



Robert Lewandowski
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 Corporate Law in Poland since 2013

Open all hours: why Robert Lewandowski is prepared to work 24/7 for his clients

Robert Lewandowski is the first to admit he's a workaholic. He starts work every day early. In the office promptly for 7am, he checks emails, reads memos and court hearings, reviews outstanding cases and sets the day's tasks for employees who begin at 9am.

As a multilinguist and expert in German and Polish civil law, and English common law, he then spends his daytimes talking to his clients across Europe. After full day, at 6pm Robert often meets with existing and potential clients at evening networking events and eventually arrives home late where his wife chides him for working too hard.

As Robert says, the job is never finished. He could work 24/7 and he'd still need to do more.

"Yes, my work never stops," he laughs. "I also have to work most weekends, sometimes writing articles or going through work I missed during the week. My wife doesn't like it. It's 24 hours a day, never ending."

Adventure in law

For Robert, his "adventure in law" as he terms it first started in Germany during the late 1980s, just as the GDR and the Berlin Wall were collapsing. He initially studied at the University of Mainz and then worked his way up doing legal apprenticeships in German courts. He later became a German solicitor to the German Bar Association of Frankfurt am Mein.

After working at the German Foundation for International Legal Co-operation ("IRZ - Foundation") in Bonn, he was appointed as project leader responsible for work across Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

"This was my first job after studying law," Robert says "I was involved in cross-border projects helping these countries to adopt the laws and regulations up to European standards and requirements after the Velvet Revolutions of 1989."

"It was a very interesting time for me; I organised many meetings, especially seminars and workshops with experts, mostly professors of law. And there were different events at different places, from Warsaw and Bratislava to Bonn and Prague."

Back to Warsaw

After working in this capacity for several years, Robert decided to relocate back to Warsaw, where we were offered a job by a large international law firm. It was here that he started working more on M&As and corporate law for high profile, international clients. The firm also sent him to London to study English common law.

"We had a lot of clients in German speaking countries such as Switzerland, Austria and Germany, but I also then needed to understand and practice English common law. As I speak a number of languages, Polish, German, English and Russian, I was able to talk to most clients no matter where they were in Europe."

Back in Warsaw for the first time in years, Robert also had to study Polish law. It was a huge challenge as he'd learned only German and English law by that time.

"It was a challenge, but it was also made easier because there are a lot of similarities between Polish and German law - both laws are originally from the same source. I am Polish and the challenge was suddenly having to understand in detail yet another legal system." After eight years, Robert was finally admitted to the Warsaw Bar Association and now proudly qualified as a German and Polish solicitor. His proficiency in English common law also gives him a unique addition to his skills as a lawyer: "Yes it is rather unique and very interesting - being able to explain to clients about civil law in Poland and Germany, and common law in the UK and English speaking countries."

"Yes you need to be entrepreneurial, disciplined and, of course, positive. There are always ups and downs in every business"

Management buyout

After working as a lawyer for 20 years, Robert and his colleagues decided to opt for a management buyout at the law firm Derra, Meyer & Partners. Renamed Dr Lewandowski & Partners, the firm refocused the legal practice away from insolvency more to M&A, corporate law, financing, insurance law, real estate law.

Robert admits he's fascinated by corporate law, which he calls the backbone of every business: "Corporate law underpins every client I advise. For me, corporate law is like the interface between the many bodies of law.

"This is true for every company or individual who is going to open and start a business. It's in the consideration about which business form this company takes; it's about the important questions around selection of the rights forms, liabilities of directors, shareholders, taxes and income.

"The complexity of corporate law is particularly highlighted when a company starts doing M&As across borders. Our clients for example are from German and English speaking countries, as well as Poland, Belgium and the Netherlands. They would all have their own versions of corporate law and as a lawyer I need to know that."

What's also interesting is that despite the complexities, company law in all those jurisdictions remains very similar, according to Robert. There are different regulations, but the structure of corporate laws remains the same, more or less.

Challenging times

For Robert, challenges involving legal systems are ultimately easily overcome, what's more challenging for him are the current times we're living in. He's particularly concerned as a Warsaw-based Lawyer about the current war in Ukraine, which has had a negative impact on his practice. With the war coming off the back of the recent pandemic, Robert's practice has had to work harder for clients – often for less fees.

"Yes, this has been a big challenge coming as it has after the Covid-19. We'd not yet shifted from working from home during the pandemic – with such a change in working patterns – and then Russia invades Ukraine. Particularly in Poland – because we're on the front line as such – this has meant we've had to adopt yet more different working arrangements."

These have included millions of families from Ukraine being rehoused in Poland and the resulting pressures on society as well as the business community.

"You can now hear Ukrainian spoken on every street corner in Warsaw. It's been a huge job welcoming people from Ukraine and Poland has done that well. With the pandemic and the war there's no doubt that we've been heavily impacted and lost business."

Indeed, Robert's Ukraine business has all but dried up as a result of the Russian invasion: "Some projects have been put on hold because of the war. Some have stopped altogether. It's a very difficult situation and it's been hard for us to manage. Generally, I'm positive that the situation may change in the near future and the war will end."

Positive thinking

This positive thinking is critical for overcoming the usual business problems that all companies come up against, particularly when times get tougher:

"Yes you need to be entrepreneurial, disciplined and, of course, positive. There are always ups and downs in every business.

"Covid 19 was a huge challenge and we had to digitise all our processes. Like our clients we were all working from home overnight and we lost a lot of business." Robert admits that client expectations have changed since the pandemic and legal advisors are now having to put more work in, often for lower fees: "Clients are putting pressure on lawyers to provide solutions as soon as possible and for as cheap as possible.

"We all know that different clients have different attitudes to money. Even where clients are less price sensitive, they expect value for money. There are different approaches we use such as settling our services on an hourly rate basis to convince clients that we have a competitive rate. I think it is very important to be able to find a balance between the clients expectations and your needs and value."

Above all, since the pandemic and Ukraine war Robert is finding clients want discounts, they want to pay less money. "That's the big change," he says. "We have to find the right solution for our clients as well as for us.

"There's a balance between clients expectations and how you value your service and your advice. I think it is possible."

IR Global support

Regarding drumming up business, Robert sees IR Global as a key part of his business development plans, including attending online networking forums and the regular events.

"IR Global is important to our business. Even during the pandemic when there was less activity in terms of attending events, we were able to generate business and help others with business referrals."

While admitting that he almost never stops working, Robert does have an out-of-work passion – opera. Whenever he travels to IR Global conferences he always likes it to coincide with concerts close by.

"Yes, I have to confess I'm a big opera buff. I particularly like Italian opera like Verdi and Puccini. It's total art that includes singing, orchestra, poetry, dance. All the innovative arts together. And I think it's very important for me to escape from reality.

"I have never been to Metropolitan Opera in New York. Maybe when IR Global organizes an event there I'll be able to visit." As well as Opera, Robert spends a few hours a week at the gym. It's important for him to fit exercise in around his busy work schedule.

"I try to spend time at gym, to stay fit because I have only one body," he laughs. "Fitness and nutrition are very important. So I try to eat the right food and keep my body in good shape.

"I have far too much work to do to ever get ill. I can't be ill, so I have to be healthy and fit, basically – and my wife agrees."

Robert Lewandowski

Partner, DLP Dr Lewandowski & Partners

+48 2210 107 40

rl@drlewandowski.eu

irglobal.com/advisor/robert-lewandowski

drlewandowski.eu

Dr Robert Lewandowski studied mathematics and German philology at the University of Warsaw and law at the University of Mainz, Germany, and later joined the list of German lawyers at the Frankfurt Bar Association in Germany, as well as the list of legal advisers at the District Chamber of Legal Advisers in Warsaw. For almost 20 years, Robert has specialised in corporate law, with a focus on private Mergers



dLP DR LEWANDOWSKI & PARTNERS
Dr Robert Lewandowski & Partners sp. k.

& Acquisitions, cross-border work, general corporate advice and litigation as well as insolvency law. His sector focus covers regulated industries and private equity. Robert is the author of over one hundred articles, many legal books and commentaries on business law published in Poland and abroad. He is currently working on his post-doctoral thesis and pursuing a professorship in the field of civil law with an emphasis on corporate law.