

Sir Anthony – He Saw It Coming

Leaders | People



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The senior partners called him Tony. The rest of us, quietly and respectfully, called him Sir Anthony.

Where do I begin with Sir Anthony?

Actually, I know exactly where it begins and where, for me at least, it ends.

My journey with Sir Anthony started on my very first day as a legal intern at Blake Dawson Waldron in Port Moresby. I was shown into an empty office - neat, sunlit, anchored by a heavy wooden desk. At the time, I had no idea that this would later become Sir Anthony's office when he returned from his role as Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

Years later, on the day I resigned from the firm, I walked out of that very same office. It was no longer his. No longer mine. But it was filled with memories shaped by one extraordinary man.

The senior partners called him Tony. The rest of us, quietly and respectfully, called him Sir Anthony.

There was something unmistakably wise about him.

His voice alone could settle a room. Not because it was loud, but because it was measured. Calm. Assured.

When Sir Anthony spoke, people listened. He knew when to talk, and just as importantly, when not to.

I had admired him long before I ever met him, for his role in politics, for his leadership at the Commonwealth Secretariat, for his reputation as a statesman. But I came to know him not through speeches or headlines, but through quiet moments at the firm. He was there as a consultant, not involved in the daily grind of legal work, yet his influence was undeniable.

His presence made you sit a little straighter, think a little deeper, act a little more carefully.

Sir Anthony hailed from East Sepik Province and was educated at Marist College Ashgrove in Queensland - a school that became an academic home for many Papua New Guineans. He returned home to study law and became one of the country's pioneering legal minds. But law was only one chapter in a much larger story.

What stood out most during my time at Blake Dawson Waldron was Sir Anthony's unwavering stand against corruption.

He chaired Transparency International PNG - a cause the firm supported not because it was fashionable or profitable, but because it was right. At the time, I was still forming my understanding of corruption. I hadn't yet grasped how deeply rooted and destructive it could become. Years later, as corruption dominates headlines almost daily, I understand why Sir Anthony fought so hard against it.

He had little patience for waste. I remember him urging public institutions to cut unnecessary spending, extravagant policy launches, lavish government Christmas parties, full-page

condolence advertisements in newspapers. He saw these not as gestures of goodwill, but as distractions from what truly mattered: education, healthcare, infrastructure, and long-term impact for our people.

When he passed away, the grief within the firm was quiet but profound. From senior partners to Giwi, the teaboy, it felt as though we had lost someone deeply personal. Someone suggested honouring him with a full-page tribute. One partner paused, then said, “Let’s do it how Tony would have wanted - low-key, meaningful, and without fanfare.”

That, in a single moment, captured who he was.

Sir Anthony never knew the depth of my admiration for him. Perhaps he didn’t need to.

Years later, while walking the halls of Harvard in Cambridge, Massachusetts, I thought of him again. He had studied there too, among some of the world’s brightest minds. Yet he never carried that pedigree with arrogance. His dress remained proudly local - a sulu, a white short-sleeve shirt, leather sandals, and a Panama hat. Grounded. Humble.

It’s remarkable how people who influence us quietly, not through instruction, but through example - return to our thoughts at the most fitting times. For me, it was standing in that same office at the beginning of my career, and again at the end.

Sir Anthony taught leadership needed integrity.

True authority comes from consistency, from showing up, standing firm, and refusing to compromise on what is right, even when it is inconvenient or unpopular.

He was a patriot, a professional, and above all, a man of principle.

Long before it became obvious, he warned that if corruption went unchecked, it would hollow out our future.

Sadly, many of those warnings have proven true. But his example remains - quiet, steady, and enduring.

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