CROSS-EXAMINATION IS...
SEXY, ELUSIVE TRICKY

‘Nuclear weapon’ Davinder Singh: I’m not intimidating, it’s just the beard

Sunny Jayagiri

It was dry and writing as a child, and he thinks his parents put money on him being a litigator.

Today, lawyers call Senior Counsel Davinder Singh (left) the ‘nuclear weapon’—it is understood as the most skilled cross-examiner in the country. Former National Kidney Foundation (NKF) chief T V Chua’s demonising with his skillful grilling.

On Friday night, this former litigator held court to some 200 Singapore Management University students and potential law to some 200 Singapore Management University students and potential law students.

The topic of the talk was “The Art of Advocacy.”

More than an intellectual discussion on the topic, it was a chance for students to meet the man behind the intellect. Davinder Singh, 50-year-old, has been a litigator for so many years, he still has some bad moments.

And, he said, the decisions a lawyer makes within the first few days it is instructed are crucial.

“That decision can either benefit you in a big way or can come back to haunt you.”

“Think of it as choosing an art work. I think it’s not just cross-examination, it’s not just what you say when you stand up. It’s about what you do before.”

He advised the planning bunch of NUS law students to read the evidence and form an opinion on it before they go to the court room.

And, it’s the writing skills. He pointed out that judges read through the written brief before they hear the case.

“You have an opportunity to present your case to the judge to your point of view. You should open your heart and soul to him.”

That’s the examiner, you should never forget focusing on your words... and your ability to use the English language to its greatest effect.

And, “If you are prepared, no amount of natural nervousness can affect you.”

Your opportunity to cross-examine, he said to laughter, is “the weakest part of the case.”

“Be as much an advocate as your opponent is a litigator.”

“Some people think that it’s such an elusive art, it’s such a tricky subject. It’s impossible to master, no matter how many years you’ve been at it. It gives you a great deal of happiness when you do it well, but it gives you a great deal of pain when you make a mistake.”

By then, Mr Singh had the audience hanging on his every word.

“Your success depends on the amount of work you do, on your ability to think on your feet and keep your eye on the judge to see if you are intimidating.”

“It depends on a whole host of dynamics which is beyond any human being’s ability to master at one go.”

He said that what distinguishes a good lawyer from an ordinary one is his ability “to diagnose with his prepared text” and change course if the situation calls for it.

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