

Early instruction a fillip for O'Sullivan

TREVOR O'Sullivan's love of the law started at an early age.

His father was a magistrate, and then later chief judge of the Industrial Court, and the young O'Sullivan grew up in a variety of towns in Western Australia, among them Narrogin, Northam and Kalgoorlie. Through his father's peers and associates in the legal fraternity Mr O'Sullivan soon became familiar with the concept and practice of law.

With that sort of upbringing his choice of career was hardly surprising.

The winner of this year's family law section in the Legal Elite, his interest in family law, however, began when he was articled to Alan Barblett, who in 1976 became the first chief judge of the Family Court of Australia.

Mr O'Sullivan said Mr Barblett had been a role model for his career.

"Barblett instilled an understanding of the need to work hard and do the best you can," he said. "He gave me a lot of opportunities to take responsibility and do court work at an early age - he was a wonderful administrator and organiser."

When Mr Barblett took up his Family Court responsibilities, Mr O'Sullivan was made a partner at Ilbery Barblett O'Dea and remained in that position for 10 years.

In 1984 he joined Robinson Cox (which later went on to become Clayton Utz) and worked in its family law section until 2000, when he and Andrew Davies decided to start their own law firm "over a bottle of white wine at Barrack St".

Mr O'Sullivan believes that good family law practitioners need to have a genuine interest in people. He also wants to promote



EARLY EXPOSURE: Trevor O'Sullivan's family provided him with a solid grounding in law. Photo: TIM VAN BRONSWJK

The O'Sullivan Davies offices have a professional dispute resolution centre, which Mr O'Sullivan said highlighted the move away from litigating everything to finding other solutions.

"In this office we negotiate more settlements than we litigate," he said.

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"The hardest thing is divorcing your personal views from what you have been instructed to do; you have to be able to deliver hard news, and it isn't always nice," Mr O'Sullivan said.

"You have got to enjoy people and do your professional best, but not get personally involved. It is not helpful to the person involved or the next client if you do."

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a greater understanding of what family law actually is.

"There are some very complex, integral legal issues that have a lot of complexity and importance and also commercial aspects, like property settlements and trusts," he said.

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But Mr O'Sullivan makes sure that he keeps a professional distance from his clients in order not to become too involved in the cases he sees.

Establishing his own firm is something Mr O'Sullivan includes among his career highlights.

"I enjoy what I do because of the people I work with. Our firm works hard, but we are very relaxed. If you can't understand that, you won't fit in here."