

Peter Lavac

High-profile criminal barrister, non-smokers' activist

As a practising criminal lawyer for over 35 years, Sydney barrister Peter Lavac is well used to fighting adversaries in the courtroom; in fact he relishes it.

Inspired by F. Lee Bailey, one of the top criminal lawyers in the US for many years and also the defence lawyer in the OJ Simpson trial, and Clarence Darrow, who was the best trial lawyer in the 1920s, Peter has been a criminal lawyer since 1976, concentrating on defence work since 1993.

In his early career, Peter practised as a solicitor in Sydney then from 1986 until 2003 as a barrister and Crown Prosecutor in Hong Kong. Since 2004, Peter has practised as a barrister at the New South Wales private criminal bar.

While already well known amongst the legal fraternity – and many of its clients – he came to more public attention as a key player in the ABC TV five-part legal documentary series, *On Trial*, which aired in 2011 and again more recently and featured unprecedented access to major criminal trials in Australian courts.

At the time the series was being filmed, Peter Lavac was fighting another battle – the battle for his life. A world-class athlete and a lifelong non-smoker, Peter was defending in a criminal case and training for a surf competition when he became ill in March 2008. He had been suffering from influenza and breathing problems when the X-ray and biopsy results came back and revealed lung cancer on the upper right lobe. He had to have a major operation to remove 30 per cent of his right lung and today is completely cured. He knew he was fully recovered when he could bench press 300 lb in the gym again.

According to Peter, who has never smoked, drunk alcohol or done drugs, he was at the peak of his physical strength as an athlete training for a world-class, elite sporting event – the Molokai Surfski World Championships – and was understandably dismayed by the diagnosis. Previously, in 1990, Peter had set a world record by successfully leading a six-member surfski team on an epic voyage more than 900 kilometres across the South China Sea from Hong Kong to the Philippines. In 2002, he had won gold and bronze medals at the World Lifesaving Championships at Daytona Beach, Florida, in the US.



Peter Lavac is no stranger to heroic actions. In 1971, while working as a young beach inspector at Queenscliff Beach, Sydney, to finance his law studies, Peter Lavac rescued a 12-year-old boy swept out by a rip, as well as his father who had gone into the water to save him and was also swept out. Both survived the ordeal, thanks to the actions of Peter and his fellow lifesavers who manned the line and reel. This remains Peter's proudest achievement.

Peter Lavac speaks about:

Law - Peter has prosecuted and defended in close to 100 murder trials, from white-collar corporate criminals to triad gangsters in Hong Kong and motorcycle outlaws in NSW. He has hundreds of fascinating stories, characters and criminal trials to relate.

Sport - Peter has been involved in competitive sport since the age of 15, from mixed martial arts, surf lifesaving to world surfski champion. His varied skills have so far helped him to disarm a gunman at the Sydney Hilton, save a District Court judge from an attack by a prisoner during sentencing in court and save the lives of a father and son in huge seas.

Health and Fitness - After what was thought to be a bad dose of the flu turned out to be lung cancer, Peter was on the operating table having the top third of his right lung removed and fighting for his life. Today he is completely clear and cured, with his doctors attributing his recovery to his strength, fitness and health lifestyle. He knew he was fully recovered after returning to the ocean on his racing ski for 4 hours nonstop and after returning to the gym to bench press 300 lb again.

Adventure and Travel - Peter lived and worked in Hong Kong for 18 years and his many opportunities for extensive global travel gave rise to some very memorable adventures. Most were adrenalin rushing, hair raising, life threatening or all three and included river rafting down the Zambezi, swimming with piranha in the Amazon, scuba diving on WWII wrecks in Truk Lagoon and climbing an active, smoking volcano in Indonesia.

Inspiration and Motivation - Peter provides strategies for achieving success in a number of areas of life: professional, financial, sports competition, fitness and health and particularly in dealing with serious illness. He provides examples and experiences from his own life as well as others who have inspired him.

Client testimonials

“ Peter delivered a most excellent 90 minutes' presentation entitled 'The Legal System in Hong Kong - A Comparison'. He revealed himself as a most knowledgeable, entertaining and witty speaker who left his audience of over 30 persons enthralled and 'clamouring for more'.

- ***Marbury Chambers***

“ A great part of Peter’s skill is his talent in advocacy. He has the ability to communicate effectively, whilst maintaining the listener’s interest at all times. Recently I attended a Continuing Legal Education talk presented by Peter. His talk was delivered in a very informative and interesting manner, in which I observed the audience respond most favourably.

- *Oliveri Attorneys*

“ I am a Legal Studies teacher ... and have found Peter Lavac’s contribution to the teaching of the criminal justice system extremely valuable ... His classroom visit provoked a greater interest, enthusiasm and knowledge in Legal Studies. The students found Peter’s visit to be both a learning and motivating experience; in short, the subject came alive for them.

- *Manly Selective Campus, Northern Beaches Secondary College*

“ To hear Peter talk about his life, achievements and challenges is to take a front row seat on the ride of your life. He is truly inspirational and an outstanding and noteworthy speaker.

- *Jill McIntosh, Barrister-at-Law*

“ He impressed me with his affable and relaxed style which was interjected with much humour and was very dismissive of political correctness ... he firmly established himself as a raconteur. I have no hesitation in putting him forward as an excellent example of a wise and worldly personality whose rich vein of professional experience and enjoyment of life comes through in his very witty style and engagement with his audience.

- *International Lawyers Co-operative*

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