

More law grads taking the road less travelled

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Lawyer Algene Tan worked for two top legal firms for almost three years, but limited advancement prospects pushed him to take a different path – one that allows him to be his own boss and to teach.

The 29-year-old graduate of the Singapore Management University (SMU) co-founded a tuition school, Think Teach Academy, with a former banker. His take on the recent move to decouple legal practice training requirements from Bar admission is that it targets a “relatively insignificant” problem com-

pared with a more serious issue – lawyer attrition.

For Mr Chan Yuk Lun, 29, the decoupling, one of the proposed changes announced last month by the Chief Justice, would make no difference to graduates like him who do not intend to practise law.

There seems to be more law graduates like Mr Tan and Mr Chan who are taking the road less travelled.

Under the changes announced by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, admission to the Bar will no longer be synonymous with being qualified to practise law.

Currently, law graduates have to first undergo a six-month course and pass the Singapore Bar exam,

known as “Part B”, and then complete a six-month training contract with a local law firm, before they are called to the Bar.

But under the new professional training regime from 2023, law graduates who pass Part B can be admitted to the Bar without needing to complete the practice training contract. These graduates can pursue alternative careers as in-house counsel, practice support lawyers and public servants.

The recommendations by a panel chaired by Justice Quentin Loh made clear that it focused its attention on strengthening the training regime, rather than addressing supply and demand issues. One in five called to the Bar last year did not go on to practise law, according to the Law Ministry.

For lawyer Marcus Li, 29, it is “entirely a personal choice” whether one becomes a practising lawyer, takes the Bar exam under the decoupling scheme, or goes straight into a non-law career.

Mr Li was a corporate restructur-



After graduating in 2014, Mr Chan Yuk Lun (above) founded SingaporeLegalAdvice.com, which began as a blog when he was in law school. The site has about 170,000 visits a month now. Mr Algene Tan (left) worked for two top legal firms for almost three years before taking a different path – co-founding a tuition school. Mr Marcus Li (below) was a corporate restructuring lawyer before he took up the position of general counsel at Slate Alt, an investment and capital raising firm. He is also a director at Hello Tomorrow Singapore, the regional hub of the Paris-based global non-profit Hello Tomorrow. ST PHOTOS: DESMOND FOO, JONATHAN CHOO

ing lawyer before he took up the position of general counsel at Slate Alt, an investment and capital raising firm that focuses on deep technologies – technologies built around protected or hard-to-reproduce scientific or engineering advancements. He is also a director at Hello Tomorrow Singapore, the regional hub of the Paris-based global non-profit Hello Tomorrow, which promotes and facilitates deep-tech development globally.

“Setting up and working on Slate Alt and Hello Tomorrow Singapore together with the team was a fresh new opportunity that came about due to advances in technology,” said Mr Li. As the skills he acquired as a lawyer have been useful to his current work, he would still opt to start as a practising lawyer first.

Like Mr Li, Mr Chan is not deterred by the potential downside in taking up a non-law career and settling for a lower salary at a start-up.

After graduating from SMU in 2014, he founded SingaporeLegalAdvice.com, which began as a blog when he was in law school. These days, the site sees about 170,000 visits a month, and is described as Singapore’s go-to legal platform.

Mr Chang Zi Qian, 30, who co-founded local legal tech start-up Intellex, said there are five law graduates in the firm.

“We still see ourselves as members of the legal industry,” he said, adding that they wanted to leverage technology and be the change they wanted to see in the industry.

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