

“Working in such an international and multi-cultural office is fascinating ”



Day in the Life
Mark Alexander Grimes
Trainee Solicitor, Johannesburg



What work do you do for Systech?

I'm a trainee solicitor, based in Johannesburg as part of a Systech team working with our client's Head of Claims at their head office.

What is your typical day?

My typical day will include work such as organising meetings, notetaking and file management on active claims. Tasks such as these take up probably around half of my time, with the remainder given to more ad hoc tasks such as drafting claims, reviewing and commenting on submissions, and legal research on English, South African and international law for the team.

What are the interesting aspects of your work?

In the work itself, the technical nature of construction projects produces complex disputes which are engaging to work with and involve several different areas of law. Working with senior lawyers and construction professionals on these cases means I'm constantly learning.

In a more personal sense, working in such an international and multicultural

office is fascinating. Most days I will hear Japanese, German, Arabic, Afrikaans, Zulu and several more of South Africa's 11 official languages being spoken. Building relationships with people from so many different cultures has been an invaluable experience professionally, but especially personally.

What words of advice would you offer someone thinking of working for Systech?

Be open-minded and adaptable. Our deployments span the breadth of the globe in places as diverse as Houston, Johannesburg, Doha and Tokyo. Particularly in respect of the developing world, reputations can be misleading and you might miss out on incredible experiences and opportunities.

What are the challenges?

Integrating into a new situation is always challenging, you have to be flexible and embrace the place you're in. Whether it's language, working culture or social attitudes, there are things that will be refreshing and some that will

be frustrating. In Johannesburg, for instance, everyone is incredibly friendly and helpful, but despite the local perception that life is fast in Jo'burg, the pace of business is slow compared to Western cities which was frustrating at first. An extreme example is that my birthday cards were delivered from the UK in November; my birthday is in June...

What training and support has Systech given you?

Most importantly for me personally, as a new expat, the local Systech team were very involved in getting me settled locally when I first arrived, and I felt at home very quickly. I'm also studying the LPC concurrently with my training contract, and Systech are supportive in being flexible around my studying and exams.

What social activities have you been involved in?

I organise a weekly 5-a-side football game for Systech and client staff against the local office of a Big Four accountancy firm. We recently celebrated our anniversary of 5-a-side by playing bubble football, which was


Horseback Safari

White-Water Rafting

Knysna Elephant Park

harder than it looks! A few of us do a pub quiz every week, and have developed some friendly rivalries with local teams, and more recently, I joined a client on a steak cookery class. I've also had some great adventures with work colleagues, including a horseback safari, bungee jumping at Soweto Towers, hiking in the Drakensburg mountains, white-water rafting and seeing Guns N Roses at the largest stadium in Africa.

What is the culture like?

Systech teams are often based in-house with the client so professionalism is expected, but the working culture is relaxed and horizontal when compared with traditional law firms. When I joined as a paralegal, I felt that my views on the matters within my experience were listened to, and that I was treated as part of the legal team rather than just support to the team.

How has working for Systech helped you achieve your career goals?

Achieving a training contract with Systech was a major milestone, and (hopefully) qualifying in 2020 will be the biggest step in my career so far, but Systech has also helped me achieve other goals. While at Systech I have begun to develop my

knowledge of construction law and to develop the basis of a specialism, which was a major attraction to joining Systech for me personally. On the back of this I have been able to begin developing a profile in the sector: an article I wrote was recently published in Construction Law Quarterly and I have also had another article accepted for publication later this year by the International Bar Association.

What makes working for Systech different from the competition?

Systech is now a truly global company, but has retained its small firm feeling. The proximity to Global and Regional management always feels close, and they are keen to get to know every employee.

What has been your greatest achievement working for Systech?

Possibly the bungee jumping! I wouldn't describe it as a phobia because being 100m in the air is a valid concern (in my view!) but facing that fear to go over the edge was a defining moment for me! I'm also incredibly proud to have been published in journals in our field; the opportunity to contribute in a small way to discussion of construction law at an international level has been exciting.

Tell us about a project where you have learnt a key lesson?

Working on the project here in South Africa, I've learned that the key to success is building strong relationships based on trust and mutual support at all levels.

Find out more about our consultants' project experiences and see our current opportunities:

systech-int.com/careers


Steak Cooking Class