] made 45, um, structural recommendations for changes to the criminal justice system to make it less racially biased, um, uh, Uh, and it was, it was a, a real education. And during that work, obviously, George Floyd [00:14:00] happened. So, the world in this area turned upside down.

[00:14:03] **Sally:** Yes.

[00:14:04] **Sam:** Um, and we were already looking at these issues and working on them and, and, and have been doing it ever since.

[00:14:11] **Sam:** But that was also a really incredible moment, uh, in terms [00:14:15] of the level of attention that this work, um, was getting.

[00:14:19] **Sally:** Absolutely. And then just as part of that, because I've been involved in a campaign called Art Not Evidence, which is all about the admission of drill music or rap music, if you like, [00:14:30] as it was called in criminal proceedings against, um, BAME youth, to coin the term that was youth, so young black men who Uh, predominantly are the defendants in those criminal cases.

[00:14:42] **Sally:** Uh, and that's launched with a professor called, uh, [00:14:45] Ben Awosu, but part of that also involves joint enterprise. And there's an organization called, um, JGBA, who are campaigning against, um, out, uh, uh, against a joint enterprise, the use of joint enterprise in the criminal courts. But [00:15:00] you've also been involved with the Howard League, haven't you?

[00:15:02] **Sally:** Looking into joint enterprise and its use. Um, again, tell me a little bit about that because these are really quite interesting areas beyond the day job.

[00:15:11] **Sam:** Yeah, well again, again, just taking a step back. So [00:15:15] one of the reasons we got involved to start with was because when we were looking at what our pro bono program had.

[00:15:22] **Sam:** And didn't have, we wanted some long-term investigatory, sort of quasi policy work. Um, and so we were [00:15:30] attracted by Justice's model of long-term investigations. Uh, one of the recommendations from the, uh, original project was that drill music not be used, uh, against defendants, um, to evidence gang, um, implication if you [00:15:45] like.

[00:15:45] **Sam:** Mm-Hmm, . Um, so we did spend some time around the drill music. Um, topic. And then, um, The first justice project led to the second justice project, which was looking at women and girls in prison in particular. Yes. But [00:16:00] during that time, Andrea Kumar, who was the CEO of Justice, moved over to become the CEO of Howard League.

[00:16:05] **Sam:** Yes, yes, she did. And she's wonderful. And we've always got on very well with her and she picked up the phone and said, well, you did such a good job [00:16:15] with justice. How about something with the Howard League? And they were looking at joint enterprise, um, with Jenga. So Howard League and Jenga are clients of ours now.

[00:16:25] **Sam:** Um, and we are, Um, we are about to embark on an analysis of a [00:16:30] unique data set of, um, those prisoners, uh, in prison due to joint enterprise with a view to supporting Jengba in the analysis of that data set and, and the lobbying and, and the policy change that is required so that these large [00:16:45] groups of often young black men are not sentenced for huge sentences, um, for crimes that the one thing you know about it is that they weren't the person that did it.

[00:16:53] **Sam:** Yeah. Yeah. Um, so. We are at the start, and we've just completed our second major project with Justice, and [00:17:00] that was 60 plus lawyers at the firm for over a year, so it was the largest single pro bono project that we have, uh, ever done. But we are at the start of our next big one, which is the um, the joint enterprise investigation with the Howard League.

[00:17:13] **Sally:** Wow. It's really, really [00:17:15] impressive. And, um, well, I hope it carries on, uh, and think what we could achieve if more firms in the city, I know they are, but, uh, if every firm, you know, was doing this type of work. But I want to talk a bit more about you, Sam, [00:17:30] because, um, you know, you're married with two young children, but you've also got a foundation.

[00:17:37] **Sally:** How did that come about? And tell me a bit more about, about that. I'm also going to ask you about, you know, your favorite book and what you [00:17:45] do for well being, probably that type of thing. But I'm quite interested in how the foundation came about, really.

[00:17:51] **Sam:** Yeah, I think like quite a lot of things in my career, when I look back at it now, it wasn't planned.

[00:17:57] **Sam:** I got to the point. In [00:18:00] around 2017, I think I'd just been promoted to senior counsel and I was on a very large commercial case,



which was a brilliant case. Um, and I realized I was now at the stage in my career where I was kind of old enough and capable enough to, [00:18:15] to lead projects and teams, uh, and, and make some change.

[00:18:19] **Sam:** And I wanted to start to advocate for some causes. And so I kind of decided that either I was to pick a charity and support it and become a trustee and get involved that way or [00:18:30] maybe I should start my own thing. And going back to that call in 2009 with the young girl, that was where I wanted to start.

[00:18:39] **Sam:** So I started my charity so I could launch a project with the National Center for [00:18:45] Domestic Violence to fund Survivors of domestic abuse when they couldn't fund the service of their injunctions. So that was where it started. And, um, I actually launched it, um, during [00:19:00] paternity leave for my second child, um, in April 2017.

[00:19:05] **Sam:** Wow. And the launch project was, was that partnership with NCDV and we funded something in the region of 150 clients in the same position as that project. [00:19:15] Since then, but it was always the other reason for launching my own charity rather than getting on board with someone else's was so I knew I was like, and I knew I was going to be interested in lots of different topics.

[00:19:28] **Sam:** So [00:19:30] it's now active in in six areas. So we support domestic abuse projects, including DARA. Um, we fund safe houses in, in London for human trafficking victims. Uh, we tackle knife crime in London and fund sports programs. [00:19:45] Um, which is sort of the flip side of that. Yeah. Um, and then globally we fund clean water projects.

[00:19:51] **Sam:** Um. and also two care homes in Trinidad. So it's a very mixed bag and I don't think there's a single other charity that would have accepted that proposal

[00:19:59] **Sally:** when I

[00:19:59] **Sam:** [00:20:00] started. So it's just as well I started my own group.

[00:20:02] **Sally:** But it's fantastic because, you know, you've provided over 13,000 people with clean water.

[00:20:09] **Sally:** I mean, you know, we all think we're doing good. Even me, who's trying to do stuff. You know, that's just an example of, [00:20:15] What

one can do, um, with a foundation and you've raised that 250, a quarter of a million thousand pounds. So, you know, that's really quite impressive. Um, in that sense, and having the [00:20:30] impetus to, to, um, uh, carry it on.

[00:20:33] **Sally:** Um, how did the, um, Trinidad Aspect come about?

[00:20:38] **Sam:** Um nappies is the short answer.

[00:20:41] **Sally:** Okay.

[00:20:42] **Sam:** Um, so my wife's from Trinidad [00:20:45] and we are there a lot Um, my children love it. We all love it. It's an amazing place Um, but as the kids were very young we would be buying nappies And uh, it really struck us how expensive these basic [00:21:00] items were milk, um kids milk nappies, etc, and then yeah

[00:21:04] **Sally:** It's

[00:21:05] **Sam:** It struck us, well, if we think they're expensive, then a lot of people must be struggling with, with basics.

[00:21:11] **Sam:** So then we started to look into that, uh, in [00:21:15] Trinidad and, um, basically my wife comes from a family full of doctors, uh, and one of her aunties, um, looks after one of the local care homes and said, well, if, if you want to help, I know where you can help. So that's where we started. So we now [00:21:30] support two homes out there for, for young kids.

[00:21:33] **Sam:** One is an all girls home and one is a. And the way I like to operate it is, um, rather than sending money overseas, we buy stuff. Yes. So we identify needs and we [00:21:45] buy, um, those items and we fundraise. And, and we give people the vehicle through which they can also give as well. And there's very generous, um, supporters that we've got.

[00:21:54] **Sam:** So we buy things like, um. One of the children in one of the homes has [00:22:00] got, uh, disability, uh, mobility challenges. We bought specialist sort of wheelchair and, um, uh, specialist equipment that he couldn't otherwise have got. Yeah. Um, you know, we bought industrial oven. because they didn't [00:22:15] have anything that they could cook with for about two years.

[00:22:17] **Sam:** And, you know, it might not seem much to people here, but it made a huge impact on them. Um, and we've just got them this Christmas. I was

quite excited about it. We just got them a piano. Um, and, you know, that is the start of trying to [00:22:30] diversify, the activities that are on offer for, for those kids in those homes.

[00:22:33] **Sam:** So it's an ongoing project and it's, um, you know, part of a love affair with Trinidad where it's just a little thank you, I think.

[00:22:41] **Sally:** Yes. Well, just whilst I'm on that, um, [00:22:45] in that area or part of the country, I suppose, um, before I go on to books and wellbeing, um, I want to deal with diversity because I think the optics are clear.

[00:22:54] **Sally:** You know, I'm a sure black woman and you're a white man, partner work in a [00:23:00] city law firm and when I look at the law firms, because I've interviewed lots of people in the city, um, and beyond, and I'm concerned about diversity, I always have been, and you know, people who listen to this podcast know that, um, that, you know, your firm, uh, isn't bad.

[00:23:14] **Sally:** Travis [00:23:15] Smith isn't bad, if I could put it that way. In fact, you're rather good. Um, but where are we with diversity? And I wondered what that is. You do, you know, you've already told us a little bit about yourself, but, um, we can see, can't we, that [00:23:30] actually the entrance is brilliant now from, you know, like a minority background, I think minorities, gender, um, but the partnership levels are still not amazing.

[00:23:39] **Sally:** And when I say I don't, um, want to offend by saying you're not bad, I just mean, of course we're [00:23:45] not at 50 50. Um, and your firm is actually doing quite well, but I wondered what you do. to kind of carry on the mantle, because I know you're quite a passionate person about a variety of topics and you're involved in activities, but [00:24:00] what do you do here, um, to kind of try and improve diversity in the legal profession?

[00:24:06] **Sam:** Yeah, I think it's um, it's a real challenge and I know that those who sort of lead those projects here are really committed to it and I [00:24:15] spend a lot of time in conversation with them, and what I can see is. At the junior end, I give a lot of talks to graduates and trainees and vacation scheme students.

[00:24:26] **Sam:** And the diversity since I joined, [00:24:30] um, you know, 14 or so years ago, is off the charts compared to what it was. And frankly, it's a big deal. It's a pleasure to see it, um, when I go downstairs the auditorium to give my next talk on why they should join the firm or pro bono and opportunities and

I look around the [00:24:45] room, you know, the whole world is looking back at me and that's brilliant and that is not how it was when I joined at all.

[00:24:51] **Sam:** And it still

[00:24:52] **Sally:** isn't in some firms, we've got to be honest about it. It still isn't, isn't quite.

[00:24:56] **Sam:** No, well, and I'm not, and I'm not claiming, um, you know, any kind [00:25:00] of victory. I'm just saying that it is clear that at the junior and the incoming end. The demographic is changing, which is great. But when you look up the ladder, um, there's a lot of work to be done.

[00:25:12] **Sam:** I think on gender, the strides over the [00:25:15] last, you know, Five, ten years have been dramatic, um, but in relation to ethnicity, they haven't, and why is that, uh, I, it's a bit like some of the justice work we've done, there's a hundred small reasons why someone might not [00:25:30] feel like they're getting the opportunities, um, that they should, or that they're in the right place.

[00:25:35] **Sam:** Um, to become a partner or whatever it might be and it takes a lot of work to provide that support for those people. So I think, I think firms need to do a lot in this, in the middle [00:25:45] and in the sort of junior, senior end if you like to, to provide the support that everybody needs to, to, to make partnership and change the face of a partnership.

[00:25:55] **Sally:** Yeah. Um, no, you're right. And actually, yeah, I'm giving you a bit of a hard [00:26:00] time, but I do know that you do a lot of mentoring of young lawyers. especially, um, but also, uh, working with, uh, my lovely friend, Akima Lambert, who's a force of nature, not at this firm, uh, Hogan Lovell. So we'll have to mention them [00:26:15] for a moment.

[00:26:15] **Sally:** Um, who is very keen on, you know, pursuing and improving diversity in the profession. And I often think actually what we need aren't just black lawyers, the bar, or in our sister profession, yours, um, solicitors. Actually, [00:26:30] we need people, perhaps, who are non black or ethnic minority lawyers, talking and supporting, um, on the issue of diversity, actually, so we're not talking to a room full of people, um, who, who look like us.

[00:26:44] **Sally:** It almost feels [00:26:45] like an echo chamber sometimes. So, thank you. You know, I applaud what you're doing or trying to do, um, and of course it, it, it's, uh, it's good work and it's important work that, that all, all,

all to be, all to be done. We talked earlier about DARA, [00:27:00] um, which is, what, the Domestic Abuse Alliance.

[00:27:04] **Sam:** Response Alliance. Response

[00:27:05] **Sally:** Alliance. And, um, and how it was set up. Where is it now? And what's it up to? Because there are other firms involved in that.

[00:27:13] **Sam:** Yes. So, [00:27:15] um, the journey with that, if you like, was that in 2020, we launched our advocacy team at Travis Smith to take on cases. And I talked about a couple of those.

[00:27:24] **Sam:** But what became apparent was that, um, There was much more need than we could meet. [00:27:30] So we spent quite a lot of 21 trying to build an alliance of firms so that we could take on more cases. So to do that, we had to do two things. We had to create an independent structure and we had to bring in more specialist [00:27:45] expertise in family law.

[00:27:47] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:27:47] **Sam:** Because some of these firms were totally new to the area. We've been in and out of family law for over a decade at that point. Um, but for some of the firms we were seeking to bring on, it was totally new.

[00:27:56] **Sally:** Yes.

[00:27:57] **Sam:** So, DARA was born, um, and it is [00:28:00] hosted by LawWorks as one of their secondary specialization offerings.

[00:28:05] **Sam:** It's a great

[00:28:05] **Sally:** charity.

[00:28:06] **Sam:** They're brilliant. And we launched on the 1st of February 2022 with seven firms, including Travis Smith, [00:28:15] um, just in London. Um, and we quickly expanded. in autumn 22 to take on two more firms so that they could operate outside of London. So we then got to London, Leeds and Manchester.

[00:28:29] **Sam:** Yeah. And [00:28:30] now we have a presence in Birmingham as well. And we took on our 10th firm as we went into year two in February,

2023. So we now have in the region of 350 to 400 lawyers across the [00:28:45] 10 firms volunteering. We've taken on 150 cases since launch in, in family courts up and down the country now. And primarily we do all the advocacy in the [00:29:00] courts and the cities where we have a presence and where we don't, we would do all the paperwork throughout.

[00:29:04] **Sam:** But it's been, it's been great. The firms have been Brilliant, super engaged. They've really adopted it as their own and it is everybody's project, which is the nice thing [00:29:15] about it. And we're reaching a lot of clients and learning a lot. So we're seeing a lot of systemic issues across the family courts. Um, And we're trying to take those learnings and pass them up to the powers that be, if you [00:29:30] like.

[00:29:30] **Sam:** We're particularly lucky that we've got Beck Fitzgerald offering the family law expertise with Jenny Beck Casey at the head of that. And so each time that a case comes in, it's allocated to [00:29:45] a particular firm. And at the same time, a family law Uh, specialist is allocated to that case team to supervise directly, uh, in addition to the firm's own supervision structure.

[00:29:56] **Sam:** So we have expertise on TAP, um, and we [00:30:00] work very carefully to develop best practice. So our lawyers have training in trauma and how you deal with a traumatized client, how you process vicarious trauma yourself, uh, and also most recently we had a [00:30:15] cultural sensitivity training because a lot of the.

[00:30:17] **Sam:** Abusive relationships, um, but we are looking at play out in particular communities or particular religions, um, and our lawyers are not necessarily aware, um, of the nuances of all [00:30:30] of that. So we've just had some specialist training in that. Um, and we work very hard to try and provide the best offering that we can and the most sensitive offering for the client because they come to us at their most vulnerable.

[00:30:41] **Sally:** Vulnerable. Absolutely. Absolutely. And with that, you'll be thinking, [00:30:45] of course, about reasonable adjustments and, you know, best way to produce the best evidence and rule and so on. So it really is good work. Um, but Sam, I want to ask you then about You know, the day job and the work [00:31:00] you're doing outside, they're quite difficult areas of work.

[00:31:04] **Sally:** Um, and I wonder, what do you do to switch off? Um, do you ever switch off? Because I can tell you, you know, in big cases with my prosecution head [00:31:15] on rather than employment cases, you know, this,

this profession is a marathon. It's not a sprint. Do you get the opportunity to have a bit of downtime? Because, you know, you live it.

[00:31:25] **Sally:** You live this sort of work, don't you? You know, you can't quite switch off.

[00:31:29] **Sam:** Yeah, [00:31:30] I agree about the marathon not a sprint point, for sure. Um, I mean, to give one example of a case, um, which I did over the last few years, that required switching off to be frank. Um, so when we [00:31:45] launched our, um, advocacy unit in 2020, the fourth case we took on was a, a young girl, she was 16.

[00:31:51] **Sam:** Um, and when she came to us, she was so fragile that she wouldn't even come on screen. So it was zoom at that point. And she couldn't come on [00:32:00] screen to look at us, to tell us about the background of her case. And, um, we had to gradually work through that and develop some trust with her and her mother and You know that the thrust of that case was that [00:32:15] she had been very badly abused by her father when she was even younger and We were being brought on because he had recently chased her down the street and she was terrified frankly so we we were brought on and we went to court and got her a [00:32:30] protective injunction and when I went into the courtroom the courtroom to do the advocacy.

[00:32:34] **Sam:** The first thing the judge said was, surely this is a criminal matter. To which I said, well, it should be. Um, but the police didn't believe her because she was 15 years old the first time she mentioned it. So [00:32:45] we're here in the civil courts to get some protection and then we'll reflect on it. Um, so we got, um, what was quite unusually a two 18.

[00:32:55] **Sam:** And afterwards, her mother said to me, well, you know, this is great, but wouldn't it be lovely if you, [00:33:00] could help us with a criminal prosecution, which is obviously way outside our expertise at the time. And so my, as is often the case, my heart said yes and my brain said no. So my mouth said maybe. Um, [00:33:15] so I bought myself a bit of time and then went back to the day job, which was a quasi white collar crime lawyer.

[00:33:21] **Sam:** And I went to the criminal lawyer specialist that I work with. I happen to be a specialist in child sexual abuse cases as well, as [00:33:30] well, to say, could you help? And so we joined them to our team and we spent, I mean, that was autumn 2020. So we then supported that family through to April 2023 when the matter finally went to trial.

[00:33:44] **Sam:** [00:33:45] Yes. In the prosecution of her father.

[00:33:48] **Sally:** So throughout the pandemic?

[00:33:50] **Sam:** So throughout the whole time we supported them to navigate the criminal process, which is a minefield as you know. Um, so we then got to trial and, um, [00:34:00] you know, at this point I also have a daughter who's not a long way off the age of the client when she first sort of started suffering in that way.

[00:34:10] **Sam:** And, um, you know, it was a, it was a very extreme case. The judge [00:34:15] described it in his summing up as the worst case he'd ever seen where the victim was still alive. And. I kind of prevented some of my team from going to court because I knew what was coming in terms of evidence and it was graphic and it was difficult.

[00:34:29] **Sam:** [00:34:30] Yeah. Um, but I kind of wanted to be there to support her and the family and represent them in some way, in some form. So we were there through what was supposed to be a five day trial and took five weeks. Um, and at the end of it, uh, the jury [00:34:45] was adjourned and, I think probably the longest two and a half days of my life was waiting for judgment.

[00:34:50] **Sam:** And I basically just camped in the court at that point, and was working remotely from the canteen in the courtroom.

[00:34:56] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:34:56] **Sam:** Um, and we were called in, um, [00:35:00] by the judge, and we thought it was because the jury couldn't decide. And so we were called in, and the jury returned, uh, 15 convictions out of 15 charges.

[00:35:09] **Sam:** Um, which was amazing. Yeah. And actually the more I learn, um, [00:35:15] Quite astonishing, um, given the number of clients I've seen who, who have had no success, uh, in those courts. And we went back in July, uh, with the client who insisted on going in person to read her [00:35:30] statement to her father, which is the single bravest thing I've ever seen, uh, in a courtroom.

[00:35:35] **Sam:** Right. And, um, and he was sentenced to 26 years, uh, in prison. And That case, uh, [00:35:45] is ongoing still, so we have just submitted a, um, an application for compensation for her in the Criminal Injuries



Compensation Authority process. But that case required me to walk away for a period afterwards. [00:36:00] Because you can only be a useful lawyer as long as you're a useful human, uh, and some of these cases get on top of you and, um, not in a bad way, but just the nature of them.

[00:36:09] **Sally:** Yeah. Uh,

[00:36:09] **Sam:** and so. It's a very long winded answer to your question, but yes, [00:36:15] um, there are periods in which you then need to take a break. And I'm very, very lucky because our pro bono practice is so broad. I can be doing carbon credit trading one morning, conservation in the afternoon, refugee charity [00:36:30] work the LGBT plus case preparation after that.

[00:36:35] **Sam:** And then come back to the domestic abuse and the human trafficking, you know, the perhaps really heavy, heavy stuff. Yes. So, um, In terms of looking after well being, I try to [00:36:45] ensure that lawyers on the really difficult cases get breaks and get looked after, uh, and I also try to enforce that with myself. Um, and it's an important role and it's a, it's a difficult thing

[00:36:57] **Sally:** to maintain

[00:36:58] **Sam:** and it's something I need to [00:37:00] improve at, frankly.

[00:37:00] **Sally:** Yeah. Well, I'm not going to lecture you, Sam. I'm not sure how good I am at it. But, um, you know, but you do like music and, uh, boxing. I seem to remember when I was digging it, digging around after you, not, not [00:37:15] deliberately. Um, but I wonder, do you have a favorite book then? I'm just trying, you know, favorite book.

[00:37:20] **Sally:** Yes.

[00:37:21] **Sam:** Yes. Um, well, first I have to make a confession that I I don't read much for fun.

[00:37:26] **Sally:** Okay.

[00:37:26] **Sam:** Um, I spend, you, [00:37:30] you will relate to this, but a lot of my time in, in documents and analyzing this and the others, so. And they naturally find reading, um, relaxing, but I do have a favorite book. Cool. And it's called Thirst, and it's by Scott Harrison.[00:37:45]

[00:37:45] **Sam:** And it is the book of his journey to setting up a charity called Charity Water. And it's a journey from being a Can I put this a New York nightclub promoter? [00:38:00] Taking too many substances. He shouldn't and achieving very little for social good Just starting one of the most phenomenal charities I've ever had the privilege of working with or learning about and it's an incredible journey And it also explains [00:38:15] just what?

[00:38:15] **Sam:** The impact of clean water having or not having can have on a community and it's, it's really, really insightful. So when I read that, I was, every page was another dose of inspiration and kind of, come on, do more. You can do

[00:38:27] **Sally:** better.

[00:38:28] **Sam:** Yeah. So, um, I [00:38:30] love that book. No pressure.

[00:38:31] **Sally:** Yeah. Now, listen, I always ask people who their favorite legal character is.

[00:38:36] **Sally:** Cause I kind of feel like, you know, interviewing you. You sound a bit like somebody from Suits, you know, the American TV program which had, of course, Meghan [00:38:45] Markle. And, uh, you don't quite look like Harvey Specter. Uh, but, you know, you're not in a, uh, a 300 pound suit as far as I can see. But, um, what I mean is they had a pro bono unit in that, in that program.

[00:38:59] **Sally:** And people will often [00:39:00] say somebody from a show like that, or Alec McBeal, or, uh, Depends on one's age, I suppose. But I wonder, do you have any legal characters that um, inspire you? Or sometimes I do a twist [00:39:15] as I say, um, if someone was going to play you in a film, yeah, who, who would it be? But if you've got a favorite kind of legal character, you can tell me about why.

[00:39:25] **Sam:** Well, I'll, I'll, I'm not sure I have a favorite legal character as [00:39:30] such, but there is a moment, uh, in a film which appeals to me.

[00:39:33] **Sally:** Oh yeah.

[00:39:33] **Sam:** Um, and that is in A Few Good Men, uh, when Tom Cruise is cross examining Jack Nicholson.

[00:39:40] **Sally:** Yes.

[00:39:41] **Sam:** Um, about ordering a code rest, a code red. Um, [00:39:45] and, and the reason I like it is because, Lots of silly reasons, but firstly, a lot of work went into that particular bit of cross examination and prepping and the team behind it, late nights and all that kind of stuff.

[00:39:59] **Sam:** [00:40:00] Yeah. And I enjoy being part of a team and all the prep. But what it boiled down to was, understanding who he was questioning and trying to get a rise out of him. Um, and people always say, we never really see that in court and don't [00:40:15] expect this or that. And that is true, but I do love the art of cross examination and I love the art of trying to get into the mind of, Who you are, um, questioning to, to extract from them that one fact, that [00:40:30] one admission that is going to make your case, even if it comes with a boatload of insults, um, or other comments.

[00:40:35] **Sam:** If you can get that one point, which sinks their defense, then, um, you know, I love the balance and the drama of, of whether you do or you don't ask that one question. So [00:40:45] that, that particular scene I like.

[00:40:47] **Sally:** Yeah. Um. Well, I was just thinking, given that, and given that you're involved, well you do a lot of your own advocacy now, and in fact you were a judicial assistant in the Court of Appeal to [00:41:00] Lord Thomas, uh, where, you know, he did a lot of high profile terrorism cases, and you also, um, were a lead, was a lead interviewer for the Serious Fraud Office.

[00:41:10] **Sally:** Uh, interviewing witnesses in aspects of, uh, you know, blockbuster [00:41:15] billion investigations. Um, so I'm just thinking, you know, why not the bar? It's not too late to come over to my side of the, uh, Come over

[00:41:24] **Sam:** to my side.

[00:41:24] **Sally:** Of the, of the profession. Had, had you ever considered it?

[00:41:28] **Sam:** I, I did actually, uh, right, [00:41:30] right at the start.

[00:41:31] **Sam:** Um, but I think it was quite short lived, to be honest. And, and the reason was. I like working with people, and I like having a modicum of control over what I do, [00:41:45] uh, and who I do it with and for. And as a solicitor, it is only a modicum of control, but the teams that I work with here, and the teams that I see working without me and doing their own projects, are great.

[00:41:59] **Sam:** And that is [00:42:00] what makes the firm special, and that's what makes me happy. Lawyering most enjoyable. I think from the most junior to the partners who've been doing it for decades, you can learn so much. And I really enjoy, you know, it's like getting the band back together when a, when a new matter comes in [00:42:15] and you're trying to crack it.

[00:42:16] **Sam:** Um, and I think I just, I wanted to work in the team was, was the short answer. So, um, I did think about the bar, but I quickly, I quickly came back to being a solicitor. I'm a solicitor advocate for what it's worth. Of [00:42:30] course. Um, I'm a slightly odd hybrid. Um, But, uh, yeah, I think I'm in the right spot.

[00:42:36] **Sally:** Ah, well, still, still, I'll still try to persuade you, I'm sure.

[00:42:41] **Sally:** So, with that in mind, and, you know, some of the work that you've done up to [00:42:45] this point, judicial assistant and the route, I wonder then, what advice would you have, perhaps, or, um, entrance to the profession? Um, who are coming into law, any kind of advice or tips, um, just a few would be [00:43:00] helpful. And then I wanted to move on to maybe people who were seeking partnership, um, uh, for example.

[00:43:06] **Sally:** Generally it needn't be pro bono, but if you got any, any tips or advice, just let me know.

[00:43:12] **Sam:** Yeah, so, um, I think three, [00:43:15] three things that, that I would say to people coming into the profession. Um, the first would be to make your own choices, um, because you're the one that has to live with them ultimately. And, and by that I mean things like, um, when [00:43:30] I was choosing university I was at a, a grammar school and I was kind of told I should go to Oxford if I could go to Oxford.

[00:43:38] **Sam:** Yeah. Um, and I went to Oxford and. I don't know why, it was only when I got there I realised that it's about a [00:43:45] 20 minute drive from my parents house. Didn't feel like a great adventure and I didn't particularly like the guy who interviewed me. Um, and then I went to UCL in London and just travelling into London I heard more languages on the train than I did in my entire time in [00:44:00] Oxford.

[00:44:00] **Sam:** And I just thought to myself, why are you going to Oxford to study languages when you could go to London and live it? Yeah. Um, and then As a trainee, I only applied to two firms, Travis Smith and Herbert Smith. On paper, Herbert Smith was [00:44:15] bigger, but Travis Smith felt right.

[00:44:16] **Sally:** Yeah, you've got a thing for Smith.

[00:44:19] **Sally:** I do, yeah. Maybe

[00:44:20] **Sam:** it's the Smith thing, but, you know, it was the right decision for me, and at different times in my career, I've made decisions which were perhaps not obvious, but they were right for me.

[00:44:29] **Sally:** Yes. [00:44:30]

[00:44:30] **Sam:** And I think that is more likely to lead to success than doing what You know, maybe other people think you should.

[00:44:36] **Sam:** So that would be number one. Number two, it's sort of related to that, and it would be just keep your mind and your eyes open. I'm a partner in a role which didn't [00:44:45] exist, um, when I started training at this firm. In fact, there are very few people who are. Partners in this role at any firm. Um, but that's where I am.

[00:44:54] **Sam:** And if you'd ask me five years ago, is that where I'll be? I'll say no. If you'd ask me when I started in [00:45:00] law, is that where I'd be? I would say no. Um, but you've got to keep your eyes open. The markets change. Um, you change. Um, and so just be open to opportunity. Great. Um,

[00:45:10] **Sally:** and then the

[00:45:10] **Sam:** last one, which was one that I was told when I was junior, which I think is really true, [00:45:15] is if you want something, you need to let people know.

[00:45:18] **Sam:** Thank you. So if there is a role you want, there is a promotion you want, there's an opportunity that you think should be yours, then, then tell the decision makers and make your case. Because the worst thing [00:45:30] is if you see that role announced for someone else and then the decision makers say, Oh, we didn't know.

[00:45:35] **Sam:** We didn't know you were interested. This other person had come to us. Sorry, maybe try next time. And if you can see that role and it doesn't exist, then go and build it. [00:45:45] Um, you know, make it happen. And if you're somewhere where it can't happen, then you're probably in the wrong place.

[00:45:51] **Sally:** Yes, that is fantastic advice.

[00:45:54] **Sally:** You know, this podcast and women in the law. I started it because I didn't feel that there [00:46:00] was anybody telling the stories or the career roots of leaders in law with interesting journeys and careers in the law. Because there are, there are lots of really brilliant podcasts and associations and so on.

[00:46:12] **Sally:** But I didn't really hear. You know, the [00:46:15] stuff that I wanted to hear. So I started one. So it's a really important advice. You know, if you don't see it, build it. Um, and I know, you know, people have set up their own law firms, for example, off the, off the back of that. What about people seeking progression in law, kind of [00:46:30] partnership or, Leadership, which is a different question I want to ask you a bit later about, you know, leadership skills that appeal to you because you're leading here.

[00:46:38] **Sally:** But what about people who are looking to progress? Maybe they're 10 years plus or more and thinking, what about [00:46:45] partnership or a form of progression?

[00:46:46] **Sam:** Yeah, I think, um, I think you have to be very, very business minded about it. Uh, which is nothing for a pro bono partner to say, but if you're seeking partnership and you're in a particular department in a particular [00:47:00] firm, look at the market.

[00:47:01] **Sam:** That's the first question. Does the market suggest that that opportunity is going to be there when you're at that level of seniority for the decision to be made? Does the structure of the team you're in suggest that there is [00:47:15] space for you to become a partner and, and look at it early and, and quickly.

[00:47:20] **Sam:** Um, and then one of the things I tried to do right or wrong, I'm not sure, but it worked for an interesting career route was always add to your bow. [00:47:30] So when I was a judicial assistant in 2011, that was my thing. For a while, Sam, he's been to court, he understands this. Then after a few days, I realized, well, that's out of date now.

[00:47:41] **Sam:** So then I went to the SFO and, you know, then I had insight into the management of [00:47:45] the SFO and what was happening with those prosecutions. And when I came back from there, within a month, I was back at the SFO representing people being prosecuted. So, you know, what is your skill? What can you do and what can you bring that others can't?

[00:47:57] **Sam:** And if you Can't identify [00:48:00] that, then no one else is going to do it. So I think, um, yeah, develop a skill set which has got market value and, and look hard at where you are and where your team is and assess your opportunities and just have really frank conversations. I was very lucky [00:48:15] that I was told in black and white where I was on, on my career ladder.

[00:48:20] **Sam:** Um, by a lot of good, uh, senior partners here. It wasn't always good news, um, but it was always honest. Um, and I could do with [00:48:30] that what I wanted. Either I go and demonstrate that I can do what they need, um, or, you know, you won't get over the next hurdle and so on and so forth. So, I think be realistic, uh, and seek out honesty with those, um, who make decisions.

[00:48:44] **Sam:** And if you're [00:48:45] not getting honesty, and it's always some sort of general. push back, then again you're probably not in the right place.

[00:48:53] **Sally:** I mean, that's really great advice because sometimes it can be brutal, can't it? You know, you might be the best person, [00:49:00] but then you go for an interview and then you don't get it.

[00:49:02] **Sally:** And you're kind of like, oh, well, I thought you said I needed, I needed this. So it's kind of getting the, maybe sometimes the brutality. It's a balance, isn't it? Of whatever the advice is they say that they need, [00:49:15] um, and then working on it or and realizing that it maybe it's not for you. I mean, you found a great home here, you love the firm, but sometimes actually, um, it just might be time to move on.

[00:49:27] **Sally:** Um, would that be a fair assessment, do you think?

[00:49:29] **Sam:** Yeah, I [00:49:30] think so. And I, um, I took the approach that I kind of wanted to re choose the firm every few years. So I, I looked at my career and the firm and what I was doing and where I was going and I kind of re selected it every time. So, um, I, I [00:49:45] think it's good to be alive to, um, your practice and what you want to do.

[00:49:50] **Sam:** And, And choose your firm again. I mean, I don't think I'm the best person at giving career advice having stayed at the same place all my career, but I am [00:50:00] extremely happy. I am. I love my job. I've got nothing but gratitude and positivity for the people I work with and the place I work. And that is an active decision.

[00:50:11] **Sam:** That is not something I've fallen into. It's when [00:50:15] it has moved in a direction I didn't like, I've changed it. And I've asked for help from people that could help me. And I've been surrounded by really good people who've always gone out of their way to, you know, provide me with opportunities and support.

[00:50:27] **Sally:** I mean, you said you were very lucky, but you've actually [00:50:30] been quite strategic when one looks at your career and the interests that you've had outside it. I don't mean, you know, setting up a foundation in your name is strategic. That's just you doing something good. But even that in itself requires strategy, doesn't it?

[00:50:43] **Sally:** Because often [00:50:45] You know, particularly kind of women in senior roles I find will say, I was very lucky at this, and men actually, the officer, I was very lucky at this, actually requires strategy sometimes, doesn't it? And being strategic and where you actually want to go [00:51:00] and where you want to lead.

[00:51:02] **Sam:** Yeah, I think so.

[00:51:03] **Sam:** I think, um, You know, if you don't think hard about your career, no one's going to. So, the responsibility starts with you. Um, and I take my career very seriously, and I take it no less seriously [00:51:15] now, being a pro bono lawyer than I would as a commercial lawyer. Yes. Um, but I would say it's as much strategy as building relationships, and probably more the latter.

[00:51:27] **Sam:** You know, what counted for me is that when [00:51:30] I got to critical decision moments, I was trusted by the people in power because I had demonstrated the right commitment and skill set. And that trust is what enabled them to give me an opportunity that they maybe wouldn't have given [00:51:45] Other people who just came in the door and said, I'm the right person for the job and that trust takes a long time to build up and there's no short answer.

[00:51:52] **Sam:** It's just hard work and, um, you know, making sure you deliver so yes, strategy. [00:52:00] If it's within an organization you've been at for a while, it's about relationships and consistently delivering and, and so those above you in the food chain know that they can rely on you to, to do a good job.

[00:52:11] **Sally:** Yes. Well, I said I would ask you about leadership then.

[00:52:14] **Sally:** What are the [00:52:15] leadership qualities that you admire? You know, you yourself are a leader. Um, have you got certain qualities? It's a



hard question because, you know, You were just talking about trust, um, and I think there's some surveys certainly in the education sector [00:52:30] that, you know, people like to trust their leaders.

[00:52:32] **Sally:** Um, what are some of the qualities that, um, you know, you, you admire? I ask you because I'm writing a book called, Talking law and leadership and often in law, you know, we, people can be critical and say we have [00:52:45] leaders who haven't had any training or suddenly they're asked to manage teams but they haven't been trained, um, or whatever it is.

[00:52:51] **Sally:** So I just wonder then from a leadership point of view, what are some of the. Qualities in leaders that you admire? It's, it is a hard question. I appreciate that. [00:53:00] But it's interesting one, isn't it?

[00:53:01] **Sam:** Yeah, I think, um, I think it's a good question. I think, um, trust is critical actually, and integrity. Um, I think what I look for most in a leader [00:53:15] is that if I wasn't in a room or someone else wasn't in a room, they would represent accurately and fairly what we brought to the table.

[00:53:24] **Sam:** How we should be dealt with. So I think there has to be fairness, [00:53:30] uh, fundamentally. So to be trusted, you have to say to your team, this is what we're going to do. If you do ABC, this is what's going to happen. Um, and we're all in it together. So I would say a combination of. integrity of of doing the right thing, [00:53:45] um, in all circumstances to the extent that's possible.

[00:53:50] **Sam:** Um, but also if you are a leader, you've got to be prepared to do everything yourself. So I think you've got to, the way I've looked at it, you've got to take [00:54:00] on the hardest cases. You've got to be prepared to work the longest hours, and you, So you have to catch any ball dropped by any member of your team at any time.

[00:54:10] **Sam:** And for me, you have to look after everyone in your team. Um, and I [00:54:15] think in terms of where do I want to work and who do I want to work with, I want to work with people that care about people as well as the business. Um, and I've had that when I was junior. I had a difficult moment on a case [00:54:30] and, uh, I suppose I was, exposed, uh, and immediately the senior lawyers in the team came around and rallied around, not even blinking to say, don't worry about this.

[00:54:39] **Sam:** We will do ABC and we'll take care of it. Now, I was already on the war path in [00:54:45] relation to that particular issue and already

working to, to deal with it, uh, which we did. But it was their reaction that stuck with me, and that is culture being passed down. So when I see that, with my team being worried, or juniors, you know, [00:55:00] mistakes happen all day, every day.

[00:55:02] **Sam:** Um, but you need to work somewhere that will look after you in those circumstances. Um, and that was a lesson I learned in, in real time. And I think one of my, um, One of the most [00:55:15] impressive lawyers at this firm said to me something like, um, if you're a litigator and you've never reported anything to the insurers, then you're not really doing your job properly.

[00:55:23] **Sam:** And, um, she's one of the most incredible minds I've ever worked with. I'm not going to embarrass her by naming her, [00:55:30] but it was reassuring and You know, I learned that lesson on the spot. Then if you want to be a leader, you look after the people who are putting in the hours below you to support you with your caseload.

[00:55:43] **Sam:** Um, so those are the [00:55:45] kinds of things I think I look for leadership in terms of, um, acting. you know, doing by acting, acting, sorry, doing the right things at the right time, but also being [00:56:00] empathetic, uh, understand that everyone's lives outside of work are going on at the same time as well. They will have life events that will prove challenging and you need to look after them.

[00:56:09] **Sam:** The work mostly will be there, um, in a week or a month. Yes. Your [00:56:15] people, you know, we're a law firm. What have we got? We have a building full of people and the people are the most precious thing.

[00:56:21] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:56:21] **Sam:** Um, also the clients. Uh, yeah. But we need to look after the people to service the clients and deliver the impact that we're after.

[00:56:28] **Sam:** So I would [00:56:30] say, yeah, lead by action, but also prioritize your people.

[00:56:33] **Sally:** Well, it's, it's crucial and it's interesting because I remember doing a round table where, uh, with lawyers and I was chairing it and we were talking about the, the assets, people as assets, uh, and [00:56:45] actually, uh, there was a lot of resignations from this particular, um, uh, lawyer's firm in lockdown and not a lot, but a lot of junior lawyers resigned.

[00:56:54] **Sally:** Um, and they, some of the reasons why it's easy to resign from a, you know, computer screen. [00:57:00] Um, and I think it's important, isn't it, to value. from the top to the bottom, um, and so, you know, recruitment, because of course we know the junior end now, pay is not enough, and they want a culture that's them, and, um, [00:57:15] and they want more things than just, just income, and so it is a, a really, um, important point.

[00:57:21] **Sally:** I wanted to ask you this, which is noticeable about Travers Smith, which is that you don't seem to have, um, A fixable, [00:57:30] billable hours. Is that right?

[00:57:33] **Sam:** That is right. Um, I can confirm. Where do you

[00:57:35] **Sally:** have that? I can confirm

[00:57:37] **Sam:** that I cannot tell you how many hours I have done since my first day here in 2006 on any year at the firm.

[00:57:43] **Sam:** Um, [00:57:45] which is very unusual. We have it for a number of very good reasons, I think. The first is, if you come in on January 1st knowing you've got to hit 2, 000 hours, [00:58:00] every day looks different. Um, when a colleague comes and says, Can you help me with this piece of work? Can you give me a bit of advice? You might not want to give them a bit of advice because that's impinging on your hours.

[00:58:11] **Sam:** If somebody needs a chat or a lunch, um, or wants you [00:58:15] to come and help with some BD or graduate recruitment, well that might get in the way of your target. So why would you do it? And then a client comes to you and says, It's, I need this big deal done. And you know that the other partner in your team has just done [00:58:30] exactly that deal and is the right person for the job, but you need the hours.

[00:58:33] **Sam:** So you take on the case or the deal and you do it perhaps less good, um, but you keep the hours and you hit your targets and your colleague doesn't develop their expertise another step further. So [00:58:45] there's a lot to dislike about it. Um, the reality is, we're a very successful firm, we're extremely busy.

[00:58:52] **Sally:** Yeah.

[00:58:52] **Sam:** So whether or not somebody gives us a target at the start of the year or not, there's a lot of work to be done. But just mentally, um, [00:59:00]

it's about the right people at the firm doing the work that they are best placed to do. It's about sharing it with the right partner. All right, level of your team, and it's not about just putting down hours for the sake of it.

[00:59:11] **Sam:** So if you're a client, I would run to a firm that [00:59:15] doesn't have targets, um, because it means that when a call comes in to one of our financial services experts, and they know you need a capital markets lawyer, that's who you get. And when that partner knows actually you need a two year PQE person and a trainee to do it, [00:59:30] that's who you get.

[00:59:31] **Sam:** Um, so it's mainly a service thing, but it also leads into culture.

[00:59:36] **Sally:** I, I, I just love that because of course there are other models like gonna cook and, uh, what should I think of some of the Bexley Beaumont, some of these newer [00:59:45] models which talk about not having fixed, you know, fixed, fixed hours, uh, fixed and billable hours.

[00:59:50] **Sally:** And, but you've been doing here for a long time. It's just in the research. I was astounded. Um, and because it's quite attractive actually, um, from a work, you know, from a work point of [01:00:00] view and a recruitment point of view, but there's looking for places, um, Yeah,

[01:00:05] **Sam:** it's not to say that we don't have, obviously we're a business, we look hard at our finances and, and we, um, you know, we keep an eye on capacity, etc.

[01:00:14] **Sam:** [01:00:15] But fundamentally, um, you don't come to work hitting a particular number for some kind of reward. People look at how good you are as a lawyer, how good you are as a team player, what have you done for the collective good, and we operate on the collective good. [01:00:30] But, you know, we are a partnership and a firm that.

[01:00:32] **Sam:** works for the firm, not for, um, individuals.

[01:00:36] **Sally:** Yes, quite. Now, I want to talk about social media. Uh, because the world has changed. Um, uh, In the, [01:00:45] in the, you know, we write article, well, I write newsletters all the time about, not my cases, um, uh, but legally interesting cases in my area and so on. And, um, and so we, you know, we're all taught or invited to use [01:01:00] things like LinkedIn because it's a professional platform, other platforms as well, uh, people say you should choose.

[01:01:06] **Sally:** But I noticed on yours recently that, um, you were talking about a case that you did, which has had, over 200, [01:01:15] 000 engagements and views. Just tell me a bit about that, about a junior doctor, um, and that hearing. Um, because I was really fascinated by one that, you know, you just wrote about and it's obviously engaged people and touched a [01:01:30] nerve, but what was that case about?

[01:01:31] **Sally:** And what were the, some of the interesting aspects of it?

[01:01:35] **Sam:** Yeah. So, um, I mean, a lot of what I do is not sort of traditional commercial lawyer lawyering, if you like, but this was even one step [01:01:45] removed from our sort of normal practice. So, effectively, the client's a junior doctor who'd been subject to, um, disciplinary process for, um, many years, um, for an incident that took place [01:02:00] literally on her first day, uh, in a new ward, uh, as an F1, which is the most junior of junior doctors.

[01:02:07] **Sam:** Um, and there's a lot, there's a lot going on with this case. So, um, I won't go into too much detail of [01:02:15] the incident, but really the focus of the post was less the incident and more the process. So, If you think how long the pandemic went on for, assuming and hoping that it's finished, uh, well, this investigation predated and postdated [01:02:30] that.

[01:02:30] **Sam:** So effectively her entire career was, um, conducted under the cloud of being under investigation. The level of financial cost imposed on her was enormous. With one hearing alone, um, she was charged her [01:02:45] entire year's to be represented for two days. Um, and I mean, when we were preparing her evidence to demonstrate that, um, she has, she is fit to practice we were looking [01:03:00] back at how many different documents she'd have to write reflecting on what happened and it was something like, um, 35 separate individual reflections over four years, over 12 to 15, 000 words, um, it was just [01:03:15] a huge mental burden.

[01:03:16] **Sally:** Yes.

[01:03:17] **Sam:** And so the post was simply to say we'd done the hearing, um, conducted the advocacy, had her reinstated and she was fit to practice again, which was great. But what, [01:03:30] what then happened was, Um, her mother wanted to video call us with her sister to say thank you, and it was at that point that I started to realize, well, this isn't just a junior doctor who's been under the grill.

[01:03:42] **Sam:** It's our whole family who's been [01:03:45] through this and had this huge burden imposed upon them. And the sanctions, Uh, suspension and possible erasure were enormous. And, and so when I was writing my post at the end of it, and again, I don't post that much on [01:04:00] LinkedIn, but this one just took off. I just said, you know, junior doctors are, are really the best of us.

[01:04:05] **Sam:** They are totally dedicated, unbelievably intelligent. And, you know, They choose these jobs to help people. They're not getting paid. They're [01:04:15] not buying huge houses and fast cars. They are working hours and hours and hours under incredible stress in a broken system, saving lives. And if there's a mistake, there's a mistake.

[01:04:27] **Sam:** They should be looked after. Obviously the [01:04:30] public needs to be protected. But this is, this was, you know, and I won't go into the details of it, but The doctors also need to be looked after. Of

[01:04:38] **Sally:** course.

[01:04:39] **Sam:** So the thrust of my post was that. That it was a reminder to me that we do these cases, whether it's a [01:04:45] domestic abuse, human trafficking, or somebody under the, um, disciplinary grill, and you see the individual.

[01:04:51] **Sam:** But actually, it is them, it's their sisters, it's their family, it's their friends, and it's their whole careers, um, sometimes. And their lives, which are up [01:05:00] in the air. And so, when I was looking at, at prepping for this case, I then did the usual Google around investigations into junior doctors and, and what came up, came up a BMJ, um,

[01:05:13] **Sally:** British Medical, um, [01:05:15]

[01:05:16] **Sam:** Journal.

[01:05:16] **Sam:** Journal, yeah. Sorry, BMA, British Medical Association, I think it was, uh, ruling, um, I'm going to use the wrong terminology. That's alright, they have got a journal

[01:05:24] **Sally:** as well.

[01:05:24] **Sam:** Um, it, it was a motion, I think is the right one, to say that the, the [01:05:30] GMC, GMC, And the MPTS who are in, who are investigating these things are too heavy handed.

[01:05:36] **Sam:** Uh, and the stat that they, I haven't got it in front of me, but, but roughly the stat that they said was between 2020 and 2022, 29 separate doctors under [01:05:45] investigation had died. Uh, and it said 5 or 6 were by suicide. Now I, I'm not sure What the other 20 plus would have died from during that process. But the number is very significant.

[01:05:57] **Sam:** Yes, it is. And, um, [01:06:00] you know, incidents of that nature are, I know from experience, people that this kind of stuff has happened to and the impacts that it has had. And it's a total disgrace. So, So I put the [01:06:15] post out there, um, to just, I wrote it on the tube on the way in, uh, and, you know, thought I'd get my usual three likes and a, and a thumbs up.

[01:06:24] **Sam:** And, um, it just hit a nerve. And Whether it hit a nerve specifically [01:06:30] with the medical profession, or it hit a nerve with all junior people, or anyone who's ever been junior, and, and been hung out to dry, um, or been looked after either way, um, yeah, it's gone, it's gone bonkers, and it's gone out of my hands now.

[01:06:42] **Sam:** Yeah, and it's

[01:06:43] **Sally:** interesting, isn't it, that [01:06:45] actually, you know, we are all using, the platforms that exist in, you know, whatever ways there are. But it does have really important consequences to engage in the work that you're doing and the [01:07:00] outcomes. And so it just struck me that, um, you had reached, uh, uh, or, um, you know, hit a nerve or a chord or whatever.

[01:07:09] **Sally:** And it was, it was good to, good to see. Um, Sam, we are coming, or at the [01:07:15] end of our, our time together. And I wanted to ask you really, what's, what's next? You know, you're doing really well here. Your foundation is doing well here. We've talked a lot about your work in the day job and outside it. And I am [01:07:30] a keen fan of, makes a complete lawyer, um, outside and inside.

[01:07:36] **Sally:** But what's next? Maybe managing partner or can I persuade you to the bench? Um, uh, you know, to come to think about the judiciary.

[01:07:45] I know there aren't that many partners still, uh, from, uh, you know, solicitors branch or higher, higher social advocates is on the bench. But. What's coming that you can share with me?

[01:07:57] **Sally:** Can I persuade you to come to the bench [01:08:00] as a part, as a part timer or maybe managing partner? I don't know. I don't know.

[01:08:04] **Sam:** I'm loving both pitches. Um, I think

[01:08:07] **Sally:** there are others, of course.

[01:08:10] **Sam:** I am. I'm very fortunate to be in pretty much my dream job, um, to [01:08:15] be honest. So next is a continuation of a similar theme.

[01:08:20] **Sam:** I'm four years in. Um, the practice at Travis Smith is four times the size it was that we started with. Yeah. Um, and we have [01:08:30] some major impactful projects in domestic abuse, uh, racial justice. areas. So what's next is the build out across the other areas. Um, we've got some incredible, um, refugee focused projects, um, we're [01:08:45] doing a lot in the climate space.

[01:08:47] **Sam:** Um, with a particular view on the climate space, I'm really trying to build out, we're in a green tech, uh, legal collaborative, um, this year, which is growing next year. And that's a fascinating area. The [01:09:00] startups are incredible and the lawyers are engaged. So, uh, I hope. that we build out our involvement in that.

[01:09:06] **Sam:** We do a lot in the entrepreneurship space, um, particularly for, um, underrepresented communities. And we've been bringing our clients into that [01:09:15] conversation, which has been great. So I think there'll be a lot more sort of fee paying client engagement in pro bono activities, which is exciting. Um, I've always liked to think a bit outside the box.

[01:09:26] **Sam:** So I am asking myself where do the lawyers, [01:09:30] um, and the media, uh, And the clients and government come together to have an impact. So I, I'm a big fan of collaboration. Um, and there's never a moment when I don't have a new project in my head or on paper. So there's a few of those kicking [01:09:45] around, but next primarily is to, um, is to look across the whole practice and find these projects of scale that are leading, um, our lawyers and their expertise, uh, into areas of impact.

[01:09:58] **Sam:** And there's so much talent at [01:10:00] this firm that I have to work quite hard to try and keep up with it and facilitate opportunities that, that sort of meet their brain power. So, um, that's the main thing of NEXT. And then, individually, I want to improve my skill set. [01:10:15] As a lawyer, as an advocate and, um, you know, a leader of teams.



[01:10:20] **Sam:** So I think I've got quite a lot of learning to do, uh, in that. in that area.

[01:10:26] **Sally:** Yes.

[01:10:26] **Sam:** Um, and that should probably keep me busy. What was  
[01:10:30] two small people waking me up all the time? I was

[01:10:32] **Sally:** going to say, I'm trying to find a balance, um, at home, uh, as well. Well, Sam Cotman, I feel like this is like, this is your life.

[01:10:42] **Sally:** I'm about to hand over a large book [01:10:45] to you. You know, anybody who's, Sort of not my age would be like, this is your life on earth. Is that, um, you discussion about your career on talking law. Thank you for the time that you've given me this afternoon. I know you haven't reached your bill b for the day 'cause you've been sitting around here waiting for me to come [01:11:00] from court.

[01:11:01] **Sally:** But it's been fascinating interviewing you about your work here. Um, and uh, I really appreciate it. Thank you, Sam.

[01:11:08] **Sam:** Thank you very much. It's been an absolute privilege.