

## Anna Fernqvist Svensson

IR Global's exclusive advisor  
for Corporate Law and  
Data Privacy & Security  
in Sweden since 2016

# Eyes on the prize: Anna Fernqvist Svensson has worked hard to achieve her life's dream ever since she was five years old – just don't mention the ballet

**Anna Fernqvist Svensson is a very witty, no nonsense, say-it-as-it-is Swedish lawyer**, whose dry self-deprecating humour underpins her steely ambition that can be traced back to when she was five years old. "One day I told my parents I wanted to be a lawyer," she smiles.

Not only was this an odd aspiration for a toddler, but it also kicked against the family tradition involving generations of technical engineers.

"I'm not sure where I got the lawyer idea from, I just had it in my head that I loved the law," Anna laughs. "I also wanted to become a ballerina, so I'd set myself some big challenges as a five-year-old."

Anna even applied to the Ballet Academy in Stockholm when she was a little older, only to be rejected. While this came as a huge blow – she gave up ballet as a result of her rejection – it turned out to be a blessing in disguise: "Now I love to watch ballet, but can you imagine being a ballerina? You work until you are about 35 years old, and then your body is finished. It's over. You can't do anything."

What Anna did instead was fall back on her legal ambition and ballet's loss was the legal profession's gain. As with everything in her life, she attacked it with absolute passion and her innate sense of right from wrong.

### Specialist in GDPR

A practice area in which Anna is considered a highly regarded specialist is data protection law and GDPR. She admits that becoming an expert in the topic was an accident at first. After starting out at the firm "more years ago than I care to mention", she was offered the role of data protection advisor almost as an aside: "The partners at the time (all men, of course) said, 'this new law is coming in here and it seems to be very important, but a bit odd, can you please take care of it?' I said: 'Yes, of course.'"

The Act, one of the earlier pieces of legislation to protect an individual's data, had a mixed reception from clients: "Some were really eager and wanted to be good at data protection, but most clients were like: 'Do we really have to deal with this?' Some clients even said: 'No, we don't care about it.'"

Over the years, Anna's knowledge and almost obsession with the subject grew, covering various updates on Swedish legislation, until her role took on a pan EU perspective with the introduction of GDPR legislation. "There was a lot of confusion and everything I did for a while was connected to the GDPR," she recalls.

**"People ask me what I do in my spare time. I love the law. I do that in my spare time. Does that make me boring?"**

Since it became legislation across the EU, the demands for Anna's expertise have remained consistent; "GDPR is an integral part of all businesses now. It is part of corporate governance and of M&A activity, for instance, and that's where I get called in to provide advice."

Indeed, Anna has been working part-time at the Swedish Pension Authority since mid-December, assisting the huge public sector organisation with its data protection best practice.

Moreover, much of Anna's GDPR work has an international aspect: "The firm has large corporate clients with subsidiaries around the world and we have assisted them with GDPR issues they face in Sweden and the wider EU."

Some of this involves working with lawyers in firms in countries that are outside GDPR legislation, such as Turkey, which has its own data protection laws.

"It's interesting to discuss with Turkish lawyers, how do we deal with this? What is the difference?" Anna says. "For instance, in Turkey you have to register as a data controller because the Swedish parent company is the data controller for many of the processing activities. So they had to register in Turkey and we had to find out what we could and couldn't do – and what would happen if we got it wrong!"

With all the international work the firm does, being a member of the IR Global network is a big plus: "You really find many interesting people and you get to be good friends with a lot of them. It feels like it is a big family. We all cooperate, whether we are from larger or smaller countries or big or small firms."

Anna is well suited to international work, being fluent in several languages: in addition to her native Swedish, she speaks English, French, German and Italian.

#### Moot point

Anna also enjoys passing on her legal knowledge to the next generation, mentoring aspiring lawyers and taking part in the annual Nordic Moot Court Competition. This is a competition open to 12 teams from Nordic countries.

"I participated in a Moot Court competition when I studied at Stockholm University. In 10 weeks you learn to write statements to the European Court in Strasbourg and you practice in pleading.

"Every year we get this fictional case – often a hot topic that is on its way up to the European Court. The real judges from the European Court then judge it. It's fantastic experience.

"It's a big project every year, but it is very nice for me because now I'm a teacher. I teach the new students that are coming into our lawyers' club. I'm the president of our club and it's really fascinating to me, having all these new students every year, and it gives me so much pleasure to educate younger lawyers.

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Anna admits she also learns a lot when educating young lawyers: "I have to think, how do I write? How do I sound when I speak? It's really good for me."

While Anna does not spend the entire 10 weeks with the team of six students, she endeavours to help and support them as much as she can to ensure they have the best outcome.

#### Performing to win

Anna also advises students that it is normal – even a good thing – to be nervous when they get to court. Even now, with her years of experience, Anna admits she still gets nervous: "I guess court is where I always wanted to be as a lawyer. In court you have to perform in front of a lot of people. In many ways it's not that much different from acting.

'As with the theatre, you can't just leave the audience and the show. I get really nervous, but I always get a great thrill out of it when I finish it. I come out from a courtroom and say to myself 'I want to do that again.'"

In many ways this passion has been with Anna ever since she was five, and it's never left her. For her, law is a lifestyle not just a day job: Being a lawyer is a lot of work, and I work a lot." But maybe surprisingly Anna's life isn't all about the law. Her other passions and hobbies include skiing and looking after her young family.

She does, however, still take the same philosophy from her professional work into her leisure time: "If you are up in the Alps somewhere very high, you think 'oh my God, this is so steep, what am I doing?' But then you think it through and it's no different than being in court. It's a thrill and you feel really happy after you've conquered your fears."

Anna admits she's pushed herself all her life to ensure that whatever target she sets as her goal, she achieves it. This could be learning the minutiae of GDPR legislation, winning her day in court or skiing down the alps – maybe just don't mention the ballet.

## Anna Fernqvist Svensson

Partner

+46 8 22 09 00  
 anna.fernqvist@hellstromlaw.com  
 irglobal.com/advisor/anna-fernqvist-svensson

www.hellstromlaw.com

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