



AMCHAM THAILAND

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Developing Future Thai Leaders

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Tiziana Sucharitkul and Darani Vachanavuttivong

Co-Managing Partners, Tilleke & Gibbins

How did you become Co-Managing Partners at Tilleke & Gibbins?

Tiziana Sucharitkul: I first joined Tilleke & Gibbins as a legal intern working in the firm's Dispute Resolution Department. That was in 1993, just after I finished my Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees (focusing on Italian Language and Literature) at the University of Virginia.

During my year-long internship, I developed strong ambitions to pursue a career in the law, and I spent the next three years obtaining my Juris Doctor at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law, during which time I returned to Tilleke & Gibbins each summer as a Summer Associate. After graduation, I worked first for Tilleke and then for an international law firm, Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy, where I split my time between Los Angeles and Singapore.

Eventually, I returned to Thailand to become a Partner and Director of Tilleke's Dispute Resolution Department, and my role evolved further when I was appointed Co-Managing Partner, along with my colleague, Darani Vachanavuttivong. In my case, something as small as an internship laid the groundwork for my career, so I'm very grateful to the firm for helping me get started in my career in law, despite the fact that I didn't have a legal background at the time.

Darani Vachanavuttivong: I've been at Tilleke & Gibbins for over two decades. Much like Tiziana, I didn't begin my higher education in the legal field. I first completed my B.B.A. (Accounting) at Thammasat University in 1985, and then I went on to get a Higher Diploma in Auditing in 1988 and an M.Sc. (Accounting) in 1991, both at Thammasat University. After first starting my career as an assistant auditor and financial controller, I joined Tilleke & Gibbins and became Head of Trademark Registration in 1993. It was during this

time that I was inspired to become a lawyer. I began studying for a law degree, and in 1999, I received my LL.B. from Ramkhamhaeng University. In the early 2000s, I became Managing Director of our Intellectual Property Department and a Partner at the firm, and in 2006 I assumed the role of Co-Managing Partner.

Interestingly, I think that my background in auditing was very beneficial for my career in law. Intellectual property, which is my area of legal specialization, involves a lot of processes and systems in order to effectively serve clients. Because I love identifying issues and solving problems, I brought an auditing-based approach to the firm's intellectual property systems and dedicated a lot of time and effort to improving them and talking to clients about their needs. I think that having a diverse background—which is something that Tiziana and I share—can be very helpful in building your career.

Describe some of the biggest challenges that your company faces at the moment.

Tiziana Sucharitkul: Our firm has undergone some very significant expansion in the Southeast Asian region over the past few months. Until recently, we had offices in Bangkok, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City. As of November 2013, we now have three new offices in Jakarta, Vientiane, and Yangon.

While we have been assisting our clients with projects in Indonesia, Laos, and Myanmar for many years, establishing

new on-the-ground operations is always a challenge, the greatest of which is finding and hiring the best local talent. Thankfully, we've had some great success in transferring existing staff from our Bangkok operations to the new offices, as well as hiring excellent new members of the team in each location. We're confident that these new offices will help us to better serve our clients' legal needs across the region.

Darani Vachanavuttivong: The biggest challenge that Tilleke & Gibbins currently faces is staying competitive in the ever-changing legal industry. We must look ahead to plan how our firm should grow. There are three main factors for us to consider. First, we must maintain high standards of service and legal advice for our clients. Second, we must invest and recruit in growing areas of legal practice, while carefully observing and keeping pace with our clients' evolving needs. Third, we have to advance our technology to assist and support our teams. Clients aren't just looking for lawyers; they are looking for business partners who can provide meaningful value for their organization. We therefore need to continuously improve so that we can always exceed our clients' expectations.

What do young professionals need to do in order to be successful in the Thai business environment?

Darani Vachanavuttivong: Young professionals in Thailand need to become more international, regardless of whether they are from Thailand or from abroad. It is important to have a diverse range

Even after you have secured that dream job, it is a good idea to continuously broaden your knowledge, because it will open you up to many new professional opportunities.



Darani Vachanavuttivong (left) and Tiziana Sucharitkul (right)

of experience and to be able to adapt. Working hard, loving what you do, and understanding your clients' businesses are all crucial to success.

Young foreign professionals who want to pursue a career in Thailand should be aware that prior work experience in your home country is, in almost all cases, a necessary prerequisite for employers. This is particularly true for those seeking a career in professional services. Getting two to three years of post-qualification experience under your belt, before you make the move to Thailand, will be hugely beneficial for your application, as it means that you will be able to contribute additional knowledge and expertise to your prospective employer.

If you can demonstrate your willingness to work hard, your ability to adapt to Thai culture, and show that you can use the experiences and strengths you have gained abroad for the benefit of your team, then success in the Thai business environment will be sure to follow.

What should students consider when preparing for a professional career?

Tiziana Sucharitkul: One of the most important preparations a student can make for his or her professional career is to gain work experience. Internships are an excellent way to do this, and I can speak from firsthand experience that my internship at Tilleke & Gibbins had a profound effect on my career, because of the excellent training I received.

Our current internship program at Tilleke & Gibbins provides an opportunity for both Thai and foreign interns to participate directly in real cases. They work side-by-side with our expert practitioners, learning not only about the law, but about the business environment in Southeast Asia. It is an invaluable experience, and we encourage ambitious students to apply on our firm's website, at <http://tilleke.com/careers/roles/interns>.

Darani Vachanavuttivong: Building on Tiziana's comments about the importance of job experience, competition for the top jobs is extremely high these days, so you really need to do everything you can to make yourself stand out among the other candidates. Getting experience, wherever possible, will always be

advantageous to you. Not everything can be learned in the classroom.

Students should remain open-minded and not pigeonhole themselves into a particular career track too soon. When you are young, you should gain broad experience, and don't be afraid to fail. You should also be prepared to make a life-long commitment to learning. Even after you have secured that dream job, it is a good idea to continuously broaden your knowledge, because it will open you up to many new professional opportunities.

Describe how being an AMCHAM member has impacted your business.

Tiziana Sucharitkul: Tilleke & Gibbins shares a long history with the American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand. Albert Lyman, a former partner of Tilleke & Gibbins, was a co-founder of the American Association of Thailand, which evolved into the AMCHAM that we all know today. His son, David Lyman, who is our firm's Chairman and Chief Values Officer, has twice served as President of AMCHAM and has just recently completed a term on the Board of Governors.

Over the years, being an AMCHAM member has exposed our firm to a large network of local and international colleagues who make significant contributions to the Chamber and the wider business community in Thailand. Through our membership, we've had an opportunity to connect with leaders in their fields, which has taught us important lessons about the Thai business environment and the needs of clients.

AMCHAM has also provided opportunities for many of our lawyers to participate in important discussions on key economic and business issues, which in turn helps to expand their horizons and build future leaders for our firm.

Finally, we've also made important connections with current and prospective clients, while making a significant contribution to the strong relationships between Thai and American businesses. We have no doubt that Tilleke & Gibbins will continue to play an important role in AMCHAM in the years ahead. ■