



James d'Apice

Director and Commercial Litigator at Chamberlains

Host of podcast 'Coffee and a Case Note,'

Written by Amy Danek

James is one of our amazing legal superstar guest speakers at the UNELSS 2023 Annual Law Ball. Be sure to come along and meet our awesome line up!

James d'Apice is a Commercial litigator and Director at Chamberlains. The original interview I conducted with James was centred around his creative flair, as I thought it was important to highlight creative diversity in the legal profession. James emanates that creativity via his social media pages and podcast 'Coffee and a case note.'

I found James' attitude towards anxiety experienced as a lawyer refreshing and honest. I came across a video he had posted on Linked in analysing the experience of anxiety versus sociopathy in the legal profession, which was presented in a darkly humorous tone to illustrate the normalcy of experiencing anxiety when you work in a profession where you are exposed to the vicarious trauma of others. I found this approach enlightening because past generations of lawyers tend to sweep the issue of mental health under the rug, whereas the current generation is more open about these issues and making a conscious effort to address them. With open discussion, change in social attitudes usually follows! So, I feel like Lawyers like James deserve high praise for instigating open conversation on the impact of mental health issues in law.



The UNE Law Student Society are very excited that James will be one of our guest speakers at our upcoming annual law ball in Sydney and I had since come across an interview podcast featuring James, where I found the discussion around his life experience to be very insightful personally.

There is a lot of discussion within our student social groups on the topic of imposter syndrome at the moment, and in this podcast, James and Rose discuss an enlightening perspective. James mentions that having imposter syndrome means you care about delivering for people who put their faith in you. Most law students are driven and empowered by a sense of social justice, so this care factor is essential to what drives you in your chosen profession, the law. Rose then highlights that it shows you are conscious about how you're showing up and challenging yourself outside your comfort zone.

Given that imposter syndrome is centrally driven by a sense of perfectionism and perfectionism is behaviourally trained into us as law students at university, the next point from the podcast I thought was important was the 80/20 rule. James discusses the 80/20 rule as 80 is 'good enough,' where 80 is the goal because aiming for 100 limits your productivity. I feel like this real-world advice is essential to instil into a law student mindset early on, so we don't get bogged down in the expectation of an HD-level essay as the minimum standard we set ourselves moving forward.

The last point I would like to cover from the podcast was the question Rose asked James, if he could go back in time and give his younger self advice, what would it be? James answered that he wouldn't go back and give any advice to his younger self because messing with that timeline would cause a ripple effect in shaping the person you are in the present. Leaving your younger self just the way he/she was, mistakes and all, in the past and focusing on developing yourself as a more understanding, evolved person moving forward is a very smart and empowering concept that we students should take some time to give some serious thought to. We all have moments when we say or do something, especially in a social media-driven world, that our current selves might regret or feel shame over. These past experiences and perceptions of ourselves tend to limit and restrict our advocacy voice on public platforms such as LinkedIn due to the fear of voicing a viewpoint that you fear others might find socially unacceptable. The fear of a negative impact on your career as a young lawyer only strengthens the inner critic within to whisper in your ear even louder.

I have spoken to many students who have an intense fear of being that active voice on social media, and I often overthink and overanalyse my content before I post it, and that is if I post it at all. I studied social media law to make sure I understand the legal implications of public expression of opinion, especially as a future lawyer. I currently coach students on how to network on LinkedIn as our graduates are finding that a strong network is imperative in the legal industry, especially in major cities such as Sydney, where competition in the employment realm is high.

So, I strongly recommend listening to the podcast link below, taking this outstanding life experience advice from James and thinking about how you can apply these concepts to your own mindset to gain the confidence you need as a future legal professional to boot the anxiety-driven cycle that is imposter syndrome out the door and become the advocate which you are meant to be.

Q&A

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself, such as what inspired you to study law, what area of law you work in and what your typical day in the office usually looks like?

I am a commercial litigator and director of Chamberlains Law Firm. My typical day is like any other white-collar job – emails, phone calls, meetings – with an occasional trip to Court thrown in. In addition, I work two or three days a week from home.

2. Is your experience as a lawyer what you envisioned it would be like as a student? If not, can you explain the differences, perhaps anything you wish you had been aware of or certain aspects you hadn't expected would be involved in the job?

Yes, it is what I expected. My dad was a lawyer, and I did a lot of work experience and paralegal work at law firms before going into practice, so I had an idea of what the profession entailed.

3. In some units at university which by nature discuss emotionally charged issues, the advice has been that a lawyer must find a way to cope with the mental health implications that come from hearing and advocating for these issues because after all, we are human and listening to another human being in distress must cause some stress and anxiety. How do you cope with this?

This issue concerns me a lot. It is part of the reason why I have chosen to focus in my area of practice. The issues I deal with have no bearing on a person's liberty, where a person can live, what relationship a child might have with a parent etc. The facts I confront in my work are – strictly speaking – commercial. Even though I often deal with people who are sad, angry, or have hurt feelings, I do not deal with any problem that goes beyond the financial. This allows me to focus and perform better. I am not sure I would have the resilience to adopt a detached and professional approach to work which deals with more immediate human issues. I admire that wonderful lawyers that do.

4. Being in a position where your job requires you to act objectively and keep a client's issues at arm's length to be able to advocate for them in their best interests, do you have any advice that you have learned through your experience as to how to best maintain that emotional distance and remain objective?

No, aside from: if you are a person who is inclined to feel for those you interact with (as I am) then bear this in mind as you forge your career. Choose an area where those issues which are likely to reduce the quality of your work, and damage your mental health, are less likely to arise.

5. Are there any coping strategies that you find helpful that you would like to share?

The usual: sleep, exercise, enjoy activities outside of the law, and “let the mask slip”. There is no need to always be in Lawyer Mode when in practice. Try to be an authentic person, rather than a person who fits a stereotype.

6. Can you describe the source of stress and anxiety in relation to working as a lawyer, as in do you find it to be the client’s trauma that rubs off on you as a human being or perhaps the way people in the industry might communicate with each other? (using tv as an example, I’m sure if we all behaved like the lawyers on suits do, there is bound to be a lot of stress surrounding that type of communication!)

The conduct of other lawyers does not distress me. Generally, if an opponent wants to yell and complain it means they have nothing of value to say and their client’s position is weak. The opponents who intimidate me and the ones who are well organised, responsive, and polite. They tend to “have it all together” and so are more likely to be a challenge to litigate against. As mentioned, I avoid practising in areas where my work touches on the trauma clients might have suffered.

7. Is there any other advice you might have for our law students?

Keep going! It’s worth it.

8. From the Chamberlains website, It states that you spend much of the week working from home. Is the hybrid work environment something that is usually offered within law firms?

Yes, to both. We are currently in an employees’ market. So, if it is something you want, press your employer for it.

9. On the point of the hybrid work environment, do you think it is a positive thing for your mental health to be able to work from home? I ask as many have said during covid that they were expected to fit more work or hours into their day while working from home, causing more work-related

stress, yet others found work/home life much better being able to work from home. Could you describe your work environment and how you feel it is beneficial?

I think this balance is important. I have the immense privilege of having a separate “workspace” at home. If my workspace was also the space where I prepared dinner and cared for children, the situation would be much more difficult. So, for those who are not able to have the perfect home setup, yes, I think WFH has its challenges. There is also, it must be said, something lost in the way of mentoring while WFH. I am a better mentor in person than I am by phone or video. Juniors in my team get – objectively – a worse experience if they are not able to have direct, in person mentoring from me.

10. At UNE, we love to share the things that make us unique! Hobbies form part of who we are and I believe we should always make time for the things that we love doing, even as a busy legal professional! I noticed on your website that you host a horror podcast and used to make rap music! Can you share any stories or links?

I used to host radio, enter rap battles, and write music journalism. These days my chief hobby outside of work is co-hosting the podcast, Spooko

Resources

[*Podcast: Rose Tinted Law*](#) Hosted by Rose Inglis

[Find out more about James here](#)

[Spooko Podcast](#) – Spotify link but can be found on other podcasting platforms

[Coffee and a Case Note Podcast](#)

About the Author: Amy Danek

Amy is a third-year law student at the University of New England and is the 2023 Social Justice and Equity Officer for the UNE Law Students’ Society.

She is passionate about research and writing on issues relevant to psychology, neuroscience and science and technology as they relate to law.

Her goal when she finishes her studies is to find a niche area of law that inspires and challenges her, such as in family, children’s, medical, emergency powers in government or biotechnology law.