

Anderson plays deft hand in Star City Casino Role

Taking on the role of general counsel for Tabcorp's Star City Casino in Sydney might have felt like a gamble at the time, but **Michael Anderson's** shrewd ability to quickly understand the business and its regulatory environment, and devise ways to make it work better, has ensured the chips have fallen his way. The Australian Corporate Lawyer of the Year for 2009 talks to **Kellie Harpley**.



Chatting to Michael Anderson is as refreshing as the heavy downpour that is making its presence felt outside. Knowing that you are about to meet a man who last year led the team of lawyers and businessmen that successfully negotiated a 12-year extension of Star City's exclusivity and tax deal (yes people, the "T" word) with the NSW Government, you are forgiven for expecting someone who will be a little conservative and reserved, a little frustrated at having to answer trifling questions from a reporter and altogether preoccupied with getting back to the important matters of the day.

Rather, Anderson is laid back, obviously intelligent, funny, and incredibly relaxed. It seems that he is not only a person whose hard work has led to great achievements, but he's one of those people who makes those achievements seem effortless.

But let's just reiterate that a lot of effort, and countless hours, have been required to get Anderson to where he is today. As general counsel for what is a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week business, the timeframes are always going to be strenuous.

"It's lots of hard work, and consistently hard work. There's no downtime," Anderson says.

"Most in-house lawyers would face that situation, but at Star City it's the combination of large, strategic project work with the requirement to also meet the daily business operation requirements, all with a quick turn-around time."

And carrying out that work in what is a highly regulated industry is the biggest part of the equation.

"All decisions made are consistent with the regulatory requirements; you just need to work innovatively within those boundaries.

"Every decision is complex; no matter how simple it might seem. Every decision requires a lot of complex thought as to how that business decision, or that call, interacts with all the complex legislation, regulations and government agreements that govern our business.

"The business still requires quick, quality legal advice and decisions despite that massive level of complexity."

So visions of the Star City legal team throwing down tools at the closure of a particularly tricky but immensely successful

deal, having their pockets stuffed with chips by the incredibly thankful executive and escorted into the high-rollers' room for a night of celebrations aren't quite on the mark?

"The reality is that employees aren't allowed to gamble at the casino, but at the same time, it's still a very exciting place to work. There's a lot of shows, a lot of functions, a lot of celebrities. So you can do all that if you want, but often we're still in the office working. And you don't always want to go to a function ... sometimes you just want to go home and sleep."

However, Anderson adds as an aside, Star City does offer a huge variety of work. "I'll find myself doing everything from working in overseas jurisdictions in Asia for Star City's international business to acting as a judge in the *Ralph Swimsuit Model of the Year* competition."

Anderson started his legal career with three years in private practice at smaller, quality law firms before moving on to in-house roles at BOC and David Jones.

"I had a lot of direct client contact and responsibility (in private practice) and that probably made me quite self-reliant and resourceful," he says.

"Initially I did a variety of commercial and non-commercial work but I spent a lot of time doing commercial leasing and contracts, which I found quite interesting. The reason I moved on to BOC was to get more of that sort of experience.

"BOC was quite a big role. I did a lot of overseas travel and completed some major acquisition work in Thailand, while also providing general support through East Asia, Australia and New Zealand."

After almost four years of maintaining a hectic travel schedule with the company, Anderson took the role of senior legal counsel with David Jones, and was there for almost 18 months before he was offered the role at Star City, where the range and technicality of his work, and his aptitude for it, has led to his Corporate Lawyer of the Year Award.

When asked to name the highlight of his career so far, Anderson's only difficulty is in narrowing down his options. Naturally, the aforementioned award is up around the top of the list, but in terms of projects, two lay equal claim to the title.

“THE 12-YEAR TAX AND EXCLUSIVITY DEAL (FOR STAR CITY) IS A HIGHLIGHT.”

“The 12-year tax and exclusivity deal (for Star City) is a highlight. It was a huge, complex piece of work with a lot of stakeholders. From a legal perspective, the challenge came from technically defining what your gaming product is or does, and trying to future-proof it from technology advancements over the coming years.

“And there was huge interaction between complex documents, including old commercial contracts that had been put in place when the casino was established and that needed to be amended.

“The other was when I worked with BOC. I worked on the purchase of a listed LPG and ammonia business in Thailand for them. It was a complex business and there was complex due diligence and protracted negotiation. That deal required 16 flights to Thailand in six months.

“At the time, this deal was huge and I was quite young. It really moved me up in BOC.”

With no previous experience working in the heavily regulated casino industry, Anderson has become recognised as a leader in his field during just four years at Star City. His achievements with the company also include significant contributions to reforms of the *NSW Casino Control Act 1992* and Regulations.

“They have been sensible changes that don't in any way affect the integrity of what we do, but do remove unnecessary red tape.”

Anderson's achievements haven't been recognised only by ACLA. He will soon move up to the role of General Counsel for Tabcorp Casinos Division and go from managing a team of seven to a team of 16.

“It is a challenge I am looking forward to, it will be interesting. I'm looking forward to having a bigger and better team and implementing best practice procedures across the business.”

So, it looks as though that heavy workload could be about to increase, but Anderson will take it in his stride.

“I try to isolate my weekends. I come in very early and leave very late through the week, but I do try to isolate my weekend from work – it's not always possible, but that's the aim.”

Rather than tracking his BlackBerry, he prefers to mow the lawns, take a bike ride, spend some time at the gym and generally relax.

If he's lucky, he might get a chance to dust off his drum kit, but he says these days he spends more time listening to music than playing it.

But with a move to a role that sees him overseeing four casinos – Star City, Conrad Jupiters, Conrad Treasury and Jupiters Townsville – as opposed to just one, and increasing his team to 16, that drum kit could find itself getting more of a workout than usual. Let's hope the neighbours appreciate raw talent as much as Tabcorp does.



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