



Akira Kawamura

Anderson Mori & Tomotsune Corporate Partner

Japanese corporate partner Akira Kawamura has been leading teams at Anderson Mori & Tomotsune for all of his professional life. His international experience means he is equally at ease dealing with the needs and expectations of international corporations as he is with their Japanese counterparts.

Internationally Kawamura has been seen as a 'diplomat' who bridges the cultural gap between Japan and the rest of the world. His reputation has grown after years of meeting his international client demands, which in the Japanese market has earned him the informal title – 'international expert' because he continuously advises his clients on how to overcome cultural differences and successfully invest in Japan.

Over his 38-year career, Kawamura has advised the world's biggest brands, such as Time Warner and McDonalds on their multi-billion dollar interests in Japan. He has also aided the Australian and other governments on some of its dealings with Asia's most advanced economy.

Throughout his career he has taken up several external roles outside his firm, from Managing Director of Japan Arbitrators Association to Visiting Professor at Kyoto University. He continues to play a key role in a number of legal bodies including the International Bar Association (IBA). Although at 63-years of age he is proud of his professional achievements, he openly admits that he has the drive and determination to reach greater heights.

Practice Areas

Corporate Law, Cross Border Mergers and Acquisitions; Intellectual Property; International Trade; Entertainment; Publication; Energy and Real Property Law

Languages

Japanese and English

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CURRENT ROLE

Anderson Mori & Tomotsune classifies Kawamura as one of their most senior Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) lawyers, an honour that Kawamura rarely acknowledges – his humble character would not allow it. However, it is for his corporate work that he is most renowned, a number of directories rate him and his firm's extensive corporate practice as at or near the top of the Japanese market – a reputation he cannot ignore.

Kawamura enjoys challenging his legal expertise and frequently advises on other legal areas, such as arbitration. He is currently the Managing Director of the Japan Arbitrators Association.

But to look only at Kawamura's client work is to underestimate the standing of the man in the Japanese legal sector. He

After such experiences it was perhaps a logical move for Kawamura to begin to play a greater role at the International Bar Association (IBA). He is an active member and plays a key role as the chairman of the Bar Issues Commission – an area close to his heart.

In recent years he represented the interests of Japanese lawyers in discussions with the World Trade Organisation on the trade in legal services, as part of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Another external role he maintains is membership of the local board of McDonald's Japanese operation. This role runs in parallel with his advisory role to the US parent company of McDonalds.

Despite his numerous outside commitments Kawamura spends a lot of time advising clients, a role that continues

EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

Kawamura qualified as a lawyer in 1967 and chose to follow the path of legal practice rather than becoming a judge or state prosecutor. He admits that at the beginning of his career it was not clear what the difference between a business lawyer and a general lawyer was. This is not surprising, as in Japan in the 1960s there was very little influence from commercial foreign law firms from America or the UK. It is fair to say that until relatively recently many Japanese lawyers worked as generalists, rather than adopt the Anglo-Saxon approach which focuses on corporate, finance or tax practices.

However, Kawamura made a great choice when he chose to join the then Anderson Mori & Rabinowitz. The unlikely-sounding Japanese firm was started in the 1950s by three American lawyers who were granted the exceptional right at the time of practising as Japanese lawyers by the Supreme Court of Japan.

"I have not changed my employer because I like international practice and Anderson Mori & Tomotsune is the most internationally orientated firm in Japan," Kawamura says. He adds that the firm prepared him well for a life of international law, in a way that perhaps younger lawyers at global Anglo-Saxon firms may today take for granted.

"We were very well guided by the founders in our early years. We had good access to English and US legal practices from the very beginning and the young associates were trained for international work. That has helped a lot," he says.

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was previously executive vice president of the Daini Tokyo Bar Association in 1986 and chairman of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations committee on foreign lawyers between 1995 and 1997. The committee's work has led in recent years to the liberalisation of the bar rules for foreign law firms.

to create the same level of excitement for him as it did when he began his career.

When asked to describe his career Kawamura modestly says: "My life as a lawyer has been very simple." This is quite a statement when most lawyers can only dream of functioning at such a high level in so many fields.

An international focus

From the beginning of his career Kawamura has been fascinated by international aspects of law. Testament to this was his choice to do his LL.M at Sydney University in Australia where his thesis compared Japanese and Australian investment law.

"I still love advising the clients. I am very healthy and I will continue as long as I can."

After returning to Japan, Kawamura progressed through the ranks from associate to partner and in the 1980s earned himself great respect in the firm when he began advising large international companies like Aramco and BP.

An example of the significant aid he gives came just a couple of years ago when he helped a US parent company modify the structure of its Japanese subsidiary. It was a complex and highly sensitive legal undertaking that eventually saw the local board change its membership.

He has also advised media giant Time Warner and carried out a landmark expansion project for them when their theatre chain chose to open up multiplex cinemas for the first time in Japan.

Overcoming restrictions

As with all his client work, Kawamura avoids talking about the details. Unlike in London and New York, the lawyers of Japan are not so keen to shout about their work. However, he will share that on one particular Australian transaction: "I was very proud that we could help the Australian government to restructure and redevelop valuable properties in Tokyo so successfully at such a difficult time."

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Kawamura says that he enjoys working in teams with his younger colleagues. He adds it "would not be possible" for him to work for clients in any other way.

Although he is an academic, he thrives on thinking through problems and has a love

of getting to grips with legal issues and legislation. It is also fair to say Kawamura is not a text-book lawyer who relies on what is written in a book, instead he uses his experience and legal knowledge to guide his decision-making.

He is a negotiator, or to use a more modern phrase a facilitator. He also thinks of himself as a 'diplomat' for good reasons. He sees his role as an international lawyer as something far greater than just doing deals.

Purpose and ambition

"I felt a mission for my professional life," he says. "I thought that international legal services would help the development of Japanese society. I have now been carrying out that mission my entire career." And he means it. All of his deals are part of a bigger picture. Kawamura does not separate the idea of helping clients from a broader sense of helping his country and profession. For him the evolution of modern Japan and the part that legal services have played in this are intertwined.

"I am not interested in politics, you need different skills for politics. But I am involved in the kind of diplomatic, international activity that helps people," he explains.

Some clients may think this sentiment is nice, but not useful to them. However, in a naturally conservative country like Japan, clients are likely to find Kawamura's enthusiasm for new foreign ventures and sensitivity to Japanese culture an invaluable commodity.

On a practical level Kawamura is a problem solver, as seen in his work for companies like McDonalds. He gets things done and he tries not to offend local values.

Freedom of choice

"I try to understand the business of the client. I try to practically solve the client's problems," he says.

In terms of personality, Kawamura is straight-forward. He is a no-nonsense type and does not mind telling you if he thinks you have made an error. This is an excellent quality in a lawyer, he explains, because no one wants a lawyer who is too shy to tell the client they are making a mistake.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Date of Birth	9 May 1941
Education	Sydney University – LL.M – 1979 Kyoto University – LL.B – 1965
Admitted	1967, Japan
Employment	1967 – Present, Anderson Mori & Tomotsune
Memberships	International Bar Association (IBA) – Council Member; Member of the Management Board; Chair of Bar Issues Commission. Lecturer (Chuo University, Graduate School of Law, April 2004) Visiting Professor (Kyoto University, Faculty of Law, April 2001 – Present) Chairman of the JFBA Foreign Lawyers and International Legal Practice Committee, 1995-1997 The Japan Federation of Bar Associations – Executive Director, 1987 Daini Tokyo Bar Association – Executive Vice President, 1986 Japan Arbitrators Association – Managing Director China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission – Arbitrator
Articles	Law and Business in Japan – New Edition – Editor-in-chief/Author – 2000 Law and Business in Japan – New Edition – Editor-in-chief/Author – 1982 Australia Law and Business – Editor-in-chief/Author – 1979

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