

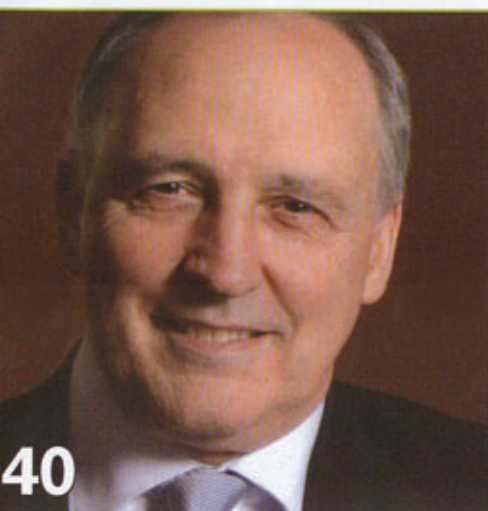
# Wealth

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## Prime Respect

In the late 1990s, Law graduate Sohila Zanjani teamed up with Victorian solicitor Yuri Rapoport to form *Prime Law Brokers*. In less than ten years, the company has expanded to become Australia's premier law broker.

**WCM:** What was the idea behind *Prime Law Brokers (PLB)*? What did you see in the market that needed addressing?

**SZ:** The core idea behind *PLB* has been to help people make informed decisions when it comes to choosing a lawyer. The legal market has no service which directs clients to the right lawyer for specific matters – except for mine.

**WCM:** What business principles do you live by?

**SZ:** As a business owner it is imperative that you constantly convey confidence in your ability and knowledge to your clients. I may not get things 100 per cent right all the time, but my self esteem, self belief, and self-confidence has always helped me move forward. I attend to details and take extra steps to ensure that *PLB* exceeds expectations.

**WCM:** You deal with people from all walks of life and all situations. How do you meet individual needs?

**SZ:** I listen intently to their issues, needs, objectives, fears, and desires. It's fair to say that my ability to listen to clients is one of the business's cornerstones. I listen carefully and convey a genuinely supportive attitude at all times.

**WCM:** Why has *Prime Law Brokers* been so successful?

**SZ:** I think we've been successful because we are a private, Australian owned and operated company. In a world which is now hallmarked by large, multi-national organisations, there is certainly something to be said for the quality and service of locally operated businesses.

“ I endured enormous hardship in my personal life in Australia and indeed in my interaction with the Australian society due to the fact that I was ignorant about Australian customs and laws. Hence, I had no hesitation to sit next to very young VCE students at *Frankston TAFE* classes and study Year 12 again to achieve my dream. ”



Sohila Zanjani knows how hard you have to work to be a success.

**WCM:** You have been through many struggles, particularly in Australia. Which have been the most difficult?

**SZ:** The most difficult one was when I was suddenly left alone in a business when its founder, Yuri Rapoport, left Australia. I was faced with the difficult decision of moving forward, or going back home and continuing receiving my sole parent pension. I was a law graduate without any business background. As a full time mum of four very young children, I was hardly the right candidate for this challenge. However, I stood by extremely long and arduous days, working unthinkable hours, even though it was impractical.

**WCM:** How difficult was it to have to study again?

**SZ:** It was very difficult but I was determined to do it. I had a degree in Economics and Insurance (from RCD International School of Insurance in Tehran – 1978) and I also obtained my Graduate Diploma of Education (Women's Studies –1991) at Victoria College, but none of these qualifications were sufficient for admission to law school. So, I had two options: to re-enter through VTAC by doing VCE again or forget about studying law. I simply could not put off my dream of becoming a lawyer.

I endured enormous hardship in my personal life in Australia and indeed in my interaction with the Australian society due to the fact that I was ignorant about Australian customs and laws. Hence, I had no hesitation to sit next to very young VCE students at *Frankston TAFE* classes and study Year 12 again to achieve my dream.

**WCM:** How did you keep going after 52 job rejections?

**SZ:** I cried silently and sometimes out loud! I soon came to

realise that not all my problems would be solved after I had successfully graduated from Law School (*Monash University*) and I still had a long way to go. Because of the huge competition for articled clerk positions, I was never granted an interview from my 52 applications. Things changed when I noted an advertisement by a solicitor looking for a law graduate.

**WCM:** What things have most influenced your life?

**SZ:** My mother was extremely supportive of me and wanted me to think outside of Iran's borders. She was very supportive of my academic pursuits, and constantly encouraged me to extend my educational horizons. I cherish my education, and always have. My four children have also had an enormous influence and my business itself is also a huge influence on my life. It connects me to my clients all over Australia. I don't just speak English and Persian; I speak the 'language of the masses' in relation to lawyers, and how to find the right ones! A large law firm will have around 40,000 clients on their accounts but I have personally spoken to over 230,000 clients – and, when you speak to people every day, you get an

insight into their lives and what they want. As they say "a new language is a new life" and my business has given me just that!

**WCM:** Did you think you'd be in the position you're in today?

**SZ:** I always believed in myself but the comments and opinion of others stirred doubts in me that I was a failure and could not contribute to the society. So many factors in my life made me think that I am not worth it. Now that I have made it this far, I know I have proven to people that I am, and more importantly I proved it to myself.

**WCM:** What is it about you that has made you a survivor?

**SZ:** The fact that I believed in my work and myself. I was flexible to absorb the criticisms, learn from my mistakes and move on. *Prime Law Brokers* would not have been such a successful business if I simply dreamed about it. I pulled my sleeves up and answered calls, day and night, 24/7 with care and professionalism. I am a survivor because I had hope. I have discovered that I was actually living a good life full of difficulties, which made me stronger and kinder. The hard times I have suffered have made me who I am today. **wcm**