

A moment with: Ahmad Saleh

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Born in Lebanon but raised in Canada, Ahmad originally had his sights set on becoming an engineer. “The majority of Arab parents wish their children to become either engineers or doctors”, he laughs. The middle child and only son, Ahmad and his family – mum, dad and four sisters – moved from Lebanon to Miami in the US when he was 10 years old. After a year in the states, the family decided on another move to Canada where they settled in Montreal, Quebec.

Whilst two such big moves could have been quite an upheaval for a young child, Ahmad credits the support of his family at the time and says he found it all ‘a rather exciting adventure’. “I am so thankful to my family for everything,” he says. “My parents, through their love of Arabic poetry and literature, encouraged me to never lose touch with my roots and my older sisters were an inspiration to pursue my engineering career. I, in turn, then encouraged my younger sisters to pursue their passion for careers in law. We are a very close family”, he smiles.

Moving to the Francophone province of Quebec meant another challenge for young Ahmad – learning to speak the language. With his mother-tongue language of Arabic and English as his second language, schooling and the participation in summer courses soon saw Ahmad add French to his language repertoire.

It was during his high school studies that Ahmad first developed an interest in the law. “I used to go to the courts after school and sit in the public gallery to listen to the lawyers”, he recalls. “I found it fascinating and it was so exciting listening to them arguing their cases. I also had a passion and curiosity for sciences and engineering. The library I built before starting university was a mosaic of sciences and law”. Nevertheless, he continued on his chosen path to become an engineer and completed his bachelor’s degree in Computer Engineering at the University of Montreal.

“Once I had completed my engineering degree, my love for the law was still there and so I wanted to see if there was a way of combining the two” says Ahmad. Combine he did, as he embarked on an ambitious course of full-time study for not one but two degrees – a Master’s in Electrical Engineering and a Bachelor’s degree in Civil Law. Whilst studying, Ahmad also managed to fit in engineering internships at Motorola and the Canadian Space Agency and also occupied a research assistant position in IP and technology law at the Research Center in Public Law – University of Montreal.

Having realised that IP law was the ideal field in which he could merge his engineering skills with his passion for the law, Ahmad was admitted to the Bar of Quebec in 2006 and embarked on his first legal role as a patent specialist at a large Canadian law firm. He spent two years there before becoming legal counsel at Hibe, a Canadian internet & social media corporation, where he drafted, filed, prosecuted and managed patent applications and trademark applications worldwide.

Ahmad’s next role was as a patent specialist, lawyer and trademark agent for an IP firm in Montreal. His role provided many opportunities for travel to the Middle East, where he visited agencies and law firms to strengthen ties and promote the services his firm could offer. “The fact that I was a western-educated lawyer and engineer who could speak Arabic definitely was a huge advantage” says Ahmad. “A lot of patent related work was referred to me in Canada by Middle Eastern inventors and companies and my greatest joy was when I was assisting them protecting their innovations originating from this region... I was also impressed by the knowledge and innovation there ”.

It was during this time, as his career was going from strength to strength, that Ahmad’s personal life was

also flourishing and he met and married his wife, Carine, a psychologist also Canadian of Lebanese origin. Whilst deciding on where in the world to settle and supportive of her husband's interest in the Middle East, Carine encouraged Ahmad to look at opportunities in the region. "We felt a strong sense of 'being at home' in the Middle East despite us both having been away for a long time. There is so much potential in the region and I really wanted to be able to contribute to its development", says Ahmad.

In preparation for his move to the region, Ahmad decided to complement his civil law background with a Common Law degree and attended school in the evenings whilst working full time. Ahmad completed his Common Law degree in 2011 and shortly after, he and his wife left Canada and moved to the UAE, where he joined a law firm in Dubai managing their Patents team. Ahmad says he 'loves living in Dubai' and thinks this is one of the most promising places in the world. "Dubai is the perfect marriage between East and West", he says. "The diversity here adds to the richness of the country and has built what Dubai is today".

Whilst happy to be in Dubai, Ahmad felt that there was still more he could do in order to feel as though he was achieving his dream of 'fostering innovation in the region'. "I truly believe in the potential here and wish to see a renaissance of the golden era of science in the Middle East, particularly the Gulf region", says Ahmad and so he did not hesitate when the opportunity arose to join Al Tamimi & Company. "Al Tamimi is the leading law firm in the Middle East and I immediately felt that the environment and culture at the firm fit with my expectations. The Firm is the perfect embodiment of the belief that 'you can't achieve external success without running successfully inside", he says. "With the support of a great team, the Firm's excellent reputation throughout the region and its unrivalled contacts at universities, leading businesses and with the authorities, I finally feel as though I am in a position to achieve what I came here to do - and that is to contribute and enhance the process of developing knowledge and innovation in the Middle East".