

I'm In! *This is my story*



“ *I am a practising Muslim and a proud feminist. I want my daughter to have the same opportunities as anyone else’*

Shakeel Adli

Partner, Head of Islamic Finance

Q: Tell us a little bit about yourself.

A: I am a Partner based in the Dubai office and head of CMS' Islamic Finance practice. I am also amongst other things a practising Muslim, proud father and feminist and owner of two wonderful cats. I was born in Pakistan and came to the UK aged four together with my mum and elder brother. My dad had by that time been in the UK for around 18 years. He had to leave school aged 15 and worked numerous manual jobs to be able to build a life for us in the UK. I feel incredibly blessed to have the life that I have but I know that I wouldn't be where I am without the sacrifices of others in particular my parents and wife and also the helping hand that I have received along the way from friends, teachers and co-workers.

Q: What does diversity and inclusion mean to you?

A: Tolerance, understanding, awareness and respect for others and their differences. Ultimately embracing diversity and inclusion is something we should all be doing not only because fundamentally it is the right thing to do as human beings but also because from a business perspective it makes infinite sense. Diversity and inclusion to me however goes beyond simply race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and disability to encompass the need to provide opportunities to those who would not

otherwise have them or feel able to take them up. I think it is also important to have organisations that reflect the societies that they form part off. In that sense having partners for example who don't all look the same and come from different socio-economic backgrounds is to be welcomed and actively encouraged.

Q: How do you feel you are perceived by society and how would you like to be perceived?

A: I would hope that I am perceived as approachable, hard-working, tolerant and unique particularly by those that know me but I am a realist and cognisant that there will be a significant minority who will have negative preconceptions about me based on my outward appearance and belief system. It is an unfortunate reality that when I describe myself as a proud Muslim feminist the reaction from most people will be cynical at best when to me it is incumbent upon all Muslims to demonstrate that such terms are not limited to non-Muslims given the example of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is very clearly protective of women's rights. As the son of a brilliant mother and as a father blessed with an incredible daughter, I simply cannot see how it would be possible for me to be anything other than a proud feminist. The fact that many in society would think that I cannot label myself as such simply because I practice my faith is really rather unfortunate.

Q: Have you encountered anyone at work with different beliefs from you? If so, how have you found that experience and what do you appreciate about those beliefs?

A: Yes, on a daily basis in my professional life I encounter people with different beliefs to my own. This however is not something that is isolated to my professional life not least because as I see it being in a minority naturally means that your experiences and in all likelihood beliefs will differ from those of the majority. I also see being in a minority and experiencing people with different belief systems as a real positive because it can create opportunities for open, tolerant and respectful dialogue. Indeed some of the most powerful conversations I have had and ones that I have learnt the most from are those with people who have fundamentally different belief systems or live their lives very differently to me.

Q: Do you believe CMS is a diverse and inclusive business, and how could it improve?

A: Yes, I do believe that CMS is diverse and inclusive. Of the seven major firms that I have worked at since leaving law school, it is by far and away the best in terms of visibly showing its commitment to diversity and inclusion. I was responsible for example for launching the CMS Muslim Network shortly after joining CMS and in launching the network, I have had strong levels of support across all levels of the firm. The key as with all things to improvement is to not rest on ones laurels and strive to be better. One of the main ways to achieve this is to create a culture where everyone within an organisation feels able to air their thoughts and suggestions of how it can improve and this is something I think CMS is very good at doing.

