NO STRAIGHT LINE:

100 LAWYERS SPOTLIGHT

100 DIFFERENT JOURNEYS

A Flagship Publication of the
NBA-YLF Continuing Legal Education Committee







Published under the leadership of the
2024-2026 NBA-YLF Governing Council

The Chairman's Remark





It is my distinct honour to specially commend the NBA-YLF Continuing Legal Education Committee, led by Omotayo Mary Dada, for putting together this visionary project. You have given young lawyers a library of wisdom and a legal compass for great professional growth.

Behind every SAN, Bencher, Judge and respected Bar Leader is a journey.
A journey of a young lawyer who once drafted processes by candlelight.
Who lost cases and learnt more from the losses than from the wins.
Who chose integrity when compromise was easier.
Who stayed the course when the practice was tough.

To my colleagues, as you read the journeys of these 100 senior lawyers, you will discover three most important lessons:

a) Foundation Matters
b) Character Endures
c) Mentorship Multiplies

Dear colleagues, do not just admire these journeys. Emulate the principles behind them. The future of this noble profession rests on our shoulders. Let us build it with excellence, ethics, and courage.

To our distinguished seniors and colleagues, thank you for graciously sharing your journey with us. Thank you for lighting the path for young lawyers to follow and for mentoring us through your stories.

To my colleagues: Read. Reflect. And Rise to Lead.

God bless the NBA-YLF.
God bless the Nigerian Bar Association.



TIMOTHY CLEMENT
CHAIRMAN, NBA-YLF GOVERNING COUNCIL.

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It is with immense pride and gratitude that I present No Straight Line: 100 Lawyers, 100 Different Journeys. Leading a committee of eleven visionary young lawyers to bring this publication to life has been a rewarding professional experience.

No Straight Line was conceived as a lasting guide for lawyers, drawing its strength from the voices and lived experiences of practitioners across the many sectors of our profession — from litigation to the bench, from academia to public service, from corporate practice to entrepreneurship. Their journeys demonstrate the breadth of opportunities available to lawyers and the many ways legal training can be applied to create impact.

You will notice that we have arranged the publication in alphabetical order. This was deliberate. We did not want readers to rank one journey above another or perceive a hierarchy based on seniority, sector, reputation or acclaim. Whether you turn first to a Senior Advocate with decades of experience or a young practitioner just beginning to establish a career, every story is presented as equally worthy of attention.

We have also introduced three special features that reflect a distinctive and increasingly common reality within the Nigerian legal profession: lawyers who share the profession with those closest to them. There are numerous families with husband-and-wife lawyers, parents and children who are lawyers, and siblings who have chosen the same profession.

Through the special features, we explore what it means to build a legal career alongside family. These stories offer an intimate look at shared beginnings, support, expectations, different career choices, and the unique experience of having your family member navigate the same profession as you. We hope these features will resonate especially with lawyers who see their own family stories reflected in them, while offering the wider profession a fresh perspective on how careers are shaped by the relationships we build our lives around.

My hope is that this publication becomes a trusted companion for young lawyers navigating uncertainty, a source of inspiration for those considering a career transition, and a reminder that every professional journey is unique. Whether you, our reader, are a law student, a newly called lawyer, a mid-career practitioner, or a senior member of the Bar, there is something within these pages that can inform, encourage, and challenge you. As you explore this publication, I encourage you to pay attention to the lessons learned, the obstacles overcome, the risks taken, and the values that sustained each contributor throughout their journey. Those are the insights that truly shape meaningful and impactful careers.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to every lawyer who generously shared their story, to our sponsors and partners who believed in this vision, and to the dedicated members of the Publication Committee whose hard work brought this project to life. Your contributions have created a resource that will continue to benefit the legal profession long after today.

I hope that young lawyers will pay close attention to the emerging and non-traditional opportunities highlighted throughout this publication.

Many of our contributors have built remarkable careers in areas that were once unfamiliar or unconventional, demonstrating the vast possibilities that exist beyond the paths most commonly discussed in law school. As you read their stories, I encourage you to identify individuals whose experiences resonate with your aspirations and, where appropriate, take the initiative to reach out and seek guidance.

My sincere hope is that this publication will not only inspire reflection but also foster meaningful connections between generations of lawyers, creating opportunities for learning, mentorship, and collaboration across the profession.

Have a great read.

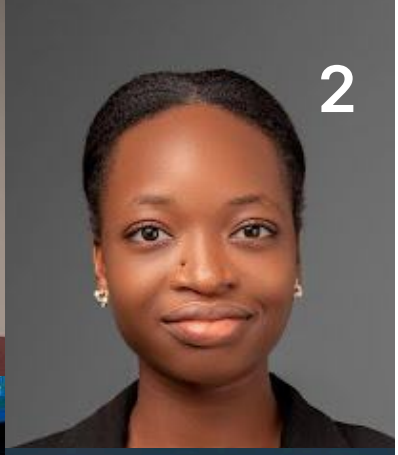
Omotayo Mary Dada

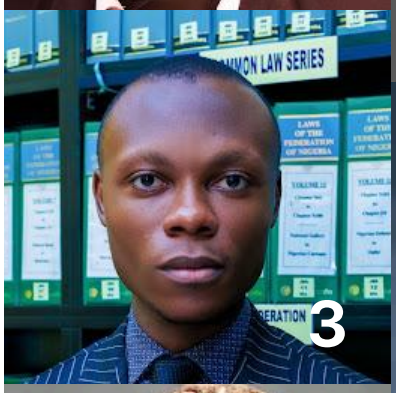
Chairperson NBA-YLF Legal Education Committee and Chairperson the 100 Lawyers Publication Committee

THE EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

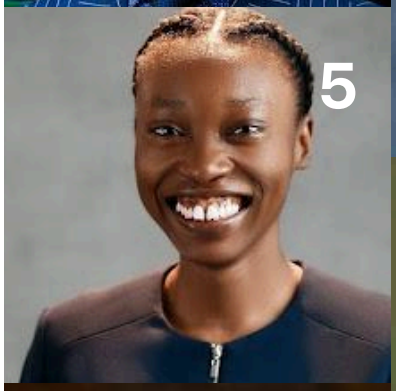
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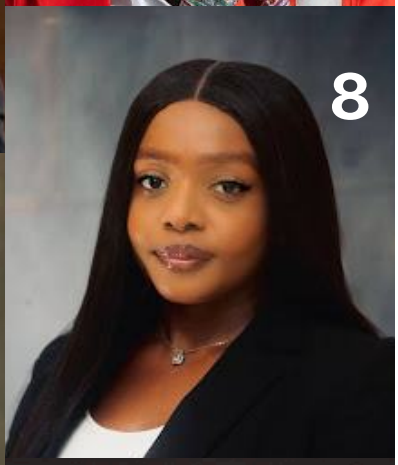














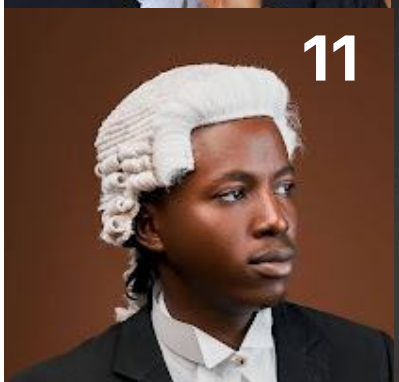




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Afam Josiah **Osigwe, SAN**



Afam Josiah Osigwe was Called to the Nigerian Bar in 1999, he founded his law firm, LAW FORTE, in 2002, where he continues to serve as Senior Partner. In 2006, he was appointed a Notary Public of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, and in 2011, he became a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (UK). Mr Osigwe's legal expertise spans a wide range of fields including corporate and business law, banking, intellectual property, energy, oil and gas law, and both domestic and international commercial arbitration.

He has also been involved in shaping legal frameworks in Nigeria, serving on key committees responsible for reviewing the High Court Civil Procedure Rules and ADR laws in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. He has also held several notable positions, including being a Life Bencher and a member of the General Council of the Bar. His dedication to the legal profession was further recognized when he was elected General Secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association and later became its 32nd President. Beyond his professional achievements, Mr Osigwe has a strong commitment to community service. He provides pro bono consultancy to NGOs on human rights in Africa and offers legal representation to indigent defendants in criminal trials. He is also a prolific speaker and writer, presenting papers at numerous conferences and legal forums.

> **Perhaps the greatest lesson from those formative years is that there is truly no straight line to professional fulfilment.**

What were some of the most defining moments for you as a young lawyer?

When I look back on my first seven years in legal practice, I see a period that laid the foundation for everything that followed. I began my professional journey during my National Youth Service at Chike Chigbue & Co. in Abuja. Those early years taught me that success in the profession is determined by intellectual ability, discipline, diligence, integrity, and an unwavering commitment to serving clients. One defining decision during that period was the establishment of LAW FORTE in 2002. Perhaps the greatest lesson from those formative years is that there is truly no straight line to professional fulfilment. Every lawyer's journey unfolds differently, and success rarely comes from following a predetermined path. It comes from embracing opportunities, learning from setbacks, remaining open to growth, and consistently striving for excellence.

Why did you establish LAW FORTE three years after being called to bar?

My decision to establish LAW FORTE in 2002, barely three years after I was called to the Bar, was inspired by a desire to build a practice founded on excellence, integrity and service. Having begun my legal career at Chike Chigbue & Co. in Abuja, I was privileged to gain practical exposure to legal practice very early. Those formative experiences gave me confidence in my abilities, but more importantly, they instilled in me the understanding that success in the legal profession is earned through competence, diligence, and a commitment to clients. I do not think the question is whether three years was too early; rather, it is whether one is adequately prepared for the responsibilities that come with leadership. It is very important to build a reputation for competence, integrity, and reliability. If your clients can trust your judgment, your colleagues can trust your leadership, and you remain committed to continuous improvement, then you are laying the right foundation, not just for a successful law firm, but for a fulfilling legal career.

What has been your inspiration to serve in various NBA leadership positions?

I have had the privilege of serving the Bar in different capacities, including as a Prosecutor of the Legal Practitioners Disciplinary Committee, a member of the General Council of the Bar, General Secretary of the Nigerian Bar Association, and now as its 32nd President. Each of these roles provided a different perspective on the challenges facing the profession and reinforced the importance of building strong institutions. They also deepened my appreciation of the diversity of the Nigerian Bar and the need for leadership that listens, builds consensus, and places the long-term interests of the profession above personal considerations. Perhaps the greatest inspiration has been the opportunity to make a meaningful difference, however modest, in the lives of lawyers and in the development of the profession. Whether through promoting continuing legal education, strengthening professional standards, improving lawyer welfare, advancing institutional reforms or defending the independence of the Bar, the objective has always been to leave the Association stronger than I met it.

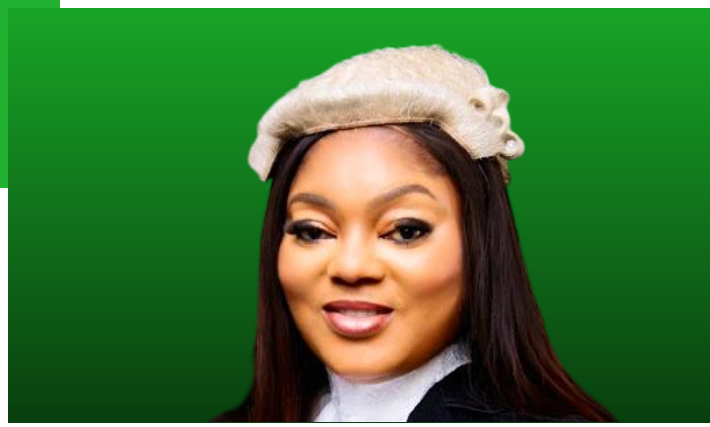
Many young lawyers are inspired by your career trajectory, what core principles have sustained your growth over the years?

I would say commitment to continuous learning, integrity, and hard work. The legal profession is one in which knowledge can never be static, and I have always believed that every lawyer owes it to both clients and the profession to keep learning. That conviction has shaped many of the decisions I have made, including pursuing two Master of Laws degrees. Another principle that has guided me is the willingness to embrace service opportunities. Looking back, I have come to realise that every stage of my journey, from starting practice during my National Youth Service, establishing LAW FORTE, serving on law reform committees, the Council of Legal Education, the General Council of the Bar, and eventually serving as General Secretary and President of the Nigerian Bar Association, was built on a readiness to accept responsibility and contribute beyond my immediate professional interests. A fulfilling career is built gradually through competence, consistency, and character. There will be disappointments and setbacks along the way, but those experiences often become the greatest teachers.

How deliberate have you been about mentoring the next generation of lawyers and what should more senior lawyers be doing?

I believe mentorship is one of the greatest responsibilities that comes with experience. Throughout my career, I have been intentional about developing younger lawyers. At LAW FORTE, I have created an environment where young lawyers are entrusted with responsibility, exposed to challenging work, and supported in their pursuit of professional development. As NBA President, that philosophy extended to the Association's work. We deliberately created greater opportunities for young lawyers to serve on NBA committees, expanded access to Professional Development programmes, established the Kanu Agabi, SAN Young Lawyers' Co-Working Space, made the relaunched Digital Seal available free of charge to young lawyers and continued to advocate for better remuneration and working conditions through the enforcement of the Legal Practitioners' Remuneration Order and proposed amendments to the Legal Practitioners Act. These initiatives reflect my belief that investing in young lawyers is an investment in the future of the profession. A profession thrives when knowledge is shared across generations.

Aanuoluwapo **Omoloju**



Aanuoluwapo Omoloju (Mrs.), FCArb, FCIArb (UK), FICMC, FICIArb, is a distinguished legal practitioner and notary public with over 20 years of experience. She holds a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) from Obafemi Awolowo University, and a Master of Laws (LL.M) from the University of Lagos. She is also an alumna of Lagos Business School.

Mrs Omoloju is the Managing Partner of Harris-Isa, Omoloju & Co., a leading contemporary law firm in Lagos, Nigeria. She currently serves as the Lagos Branch Chairperson of the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators (NICArb). Mrs. Omoloju serves as a Faculty Member at the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators (NICArb), where she teaches and mentors aspiring ADR professionals. She is a proud Fellow of several esteemed institutions, including the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators (NICArb) and Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (United Kingdom). Mrs. Omoloju is the Network Pastor Nigeria for the Jewels Ministry of the Elevation Church under the leadership of Pastor Bolarinwa Akinlabi. She is happily married to Pastor Olumide Omoloju and blessed with amazing children.

> **Balance is not achieved by doing everything yourself; it is achieved by building systems and empowering people.**

What were your aspirations when you first started your legal career?

My earliest aspiration was to see justice done and ensure people understood both their rights and responsibilities. Influenced by my late uncle, Hon. Justice Solomon Afolarin Adeloye, I initially envisioned a career in litigation and perhaps the Bench. Over time, I discovered that justice extends beyond courtrooms. Arbitration and mediation revealed the power of resolving disputes efficiently while preserving relationships. My focus gradually shifted from personal achievement to institution-building, mentorship, and leadership. Today, my aspiration is to create lasting impact by strengthening the legal profession, developing future leaders, and advancing justice beyond my own career.

What mistakes do young lawyers make when trying to transition from general practice to a specialised field?

One common mistake is seeking specialization without first establishing credibility and competence. Specialization is earned through expertise, practical experience, and trust, not merely interest. Many lawyers also underestimate the importance of relationships and professional networks, which often create access to opportunities. Another error is abandoning existing practice areas prematurely instead of transitioning gradually while building knowledge and experience. True specialists are not self-proclaimed experts; they are professionals whose knowledge, consistency, and results have earned the confidence of others.

How important has professional involvement been to your growth as a lawyer?

Professional involvement has been one of the most transformative aspects of my career. While legal practice develops technical competence, professional institutions develop perspective, leadership, and influence. Technical excellence requires constant practice, you attain excellence through being diligent and being consistent. Professional involvement has significantly shaped my growth beyond technical legal practice. Through active participation, I gained access to valuable networks, international best practices, and opportunities for service. Leadership roles taught me that true leadership is about building people, strengthening institutions, and creating opportunities for others. Professional engagement expands your impact beyond your office and allows you to contribute to the advancement of the profession itself.

As a woman who has attained leadership and distinction within the legal profession, what advice would you offer to young female lawyers seeking to build impactful careers?

My advice is simple: never allow your gender to become an excuse for mediocrity. The profession rewards competence, so focus on becoming exceptionally good at what you do. Develop your skills, invest in continuous learning, and build confidence in your abilities. Beyond competence, ensure your excellence is visible. Seek opportunities to speak, write, serve, and lead. Build strong relationships with mentors and sponsors who can guide and support your growth. Define success on your own terms and pursue it courageously. The profession needs women who not only succeed but also create opportunities and inspire future generations.

What practical steps can a young lawyer take to identify the area of law they are best suited for?

Finding your niche begins with self-awareness and exposure. Understand your strengths, interests, and natural abilities. Then deliberately explore different areas of practice before making long-term decisions. Pay attention to assignments that energize you, not merely those that offer immediate rewards. Seek honest feedback from mentors and supervisors, as they often recognize strengths you may overlook. Remain open-minded because the profession continues to evolve and create new opportunities. Your ideal specialization often lies at the intersection of competence, passion, and market demand. Clarity rarely comes instantly; it develops through experience, curiosity, and intentional growth.

If you were to design a "success roadmap" for young lawyers, what would be your top three non-negotiable principles?

My success roadmap rests on three principles. First, relentless competence and lifelong learning. Master your craft, remain curious, and never stop growing. Second, Integrity and Relationship capital: Your reputation is your greatest asset, and meaningful relationships create opportunities throughout your career. Third, resilience with disciplined execution: Success requires consistency, perseverance, and the ability to keep moving despite setbacks. Intelligence alone is rarely enough. Long-term success belongs to those who remain focused, adaptable, and committed to excellence. When preparation consistently meets opportunity, meaningful success becomes inevitable, and impact extends far beyond personal achievement.

Abdulrasheed Bolaji **Ijaodola**



Abdulrasheed is the Co-Founder and CEO of UseABI, where he is building the next generation of the M&A workforce. Before starting UseABI, he was a corporate lawyer focused on private equity, M&A and venture capital transactions. At Greenberg Traurig in New York, he worked on more than 45 transactions for leading private equity firms. He also advised founders, startups, and investors on venture financings and other corporate matters.

Abdulrasheed started his legal career at Babalakin & Co., one of Nigeria's leading law firms, before moving to the United States. He holds an LL.M. in Law, Science and Technology from Stanford Law School and an earlier master's degree focused on financial technology law. He graduated first in his law class at university and finished second nationally at the Nigerian Law School. He is admitted to practice law in New York, California, and Nigeria.

After being called to the bar, what did you imagine your legal career would look like?

At that point, I simply wanted to be the best lawyer I could be. Given my academic profile and the capacity I knew I had, I was confident I would have a stellar career and was eager to get started. At the time, however, my vision was still largely Nigeria-focused. I saw myself becoming a Senior Advocate of Nigeria and, ultimately, one of the leading dispute resolution lawyers in the country.

Your early years in practice involved commercial litigation in Nigeria, while your current work focuses on private equity, venture capital, and M&A transactions in New York. How did that transition happen?

The blockchain and web3 boom in 2021 led me to work with startups, which I enjoyed. As a litigator, I was only brought in at the end of relationships, and I grew curious about how those relationships were built. The transition began at Stanford, where I attended for my LLM in Law, Science and Technology and taught myself how to be a VC lawyer. That experience got me into my current firm, where I have now closed over 40 PE and M&A deals.

For lawyers who want to work outside Nigeria, do you think there is a "right time" to undertake a master's as the pivot point to a legal career outside Nigeria?

I do not think there is one universally right time, but I generally think it makes sense after at least two years of practice. Generally, the earlier the better, and you are much more likely to find a role with at least four years of experience. However, if you have the appetite for risk, you can go earlier. I had the opportunity to leave in 2021 but it did not feel right, given the schools available and my level of experience. It felt right in 2022, even though I was stepping into more senior roles at that point in my career.

How easy was it for you to get a job with a top law firm in the US?

Extremely difficult, especially since I was job hunting for practice areas I did not have prior experience in, and my total experience at the time was just over two years. In the one year of my LLM, I sent over 1,500 emails requesting informational interviews. Since US firms generally hire through summer associate programs, there is typically no availability for LLMs unless someone is willing to take a chance on you.

For lawyers interested in corporate transactions, venture capital, or emerging technology, what foundational knowledge should they start developing early in their careers?

> **"My biggest recommendation, however, is to use AI. Give it detailed instructions about your experience and interests and ask it to create a tailored learning plan."**

We are in a different world today. Although the best way to learn is to do, there are now numerous resources available. Many firms have newsletters and dedicated website sections with materials on different practice areas. For venture capital, I recommend Secrets of Sand Hill Road by Scott Kupor. My biggest recommendation, however, is to use AI. Give it detailed instructions about your experience and interests and ask it to create a tailored learning plan. From there, reach out to practitioners and ask about their day-to-day work.

You have worked on dozens of complex disputes and corporate transactions within a relatively short period of practice. What habits or disciplines helped you grow quickly as a young lawyer?

Speed, taking ownership, and a willingness to do whatever it takes. People say the reward for hard work is more work, but that is exactly the reward to be sought, because knowledge cannot be taken from you. I make myself available and take on as much work as possible, as early as possible. I also tackle the hardest task I can find, because figuring it out automatically makes other tasks easier. Knowledge compounds. The more you do, the more you are able to do, and the faster you are able to do them. For context, I worked on over 50 litigation matters and have now closed more than 40 deals (although I have worked on a significantly higher number as not all deals close, unfortunately).

From Babalakin & Co. to Greenberg Traurig; has the journey always been a smooth one? What were some of the uncertainties that you had to work through?

I would not say it was very smooth, particularly the process of getting a job in the US. However, when it comes to doing the job, my term would be "a welcome challenge." There were real challenges with the learning curve when I started afresh in Nigeria and again as an M&A lawyer in the US. Figuring things out excites me, so I was deliberate about learning each practice. It looks rosy from the outside, but behind it are thousands of hours, sleepless nights, and numerous sacrifices.

Looking back, was there a moment when a risk or unconventional decision significantly shaped your career path?

My life has been one of risks. I got my job at Babalakin & Co. by taking a risk, the details of which I will not share, and the same applies to Greenberg Traurig. Both firms had previously rejected me, and I took risks to get them back. I chose Stanford without funding over a program where I had funding. I changed my practice area from one I was already comfortable in. All of these decisions have been fundamental to who I am today.

Adetola **Onayemi**



Adetola Onayemi is a technology lawyer, entrepreneur, investor, and international trade policy expert whose work sits at the intersection of law, technology, finance, and digital trade. He is the Co-Founder and CEO of Norebase, a digital infrastructure company that enables businesses to establish, expand, and operate seamlessly across more than 60 jurisdictions worldwide, and the creator of AutoComply, an AI-powered regulatory compliance platform for highly regulated industries.

Beyond entrepreneurship, he has played a pivotal role in shaping Africa's digital trade ecosystem, serving as one of five technical experts who advised the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat on the development of the continent's Digital Trade Protocol. A First Class graduate of the University of Lagos and a Cambridge-trained lawyer, Adetola has held leadership roles across the Nigerian Presidency, the Nigerian Office for Trade Negotiations, Future Africa, and Circle LLP. His career is driven by a commitment to reducing barriers to cross-border commerce, advancing innovation-friendly policy, and building technology that expands economic opportunity across Africa and beyond.

After your call to the bar, you worked as an associate in a law firm, a visiting lecturer and a legal adviser at the OPCW. Were these roles you took up before you discovered your interest in international trade law and policy?

My interest preceded most of them. I went to Cambridge intending to become a commercial lawyer but treated the LLM as an exploration. I took courses in international environmental law, competition law, then wrote my thesis on trade law under Professor Henning Grosse Ruse-Khan on the US and Antigua and Barbuda gambling dispute and cross-agreement retaliation at the WTO. Trade law captivated me as international law with teeth, combining principle with a real dispute settlement system. By the time I joined the OPCW, working under Dr Femi Elias, that direction was already set.

How important are the first few years in shaping a lawyer's long-term journey?

They matter, but not in the way most people assume. Young lawyers over-optimise for getting it right and under-optimise for working on the most interesting problems available to them. I think working on the most interesting and significant problems in the world is a sure way to meet interesting people and come upon an impactful path. You will likely have a forty or fifty year career, and certainty today is a poor predictor of relevance later. I turned down top London law firm offers for the OPCW, which paid a fraction. The early years are for calculated risk, deep competence, and curiosity. Mistakes are data points. Motion gives clarity.

How did all your experience lead you to being a Partner in Circle LLP and the Chief Executive Officer of Norebase today?

The same thread runs through everything: working on the most consequential problem available to me. After helping negotiate parts of the AfCFTA, I grew restless. The passing of late Ambassador Chiedu Osakwe, who I had worked very closely with, sharpened that restlessness. Around the same time, Iyinoluwa Aboyeji and I co-founded Future Africa, and portfolio companies kept asking me to help them actually expand across the continent the AfCFTA had opened. Norebase was the answer to that friction. Circle LLP reflects the same instinct in legal practice.

If you could deliver another TEDx speech to a room filled with thousands of lawyers, what would you talk about?

> **"Young lawyers over-optimize for getting it right and under-optimize for working on the most interesting problems available to them."**

Compliance is the New Compute; Everyone is rightly excited about AI as a productivity unlock, but the bigger unlock for emerging markets is collapsing the cost of regulatory compliance. Regulation is a hidden tax on African business. Crash that cost, and you make the continent radically investable, which is the real engine of prosperity. My second theme would be the new world order: the post-war principles are being openly rewritten, and lawyers should help shape what replaces them rather than merely react.

What practical steps would you recommend young Nigerian lawyers take to enter international trade, policy, or multilateral negotiations?

Start with substance. The WTO, UNCTAD, and ITC publish excellent free materials. Work through them. Identify your entry point: law firm, government, industry body, trade-tech company, or multinational. Each requires different positioning. Then write. Publish your perspective, even imperfectly. Reputations compound on competence, not branding. Build horizontally with peers, not only vertically with mentors. Attend SIEL, ASIL, and AfCFTA convenings, and engage rather than spectate. The more rooms you enter, the faster the path reveals itself.

What does a truly meaningful and impactful legal career look like to you? And if you could redesign your career path, what will you do differently?

A meaningful legal career changes individual lives. A meaningful career to me is one that opens pathways for others, pushes against the conservatism legal training instils, and demonstrates that excellence and integrity coexist, which matters to me as a person of Christian faith. If I could redesign anything, I would have taken more risk in my early twenties. Life is more forgiving of risk taken young. Treat outcomes and failure as data points, and the asymmetry favours boldness.

Adokiye **Irisominabo**



Adokiye Irisominabo holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from Igbinedion University, Okada, Nigeria, and was called to the Bar in Nigeria in 2020.

He was first posted to OKOCHA & OKOCHA in August, 2019, as part of the Law Office Attachment/Externship segment of the Nigerian Law School training programme, and formally joined the Law Firm in March, 2024. He specializes in General Litigation, Corporate Law and Practice, and Maritime Law. In his spare time, he enjoys watching Motorsports, and listening to soul music.

What was your transition from law student to practising lawyer really like?

My first shocker during the transition period was that practice was sharply contrast to what was obtainable in school. As a law student, life was first about cramming Latin Maxims, then later about knowing substantive laws and legal theories. However, upon becoming a Lawyer, there was a mindset shift. The most knowledgeable doesn't always make the best lawyer. The best lawyers are those who have the dexterity of applying the knowledge of the law towards solving or preventing practical problems for their clients.

Can you share a career setback, disappointment or difficult season that significantly shaped the lawyer you eventually became?

My start up was rough. Upon my call to the Bar, I joined a Law Firm that paid a meagre wage. After a few months, meagre became nothing. For a lawyer barely one year old, that was enough to tick off an internal alarm to find an alternative trade to ply. Against all odds, I stuck with the Legal Profession, albeit with great economic discomfort, determined to learn the ropes by performing every task available within the Law Firm. As a result of my determination to learn, even in those difficult months of little to no wages, the foundation of my knowledge and experience in the practice of law was cemented.

What is one lesson about dealing with clients, colleagues or opposing counsel that you learnt through experience rather than formal training?

Nobody will teach you in Law School that your clients or a fellow lawyer on the other side can betray you. Always reduce all communication to clients and opposing counsel, to writing. Even if an arrangement is made or agreement is reached over the phone or in-person, send an email or text message to them afterwards, seeking their confirmation of the oral conversation.

What role have mentors, colleagues, friends or professional networks played in your development?

Nobody practises Law in isolation. I have a mentor who eventually became my Managing Solicitor. Even before I joined his Law Firm, he was a guiding light who helped me see and interpret my vision, as I navigated the unfamiliar terrain of legal practice. Even now, I still consult my mentor, seniors, my classmates and even my juniors on issues which I believe they have superior knowledge of. From time to time, these colleagues continually lend their shoulders for me to stand on.

> "...The legal profession thrives on social currency."

What professional mistake have you made that you would be most reluctant to repeat now?

I started working on a brief, without fully negotiating fees. I learnt a bitter lesson – settle fees first, and receive at least 50% thereof before you commence the execution of any brief.

How have your priorities as a lawyer changed from the early years of your career to where you are now?

I started practising law with the singular goal of becoming a Senior Advocate of Nigeria. As I began to grow in the profession, my priorities became to be a knowledgeable and reliable lawyer, who clients can rely on to deliver quality legal services; and to contribute my quota to the development of Law in and out of Nigeria. My priorities, therefore, shifted from chasing recognition to being valuable; and recognition always chases value.

Beyond technical legal knowledge, what personal qualities have been most important to your growth as a lawyer?

Social Skills. The legal profession thrives on social currency. You cannot build or contribute to a Legal Practice if you cannot attract briefs. As a Lawyer, besides your technical knowledge of the law, you need to connect to people on a social level to be able to build and grow your practice.

Aigboje **Aig-Imoukhuede, CFR**



Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede, CFR, is a leading African investor, banker and reformer shaping the continent's economic trajectory. He chairs Access Holdings Plc and Coronation Group, and co-founded the Tengen Family Office, which oversees a multibillion-dollar investment portfolio. Under his leadership, Access Bank evolved into one of Africa's largest banks with operations across Africa, Europe and Asia.

He also chairs EnterpriseNGR and has played pivotal roles in the financial markets as the President of the Nigerian Stock Exchange and the Chairman of the FMDQ Exchange, he chairs the King's Trust International Africa Advisory Board and the France-Nigeria Business Council.

A law graduate and Executive MBA holder from LSE, NYU Stern, and HEC Paris, he is a Fellow of Nigeria's banking and stockbroking professional institutes. His memoir, "Leaving the Tarmac – Buying A Bank In Africa", chronicles his transformative journey in African banking. Honoured with Nigeria's Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic (CFR) and multiple global awards.

> "Vision attracts capital, governance sustains it, and execution compounds it."

Immediately after you were called to the Nigerian Bar, what did your ideal career path look like?

During my law school year, a number of friends who had graduated with me had started Youth Corp in banks, particularly Merchant Banks. It was while I was in law school that I decided to commence a career in banking as corporate counsel.

Many young lawyers struggle with the fear of stepping away from traditional career paths. How did you navigate the uncertainty that accompanied your own unconventional career choices?

At our time, there was no such fear. A remarkable number of lawyers were also pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities as a side gig; perhaps it reflected the economic liberalism of the late 80s and early 90s that characterised Nigeria's economy.

You began your career in the legal department of a bank. What prompted your transition from legal practice into core banking?

I wrote about this in my book, "Leaving The Tarmac – Buying A Bank In Africa". I found more fulfilment participating in transaction origination and completion than in supporting the core banker with legal advice.

If you had the opportunity to begin your professional journey again, would you still choose to study law?

Yes, I would still study law, because it provides me with the core foundation of logical thinking,negotiation.

How have you maintained conviction and a sense of purpose during periods when progress seemed slow, or the results of your efforts were not immediately visible?

I read a lot, particularly economic history. There are too many precedents in the world that evidence the saying: Rome was not built in a day! So, I have learnt to be patient and to stay disciplined. However, with experience you learn to measure progress not by focusing only on major milestones, but on the daily and weekly activities that together lead to the major milestones. Those may be small, but they are certainly visible.

Looking back, is there a professional setback or disappointment that ultimately became a turning point in your development as a leader? What lessons did it teach you?

In my book, "Leaving the Tarmac", I wrote about not getting onto a scheduled flight despite getting to the airport on time and having my boarding pass, due to the corrupt and inefficient reality of the times. It taught me to always be better prepared and much tougher to survive the Nigerian political economy.

Visionary leaders often see possibilities long before others do. How easy or difficult has it been to persuade others to embrace your vision for institutional transformation and success?

It's difficult but necessary for any successful leader. Vision attracts capital, governance sustains it, and execution compounds it.

Alalafia **Qudus**



Mr Alalafia is a Litigation and an ADR Specialist with experience across civil and criminal litigation, arbitration, real estate and property law, election petitions, sports law, and corporate/commercial practice. He holds a Master of Laws (LL.M, Distinction) and sits as a Member of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (UK) and as an Associate, Chartered Tax Institute of the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria (CITN). He currently serves as a Partner at Chinedu G. Udora & Co., where he brings strategic insight, innovative leadership, and a commitment to excellence in advancing the firm's dispute resolution, corporate advisory, and client-focused legal services.

He has authored several publications featured by Lambert Academic Publishing, Germany, and Al-Hikmah University, Nigeria, and he frequently contributes expert legal commentary across national television and leading newspapers. In 2023, he was named among Nigeria's Top 100 Lawyers, ranking 41st on the Legal Eagle Initiative list, and received an Award of Excellence from the West African Law Students' Association (WALSA) for contributions to legal education and mentorship. Mr Alalafia also lectures Business Law at the Tax Academy, accredited by the Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria, in Abuja.

> **Trust is earned long before responsibility is given.**

You have built a career that combines litigation, arbitration and commercial regulatory insight. What shaped your decision to develop across these connected areas?

From the outset of my career, I never wanted to be confined to resolving disputes after they had arisen. Litigation gave me a deep appreciation of how legal conflicts develop and the consequences they have for individuals and businesses. That experience naturally led me to arbitration, where I saw the value of efficient, commercially sensible dispute resolution, and then to corporate and regulatory practice, where sound legal structuring can prevent many disputes altogether. My decision was therefore shaped by a desire to serve clients across the entire life cycle of a legal problem, from prevention and risk management to dispute resolution and enforcement.

How can young lawyers build substance before seeking recognition?

Visibility has become easier than ever, but substance still demands patience. I believe young lawyers should resist the temptation to pursue recognition before developing genuine competence. Invest time in mastering legal research, drafting, advocacy, negotiation and professional ethics. Read beyond compulsory materials, write consistently, embrace difficult assignments and welcome constructive criticism. Reputation built on publicity is often short-lived, but recognition founded on excellence, integrity and sustained value naturally commands respect and stands the test of time.

What should young lawyers learn beyond black-letter law if they want to become commercially useful to clients?

Clients rarely seek lawyers simply to know what the law says; they seek lawyers who understand what the law means for their business, investment or personal objectives. Beyond black-letter law, young lawyers should develop commercial awareness, financial literacy, negotiation, communication and emotional intelligence. They should learn how businesses operate, how industries are regulated and how clients make decisions. A commercially useful lawyer does not merely identify legal risks; he proposes practical, lawful and commercially viable solutions.

What would you say to a young lawyer who feels unseen despite working hard?

I would remind them that not every season of hard work is meant to be visible. Some of the most important growth in a legal career happens when no one is watching. Continue refining your skills, producing excellent work, and conducting yourself with integrity, even when recognition seems distant. Opportunities often come quietly to those who have consistently prepared for them. Let your focus be on becoming indispensable rather than becoming noticed; recognition usually follows sustained value.

As someone who grew within a law firm, how can young lawyers become trusted with important work before they have many years of experience?

Trust is earned long before responsibility is given. Early in my career, I learned that senior lawyers observe not only legal ability but also attitude, reliability and discretion. Young lawyers who consistently produce quality work, respect confidentiality, honour deadlines and demonstrate initiative soon become dependable members of the team. Experience certainly matters, but trust grows from character and consistency. When people know they can rely on you, meaningful responsibilities naturally begin to follow.

What do you know now about legal practice that you wish you understood earlier in your career?

I wish I had understood earlier that successful legal practice extends far beyond knowing the law. Technical competence is indispensable, but relationships, reputation, emotional intelligence and commercial awareness often determine long-term success. I also came to appreciate that every interaction with a client or colleague contributes to one's professional reputation. The law opens doors, but integrity, professionalism and the ability to create practical value are what keep those doors open throughout a career.

Babatunde **Ige**



Babatunde Ige is a Managing Associate in Olaniwun Ajayi LP'sdisputes resolution practice and has over 13 years of significant experience in handling complex commercial litigation and arbitration. He routinely provides strategic advice on, and represents a myriad of clients in, matters arising from contractual breaches, land disputes, corporate governance disputes, and debt recovery, among others. He also regularly interfaces with law enforcement agencies on behalf of clients.

You have spent over 13 years building a career in dispute resolution and arbitration. What drew you to dispute resolution?

What drew me to dispute resolution, particularly in comparison with transactional work, is the complexity and unpredictability of disputes. In transactional practice, there is often a defined commercial objective and a relatively structured process for achieving it. Dispute resolution, by contrast, requires you to navigate complex and sometimes unexpected scenarios, where the facts, the personalities, the commercial interests and the legal issues can all interact in different ways. I have always found that intellectually stimulating. No two disputes are exactly the same. Even where the legal issues appear similar, the factual matrix, the client's objectives, the conduct of the opposing party and the strategic considerations will invariably be different. That means you are constantly analysing new problems, thinking several steps ahead and developing solutions that are specific to the circumstances of the case.

What should young lawyers start doing today if they want to build the capacity to handle the kind of complex, high-value disputes that have defined your career?

First, master the fundamentals. There is no shortcut to becoming a good dispute resolution lawyer. Young lawyers should develop a strong understanding of procedure, evidence and substantive law, and should read judgments beyond the cases that are directly assigned to them. Complex disputes are often won or lost on seemingly simple points of law or procedure. Read beyond what you are asked to read. Ask why, understand the strategy behind the work, and learn from every matter. If you do this consistently, you will develop the judgment needed to handle complex disputes. Ultimately, good judgment is what distinguishes an experienced dispute resolution lawyer from someone who simply knows the law.

> "There is no shortcut to becoming a good dispute resolution lawyer."

What have you learnt about leadership from working with younger lawyers, and what do you wish more senior lawyers understood about developing the next generation?

Working with younger lawyers has taught me that one of the most effective ways to lead is by example. Young lawyers watch what you do as much as they listen to what you say. Your approach to clients, your work ethic, how you handle pressure, how you treat colleagues, and even how you respond when things go wrong all shape the lawyers working with you. I have therefore learnt that leadership is not simply about giving instructions or correcting mistakes. It is about demonstrating the standards you expect from others. If you expect young lawyers to be hardworking, thorough, respectful and committed to their work, you must first demonstrate those qualities yourself.

What is a piece of advice you received early in your career that has stayed with you, or what advice do you wish someone had given you sooner?

One piece of advice I wish I had received earlier is: do not stop at the obvious answer. In legal practice, particularly in dispute resolution, the first solution is not always the best solution. I have learnt to always ask: Is there another way of approaching this? What have we missed? What more can we do to achieve the client's objective? Sometimes the difference between an ordinary result and an exceptional one is the willingness to look beyond the obvious and go the extra mile. That mindset has stayed with me. Being a good lawyer is not only about knowing the law; it is about being resourceful, thinking creatively and taking ownership of the problem until you find the best possible solution.

Bako Gad **Nathan**



Bako Gad Nathan is a distinguished Nigerian lawyer, legal practitioner and public-sector professional whose career spans more than three decades across private legal practice, teaching, law enforcement, investigation and anti-corruption work. Called to the Nigerian Bar in 1995, he has built a unique legal career shaped by courtroom experience and over two decades of service with the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).

His work at the ICPC exposed him to complex investigations, forensic analysis, institutional reviews, criminal litigation and the intricacies of public-sector governance. He developed deep expertise in evidence, financial records, investigative techniques and the legal and procedural frameworks governing public institutions, while maintaining a strong commitment to due process and the protection of fundamental rights. Having returned to private practice after public service, Mr. Bako brings an unusually broad perspective to legal advocacy, combining courtroom knowledge with an insider's understanding of government processes. A passionate teacher and lifelong learner, he remains committed to continuous professional development.

What were some of the challenges encountered in your early years of practice and how did you navigate them?

My challenges in early years of practice stemmed from the diversity of my first two engagements. Thrown into court appearance immediately alone all the time, fear of spoiling my Principal's client's case, raced my anxiety into dangerous realms. I learnt quickly. At J.B. Daudu & Co., Abuja Office where, substantially alone in starting the office, client quest via distributing letters of introduction across the public and private sectors in the city of Abuja was very slow in producing results. My launching out into solo practice was equally hard.

What motivated your transition from private practice into public service?

My transition into public service was driven by several challenges. First was the drought of capable clients as the majority were either indigent or family, all hoping for pro-bono services, or ultimately ending up as pro-bono clients. Secondly, wages in law firm employment then hardly paid personal living expenses. Also, the public office that came had the attraction of being a law enforcement one, and therefore still legal practice in a way.

What was the biggest adjustment upon moving into public service?

The biggest adjustment in my transition between the legal practice and public service was disposing of my substantially pro-bono legal clients who kept coming to the ICPC as if it was my Law Firm. But work at ICPC in its establishment years was overwhelming, everyone overworked amidst a lot of training to undergo. While a lawyer in investigation, it helped that I was working with lawyers in the legal department on analysing and giving opinion on petitions, drawing up strategies for hundreds of cases and gathering admissible evidence in proof of cases.

You spent over two decades at the ICPC. Looking back, what was the attraction?

My attraction to anti-corruption work where I spent over two decades was from a mix of factors. First, my natural hatred for injustice and abuse of power which aligned with the anti-corruption mandate. Secondly, the prospect of staying within legal job description. Thirdly, the need for me to earn a better sustainable living income. A lot of other benefits did come, including a lot of training sessions in a wide scope of fields and travel across all states of the country and abroad. The experience is invaluable.

> **"...studying the current court procedure rules and practice directions, studying law reports, and attaching to and consulting with some of my friends and colleagues who have been in practice for longer and for help and guidance."**

How has starting a new chapter after retirement felt like?

Starting a new chapter after retirement has been a mixed-bag of excitement and surprises, challenges and frustration. Excitement for coming home to the profession to roost and for the freedom to take up the responsibility to make and bear liability for all my decisions. I was surprised to find that the knowledge and skills for the practice of law has not left me. Challenge - the many reforms that have happened in the rules of practice and regulations. Frustration at the cost of things necessary for re-establishing a practice.

How have you adapted to the changes in legal practice since you left?

Adapting to the changes in realities of legal practice after so many years away has been quite a challenge. But being a workaholic, I employed several strategies to overcome them: attending court to listen to cases; obtaining records of proceedings of different cases; studying the current court procedure rules and practice directions, studying law reports, and attaching to and consulting with some of my friends and colleagues who have been in practice for longer, and for help and guidance.

Looking back now, would you do anything differently?

Looking back, there are many things I would have done differently in my career: I should have left service earlier to establish practice at a younger age with enough energy to pursue the rigours of a new practice; I should have invested more seriously on the facilities and infrastructure for establishing a law firm while in service; I should have completed my LL.M. course abandoned due to overworking during service, etc. Despite all of these and ultimately, I appreciate God for every experience in life which has prepared me for what happens next.

Benjamin **Oyewale**



Benjamin Oyewale graduated with a First Class from the Nigerian Law School and holds an LL.B from Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti. He is a lawyer and Governance, Risk, and Compliance professional at KPMG Nigeria, where he advises on governance, regulatory compliance, and risk management across multiple jurisdictions. Benjamin is an Associate Member of the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators (Nigeria) and a Chartered Secretary and Administrator. Passionate about leadership, mentorship, and education, he also serves as the Director of Shalom Royal Schools, where he is committed to nurturing excellence and developing future leaders.

Law firms and professional services firms like KPMG offer different kinds of legal careers — what made you transition from the law firm where you worked earlier?

My decision to leave law practice was not because I had grown tired of the law. I worked in a corporate and commercial law firm and genuinely appreciated the exposure it gave me. When the opportunity to join KPMG's Governance, Risk and Compliance practice came, I saw it as a chance to apply my legal training in a broader business environment. I have always believed that a law degree should not limit your career options but equip you to excel in diverse spaces. KPMG offered exactly that opportunity, and it has broadened my perspective on legal practice and the many ways lawyers can create value.

How has working in a multidisciplinary professional services firm shaped your understanding of legal practice?

Working in a multidisciplinary professional services firm has completely broadened my understanding of what it means to be a lawyer. Growing up, I thought legal practice was largely about appearing in court or working in a traditional law firm. My experience at KPMG has shown me that legal thinking extends far beyond litigation. Every organisation faces legal, regulatory, governance, and commercial issues, and lawyers bring a unique perspective to solving them. Today, I no longer see law as something that only happens in a courtroom. I see it as a way of thinking that helps organisations make better decisions, manage risk, and solve problems.

What professional skills have you had to develop that were not emphasised during your legal education?

Quite a lot, actually. Legal education gave me a strong technical foundation, but the workplace demanded much more. I have had to develop stronger communication skills, particularly in presenting ideas clearly to different audiences. Emotional intelligence has also been invaluable, learning to work with different personalities, manage difficult conversations, and remain professional under pressure. Patience, leadership, teamwork, and adaptability have become just as important as legal knowledge. I have come to realise that success in practice is not determined by what you know alone, but by how effectively you work with people and respond to new challenges.

> **“Excelling academically does not automatically make you feel prepared for every challenge in the workplace.”**

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome despite your achievements? If so, how did you deal with it?

Yes, I have, and occasionally I still do. I think it is a normal experience for many young professionals transitioning from school into practice. Excelling academically does not automatically make you feel prepared for every challenge in the workplace. There were moments when I questioned whether I was good enough, especially when faced with unfamiliar tasks. What has helped me is remembering that everyone I look up to was once new too. I ask questions, seek guidance from more experienced colleagues, and give myself permission to learn. Rather than trying to know everything immediately, I focus on becoming better each day.

If you were advising a law student who wants to work in a global professional services firm like KPMG, what would you recommend they begin doing now?

First, take your academics seriously because strong academic performance often opens the door to opportunities with leading professional services firms. Beyond grades, start preparing early for aptitude tests and assessment processes instead of waiting until recruitment begins. Seek internship opportunities to gain practical exposure and understand how organisations operate. I would also encourage students to take on leadership roles, whether in school, student associations, or volunteer organisations, because those experiences build confidence, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Most importantly, stay curious, remain teachable, and never stop learning. The legal profession rewards people who are willing to keep growing.

What has been your most memorable professional assignment so far, and what did it teach you?

One of my most memorable professional assignments was being seconded to support the regulatory compliance work of the Mastercard Foundation, a global organisation operating across several jurisdictions. The engagement exposed me to regulatory frameworks in different countries and showed me how the same legal issue can be treated differently depending on the jurisdiction. It reinforced that every organisation, regardless of its mission, must operate within a legal and regulatory framework. Beyond deepening my knowledge of regulatory compliance, the experience taught me to think beyond one jurisdiction, appreciate different legal systems, and tailor legal solutions to the context in which an organisation operates.

Bernice **Asein**



Bernice Asein is a fashion lawyer and the Founder and Executive Director of the Fashion Law Institute Africa, the first institution on the continent dedicated to the intersection of fashion, law, and policy. Through the Institute, she works on strengthening legal infrastructure for Africa's fashion and creative industries, with a focus on legal education, regulatory awareness, and industry development.

She is the Founder and Lead Counsel at Cardinal Counsel, a fashion law advisory practice supporting stakeholders across the fashion value chain, including designers, manufacturers, retailers, and creative enterprises. She also serves as Legal Counsel and a pioneer board member of the Nigerian Fashion Council. Bernice is an adjunct lecturer at the Yaba College of Technology, where she teaches fashion law to students in the Fashion and Design Department. She is the author of Fashion Law in Africa, the first comprehensive text on the subject on the continent. She has received several trainings including from the Milano Fashion Institute.

> "I often say I didn't break into my niche, I built it. That requires you to appreciate the tremendous amount of work that entails."

When you were called to the Bar, what did you think success in the legal profession looked like?

I'll be candid: I didn't really get the rave about working at a top-tier firm. I didn't even know it was the thing to want, and by the time I understood that it was, I still didn't feel the pull of it. What I did feel quietly, stubbornly, was a desire to be genuinely good at whatever I was doing. Not impressive. Good. There's a difference.

Was there a point when you realised that the career path you were building would look very different from the traditional legal trajectory?

It was cumulative, not a single moment. The clearest signal came when I started Cardinal Counsel straight out of NYSC, a major leap of faith, the very definition of just going. That same year I began FLI Africa, which took two years, eight months, five days, three rejections, three appeals, and two name changes to achieve official approval. I realised I wasn't just practising law. I was building an infrastructure that didn't exist. Five years on, I'm still running both. Unconventional, not by accident, but by design.

Were there moments when people questioned your choice of niche or suggested that you pursue a more conventional path?

My father was still referring me for job interviews after I opened the law firm — but he's now my biggest believer because he sees what we've built, and that tells you everything. When you tell people you do fashion law, they don't take you seriously. Many believe it barely exists. It isn't seen as sharp or serious the way energy, tech, or startup law is. And then there's the endless debate about whether lawyers should specialise early. The generalists always win that argument online. But then there's us, quietly changing the status quo.

What practical steps did you take to become recognised as a leader in your field?

I often say I didn't break into my niche, I built it. That requires you to appreciate the tremendous amount of work that entails. I volunteered. I invested in visibility. I focused my time on the fashion industry, not on impressing fellow lawyers. Lawyers often compete with each other, trying to prove they are the best in the room but what actually matters is who has the clients and who the industry knows. So I focused on the African fashion industry, understood what it needed, and capitalised on that. Specialisation in law is like choosing a life partner: whatever you choose, you have to be committed to making it work and being the best at it.

How important were writing, speaking engagements, research, and thought leadership in building your professional reputation?

They were everything. In a field you are essentially creating, thought leadership is not supplementary to practice, it is how the practice gets legitimised. I wrote the book. I launched the journal. I convened the summit. When nobody is writing about fashion law in Africa and you write the definitive text, you become the reference point. Recognition follows contribution, never the other way around. If you are building in a new space, your ideas must arrive before your reputation can.

How can young lawyers develop an entrepreneurial mindset while still focusing on excellence in legal practice?

Law is a business, and the sooner you internalise that, the better. Know your lifestyle costs, price your services accordingly, and stop being cheap with your own value. Focus on client experience, not just legal skill because clients are not coming for legal advice alone. When you own a niche, you build expertise, community, and industry contacts that make you indispensable. The average businessperson understands the truth of compounding value. Stop romanticising the idea of the one client or brief that will change your life. Bill well, invest in visibility, save, and build retained earnings in your practice.

If a young lawyer feels that they do not fit neatly into the traditional mould of legal practice, what advice would you give them?

Start with passion or start with discipline but understand that you will need both. Passion without discipline will not sustain you, and discipline without passion will not fulfil you. Whichever way you enter, the core principles of excellence, commitment, and service are non-negotiable regardless of the path you choose. Start early. There is no time to wait. In the age of AI, you need to move with the speed of light. Use every tool available like visibility, social media, digital presence, to build your place in the profession before the profession decides where to put you.

Beverley Agbakoba-Onyejianya



Beverley Agbakoba-Onyejianya is a Partner and Head of the Sports, Entertainment and Technology (SET) Practice in Olisa Agbakogba Legal. She is a highly accomplished legal, regulatory, and compliance professional with over two decades of experience across Nigeria and the United Kingdom. She began her career in financial services regulation and compliance in the UK and has since built a distinguished practice spanning corporate and commercial law, governance, and policy advisory.

Her expertise cuts across Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), Entertainment Law, Employment Law, International Trade Law, Intellectual Property, and Start-Up and Technology law. She is also a Notary Public of Nigeria and a world-wide recognised leader at the intersection of law, business strategy, sports, and the creative industries. She has led and contributed to high-level national and sectoral policy initiatives, including sports, creative economy, and intellectual property regulation.

> **"Tech is obviously where the world is going, and sport, entertainment and tech have all grown extraordinarily fast here in the last five years — faster than most people realise."**

Having studied and worked in the United Kingdom, did you ever seriously consider building your life and career there permanently?

I always knew I was coming back. The plan was to spend the first few years getting my foundation right in compliance, then come home. Meeting my husband accelerated it and we had each other to push each other because he wanted to come back too. So we worked towards it together. When I moved back I joined PwC again, this time in Lagos, then worked in Chapel Hill Denham where I set up the compliance department , then Renaissance Capital.

What prompted you to finally go to Law School after almost a decade of working?

My father, mostly. He said I ought to think about qualifying in Nigeria. He kept saying there was so much more opportunity in Nigeria. Eventually I quit Renaissance Capital and went to law school. That was daunting as I had been working for close to a decade. I thought to myself No salary, I will be starting again. It's turned out to be one of the best decisions I've made and I don't regret it at all. It gave me a far broader platform. And the irony of it is that I've ended up in dispute resolution anyway; at least on the arbitration side... the very thing I spent my early career running away from.

Sports law is now a recognised field, but that was not always the case. What initially drew you to the sector, and what opportunities did you see that others might have overlooked?

Honestly it was a risk at the time. There was a largely unstructured sports sector and to some extent it still is. Similarly, when I returned there was no established compliance industry in Nigeria either. I worried whether I would be able to find a job nonetheless, I brought the experience from England, built from the ground up, and then put in the effort and work over the years. Nigeria is far more progressive than it gets credit for. We look for better ways of doing things, and the private sector here is one of the most dynamic in Africa.

How can young lawyers position themselves to identify and prepare for emerging opportunities before they become obvious?

Go where the world is going. Tech is obviously where the world is going, and sport, entertainment and tech have all grown extraordinarily fast here in the last five years — faster than most people realise. So look for the niche areas, not the crowded ones. Then make yourself genuinely useful in them: learn the sector properly, write about it, and get involved early while it's still forming. That's really the same instinct as compliance was for me twenty years ago.

What role has mentorship played in your journey, both as someone who has received guidance and as someone who now mentors younger professionals?

Mentorship is underrated. Mentorship is not just something you do, it's an experience. I want to believe that I enjoy the full 360 degrees benefits of mentoring. I mentor vertically that could be up or down but also horizontally. You never know where your next help is coming from, or who is watching you. Underneath it is just being genuinely interested in people and their development, in learning from them and swapping what you know. I can't recommend it enough. It leaves you fulfilled and enriched.

How important has relationship-building been to your professional growth, and how can young lawyers cultivate meaningful international connections?

It is true that nobody makes it alone. You need people on the journey with you for support for encouragement through thick and thin. How can you meet people? Join professional bodies. Serve on boards and committees. Become a thought leader. Ask yourself what you can do to make your industry better, your office better, because people of value are drawn to other people of value, and that's really all a network is. The rest is not being transactional. The person in a junior role today is senior in ten years. Do not be over transactional, invest in relationships too.

Blessing **Kolajo**



Blessing is a distinguished Nigerian lawyer and one of Africa's most promising voices in tax law. Widely known by her professional moniker, "NaijaTaxLawyer," she currently serves in the Litigation Department of the Nigeria Revenue Service (NRS) Headquarters, Abuja. She also serves on the Technical and Legal Compliance Sub-Committee for the Implementation of Nigeria's New Tax Laws, contributing her expertise to the nation's evolving tax reform framework.

Beyond her legal accomplishments, Blessing is an award-nominated author and poet whose creative works have made significant literary impact. Her debut poetry collection, Raindrops, sold over 20,000 copies and was listed on the Oyo State accredited booklist (2020–2023). Her second collection, Loud Whispers, published by Kakaaki Publishers was also listed in 2024 and adopted as a Junior WAEC text.

> **"Young lawyers should not neglect visibility, because it is not enough to be capable...we must be heard and seen and the cheapest way right now is building digital visibility."**

How did your interest in tax law first develop, and what drew you to build a career in that area?

I had no particular interest in taxation or tax law before 2024, shortly after my youth service while I was still working in a core litigation firm. The opportunity to explore taxation presented itself at that time, and I decided to give it a try. What started as simply exploring a new path eventually grew into a field I now actively pursue.

You have built a recognizable identity around tax. Do you ever worry that building a strong niche brand could limit your ability to pivot to other areas of law if your interests evolve?

I don't see building a niche in tax as limiting, if anything, it's been a gateway. It has opened doors and given me opportunities I might not have had otherwise, while still leaving room for curiosity. I'm constantly evolving, I like to say I'll keep evolving till I die. If energy law sparks my interest tomorrow, I'll explore it fully and even blend it with taxation. I give my all to whatever I do, and my audience grows with me. For me, there's no limitation, just expansion.

What prompted your transition from private practice to working within a government institution?

At first, it was simply an opportunity I wanted to explore. What kept me there, however, is that Nigeria Revenue Service is the highest revenue authority in the country. There is no better place in the country for anyone pursuing a career in tax policy and litigation to learn deeply and build their brand.

How would you compare the opportunities for impact and growth in private practice versus public sector legal work?

The career progression is different. In public practice, I feel like I'm actively building a career through promotions, opportunities to work on national projects, incentives, and structured growth. Many private practices are largely one-man businesses with little consideration for long-term professional development. For someone like me who is career-driven and constantly seeking growth, public practice has been a good call.

You have a strong digital presence. How important do you think personal branding and digital visibility are for lawyers today?

I mentioned earlier that I will evolve till I die. I can say that confidently because I've mastered the art of personal branding and rebranding. Personal branding helps you control the narrative around how people perceive you. If you can shape perception, you can define your identity professionally. Young lawyers should not neglect visibility, because it is not enough to be capable, to reap the reward of capacity, we must be heard and seen and the cheapest way right now is building digital visibility.

For lawyers trying to choose a speciality, what signs should they look for to know they have found an area worth committing to?

Ask yourself: can you work on this for years without losing interest? For me, taxation works because it constantly presents new problems to solve. Just when I think I've grasped something, another layer emerges and keeps me learning. It's also a space many avoid, which means there are still countless unresolved issues. That's key. Focus on identifying a legal problem that genuinely intrigues you. The field that problem belongs to might naturally become your niche.

How much did financial considerations influence your career choices?

At every point in my life, I've always done the things that genuinely interest me. I believe that if I become very good at something, I will eventually monetize it well. Financial considerations have never been the deciding factor in any of my career choices.

Caleb **Oboagwina**



Caleb Oboagwina, Esq., is a distinguished legal practitioner, author, and thought leader in legal education and professional development. He possesses a wealth of experience that bridges legal scholarship, publishing, and strategic advisory for individuals and corporate clients.

With over a decade of active contribution to the Nigerian legal industry, Dr. Caleb has built a strong reputation for simplifying complex legal principles and promoting access to legal knowledge through EasyRead Legal, and its publishing arm, EasyRead Series. His work has empowered thousands of lawyers and law students across Nigeria and beyond, fostering a deeper understanding of both substantive and procedural law.

A recipient of the Prof. Agaba Award in Legal Writing (2023), Caleb has authored and edited numerous legal texts and publications recognized for their clarity and impact. He is also a public commentator on ethics, consumer protection, and governance, often engaging media and regulatory bodies on key issues shaping the Nigerian legal and business landscape.

> **Today, I think more about success through the lens of impact and systems change. It's about building platforms and creating structures that empowers others.**

Immediately after you were called to the Nigerian Bar, what did your ideal legal career look like?

When I was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2014, my vision extended beyond appearing in court. I wanted to become a lawyer who simplified the law, inspired future practitioners, and contributed meaningfully to legal education. I believed the legal profession should be more accessible and practical. That conviction eventually led to the EasyRead Series, EasyRead School, and other educational initiatives designed to bridge the gap between legal theory, professional practice, and effective learning for aspiring lawyers.

You have spoken openly about the criticism and resistance you encountered in the early years. What kept you going during those moments when it would have been easier to abandon the vision?

Every worthwhile idea attracts scepticism, especially when it challenges long-standing traditions. In the early years of the EasyRead Series, I faced intense resistance. Some lecturers openly tore my books before students, while copies were even burnt on certain campuses to discourage their use. Ironically, some students asked if I had offended their lecturers personally. I always replied, What kept me going was watching students succeed. Their improved confidence, academic performance, and professional growth became the strongest response to every criticism and reinforced my belief that genuine service, consistency, and excellence would ultimately prevail.

Looking back, how did those early setbacks shape your leadership style and strengthen your sense of purpose?

Those challenges taught me resilience, patience, and the importance of listening. I learned that leadership is not about proving critics wrong but about remaining committed to a worthwhile mission despite opposition. Every setback refined my vision, improved my work, and strengthened my resolve to focus on impact rather than approval. Today, I lead with greater empathy, encourage innovation within my team, and view challenges as opportunities to improve rather than reasons to quit.

Many brilliant ideas never move beyond the idea stage. What lessons have you learned about execution, consistency, and building sustainable ventures?

Ideas create possibilities, but execution creates results. I have learned that consistency is often more valuable than brilliance. Sustainable ventures are built through discipline, continuous improvement, teamwork, and an unwavering focus on solving genuine problems. The EasyRead journey taught me to start before everything feels perfect, remain committed during difficult periods, and constantly improve through feedback.

Success is rarely the product of one breakthrough but of many disciplined, consistent actions over time.

What personal values have guided your decisions and sustained your motivation throughout your journey?

Purpose, integrity, excellence, service, and continuous learning have remained the foundation of my decisions. I believe success should create opportunities for others, not merely personal recognition. Every project I undertake is driven by a desire to simplify legal knowledge, empower young lawyers, and contribute meaningfully to the profession. These values have sustained me through criticism, uncertainty, and growth because they remind me that lasting influence is built on consistent service and genuine impact.

If you could redesign one aspect of legal education in Nigeria, what would you change and why?

I would make legal education more practical, technology-driven, and student-centred. Students should learn not only legal principles but also legal drafting, advocacy, legal technology, artificial intelligence, entrepreneurship, and problem-solving from the earliest stages of their education. The profession is evolving rapidly, and legal training must evolve accordingly. Producing competent lawyers requires integrating practical experience with academic excellence, so graduates are prepared for both traditional practice and emerging opportunities.

What advice would you give to young lawyers who feel called to solve problems within the profession but fear criticism or rejection?

Criticism is often the price of innovation, so do not allow it to silence your vision. I remember sharing my dream for EasyRead with a very senior lawyer, a former Chairman of the Body of Benchers, during its early years. Drawing from his wealth of experience, he advised that such a vision could only be realised after about fifteen years, when I had become more established. I respected his perspective, but I believed growth also comes from learning on the job. That conviction gave me the courage to start early, improve continuously, and let results speak louder than opinions. My advice is simple: pursue value, not recognition. Build competence, remain ethical, stay consistent, and trust that genuine impact will eventually win even the sceptics over.

Prof Cheluchi **Onyemelukwe**



Prof Cheluchi Onyemelukwe is Managing Partner at Health Ethics and Law Consulting, a law firm which advises in the health and social sectors. She has advised governments, regulators, and private businesses on medico-legal and health law concerns. She regularly consults for the WHO, the World Bank, ECOWAS, the Commonwealth Foundation and other development entities. She is a full professor of Law at Babcock University.

She is the Founder of CHELD which does extensive work on disability and, alongside Nigeria's Ministry of Health, is the only other Nigerian member of the WHO Disability Health Equity Network, a global network on disability and health. She has supported organisations like IOM, UNFPA, UNODC, amongst others on disability inclusion, in the areas of criminal justice, gender, migration, health amongst others. Prof Cheluchi is the recipient of several awards including, most recently, the Powerof100 Africa awards recognising her leadership and impact in health and the law in Africa. She won the NLNG Nigeria Prize for Literature in 2021, and is the recipient of several other literary awards.

What first drew you to Health law?

When I first became interested in health law, it was not a recognised career path in Nigeria. I started out with a curiosity about the intersections of law and HIV, which had emerged as a huge public health concern as I graduated university with my law degree. But I became further drawn in by the significant gaps in legal protections against discrimination on the basis of health status, patient rights more broadly, medical negligence and research ethics, some of which I explored in my postgraduate studies at Dalhousie University in Canada.

How have your different roles enriched one another?

Academic scholarship sharpens my thinking, teaching challenges me and allows me opportunities for mentoring. Legal practice keeps me grounded in real-world challenges and informs my engagement even with my students. Policy advisory work allows me to translate ideas into practical reforms encapsulated in legislation and other policy instruments which filter into culture. And institution-building continually reminds me of the need for supportive frameworks for the reforms and the human realities behind the policies we develop. Each role has strengthened the others and reinforced my belief that meaningful change requires more than good ideas.

What lessons have you learned about creating opportunities in emerging sectors?

One of the most important lessons I have learned is following one's heart, which in my case meant committing to a field before it became sought after. If you recognise an unmet need and believe your skills can make a difference, that is often where the greatest opportunities lie. Emerging sectors reward passion, curiosity, perseverance and a willingness to keep learning.

> **"The biggest hurdle was convincing people that health law was a specialised field that needed its own dedicated practice..."**

What were the biggest challenges in establishing credibility in Health Law?

The biggest hurdle was convincing people that health law was a specialised field that needed its own dedicated practice, rather than just an academic interest. When I founded Health Ethics and Law Consulting (HELC), virtually no other firms offered integrated legal, regulatory, and policy advice tailored specifically to the health sector. We proved our value by showing clients how proper legal structures prevent crises, manage real-world risks, and make high-level policies work on the ground. Delivering practical, evidence-based solutions to complex health law issues earned us trust and credibility. Today, we serve governments, development partners, civil society, and healthcare providers.

What professional decision had the greatest impact on your trajectory?

The decision that shaped my career most was choosing to pursue health law as a long-term calling rather than following a conventional legal path. At a time when the field was still emerging, I committed to building expertise and creating institutions that could bridge law, policy, and practice. This choice led to the establishment of Health Ethics and Law Consulting, creating platforms to influence legislation, strengthen health systems, and improve public health outcomes.

What is one fun fact about you that would surprise people who know you only through your professional accomplishments?

Many people know me as a health lawyer and academic, but fewer realise that I am also a novelist. Writing fiction has given me a different way of exploring justice, humanity, and the complexities of people's lives. Winning the Nigeria Prize for Literature and being shortlisted for the Scotiabank Giller Prize for my debut novel, The Son of the House, usually catches my colleagues off guard. They often find it hard to reconcile a rigorous, analytical health lawyer with a creative storyteller.

Chijioke **Ukomadu**



Chijioke Ukomadu is a commercial dispute lawyer and policy researcher with experience representing institutions, corporations, and individuals in complex, high-stakes commercial disputes.He graduated with a First-Class degree in Law, ranking among the top students nationally, and earned over twenty academic awards and distinctions across core commercial and public law subjects. His academic work is reinforced by peer-reviewed publications and policy research published in academic journals and leading international think tanks.

Beyond legal practice, Chijioke is deeply committed to global policy and civic leadership. He serves as Vice-Curator of the World Economic Forum's Global Shapers Community, Lagos Hub, where he leads structured initiatives on youth policy, governance, and civic engagement. His contributions to law and public service have been recognized through several competitive international fellowships and awards, including the Walter Carrington Youth Fellowship from the U.S. Government, the Emerging Star in International Law Award from the International Law Association – Nigerian Branch, and the Lawverse Rising Star in Dispute Resolution in Africa.

> **"Equally important are soft skills such as time management, adaptability, and emotional intelligence."**

Looking back to your time as a law student, what kind of legal career did you envision for yourself?

As a law student, I initially did not have a fixed interest in litigation and dispute resolution. My early inclination was more broadly toward commercial and advisory work, particularly within corporate and institutional environments. I was interested in how legal frameworks support business and financial systems. However, as I progressed through internships and early exposure to practice, I developed a growing appreciation for dispute resolution and advocacy. This led me to a career in commercial litigation and dispute resolution, where both analytical rigour and persuasive reasoning intersect.

Did you struggle with imposter syndrome in your early years of practice?

Yes, I experienced imposter syndrome in the early years of my practice. Despite strong academic performance and prior exposure through internships, transitioning into real practice revealed a steep learning curve. There were moments of self-doubt, particularly when faced with complex matters and high expectations. Over time, I learned that confidence in legal practice is built gradually through preparation, repetition, and feedback. Working with experienced seniors helped reframe uncertainty into structured learning and professional growth.

What deliberate steps did you take to prepare for a career at one of Nigeria's leading law firms?

My preparation was intentional and consistent. I prioritised academic excellence while actively seeking internships in reputable law firms to gain early exposure to practice. I also invested in legal writing, research, and participation in academic and advocacy competitions to refine my analytical skills. My advice to young lawyers is to focus on building strong fundamentals, seek practical exposure early, and remain disciplined. Top firms value reliability, intellectual curiosity, and consistency just as much as technical ability.

Are there any skills you acquired outside the classroom that have been particularly important to your success?

Yes, several key skills developed outside the classroom have been critical to my success. These include legal drafting, commercial awareness, and effective communication, largely shaped through internships and practical exposure. Equally important are soft skills such as time management, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. Working in firm environments taught me how to handle pressure, respond to feedback constructively, and maintain precision under tight deadlines.

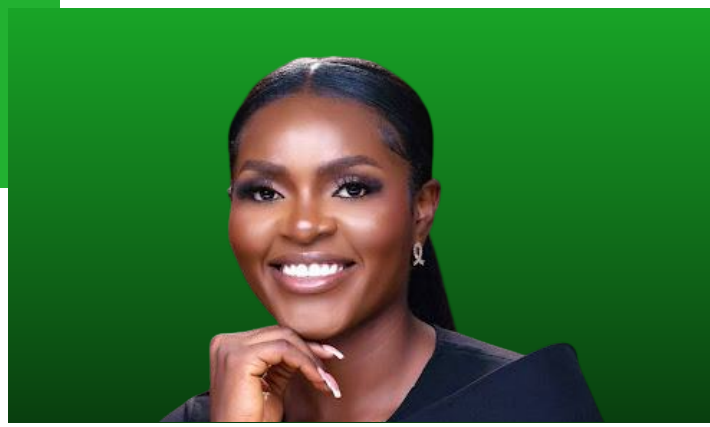
Your career reflects a strong commitment to both legal practice and community development. How have you managed to balance these responsibilities?

Balancing legal practice with community engagement requires intentional prioritisation and discipline. I approach both as complementary rather than competing responsibilities. Legal practice provides the professional platform and technical discipline, while community involvement ensures a broader perspective and grounding. My motivation stems from a belief that professional success should extend beyond individual achievement. Even within demanding schedules, I remain committed to contributing to initiatives that support legal education and youth development where possible.

When your career is viewed in retrospect, what impact or legacy would you like your work to have on colleagues, the legal profession and the wider society?

When I reflect on my career in retrospect, I would like my impact to be defined by three core values: excellence, integrity, and mentorship. To my colleagues, I hope to have contributed to a culture of professionalism where collaboration, discipline, and high standards are consistently upheld. Within the legal profession, I aspire to have played a role in strengthening the quality and clarity of commercial dispute resolution practice. For society, I would want my work to reflect a commitment to fairness, access to justice, and the responsible use of legal expertise to support institutional and economic development.

Chinasa **Akachukwu**



Chinasa Akachukwu is a lawyer, entrepreneur, public speaker, media personality and the Founder of Life After Law School Initiative (LALSI), a platform focused on preparing, mentoring and empowering young lawyers and Bar aspirants for professional life.

Chinasa is passionate about youth and young lawyers' development, speaking, teaching, and personal branding. She uses her platforms, LALSI, and social media to share insights on law, career development and intentional professional growth.

What were some of the most difficult challenges you encountered during your first three years of legal practice, and how did you navigate them?

The first challenge was working endlessly because we were all concerned about being retained, sometimes without knowing whether I was doing things right. Also, the seniors sometimes handed me transactions I knew very little about. You could be called upon to work on a transaction without having been privy to the client's meeting, with only a very brief explanation, while being expected to know what to do next. I found it difficult to keep going back with questions because I worried that it would make me appear as though I did not understand things quickly. Eventually, I started going to colleagues who were not partners or very senior, asking questions and learning from them. I also struggled with choosing an area of practice. Clients always ask about your area of specialisation, and saying, "I do everything," makes one sound unserious. Yet, three years ago, I genuinely wasn't sure whether I wanted to be a litigator or a corporate/commercial lawyer. With time, I realised that I didn't have to choose. I could be both, and being exposed to both sides has made me a more grounded lawyer.

Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome or moments of self-doubt, and if so, how have you learned to manage them?

Yes, I have experienced imposter syndrome, particularly when I first started hosting events. On one occasion, while I was on stage, I felt that I could have done much better, especially compared with other professionals I had seen on stage. I couldn't wait for the event to end. But when I came off stage, senior members of the Bar and other respected professionals commended me for my confidence and delivery. That experience taught me that feeling nervous does not mean that you are performing badly. I still practise before every event and sometimes have a trusted colleague listen to me. I have learned to keep speaking, smile and not let the fear show, no matter how I feel inside. I just have to keep going.

What has kept you motivated through periods of uncertainty, difficulty or disappointment in your career?

Mentors and past achievements. There have been periods when I would look at everything I could be working on and the goals that I had set for myself and feel that I wasn't doing enough. During those moments, my mentors helped me put things into perspective. At certain points, their belief in me has been stronger than my own, and I have had to learn to believe in myself too. Other times, I go over my past achievements and remind myself, "I did this; I can do it again." Then, if it is about an omission, I remind myself that whatever I didn't do well yesterday, I can start again today and do better.

> **"One professional habit I developed early in my career is reading at least one complete judgment every day."**

What is one professional habit or discipline you developed early in your career that has continued to yield significant benefits?

One professional habit I developed early in my career is reading at least one complete judgment every day. I learnt this from Mr Folabi Kuti, SAN. I usually start reading on my way to work and continue on my way home. I focus particularly on the issues, ratio decidendi, authorities and dissenting opinions. If I cannot finish a judgment that day, I continue the next day. This habit has helped me converse confidently with clients about areas of law in which I may not have practised directly.

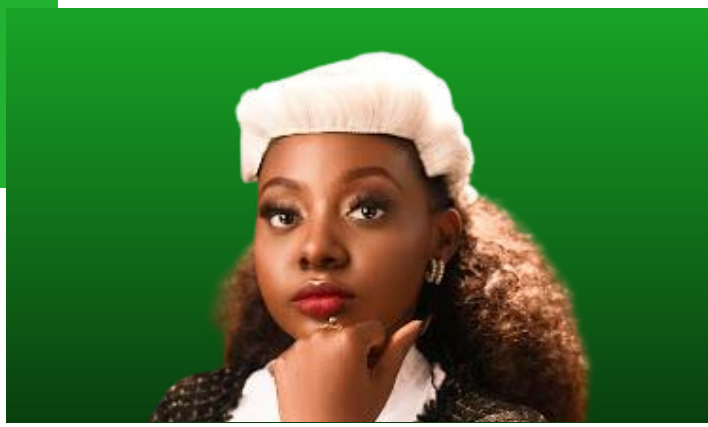
You founded the Life After Law School Initiative (LALSI) few years ago, what impact do you hope to achieve through it?

I want Life After Law School Initiative (LALSI) to become a platform that helps young lawyers make better career decisions earlier. I want participants to understand what to expect in practice, know that there are multiple pathways within and beyond traditional legal practice, and learn how to position themselves intentionally for opportunities. Beyond information and mentorship, I intend for LALSI to create access to opportunities—whether through employment, internships, sponsorships, scholarships or meaningful professional connections.

How can young lawyers become more intentional about building professional visibility?

Young lawyers need to first define what visibility means to them (is it likes or connections with potential clients?) and, more importantly, what they want to be known for. Then they can intentionally build around the answers they come up with. You can go viral in a minute by doing certain things, but is that what you want your name associated with? Professional visibility involves intentional positioning and consistently putting yourself in front of the people you want to reach for opportunities, collaborations, business or patronage. Once you know what you want your name to represent, build around it. Define your brand, evolve when necessary, but don't sacrifice your professional identity for any trend.

Chioma **Alumonah**



Chioma Alumonah is a lawyer bridging Africa's talent-to-opportunity gap. She is the founder of Students & Bosses, a career and talent platform helping students, graduates and professionals navigate the journey from potential to opportunity. Her work spans employability, job search support, talent matching and career development, with experience helping candidates pursue jobs, internships, scholarships, fellowships and postgraduate opportunities.

Chioma began building Students Bosses as a 300-level law student, and her journey reflects a growing career beyond conventional legal practice. She is also passionate about education and education law, particularly expanding access to quality education and decent work opportunities, in alignment with SDGs 4 and 8.

What made you comfortable stepping off the conventional track for lawyers into something more entrepreneurial?

I never really saw it as stepping off the conventional track. I simply kept following work I found meaningful. What began as helping classmates with CVs grew through referrals, and the fulfilment I got from helping people secure opportunities kept me going. By the time I graduated, I decided to take a bet on myself and focus on Students & Bosses. I have always believed there is gold in what I am building, and that I will only strike it by continuing to pursue it. More importantly, it has given me the freedom to explore other passions alongside law. Today, I can build careers, work in education and technology, while remaining connected to my legal aspirations.

When you started studying law, what did you imagine your career would look like, and how different is that from the path you have taken today?

When I started studying law, I imagined a straightforward path: graduate, attend Law School, and begin practising in a law firm. As I progressed, I realised traditional litigation was not for me. I became more drawn to solicitor work, education law, and opportunities to use my skills beyond conventional practice. In my third year, I began helping classmates with CVs, LinkedIn profiles and applications, and discovered a gap in career support for students. What started informally became Students Bosses and eventually a career in employability and talent development. Today, I am building a career around helping people build theirs. It is far from what I imagined, but it feels aligned with who I have always been.

Before launching Students Bosses, what assumptions did you have about career success and employability that changed after working directly with students and graduates?

I did not realise how much privilege I had in accessing career information. As an undergraduate, I became friends with senior students who taught me about CVs, LinkedIn, internships, volunteering and intentionally building experience. I assumed many of my peers had similar access. That changed when a classmate qualified for a mentorship opportunity but did not know how to prepare the required CV. I realised many young people know what they want, a job, career growth or a better opportunity, but do not know how to get there. Over the years, I have seen that gap repeatedly. Students Bosses exists partly because access to career knowledge should not depend on who happens to be in your circle.

What has been the most surprising lesson you have learned from helping people secure jobs, internships, scholarships, fellowships, and postgraduate opportunities?

The most surprising lesson has been how many capable people do not know how to navigate opportunities. I initially assumed that if someone knew what they wanted, a job, internship, scholarship or postgraduate opportunity, they would naturally figure out the steps. I have learned that this is rarely the case. Many people lack access to the right information, guidance or networks, and sometimes rely on advice from people who are equally unsure. I have also learned the importance of surrounding yourself with people slightly ahead of you, asking questions and being willing to take a bet on yourself. Sometimes, you do not need someone ten years ahead; someone one step ahead can show you what you need to know.

> "I have also learned the importance of surrounding yourself with people slightly ahead of you, asking questions and being willing to take a bet on yourself."

Building a career in an emerging field like employability and talent development requires creating credibility around a problem that many people underestimate. What challenges did you face in establishing yourself in this space?

The biggest credibility challenge I faced was self-induced. I started Students Bosses as a 300-level undergraduate and found myself advising accountants, auditors and experienced professionals. I often wondered, "Who am I to advise these people?" I later realised that in employability, people respond to value and results, not simply age. 1 Timothy 4:12 says, "Let no one despise you for your youth." I have learned that this applies internally too: we must not look down on ourselves or the value we offer. A senior executive discovered my work on LinkedIn, became a client and has since returned and referred others. That taught me to measure credibility by the problems I solve and the lives I help move forward.

Looking back, what has been the most rewarding success story or moment from your work with Students & Bosses?

One of my most rewarding moments came from helping a friend who had been job hunting for seven months after NYSC. By then, I had worked as a Job Application Specialist and learned that landing a job involves an entire lifecycle beyond a CV: positioning, applications, interviews and follow-ups. During my externship, I applied that knowledge to her search, reworking her CV and cover letter, revamping her LinkedIn profile and helping her approach applications strategically. Within two weeks, she received three interview invitations and two job offers. That experience transformed her search and Students & Bosses. It showed me the value of supporting candidates across the job-search journey and inspired new services that have since become part of our work.

What habit, decision, or mindset has contributed most significantly to your own career journey?

The willingness to learn has shaped my career the most. One thing that has consistently helped me is learning from people who are growing alongside me, particularly those one or two steps ahead. I call this networking horizontally. You do not always need someone five or ten years ahead to guide you. As an undergraduate, I had friends in the level ahead who shared practical tips about courses, lecturers, tests and navigating university life. By the time I reached that level, I already had information that helped me settle in quickly. I have carried that approach into my career: learn from those slightly ahead, ask questions, and let their experience save you from avoidable mistakes.

Christiana Essie **Sagay**



Christiana Essie Sagay is a lawyer, scholar, and notary public called to the bar in Ontario, Canada and Nigeria. She founded Chressa Law, a boutique Ottawa firm advising on employment law, immigration, international law, and technology and AI law. She is pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of Ottawa, researching how bilateral labour agreements mediate labour rights, human rights, and migrant protections. She holds a BA in Linguistics and an LL. B from the University of Benin, and an LL.M from American University Washington College of Law. Her prior experience includes practice at Okutepa SAN & Co. in Abuja, the General Legal Division of the UN Office of Legal Affairs in New York, and impact assessment with the Government of Canada.

You spent some time in private practice in a law firm in Abuja before leaving. What made leaving feel necessary at that particular time rather than earlier or later?

Yes. I began practice at Okutepa SAN & Co. in Abuja, the firm where I'd done my law school externship, and I loved every minute of it. It was collegial, led by a supportive principal, the kind of place that let me test why I'd gone to law school. Those years were the building block for the career I have now. But underneath it all lived a quieter restlessness. I already knew I wanted a global career, or at least work that let me engage more intimately with international law, even if I couldn't yet describe its shape. Given that ten years had passed since secondary school before I earned my law degree, I felt an urgency to find my feet quickly in the world international law seemed to promise.

Many lawyers begin their careers without a clear sense of where they want to specialise. How did you identify areas you wanted to specialize in?

It wasn't always apparent what area of law I wanted to study, but I always felt a pull toward world politics, and when I encountered the Jessup moot in law school, that pull finally felt real, like something I could chase. Jurisprudence drew me in the same way, that thrill of reasoning through abstract concepts and ideas. In some ways, I found myself wanting a chance to test those instincts in an international context. That chance arrived during my LL.M when I spent a summer at the UN Office of Legal Affairs in New York, and while the day to day leaned more toward contracts and procurement than grand doctrine, it taught me to put my knowledge of international law and my love for jurisprudence to work as practical tools.

How has your Nigerian background shaped the particular questions you ask about international law, migration, and global affairs?

My Nigerian background gave me lived experience of the categories I now write about. I grew up watching migration as ordinary life: families around me sustained by remittances from abroad, professionals navigating visa regimes indifferent to their qualifications, and an economy built partly on people leaving. Then I became a migrant myself, first to study in the US and then to Canada, and what I had observed from the outside I began to observe from the inside. That shift from observer to participant shaped the questions I keep returning to about people, work, politics, and what it means to move through the world as a person.

Beyond academic publication, what impact do you hope your research actually has on governments, international organisations, or the migrant communities it concerns?

There are several limbs to the research I do. Let me focus on my doctoral thesis, which looks at how states structure the labour migration of their citizens. I want that work to sharpen the questions countries like Nigeria ask before entering bilateral labour arrangements, because the terms set at that stage determine whether workers abroad are protected or simply documented. For international organizations, I want it to challenge how vulnerability is defined in policy frameworks that claim to protect migrants but often flatten their experiences into categories that miss what they actually face. For migrant communities themselves, I want the findings to translate into better information before they leave and stronger grounds to advocate for themselves once they arrive.

> **“...every one of these chapters offered lessons I needed for the next, even when that only made sense in retrospect. I didn't always know where the thread was leading, but it held.”**

Has there been a point where you seriously questioned your career choices?

No. I have never questioned the choice to pursue law or international law. What I have questioned is whether I was on the right path to get there. There were stretches, particularly in the early years of starting over in a new jurisdiction, where the work I was doing felt far from where I wanted to be. I would be lying if I said I never wondered whether the distance was worth it. But questioning the path is not the same as questioning the destination. Every stretch that felt like a detour turned out to be preparation I didn't know I needed, and the discipline from those years still shapes how I think about where I am going.

You recently founded Chressa Law. What led you to build something of your own rather than continuing solely within existing institutions?

I have had the good fortune of navigating a mix of institutions, a law firm, government, an international organisation, and the academy, and I value immensely all I have learnt in these spaces. But I reached a point where I needed the fluidity to be both practitioner and scholar in a way that felt true to who I am. I wanted my research to influence my practice in concrete ways, and the nagging questions that come up in practice to animate my future research. So Chressa Law was born. I view it as a practice organized around the way I actually think, in a form that is uniquely mine.

The title of this publication is No Straight Line. What does “No Straight Line” mean when you reflect on your own career journey?

My path has been anything but linear. From a first degree in Linguistics to private practice in Nigeria, then to an international organization, then to the Canadian government doing impact assessment, and now building my own law firm while pursuing a doctorate, every one of these chapters offered lessons I needed for the next, even when that only made sense in retrospect. I didn't always know where the thread was leading, but it held. So for me "No Straight Line" means trusting that the thread holds even when you can't see where it's taking you, and that clarity is earned on the road, while doing the work and creating value and impact as you go along.

Chukwudi Kachikwu **Enebeli, SAN**



Chukwudi K. Enebeli SAN obtained his LL.B in 2008 from the University of Benin and was called to the Nigerian Bar in November, 2009. Chukwudi Kachikwu Enebeli started his legal career as a Youth Corp member in Pinheiro LP under the mentorship of Prof. Kemi Pinheiro, OFR, SAN. He was retained as a full staff in 2010. From the position of Junior Associate, he rose through the ranks to become a Team Leader and in 2016 he was made Partner.

Chukwudi Kachikwu Enebeli is a courtroom advocate who has appeared in all levels and hierarchy of courts in Nigeria with notable judgments to his credit. He has a passion for criminal matters, arbitration, insolvency, election related matters and commercial litigation. In September 2024 he was conferred with the prestigious rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria, making him the first and only Ndokwa Son to be so honoured.

He is a member of the International Bar Association, the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators (UK), Associate Member, Business Recovery & Insolvency Practitioners Association of Nigeria, Associate Member, Risk Management Association of Nigeria.

You have spent virtually your entire professional career at Pinheiro LP, rising from a young lawyer to a Partner. What convinced you to build your career within one institution?

My decision to build my career at Pinheiro LP was driven by the firm's unwavering commitment to excellence, integrity, and merit. From my earliest days, I found myself in an environment that rewarded diligence, encouraged continuous learning, and entrusted young lawyers with significant responsibilities. The firm provides opportunities to handle complex matters across different areas of practice while benefiting from the mentorship, knowledge and experience of our Founding Partner, Dr. Kemi Pinheiro OFR, SAN, LLD, FCIArb. Remaining in one institution was never about comfort; it was about growth and the opportunity the firm afforded me.

Many young lawyers aspire to become Senior Advocates of Nigeria. Beyond legal knowledge, what qualities do you believe distinguish those who eventually attain that rank?

Legal knowledge is indispensable, but it is only one aspect of the journey. The distinction of Senior Advocate of Nigeria demands consistency, discipline, resilience, professional excellence, and impeccable integrity over many years. Humility is equally important because learning never truly ends. Never assume you know everything. Be open-minded and continue to acquire more knowledge. Aspiring Silks should focus less on the title and more on becoming exceptional lawyers whose work consistently reflects excellence. When a career is built on merit, service, and sustained professional distinction, recognition naturally follows in due course.

How important have professional relationships been in your journey, and how should young lawyers build meaningful professional networks?

> **"The legal profession thrives on trust, mutual respect and integrity."**

Professional relationships have been invaluable throughout my career. The legal profession thrives on trust, mutual respect, and integrity. However, networking should never be reduced to exchanging business cards or seeking personal advantage. Meaningful professional relationships are built through competence, reliability, courtesy, and genuine interest in others. You must also create a brand for yourself. What do people know you as. You must consistently create a picture of a serious and brilliant lawyer within your family, friends and associates that when they think of a lawyer, they think of you. Because we do not advertise as lawyers, it is your reputation that brings in business. Young lawyers should therefore actively participate in Bar activities, legal conferences, professional associations, and continuing legal education programmes. More importantly, they should focus on adding value wherever they find themselves. People are more likely to remember lawyers who consistently demonstrate excellence, integrity, and professionalism than those who simply seek visibility with no intention of adding value.

How has mentorship influenced your own journey, and what advice would you give young lawyers seeking mentors?

I would say that proper mentoring and my early exposure and dedicated interaction with older, wiser and more experienced seniors in the profession played a huge role in preparing me for my career journey. I started to hone my advocacy and leadership skills from my university days, where I was privileged to have been elected in several capacities. That exposed me to meaningful interaction with a lot of Senior Advocates of Nigeria, Judges, Senior Lawyers and Company Secretaries of various institutions. Another added advantage was the fact that I started my career with one of the best and finest minds in the profession, Dr. Kemi Pinheiro OFR, SAN, LLD, FCIArb - (whom I met in my undergraduate days and took special interest in me). His mentorship, advice, direction and guidance without a doubt prepared me for the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria. He also afforded me the opportunity and platform to fly. In my early years, he ensured that colleagues in the firm imbibed the "can-do spirit".

Cornelius Dabiet **Yonpan**



Cornelius Dabiet Yonpan is a Nigerian lawyer and regional peace, security and governance professional with extensive experience spanning criminal justice, intelligence, transnational organised crime, legal and policy advisory, and regional cooperation. He currently works with an international development organisation, where he provides legal and policy advisory support on peace, security and governance matters, including institutional and regulatory frameworks. His earlier career in intelligence, investigation and anti-trafficking further shaped his expertise in criminal justice, security cooperation and conflict prevention across West Africa. He holds an LL.B, a Barrister-at-Law qualification and a Master's degree in Law and Corporate Governance.

Your career has taken you from frontline investigations and anti-trafficking operations at NAPTIP to advising ECOWAS on peace, security, and governance. Looking back, what were the pivotal moments that shaped this transition?

Three moments stand out for me. First, working directly with victims of trafficking at NAPTIP showed me the real human impact of crime. Second, being involved in reviewing laws taught me that changing systems can have a bigger and longer-lasting impact than handling individual cases alone. Third, joining GIZ and working with ECOWAS helped me understand that many of the security challenges we face cross national borders and require regional solutions.

How has your legal training influenced the way you approach conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and security sector cooperation across West Africa?

My legal training taught me to think carefully, analyse facts, and respect fairness and due process. These values guide my work today. Whether I am supporting mediation or security cooperation, I always try to ensure that solutions are fair, inclusive, and respect human rights.

How has your understanding of justice evolved over the course of your career compared to when you recently graduated from law school?

As a young lawyer, I viewed justice primarily through the lens of courts and legal remedies. Today, I see justice more broadly. Justice includes prevention, protection, restoration, and addressing the underlying conditions that make people vulnerable to crime and conflict. It is not only about punishing wrongdoing; it is also about creating systems that uphold dignity, promote inclusion, and prevent harm before it occurs.

You contributed to the review of both the Administration of Criminal Justice Act and the Trafficking in Persons Prohibition Act. What did those experiences teach you about the relationship between legal reform and real-world outcomes?

I learned that passing a law is only the beginning. Effective implementation depends on institutions, resources, political will, public awareness, and the people responsible for applying those laws. Legal reform must therefore go hand in hand with capacity building, inter-agency coordination, and continuous engagement with practitioners and communities to translate legislative intent into meaningful outcomes.

You have worked on several initiatives including those relating to combating organised crime. Which project has given you the greatest sense of impact?

Establishing Community Peace Committees in border communities stands out for me. It demonstrated that local communities are not just beneficiaries of peace initiatives but active agents of change. Seeing traditional leaders, women, youth, and security actors collaborate to address emerging tensions reinforced my belief that sustainable peace is built from the ground up.

> **"Lawyers should be advocates for institutional reform, policy advisers, mediators, trainers, and defenders of human rights."**

West Africa continues to face challenges relating to organised crime, violent extremism, trafficking, and communal conflicts. What role do you believe lawyers should play in addressing these issues beyond the courtroom?

Lawyers should be advocates for institutional reform, policy advisers, mediators, trainers, and defenders of human rights. They should contribute to preventive efforts, support community dialogue, strengthen accountability mechanisms, and help bridge the gap between legal frameworks and practical realities. The legal profession has an important role in shaping safer and more resilient societies.

Looking ahead, what emerging opportunities do you see for the next generation of Nigerian lawyers who want to contribute to regional governance, peace, and security?

The opportunities are immense. Areas such as migration governance, cybersecurity, mediation, transitional justice, climate security, anti-corruption, human rights, and international development increasingly require legal expertise. Nigerian lawyers are well positioned to contribute at national, regional, and international levels, particularly within organisations such as ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations, and development agencies.

What does success mean to you today?

Earlier in my career, success meant completing investigations and achieving results in individual cases. Today, success means creating lasting impact. It means strengthening institutions, helping others grow, building partnerships, and contributing to safer and more just communities.

Closing Reflection

"My journey has taught me that the law is not merely a profession; it is a tool for service. Whether in a courtroom, a border community, or a regional policy forum, our responsibility as lawyers is to use our knowledge and influence to advance justice, protect the vulnerable, and build societies where peace and human dignity can flourish."

Prof. Damilola S. **Olawuyi, SAN**



Professor Damilola S Olawuyi, SAN is an international lawyer, professor, and policy adviser specialising in business and human rights, energy, natural resources, and environmental law. He serves as UNESCO Chairholder on Environmental Law and Sustainable Development at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar and is Deputy Vice Chancellor and Director of the OGEES Institute, Afe Babalola University in Nigeria.

A Senior Advocate of Nigeria and Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators, he has advised on major energy and infrastructure projects globally. He sits on the United Nations Working Group on Business and Human Rights and chairs the IBA SEERIL Academic Advisory Group and the Legal Education Committee of the Nigeria Bar Association. His award-winning book Environmental Law in Arab States earned recognition from the American Society of International Law (ASIL) in 2023. Professor Olawuyi received a Ph.D. in Energy and Environmental Law from the University of Oxford, United Kingdom, an LL.M from Harvard University, and another LL.M from the University of Calgary, Canada. He earned his LL.B. from Igbinedion University, Nigeria, graduating in First Class Honors and his B.L. degree from the Nigerian Law School, also graduating in First Class Honors.

Many lawyers aspire to become Senior Advocates of Nigeria, while others pursue academia or international organisations. You have excelled in all three. How did you do this?

First of all, I give God the glory for the grace and opportunity to be able to achieve all the foregoing. Right from during my Bachelors of Laws program at Igbinedion University, Okada , I had made up my mind to pursue an academic career and I intentionally began to write and publish in students' journals. So as a LL.B student, I already had more than 10 publications in journals, which made it easy for me to gain Masters of Laws (LL.M) admission with full scholarship in Canada right after the LL.B and while still at the Nigerian Law School. After my LL.M programs, I obtained the doctoral degree (PhD) setting me on the path for an academic career as I originally envisioned. Having a PhD enabled me to develop my career as a scholar-practitioner, combining teaching, research with the practice of law, which has also opened doors to appointments by the United Nations, African Union amongst others, as well as to awards and recognitions including obtaining the coveted rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria.

What specific actions did you take early in your career that positioned you for international opportunities?

As a law student or junior lawyer, it is totally fine to not know which path to follow. What matters is what you then do about it. First is sitting down to determine 2-3 senior lawyers who inspire you the most and that you would hope to have a career similar to theirs. There will be a lot of answers when you read their profiles and bios, as you can begin to take some of the initial steps that they took. Second is joining international associations that can provide you a chance to develop the skillsets required for an international career. For example, I joined the International Law Association (ILA) when I was still a student, interacting with seniors and taking the chance that such a global network provides. I am today the President of the ILA in Nigeria. The third point is to take active advantage of networking and mentoring that such platforms provide. Being active will attract the attention of mentors, and such mentors will get you closer to your dreams.

Looking back, what career advice did you receive early on that turned out to be incorrect or unhelpful?

At the onset, I was advised against becoming an academic because of the belief that academics are not often well paid. While this unfortunately remains the reality in Nigeria, the enormous opportunities, networks, as well as flexibility that academics have access to, especially when operating globally, make it very rewarding and worthwhile. This shows the benefit of following one's passion and what you consider that you are very strong at, and not allowing salary or money considerations alone to be the immediate deciding factor.

> **"There are several emerging areas in today's world, but I remain biased towards international law because of the opportunities it provides for one to function and earn globally."**

Conversely, what is the single most valuable piece of advice that influenced your career trajectory?

I was practicing law at a leading global law firm in Calgary, Canada when I received the offer from Aare Afe Babalola, SAN himself to join Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti as a lecturer. This transition from a high paying job in Canada to Ado Ekiti initially sounded absurd, but I got good advice to follow my passion, and this has proven to be one of the best decisions I have ever made. I have benefitted immensely from working closely with the greatest mentor of all time, Aare Afe Babalola (SAN), a highly cerebral, versatile and supportive father, whose love for mentoring young people is unparalleled. With his mentoring and support, I have been able to accomplish several professional milestones at a very young age, which includes becoming a full professor of law at 32, Deputy Vice Chancellor at 36, and Senior Advocate of Nigeria at 37. These have opened several other doors globally that have made me to never regret leaving Canada to come to Ado Ekiti.

What emerging areas within the legal profession do you believe young lawyers should begin preparing for today?

There are several emerging areas in today's world, but I remain biased towards international law because of the opportunities it provides for one to function and earn globally. So I will advise young lawyers to explore obtaining qualifications in important and emerging areas of international law, such as international energy law, international climate, sustainability and ESG law, artificial intelligence and machine learning law, digital assets and blockchain law, biotechnology and health law, international trade and investment law, aviation law, and international development law. There is high demand globally for lawyers skilled in these specialist areas, so being one of the early mover and experts will open doors for the next several decades.

Davidson **Oturu**



Davidson is an experienced corporate lawyer, financier and investor. He was for several years a partner at AELEX, a leading law firm in Nigeria and Ghana, where he headed the firm's Startups, Innovation and Technology Practice. He has close to twenty years experience advising established businesses and startups in different areas involving mergers & acquisitions, regulatory compliance, law and management.

Some of his notable activities include his appointment to the Presidential Advisory Council that conceptualized the Nigeria Startup Act, one of the most prolific laws that directly addresses the regulatory and financial challenges that affect tech-enabled startups. Davidson serves as an advisor to several organisations, including tech-enabled startups, and also sits on the board of notable companies as a non-executive director. He mentors entrepreneurs and founders on regulatory compliance, IP and startup related issues. He invests in early stage startups and is also presently a mentor at the Founder Institute, an international pre-seed accelerator.

> "Commercial awareness is critical—understanding how businesses make money and scale."

Was the plan post law school to work hard till you can co-found a venture capital, or did that desire emanate from all the work you did while at Aelex?

The venture capital path was not the original plan. Like many young lawyers, I was focused on building a strong foundation in legal practice. However, my time at AELEX exposed me to high-growth companies, complex transactions, and the structural gaps within Africa's startup ecosystem. Over time, even though I still loved documenting deals, I also became interested in shaping them. Venture capital emerged as a natural evolution of that curiosity.

Did you ever have a small idea that didn't seem like much at the time but became more valuable as time passed?

Yes, which was basically writing and sharing insights publicly. It started as a way to clarify my thinking on law, startups, and capital. Over time, it became a platform for influence, attracting founders, investors, and collaborators into my network. What seemed like a small intellectual exercise evolved into something that subsequently supports deal flow, policy conversations, and broader ecosystem engagement.

What strategies can young lawyers use to integrate themselves into the tech ecosystem?

Young lawyers must go beyond the law office and only attending legal focused events. Doing that means that you are networking with fellow lawyers and competitors. Rather, attend ecosystem events, join founder communities, and actively engage with startup operators. Learn the language of product, fundraising, and growth metrics, not just law. Offer value early, even informally. Also, build a visible voice through writing or speaking. Integration happens when people begin to see you not just as a lawyer, but as a contributor to the ecosystem.

What were the main factors that influenced your career transition from being a partner in a law firm to being a venture capitalist?

The transition was driven by a desire for deeper impact. As a lawyer, I was advising on transactions; as an investor, I could shape outcomes earlier and more directly. I was also drawn to the asymmetry of venture capital and the ability to back ideas that can scale and transform sectors. Ultimately, it was about moving from reactive participation in deals to proactive ecosystem building.

What non-legal skills do you think are crucial to a lawyer's success?

Commercial awareness is critical—understanding how businesses make money and scale. Communication is equally important, especially the ability to simplify complex ideas. Relationship building, adaptability, and intellectual curiosity also stand out. In today's world, lawyers who can think like operators and investors, rather than just advisors, are better positioned to create value and remain relevant across industries.

Nubia Capital focuses on tech-enabled investments across Africa. If you were to hire a young lawyer to join your team today, what key criteria would you be looking out for (both technical and non-technical)?

Technically, I would look for strong grounding in corporate, finance, or technology law. But beyond that, curiosity about startups, an understanding of venture dynamics, and strong analytical thinking are essential. Non-technically, I value ownership, adaptability, and clear communication. The ideal candidate is someone who can operate at the intersection of law, business, and investment without being confined to one discipline.

What was the most challenging moment in your legal career, and how did you overcome it?

There have been many challenges, but one of them was building the technology, media, Telecoms (TMT) and fintech practice at my previous firm from scratch. It required defining a new practice area, educating clients, and navigating regulatory uncertainty in a rapidly evolving sector. I overcame it by investing deeply in domain expertise, engaging actively with founders and regulators, and consistently producing thought leadership that positioned the practice at the forefront of the market.

Desmond **Ogba**



Desmond Ogba is a Partner in the Finance, Energy, and Projects Practice Groups at TEMPLARS, one of Africa's leading commercial law firms. He holds a Master of Laws (LL.M.) from Harvard University, graduated with First Class Honours from the Nigerian Law School, and earned his Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) from Ebonyi State University. Prior to joining TEMPLARS, he practised as a Finance and Projects Associate at G.Elias & Co. in Lagos and was a Visiting Associate in the London office of Latham &Watkins LLP. Desmond is consistently recognised by leading international legal directories, including the Chambers Global Guide, IFLR1000, and The Legal 500, for his expertise in banking and finance, project finance, energy, and corporate transactions.

Beyond his transactional practice, Desmond is widely recognised for his commitment to developing the next generation of professionals. Through his flagship initiatives, The Future Lawyer Series and The Desmond Ogba Foundation, he has established mentorship, leadership, and capacity-building platforms that connect aspiring professionals with accomplished leaders across diverse industries. Recently, he was appointed by the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) to lead the Steering Committee responsible for reviewing Nigeria's investment laws with a view to strengthening the country's ease of doing business through strategic legislative and policy reforms.

Immediately after you were called to the Nigerian Bar, what did your ideal legal career look like? Did you envision becoming the kind of lawyer you are today?

Immediately after I was called to the Bar, I imagined becoming a seasoned litigator because, quite frankly, that was the only version of legal practice I had been exposed to. Even during my NYSC, that remained the plan. Everything changed when I joined a full- service law firm after NYSC and discovered the intellectual depth and commercial impact of transactional practice. My aspirations shifted from simply appearing in court to pursuing technical excellence and creating value through complex commercial transactions. So, no, this is not the lawyer I expected to become. Looking back, however, it is exactly the lawyer I would choose to be.

You earned an LL.M from Harvard University and served as a Senior Editor of the Harvard Business Law Review. What motivated you to pursue graduate studies at that stage of your career?

I have always believed that growth requires intentional reinvention. After about thirteen years in practice, including four as a partner, I felt it was time to pause, reflect, and challenge myself in a different environment. I took a sabbatical from TEMPLARS to pursue an LL.M. at Harvard, not because I wanted to leave practice, but because I wanted to return to it better equipped. The experience broadened my perspective, deepened my knowledge, and reinforced the importance of lifelong learning. To remain relevant, lawyers must continually reinvent themselves before the market demands it.

For many young lawyers, project finance appears highly technical and intimidating. What foundational knowledge or skills should they develop if they wish to build a career in that area?

Project finance can seem intimidating because it sits at the intersection of law, finance, engineering, and regulation. My advice is to master the fundamentals first: contract law, secured transactions, corporate law, and the regulatory framework for key sectors. Then look beyond the law. Understand how projects generate revenue, how risks are allocated, and why lenders are prepared to finance them. The best project finance lawyers are not simply excellent legal technicians; they are commercially minded problem-solvers who are genuinely curious about how businesses and infrastructure projects create value.

As a leader, how do you bring out the best in your team members, especially during high-pressure assignments?

> **What distinguishes outstanding associates is not intelligence alone, but mindset. The best associates take ownership of every assignment.**

One of the biggest mistakes young lawyers make under pressure is focusing only on completing tasks. I encourage my team to understand the bigger picture so they appreciate why their work matters. I set clear expectations, prioritise effectively, and ensure everyone understands the strategic objective of the transaction, not just their individual assignment. I also delegate meaningful responsibility rather than micromanage because people grow through ownership. A leader's composure is contagious. When your team feels supported, trusted, and confident, they consistently produce better work, even under the most demanding deadlines.

You have served as an expert on various technical committees of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. How did that role differ from your more traditional role of advising private clients?

Serving on Senate technical committees was very different from advising private clients because it allowed me to view the law through a policy lens. In private practice, our role is to help clients navigate existing laws and achieve the best commercial outcome. On the committees, however, the focus shifted from what the law is to what it ought to be. Instead of advancing the interests of a single client, we considered how legal reforms could strengthen institutions, improve markets, and promote national development. That experience reinforced my belief that lawyers should not only interpret the law, but also help shape it.

What distinguishes outstanding associates from average associates in a top-tier commercial law firm?

What distinguishes outstanding associates is not intelligence alone, but mindset. The best associates take ownership of every assignment. They do not simply complete the task they were given; they think ahead, anticipate issues, and understand how their work fits into the broader transaction. They are technically curious, dependable, and always bring solutions, not just problems. Above all, they earn trust. In every top-tier law firm, the associates who progress the fastest are those whom partners and clients can rely on to deliver consistently excellent work with minimal supervision.

On a lighter note, what is one fun fact about you that would surprise people who know you only through your professional accomplishments?

People are often surprised that, outside work, I am the planner in my family and among my friends. Whether it is a holiday, a family celebration, or a weekend outing, a trip with close friends, I enjoy bringing people together and creating meaningful experiences. I also place a high value on showing up for people because I believe relationships are life's greatest investment. Underpinning all of this is my belief in culture and traditional values - integrity, respect, and community. Those same values shape how I lead, advise clients, and build teams. Deals are important, but the impact you have on people is what truly endures.

Hon. Dr. Ayibatonye **Timi**



Hon. Dr. (Alaowei) Ayibatonye Alari Timi Esq is from Delta State, Nigeria. He currently serves as Executive Director, Corporate Services, South South Development Commission. A seasoned public servant, lecturer, businessman, politician, and legal practitioner. He has built a distinguished career spanning several sectors.

At 64 years old, he holds five academic degrees. His educational background includes a Bachelor's degree in Sociology, a Master's degree in Public Administration, and a Doctorate in Political Science. He became a lawyer at 60, after earning both his LL.B and B.L qualifications. Today, he combines his legal training with decades of leadership and public service experience.

At what point did you first decide that you wanted to study law, and what inspired that decision?

My desire to study law sparked when I was a 15 year old student in Form Three at Ibadan Grammar School. A National Youth Service Corps member teaching at the school explained to students that law is one of the most influential forces shaping society and that those who wish to make meaningful contributions to society should consider becoming lawyers. That conversation left a lasting impression on me and sparked a lifelong ambition to join the legal profession.

Your journey to becoming a lawyer was not straightforward. Could you share some of the major challenges and setbacks you encountered along the way?

The major obstacles in my journey included repeated difficulties gaining admission to study law, changing admission requirements, and policy changes affecting legal education. Despite multiple applications over several decades, circumstances repeatedly prevented me from pursuing legal studies at the time opportunities arose.

Did anyone play a significant role in encouraging or supporting you during those difficult periods?

My wife was and still is my greatest source of support and encouragement. She is a legal practitioner who later became a judge, she consistently encouraged me to abandon his dream of becoming a lawyer. Even after I was called to the bar, my wife continues to motivate me to engage with legal practice and explore opportunities within the profession. Her belief in the value of law and her constant encouragement helped sustain his determination over the years. The legal profession has also become a family tradition. My son is already a practicing lawyer, my daughter is studying law at university, and I hope that younger members of the family will also consider legal careers.

What advice would you give to individuals who once had the dream of studying law but have since abandoned it due to age, circumstances, or repeated setbacks?

My advice is simple, never abandon your dreams. Age should never be a barrier to pursuing legal education. I know that many accomplished professionals from various fields eventually return to study law because of its significance and influence in society. Having pursued my dream to become a lawyer for nearly five decades before achieving it, I encourage others not to allow temporary setbacks or changing circumstances to extinguish their ambitions. No one is ever too old to pursue a meaningful goal.

Many young people compare their journeys with those of their peers. What would you say to those who feel they are "behind" in life or in their legal careers?

> **"...I believe every person has a unique journey and that success cannot be measured solely by wealth, status, or how quickly goals are achieved."**

Young people should avoid unhealthy comparisons and focus on their individual paths. I believe every person has a unique journey and that success cannot be measured solely by wealth, status, or how quickly goals are achieved. I will also encourage individuals to work diligently, remain content with honest progress, and contribute positively wherever they find themselves. Whether one is a teacher, doctor, lawyer, or political leader, every role has value and contributes to society. Rather than comparing themselves to others, young people should strive to become responsible citizens and faithfully pursue the opportunities available to them.

Do you think your life and career trajectory would have been significantly different if you had been able to study law when you first applied in 1980?

I believe that my career path would likely have been different had I studied law earlier. Many of my contemporaries who became lawyers have gone on to achieve remarkable success within the legal profession. I believe lawyers have much to contribute to governance and public service. I believe, greater participation by experienced legal professionals in politics could strengthen leadership and public administration. I am grateful for the path that my journey took. I am satisfied with my accomplishments in public service, leadership, and academia, and thankful for the opportunity to eventually fulfil my lifelong dream of becoming a lawyer.

As someone who has served in leadership and public office, what principles have guided your professional and personal decisions?

The core principles were integrity, professionalism, patriotism, and service to society. I believe that public office should be viewed as an opportunity to serve rather than an opportunity for personal gain. Society often celebrates public appointments for the wrong reasons, focusing on personal benefits rather than the potential for positive impact. I am particularly concerned about the decline of patriotism and civic responsibility in Nigeria. I hope there will be a reintroduction of civic education to help citizens develop a stronger sense of national responsibility and commitment to the common good. The government must prioritize the welfare and security of citizens, while citizens must equally demonstrate loyalty, responsibility, and commitment to nation-building.

Prof. Ehi Eric **Esoimeme**



Prof. Ehi Eric Esoimeme Esq. is a Professor of Business Law and Ethics at James Hope University (Nigeria). He also holds professorial appointments at Rudolph Kwanue University in Liberia, Kennedy University in the United States, Daaru Salaam University, Hamar University and African Union University International, reflecting his international academic influence. With over 70 publications and 12 books, his work spans anti-money laundering, counter-terrorist financing, and corruption prevention.

As a leader in the field, Prof. Esoimeme is a Research Fellow at INTI International University-Malaysia, the Editor in Chief of DSC Publications Ltd. and the Managing Partner of E-Four and AAF, a prominent global consultancy specializing in anti-money laundering (AML) compliance. His leadership extends to shaping policies and practices that influence financial regulations worldwide. His contributions to the field have earned him numerous accolades; notably, his book, "The Risk-Based Approach to Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing," was ranked as the fifth-best book on money laundering of all time by Financial Expert in 2021. In 2025, Professor Ehi Eric Esoimeme was officially honoured with the Financial Crime and Fraud Prevention Leader Award at the FinCrime Prevention Summit and Awards.

> **"What I did was to apply my research skills into my law practice and consultancy services, and it has yielded immense results."**

What factors guided your career decisions between 1–7 years post-call, and have those factors changed since?

During my early career (between 1–7 years post-call), my decisions were largely guided by the critical need to make a major contribution to an impactful area of law which has been given little attention by scholars in the legal profession. Financial Crime Compliance aligned perfectly with my career path. Since then, the core factors driving my career have evolved to include a heavy focus on the integration of artificial intelligence in financial crime compliance and cross-border regulatory issues (e.g., within the African Continental Free Trade Area).

What is a valuable piece of advice that influenced your career trajectory?

I remember when I was at the preliminary stages of researching and writing my second book,The Risk-Based Approach to Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing; My Late Mum, Dr. Angela Esoimeme, had advised me to expand the scope of my research by going beyond Nigeria because the issue of financial crime is a global issue. This valuable advice not only shaped the direction of this Book but also my entire career as my research direction and advisory services adopted a global approach.

You have authored over 70 publications, including twelve books. What compelled you to become a writer and researcher rather than staying purely in practice or consultancy?

The interconnection between research and practice compelled me to become a writer and researcher while still staying in practice and consultancy. While some professionals try to treat them as different fields, I saw both as being inseparable. Practice is now mostly anchored on your written address which must be well researched. The same goes for consultancy services. What I did was to apply my research skills into my law practice and consultancy services, and it has yielded immense results.

What is a piece of feedback or criticism on your work that stuck with you and made you a better scholar or practitioner?

The feedback on my first Book "A Comparative Study of the Money Laundering Laws/Regulations in Nigeria, the United States and the United Kingdom" was that it was too academic. Some critics stated that it only analysed the laws without providing strategic measures on how to combat financial crime. This criticism pushed me to evolve my research skills and thought process, and the result was "The Risk-Based Approach to Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing" which received commendations from across the globe. The book later became a best seller on Amazon for Banking Law.

For a young lawyer who wants to specialise in financial crime compliance today, what would you tell them to study, read, or pursue first?

As a starting point, the first publication to study is the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Forty Recommendations. These Recommendations are so important because they provide the background context of financial crime. To understand the extent of its importance, Countries around the world are required to align their legal framework with the FATF Recommendations. Thereafter, a young lawyer can study the laws/regulations preventing and prohibiting money laundering in Nigeria, including Books by prominent Authors. My book "Deterring and Detecting Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing" provides comprehensive information on financial crime, in addition to my other publications.

If you were graduating from law school in Nigeria in 2026 with the knowledge you have today, how would you approach building your career?

I will still adopt a similar approach as I did in 2010 but with some modifications to it. In 2010, I commenced my law practice with a law firm (Deji Sasegbon and Co.) which was actively engaged in financial crime cases and law publications. I was fortunate to be mentored by the late Deji Sasegbon Esq., SAN who combined law practice with legal research. In addition to my Masters Degree, I obtained my Professional Certifications but this was after many years of practice. If I was graduating from law school in 2026, I would ensure to enroll for Professional Certifications within the first three years of practice before navigating to a financial institution for more practical experience.

Dr. Emmanuel **Olowononi**



Dr. Emmanuel Oluwafemi Olowononi (PhD, LL.M, BL) was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2006 and appointed a Notary Public of the Supreme Court of Nigeria in 2016. He is Deputy Director and Head of Corporate Law Practice at the Nigerian Law School, Abuja, and previously headed Property Law Practice and coordinated the Bar Part One Programme.

He is the founder of the Institute of Capacity Building, Entertainment and Sports Law Development (ICESLAD), advancing professional development through research, training and publications. A former Secretary of the NBA Cradle Bar and member of several NBA committees, he currently serves on the NBA National Legal Education Committee.

Dr. Olowononi holds a PhD in Law specialising in Sports Law and has published extensively on sports, intellectual property, legal education, ADR, data protection and entertainment law. He is also the author of several leading legal texts.

> **"...My research interest in sports law is as a result of my childhood passion for the game of football"**

Is being in academia a deliberate decision or one that happened by chance?

I love teaching and grooming the next generation at whatever level for that matter. It is a privilege to be given the platform. It is not accidental or by chance. I have always desired to be a lecturer and in particular at the Nigerian Law School and may be later at a Theological Seminary.

How are you able to combine this practice with being at the Nigerian Law School?

I have learnt to multi-task, delegate, outsource and manage time effectively. I really thank God for the privilege to work thus far to make my contributions to legal education in Nigeria. I have written several papers and made presentations in several professional fora toward development of Sports law in Africa.

In your experience as a senior lecturer and a legal practitioner with over two decades of post – call experience, does a great law career always have a great start?

Not absolutely really, but it is always better to have a road map for excellence in life and destiny very early in life in order to trail blaze. In this way, you are able to start and make progress in the chosen aspect of the legal profession whether as a private practitioner, law lecturer, corporate practice, career on the Bench, in-house solicitor.

Sports law was not widely recognized as a distinct practice area in Nigeria for many years. What inspired you to pursue it so seriously?

My research interest in sports law is as a result of my childhood passion for the game of football. During my undergraduate I began to nurture the idea of an area of law to trail blaze and then it occurred to me that Sports Law is an evolving, dynamic, passionate, lucrative and scintillating area of law that I may specialize and make my contributions towards the growth of Sports business and legal education in Nigeria.

For young lawyers interested in sports law, what foundational knowledge or experience should they begin building early in their career?

The call to bar certificate is not an end in itself, rather it is a means to an end. After the completion of Law School, you may take a trademark course (s) in Sports and Entertainment, do research and write on Sports and Law, do FIFA accreditation and agency exams which obviously qualify you as a football agent globally or pursue an LL.M in Sports and Entertainment Law.

If you could speak to a lawyer who is between 0 – 3 years post call and unsure about their career direction, what guidance would you offer?

I always advise new wigs to write professional exams such as chartered bankers, secretaries, arbitrators, mediators, negotiators, fraud examiners, football agent, and managers. Also, undertake post graduate studies in law or specialized areas of law. Try and get called in other jurisdictions such as Canada, United States, Cameroon, Gambia etc. Try and focus on globalised legal practice.

What are the requirements and some specific steps to becoming a lecturer at the Nigerian Law School?

As many of you with the flair, please come and join. Now, the reward of a teacher is on earth and also in heaven. A good class of degree at LLB, LLM and maybe few years of post - call experiences.

Final Reflection

Aim for the top. Strive to excel in all you do, make the most of every opportunity bearing in mind that you do not have a second chance of making a first impression. Be ready to work extra harder than anyone around you. Define your area of interest in the vast field of law; acquire books and materials on the field. Hone your ICT skills. Avoid the 'get-rich quick-syndrome'! Seek to please God with your professional practice. Emphasize experience over pecuniary gain at the early stage. Determine not to maintain 'status quo', take giant steps of faith.

Evangel **Augustine**



Evangel L. Augustine's experience spans corporate law, business advisory, the creative industries and the oil and gas sector. Growing up in the Niger Delta, his early interest in entrepreneurship and business literature inspired his pursuit of a legal career. He obtained his LL.B. from Afe Babalola University in 2020 and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2022.

He began his career as an Associate Counsel at a leading law firm in Ikoyi, Lagos, before moving into corporate and business advisory roles. His experience includes company restructuring, joint ventures, capital raising, project financing, regulatory compliance and intellectual property protection, advising clients across media, technology, fintech, finance and real estate.

He currently works with a government parastatal responsible for capacity development in Nigeria's oil and gas sector. Beyond his professional work, Evangel is passionate about innovation, operational excellence and community impact, supporting youth-focused and philanthropic initiatives.

While at the Nigerian Law School, what did you imagine your legal career would look like?

I initially imagined that I would spend my first year or two years after law school undergoing pupilage at a conventional legal practice firm specializing in litigation, so I could be well grounded in basic courtroom practice because theory alone is never sufficient. From there, I planned to gradually migrate toward my passion at the time, corporate law, and eventually achieve one of my dreams which is serving on company boards.

Since being called to the Bar, what has been your biggest career setback, and what did it teach you?

One of my biggest career setbacks was being rejected by a few law firms at the early stage of my career. I had certain expectations about how quickly my career would progress, so those rejections were initially disappointing. However, the experience helped me realise that career setbacks do not necessarily determine the eventual outcome of one's career. It also taught me to be more resilient, have an open mind, and focus on developing my skills.

How has your experience in business consulting shaped your understanding of the role of a lawyer beyond traditional legal practice?

It made me understand that excellent legal practice goes beyond knowing the law, giving legal advice, or being a problem solver. It is about being a strategic advisor who is proactive in addressing potential issues that may arise in your operational space, your activities, or those of your client or subject you are providing guidance to. It also made me realize that you can never know it all, but the onus is on you to keep developing and building yourself and that, I must say, never ends.

> **"Every successful journey has difficult moments, and during those times, your strengths and clarity of purpose will keep you going."**

What was the biggest challenge you faced when you moved to Abuja in pursuit of new opportunities?

The biggest challenge I faced when I moved to Abuja in pursuit of new opportunities was fear of failure. I literally ran from home which was my comfort zone, and although I had an online job and savings to live on for a few months, each passing day without getting the type of job I sought made me scared and plan to retreat back home. Thankfully, encouragement from a few friends kept me going, and on the eve of the day I planned to return, God intervened and I received the role at the business consulting firm.

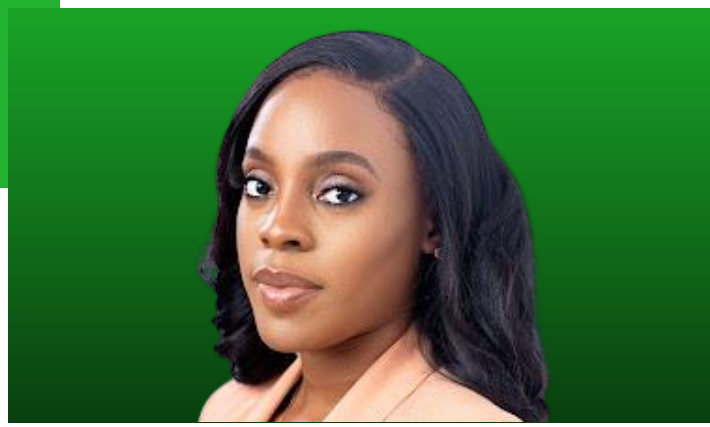
You recently joined a parastatal in the oil and gas sector, how has this new chapter differed from your earlier experiences?

It has been quite different from my earlier experiences, but I must admit the legal and business consulting experience has helped me on this new path. It has given me a much greater appreciation of legal work and knowledge, and I have come to realise that the legal profession is a universal occupation that can fit into almost every sector. I have also learnt the importance of being open-minded, because sometimes what you hear about a place or a particular environment can be quite different from the reality.

What advice would you give young lawyers facing rejection, career uncertainty or disappointment?

First, understand yourself and your "Why"—know what you want, your strengths and weaknesses, and why you are pursuing your current path. Every successful journey has difficult moments, and during those times, your strengths and clarity of purpose will keep you going. Never undervalue faith and dedication to your beliefs. Finally, work smart and focus on creating value—not only in your work, but also in the relationships and networks you build. Ultimately, the value you bring is what opens doors and sustains success.

Ezomime **Onimiya**



Ezomime Onimiya is Legal Counsel at Capital Group, one of the world's largest investment management organisations, helping millions of people invest for the long term and achieve their financial goals.

Prior to joining Capital Group, she practised at leading international and Nigerian law firms, Allen & Overy Shearman Sterling in London and Banwo & Ighodalo in Nigeria, where she focused on international capital markets and finance transactions. She is a triple-qualified lawyer, admitted to practise in England and Wales, New York and Nigeria.

As a Nigerian lawyer working on complex cross-border transactions, have there been moments when you consciously had to overcome stereotypes or prove yourself?

I am a firm believer in proving yourself wherever you find yourself. In every organisation I join, my goal is to ensure that my competence is never in doubt. Working outside Nigeria, I have also learned not to internalise stereotypes. They may exist, but ultimately, organisations value people who add value. The best way to create that value is through excellence, curiosity, and a commitment to continuous learning. For me, the focus has always been on becoming the best professional I can be while contributing meaningfully to every team I am part of and continuing to grow for my own journey and future opportunities.

How did you identify that finance and capital markets was the space where you wanted to build your career?

I would say that finance and capital markets chose me long before I recognised it. When I finished law school, my plan was to build a career in oil and gas law or perhaps become a full-time writer. But God had even better plans for me. At Banwo & Ighodalo, I was fortunate to be mentored by Seyi Bella and Ibrahim Hassan, who are incredible legal professionals. They saw potential in me before I saw it in myself, invested their time in my growth, and introduced me to the world of transactions. Through their guidance, I discovered how much I loved the intellectual challenge, pace, and impact of corporate transactions. That experience set me on a path that has shaped my career ever since.

Can you share a professional disappointment that you experienced and how you dealt with it?

One of my biggest professional disappointments was not being accepted to Harvard the first time I applied. At the time, I was devastated. I remember stepping away during dinner to call Seyi Bella, almost in tears, because the rejection felt like a major setback. I considered accepting another Ivy League offer, but deep down, I felt strongly that I should try again. I chose to trust God's timing and, the following year, approached my application differently. I invested fully into the process, sought guidance from mentors, including GetIn Edu, and made sure I had given it my very best. I reached a point where I knew that whatever the outcome, I had done everything within my power. The second application was successful, and six years later, I can confidently say that experience changed my life.

If you were mentoring a young Nigerian lawyer today with aspirations of working in global practice, what would you advise them to start doing within the next twelve months?

One piece of advice I would give every young Nigerian lawyer is to approach every opportunity with excellence, no matter how big or how small. You may not see the rewards immediately, but a consistent commitment to excellence will always set you apart. Excellence is not something you switch on when a big opportunity arrives, it is a habit you cultivate every single day. The way you handle the small assignments is what prepares you for the bigger ones. Be diligent, stay curious, keep learning, and give your best in every season.

> "Excellence is not something you switch on when a big opportunity arrives, it is a habit you cultivate every single day."

Beyond academic credentials, what competencies or experiences do international employers value most when recruiting lawyers?

Beyond strong academic credentials, I believe one of the most valuable qualities is exposure. Be genuinely curious about the world, industries, cultures, people, and how businesses operate. The broadest perspective often belongs to those who never stop learning. Technical excellence will open doors, but intellectual curiosity, adaptability, and strong interpersonal skills are what enable you to thrive once you are inside.

Many aspiring applicants assume that only candidates with exceptional grades stand a chance of admission in top schools. What other factors can strengthen an application to a school like Harvard?

Exceptional grades will always matter, but they are only one part of the story. What is equally important is your ability to communicate your vision, who you are, what drives you, and the impact you hope to make. At a school like Harvard, the admissions committee is not just evaluating your past achievements, they are investing in your future potential. Build a life beyond the expected. Pursue interests that genuinely excite you, volunteer, seek leadership opportunities, and look for ways to create meaningful impact. Remember, there can only be one 'you' with your unique combination of experiences, passions, and perspectives, so embrace and showcase what makes you different.

Many young lawyers admire your academic achievements and assume excellence comes naturally. What does excellence actually look like behind the scenes?

I will never be able to take full credit for my achievements without recognising God's guidance and the incredible people who have supported me along the way. From my mum encouraging me to study for hours as a child, to family and friends who believed I was capable of achieving great things, I have been blessed with an amazing support system, and I never take that for granted. But excellence is not always glamorous. It is choosing to study when no one is watching, seeking opportunities to grow even when you do not have to, and giving your best even when the outcome is uncertain. It is the late nights, the sacrifices, and the discipline to keep showing up.

Prof. Fatima **Waziri-Azi**, Ph.D.



Professor Fatima Waziri-Azi, PhD, is a legal scholar, Notary Public, public policy expert and human rights advocate with over two decades of experience advancing justice sector reform, the rule of law, gender equality and the protection of vulnerable populations. She is a Professor of Public Law at the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies and the immediate past Director-General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

She previously served as Senior Special Assistant to President Muhammadu Buhari on Rule of Law in the Office of the Vice President and has held positions with PACAC, Transparency International USA-Washington DC, the New York City Administration for Children's Services and HURILAWS. In 2016, she founded Safe Haven Foundation, providing legal aid, shelter and psychosocial support to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

She holds an LL.B., B.L., LL.M. and Doctor of Juridical Science, as well as a Certificate in Public Leadership from Harvard Kennedy School.

In the first seven years of your career, what factors shaped your career decisions?

My first job after NYSC was with The Human Rights Law Services (HURILAWS) in Lagos, where I provided legal services to vulnerable people. Although my time there was brief, it transformed how I viewed the law. I realized that the law is far more than a profession. It is a powerful tool for protecting rights, restoring dignity, and driving social change. That experience gave me a clear sense of purpose. Since then, every career decision I have made has been guided by one desire. To use the law to improve lives.

How did you identify the areas of law you wanted to pursue?

I did not begin my career with a fixed plan to specialize in justice reform or human rights. My direction came from experience rather than design. At HURILAWS, I worked closely with vulnerable people and quickly realized that the law has its greatest value when it improves lives. That experience shaped my career choices and led me towards public service, academia, policy reform, and survivor protection.

Was there a particular experience, case, or mentor that inspired you to specialise in justice reform and public service?

Dr. Olisa Agbakoba, SAN, had a profound influence on my career. As Founder of HURILAWS, he challenged me to think beyond legal theory and to see the law as an instrument for reform. He trusted young lawyers with meaningful responsibility and encouraged innovation, excellence, and courage. His confidence in me gave me confidence in myself.

What was your experience leading NAPTIP?

Leading NAPTIP was one of the most humbling experiences of my career. It taught me that good laws alone do not guarantee justice. Survivors often struggle because of weak institutions, limited resources, stigma, and poor coordination rather than gaps in legislation. Meeting survivors and hearing their stories reminded me that every statistic represents a human life. Justice is not measured by what the law promises on paper, but by whether people feel protected, heard, and able to rebuild their lives.

> **"...I did not begin my career with a fixed plan to specialize in justice reform or human rights."**

Many young lawyers aspire to hold leadership positions in public institutions. What prepared you for leadership before you officially became a leader?

Leadership began long before I held a leadership title. I consistently volunteered for difficult assignments, invested in continuous learning, and looked for opportunities to solve problems. I also learned the importance of serving others, building relationships, and earning trust through competence and integrity. Leadership is not something that suddenly arrives. It is built quietly through discipline, consistency, and service.

What skills do you believe are increasingly important for lawyers who aspire to influence public policy rather than remain solely in legal practice?

Strong legal knowledge remains essential, but it is no longer enough. Lawyers who want to shape public policy must understand how government works, communicate persuasively, and build relationships among diverse stakeholders. Emotional intelligence is equally important because policy affects real people, not abstract legal principles. Above all, they must remain curious and never stop learning.

How has your definition of success changed over the course of your career?

Early in my career, success meant achieving professional milestones and advancing in my profession. Today, I measure success by impact. I ask whether my work has strengthened institutions, expanded access to justice, influenced meaningful policy, or inspired someone else to lead with integrity. Some of my proudest moments are not awards or appointments, but seeing reforms take root and watching people I have mentored surpass me. That, to me, is a legacy worth striving for.

Funke **Adeoye**



Funke Adeoye is a Human Rights Lawyer, Legal Tech Advocate, and Social Entrepreneur with over a decade of experience advancing social justice and promoting access to justice for indigent women, children, and other vulnerable groups. She holds a Law degree from the University of Benin, Nigeria, and a Master's in International Human Rights Law from the University of Oxford, where she studied as a Commonwealth Scholar. She is the Founder of Hope Behind Bars Africa, an organisation whose work has secured the release of several wrongfully incarcerated individuals, including those detained for exercising their fundamental rights and Justicepadi.ai.

Funke also holds certificates in Non-Profit Leadership and Management from the Lagos Business School and in Civic Engagement from the University of Georgia. She is a Mandela Washington Fellow, Acumen West Africa Fellow, and Ashoka Fellow.In 2020, she was listed by The Attic London among the Top 50 Lawyers Changing the World for the Better. She won the Unleash Plus Dragon Competition in India in 2022, and in 2023, She received the Waistliz Global Citizen Prize. In 2025, she was honoured with the International Bar Association's Outstanding Young Lawyer of the Year Award.

> "One common misconception is that success in law is defined solely by working in top firms or following traditional career paths ..."

When you were newly called to the Bar, did you always imagine that your career would focus on criminal justice reform and prison advocacy, or did that purpose emerge later?

My father's encounters with the criminal justice system during my childhood culminating in his detention for a crime he did not commit left a lasting impression on me and inspired me to study law. As a law student, my involvement in clinic work, and later as a private practitioner at Olumide Sofowora Chambers, I began taking on pro bono cases that deepened my interest in criminal justice reform. One case that stayed with me involved fourteen clients who had been detained for capital offenses despite strong alibis. I was able to support their release through the Federal High Court and the Court of Appeal, an experience that solidified my commitment to pursuing a legal career focused on systemic reform.

Founding a social justice organisation often comes with financial and professional uncertainty. What were the hardest early sacrifices you had to make?

Starting Hope Behind Bars Africa required leaving a secure job, juicy job offers to navigating limited resources and a new space where I had to learn fast. Much of the early work was voluntary, and personal savings were often used to bootstrap the work for about 3 years.

For young lawyers who are passionate about human rights and social justice, what practical steps should they take early in their careers?

Young lawyers should focus on gaining practical experience through internships, pro bono cases, or law clinics to engage directly with rights issues. They should build networks with civil society, policy makers, and mentors to learn strategic advocacy. Developing policy, research, and tech skills early can help scale impact. Finally, cultivating continuous learning and reflection ensures they can respond effectively to systemic challenges.

What personal values have anchored you through the highs and lows of your career?

Do the grunt work. Put your head down and do the non-glamorous, thankless work that nobody will clap for. Hard work is a test of character. It shows whether you only perform when there is an audience. Beyond that, I believe in follow-through. Do what you say you will do, when you say you will do it. And be generous: with your knowledge, your time, your platforms. These three things have never failed me.

If you could go back to your first year after being called to the Bar, what is one decision you would make differently and why?

If I could go back to my first year after being called to the Bar, I would take on more indigent cases independently and with greater confidence, rather than waiting to be assigned work. There were many individuals in need of probono legal support, particularly during my NYSC year, and engaging more proactively would have accelerated my learning and deepened my advocacy/litigation skills. It would also have strengthened my sense of ownership and commitment to using the law as a tool for impact early on.

What is one misconception young lawyers often have about building a successful legal career?

One common misconception is that success in law is defined solely by working in top firms or following traditional career paths. In reality, a meaningful and impactful legal career is built by developing expertise, being intentional about your focus, and solving real problems. Many young lawyers underestimate the value of hands-on experience, alternative paths, and purpose-driven work in shaping long-term success.

What has been the most fulfilling moment in your journey with Hope Behind Bars Africa?

One of the most fulfilling moments with Hope Behind Bars Africa was supporting the release of minors who were detained for participating in the End Bad Governance protests. While we did not represent them directly, we provided strategic support through media advocacy and raising international awareness, ensuring their cases received attention and pressure for fair treatment. Seeing these young people regain their freedom reinforced the importance of using multiple levers to achieve justice.

Gabriel **Agboola**



Gabriel Agboola was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2018 and is the principal of Gabriel Agboola Law Practice, Ogun State. His practice focuses on civil and criminal litigation, property, family and tax law, energy law, and alternative dispute resolution, with particular emphasis on litigation and trial advocacy.

He has held several leadership positions within the legal profession, beginning as Chief Judge of the Students' Union of Adekunle Ajasin University. He currently serves as Treasurer of the NBA Abeokuta Branch and Appointed Secretary of CLASFON Abeokuta. He is also Publicity Secretary of the NBA Young Lawyers Forum Governing Council.

Gabriel is committed to continuous legal education, mentorship and professional service, with a long-term ambition to become an exceptional advocate and contribute meaningfully to the development of legal practice in Nigeria.

> "...relationships are built by character and strengthened through service."

When you started Gabriel Agboola Law Practice, what did you imagine the practice would become, and how has that vision evolved?

I did not initially plan to establish GALP in the year it began. The practice grew out of disappointment after I left the office where I had worked for two years following my NYSC in Lagos. At just four years post-call, I decided that I would not work for anyone else and simply needed to survive on my own. With time, however, GALP became more than a means of survival. I began to envision it as a global law firm known for excellence, integrity and effective advocacy. It remains a solo practice for now, but I hope to expand in the coming year and build the global practice I imagined.

What were the biggest challenges you encountered in the early stages of building your own practice, and how did you overcome them?

The main challenge I faced was getting clients. Starting without an established client base meant that I had to rely on relationships, reputation and referrals while demonstrating the quality of my work. I overcame that challenge gradually by staying committed to excellent service, maintaining relationships and making myself available to serve wherever opportunities arose.

How did you get your first clients, and what have you learnt about building a client base from scratch?

My first client was someone I had worked with at my former office. I did not poach him; we had built a good professional relationship, and after I left, he reached out because he wanted me to handle his matter. I remember receiving his call while I was at home, uncertain about what I would do the following month. It was around the 2021 NBA Annual General Conference in Port Harcourt. The fee from that matter sustained me for more than a month. Since then, many clients have come through referrals. I have learnt that quality service, strong relationships and genuine involvement in society are essential to building trust.

What is one courtroom lesson you have learnt from years of practice?

One of the most important lessons I have learnt through experience is that, as much as a lawyer must know the facts and the law, the lawyer must also know the judge. Every courtroom has its own dynamics, and understanding how a particular judge approaches cases, arguments, procedure and evidence can influence how one presents a matter. This is not about seeking favour or compromising professional standards.

Has your involvement in professional associations created opportunities for your career?

Yes, immensely. My involvement in professional associations has created numerous opportunities for me, both professionally and personally. Beyond the visibility that comes with participating in professional activities, these platforms have allowed me to meet people, build relationships and contribute meaningfully to the profession. Many opportunities come through people who have seen your work, character and commitment over time. My engagements with the NBA and other professional and community organisations have expanded my network and exposed me to experiences that I might not otherwise have encountered.

What qualities have opened the most doors for you in your career, and which qualities have helped you retain the trust of those who opened those doors?

I would say respect and a willingness to serve have opened the most doors for me. I have always tried to treat people with respect, regardless of their position, and to remain willing and ready to contribute my quota wherever I can. I believe people notice when your interest in service is genuine and when you are prepared to contribute without constantly asking what you will receive in return. Those same qualities have helped me retain the trust of people who have opened doors for me. Trust is sustained by consistency, humility, competence and a willingness to remain useful. For me, relationships are built by character and strengthened through service.

Special Feature: Father & Son

CHIEF O.C.J. OKOCHA, OFR, SAN, JP, DSSRS
OROWHUO W. A. OKOCHA, ESQ., PHD

Onueze Chukwujinka Joe Okocha, OFR, SAN, JP, DSSRS is the Founder of the Law Firm of OKOCHA & OKOCHA. He is a former Attorney-General and Commissioner of Justice of Rivers State, a Past President of the Nigerian Bar Association, a Life Member of the Honourable Body of Benchers (the highest body of excellence in the Legal Profession in Nigeria, which is charged with the statutory responsibility of admitting Lawyers to the Nigerian Bar), a former member of the National Judicial Council (NJC) from 2010 to 2014, and was the Chairman of the Council of Legal Education from 2012 to 2016, among numerous other professional appointments.

He was awarded the distinguished National Honour of Member of the Order of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (MFR) in 2004. He was also awarded the distinguished National Honour of Officer of the Order of the Federal Republic (OFR) in 2022.

He is a proud alumnus of both the prestigious University of Ife, Ile-Ife (now the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife), where he obtained his LLB in 1977, and the University College London (UCL) of the University of London, United Kingdom, where he obtained his LLM in 1980. He was called to the Bar in Nigeria in 1978, and was conferred with the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) in 1995. He is renowned for his expertise in general litigation, property law litigation and oil compensation claims. He has published several articles on general litigation and other professional matters.



Looking back at the early years of your practice, what were the struggles behind your successful career that people rarely saw?

Frankly speaking, I did not have too many struggles in my early years of practice. Perhaps the only challenge was when the Senior Colleague who employed me as a Junior Colleague in his Law Firm, first from July, 1979 to August, 1979, when I travelled to the United Kingdom to study for the LL.M Degree of the University of London, and then from October, 1980, when I had returned to Port Harcourt after bagging the LL.M Degree, stopped paying the monthly allowances he had agreed to pay me in the sum of N250.00. He paid for only two months from the date of my re-engagement, i.e., October and November, 1980. That was in fact what impelled me to establish my own Law Firm. I will add that I was somehow privileged, as my father bought me a car, a Peugeot 504 GL Saloon Car, brand new, and helped to furnish my Law Office.

What principles have remained non-negotiable for you throughout your career, even as the profession around you changed?

Honesty, Integrity and a total dedication to hard work.

What did lawyers of your generation understand about professional reputation, relationships, and integrity that you believe younger lawyers should never lose?

Reputation, a good name, is everything, especially for Legal Practitioners. And so, we all understood that we must uphold and maintain the highest level of competence, honesty and integrity in the practice of our noble profession of Law. We all understood that we must never be remiss in our duty to uphold and maintain strict compliance with the Rules of Conduct in the Legal Profession.

If you could restore one quality that you believe the legal profession has gradually lost, what would it be, and why?

Honesty and Integrity, at their highest levels. This is because recent events have shown that Legal Practitioners are now showing themselves to be dishonest and disreputable.

What is one lesson you hoped your son would learn from watching your career rather than from anything you ever told him?

Professional honor, honesty and integrity, and a total commitment to work hard. As the saying goes, "Hard Work Never Killed Anyone!"

Looking at the two journeys side by side, where do you see the greatest similarities, and where are your paths most different?

We have similarities in all respects and in the same measure and, accordingly, I am unable to say that our paths are different. I say so even though I am aware that he is a Lecturer in Law at the Faculty of Law in the Rivers State University, and his engagement in that regard is not strictly the practice of Law as a Private Legal Practitioner. Interestingly, I was also a Lecturer in Law, at the Faculty of Law, University of Maiduguri, from 1978 to 1979, when I was still a NYSC Corpsman. The late NIKI TOBI, JSC, was the Dean of Law at that time.

What does "legacy" mean to you?

In relation to the practice of Law, I would like to describe legacy as the reputation for honour and integrity, and the goodwill which a founder of a Law Firm leaves for succeeding generations of Legal Practitioners in the Law Firm, so that the Law Firm may continue to grow from strength to strength, and to endure for years and years, after the Founder is gone.

As you may be aware, some of the large Law Firms in the country, and in the developed economies of the world, have survived and continued to thrive long after the founders thereof have gone. So, the Law Firm of OKOCHA AND OKOCHA, LEGAL PRACTITIONERS, which I founded in the year 1983, can actually continue to thrive even through several generations of my succeeding descendants.



What is one privilege or advantage you have enjoyed, and remain grateful for, because of your father?

I do not have to spend as long to introduce myself to others in the profession, and it is easy to be ushered into rooms by the mere recognition of your pedigree. A caveat, however – getting ushered into the room is the only advantage. Only you can justify or merit your continued presence in the room.

Most people tend to focus on the benefits of having an established lawyer as a parent — what is one challenge you've had to navigate because of that privilege?

Having my every move compared and juxtaposed with his antecedents. I cannot count the number of times I have been told that my style, presentation and advocacy are just like his. It has the potential to whittle down your achievements, as the naysayers may choose not to see the effort you put into honing your craft, and choose to see your success as one that is as a result of your predecessor. For context, there are already people reminding me that by the time he was my age at the Bar, he was already a SAN, and that this means that I have already fallen behind in being as good as he is.

What advice would you give a young lawyer whose parent is already highly respected in the profession and who is struggling to find their own place?

Success is personal, so you must work hard at it. People will always compare you to your parent, and as a mentor once told me, when you are the child of a successful parent, people will automatically like you because of your pedigree, and people will automatically hate you because of your pedigree. The choice is therefore yours to find your own place, chart your own path and try to succeed, in spite of who your parent is, not because of who they are.

Looking at the two journeys side by side, where do you see the greatest similarities, and where are your paths most different?

The greatest similarity is that we are both innately passionate about a career in litigation and, as I mentioned earlier, apparently my style, presentation and advocacy are just like his. The greatest difference is that he did not have to trudge down a path already trudged, and successfully so, by a predecessor. That, on its own, brings immense and added pressure to succeed. After all, and I mean this mostly as a joke, but there is no smoke without fire; if he had practiced law for a few years and decided to try his hands at something else, no one would bat an eyelid; but now he has successfully run his own Law Firm for 43 years and, in the twilight of his career, is now talking about "several generations of [his] succeeding descendants" keeping the Law Firm alive and thriving. So, as if it is not bad enough that I am poised to fill his shoes, he is also putting pressure on my own offspring! It is well.

Gladys **Emmanuel**



Gladys Rebecca Emmanuel, Esq. is a human rights lawyer, gender-justice advocate, and researcher dedicated to legal empowerment, gender equality, and survivor-centered responses to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). She holds an LL. B from the University of Jos, where she graduated on the Dean's Honour Roll. Gladys earned a Master of Laws (LL.M) in Human Rights Law from Cardiff University as a recipient of the prestigious Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship. She is currently expanding her scholarly contributions as a Ph.D. student in Gender Studies, her research spans global and local legal pathways to justice.

Gladys has served as a Board of Trustees member for the Girls' Education Access Initiative (GEAI) and acts as a regular expert guest across major media platforms to analyze human rights and gender crises. Her exceptional advocacy work has earned her widespread acclaim, including the Cardiff University 30(ish) Community Activist Award and a spot on the 2026 Eloy Awards Power List as one of the 30 Power People who embody resilience, leadership, and inclusion in Africa. Central to her professional journey is her impactful work at the Tabitha Empowerment Centre, where she serves as the Advocacy Officer and In-house Lawyer.

> **Professional communities have shaped my journey in meaningful ways, they gave me perspective, language, and proximity to conversations that were shaping the future.**

What factors guided your career decisions between 1–7 years post-call, and have those factors changed since?

Early in my career, I was deeply moved by the systemic subjugation and violence women and girls endured. Driven by this, I transitioned from a traditional law firm to grassroots advocacy, and legal support for survivors of gender-based violence. Initially, my focus was largely on responding to immediate harm through pro bono support. Over time, my perspective shifted toward prevention, survivors support, and capacity building and strengthening for stakeholders at communities. Today, my guiding factor is institutional design —drafting and reviewing policies, standard operating procedures, and legislative frameworks to stop violations before they occur.

Can you describe one of the most impactful cases or projects you have worked on?

One of the most impactful initiatives I have led is Tabitha Empowerment Centre's Anti-GBV Campaign, which has evolved into one of our flagship interventions. Beyond raising awareness, the campaign has driven our research and evidence-based advocacy, informing policy engagement and programme design. Through this initiative, we have sensitised over 70 schools, established school-based Anti-GBV clubs to sustain peer education, and trained more than 50 Community Champions, including male allies, to lead prevention efforts at the grassroots, supported 40+ GBV survivors. What makes this project particularly impactful is its focus on creating long-term community ownership, strengthening local accountability, and building sustainable structures that prevent violence before it occurs.

What's a misconception people have about the kind of law you practice?

People often mistakenly believe that the hardest part of human rights law is arguing the law itself. In reality, the most difficult aspect is the invisible infrastructure surrounding it, particularly the "care tax" and the safety risks women face. Another misconception is that winning a case fixes the problem. True human rights work reveals that even with legal victories, structures of circular violence persist due to rigid cultural practices and institutional barriers that demand continuous, long-term advocacy.

If a young female law graduate told you she wanted to go into human rights and NGO-based legal work instead of a traditional law firm, what would you tell her about the trade-offs and the opportunities?

I would tell her that the opportunity to directly rewrite societal structures and empower communities is deeply fulfilling. However, the trade-offs are real. She will confront institutional failures, circular violence, and minimal emotional support systems for secondary trauma. She must prepare to pay a "safety tax" of heightened vigilance that male colleagues bypass. I would advise her to document everything, seek external mentorship networks, and build collaborative architecture rather than working in silos.

You have been a lawyer for over 10 years, what would you describe as the most difficult professional transition you have made?

My most difficult transition was moving from the structured environment of traditional law firms to the complex, emotionally taxing world of grassroots gender justice. Managing the dual identity of an in-house counsel and advocacy officer required learning how to balance technical legal accuracy with high-energy community mobilization. Physically and mentally, confronting the residue of survivors' trauma while simultaneously managing cross-border volunteer networks and driving national legislative reviews forced me to completely re-discipline how I pace my life.

If you were graduating from law school in Nigeria in 2026 with the knowledge you have today, how would you approach building your career?

I would still pursue gender justice and human rights because that conviction was shaped long before graduation. However, I would approach the journey more strategically. I would intentionally build expertise through specialised courses, join professional networks and coalitions. I would also prioritise mentorship, expand my professional network beyond familiar circles, and contribute to policy debates through research, publications, and conference presentations. Most importantly, consistently document my work, because expertise becomes truly impactful when it is visible, collaborative, and continuously developed.

Hikmah **Amasa**



Hikmah Amasa Abdulsalam is a legal practitioner and researcher whose professional journey has evolved from broad-based legal practice into a growing specialisation in corporate compliance, governance and regulatory law. She is also a co-founder of Amasa Solicitors, a newly established law firm through which she continues to engage with the practical demands of legal practice. She obtained her LL.B. from the University of Ilorin and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2021. She recently completed her Master's degree at the University of Ilorin and has joined the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies (NIALS) as a Research Fellow. Her interests span corporate compliance, corporate governance, regulatory law and legal research.

You spent five years at Wahab Egbewole & Co., what were the most important lessons those years of general practice taught you?

My five years at Wahab Egbewole & Co. taught me that good lawyering begins with discipline, preparation and adaptability. Working across civil and criminal litigation, as well as election petitions, exposed me to different clients, personalities, procedures and pressures. I learned that every brief deserves careful attention, regardless of its size, and that advocacy is strengthened by thorough research and mastery of facts. I also learned the importance of professional relationships, resilience and sound judgment, particularly when outcomes are uncertain.

How did your experience in general practice influence your decision to focus more deliberately on corporate compliance?

General practice gave me a foundation that made my interest in corporate compliance more deliberate. Litigation taught me what can happen when legal and regulatory risks are not identified or managed early enough. I began to appreciate that, for businesses, preventing disputes and regulatory breaches can be just as important as resolving them. Working on different kinds of matters also helped me understand that compliance is rarely confined to one area of law; it can involve corporate governance, employment, taxation, regulatory obligations, contracts and risk management. That broader perspective encouraged me to pursue compliance not simply as a practice area, but as a professional specialisation.

What opportunities do you see for lawyers who choose to practise outside Nigeria's major commercial centres?

I believe lawyers outside Nigeria's major commercial centres have significant opportunities, particularly because technology has reduced the limitations created by jurisdiction. Businesses across the country still need competent lawyers for corporate advisory, regulatory compliance, contracts, dispute resolution and governance. I, for instance served clients from several states across the country and even the United Kingdom and Canada through digital platforms while based in Ilorin. Practising outside Lagos or Abuja can also encourage lawyers to build stronger local networks and understand the realities of businesses operating outside the major commercial hubs. The key is to develop expertise, maintain professional visibility and remain accessible to clients beyond one's immediate location.

> **"...What matters is the quality of your work, the relationships you build, the expertise you develop and your willingness to seek opportunities beyond your immediate environment."**

What has been the biggest challenge you have faced as a young lawyer, and how did you overcome it?

One of my biggest challenges as a young lawyer was learning to navigate the demands of practice while developing confidence in my own professional judgment. Early in one's career, there can be pressure to know everything, perform perfectly and compare one's progress with that of others. I overcame this by embracing continuous learning and becoming more intentional about preparation. I learned to ask questions when necessary, seek guidance from senior colleagues, study matters carefully and accept that competence develops with experience. I also learned not to view challenging assignments as evidence of inadequacy, but as opportunities to grow.

What advice would you give young lawyers who feel they need to leave their home cities for Lagos or Abuja to build a successful legal career?

I would encourage young lawyers to resist the idea that success is located only in Lagos or Abuja. Those cities undoubtedly offer significant opportunities, but a successful legal career can also be built from other parts of Nigeria. What matters is the quality of your work, the relationships you build, the expertise you develop and your willingness to seek opportunities beyond your immediate environment. Young lawyers should use technology, professional networks, conferences, research and continuous learning to expand their reach. If you are practising in your home city, become excellent there first, while deliberately building visibility and connections that can open doors nationally and internationally.

Ifeoluwa **Ogunbufunmi**



Ifeoluwa Ogunbufunmi is the Founder & Chief Strategist of SWIF, a London-based global startup advisory firm. Through her work at SWIF, she has advised over 200 startups across 23 countries and worked with founders, accelerators, venture capital firms, governments, and corporates across the UK, Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. Her work sits at the intersection of founder positioning, strategic growth, brand authority, revenue growth, and long-term business sustainability. She has an MBA from the University of Oxford, where she was a Laidlaw Foundation Scholar and is an alumnus of the UK Global Talent Award for her exceptional talent in Technology & Strategy.

> **Preparation. Integrity. Reliability. Generosity. Those traits create trust in Lagos, Dubai, London or anywhere else.**

Your first role out of law school was helping reform how an entire country does business. How did you position and prepare for that role?

I didn't have decades of experience, so I'm thankful for mentorship, access, and deep belief in my capabilities. Dr. Jumoke Oduwole, who's now Nigeria's Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, was my lecturer at University. We started to build an incredible mentoring relationship in my second year (2012). In 2015, I won a regional essay competition in Kenya, where she was also attending the WTO Ministerial Conference. That was where she told me about the opportunity that had opened up for her as one of the key advisors to the Fmr. Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osinbajo SAN. A year later, I joined her team, which was leading the country's ease of doing business efforts, and it remains one of the life-changing opportunities of my career. Being in that environment taught me something I still believe today: law creates its greatest value when it enables progress rather than simply manages risk. The best lawyers shape systems. They make economies, businesses and institutions work better. That insight completely changed how I viewed my career.

There is a version of your story where you stayed on a safe, prestigious track. What made you keep choosing the less certain door?

Because growth has never lived on the safest path. Every major opportunity in my career initially looked like a risk. Leaving traditional legal practice. Moving into government. Pursuing an MBA at the world's leading university, the University of Oxford. Joining a fast-growing technology company, Flutterwave, by pitching myself directly to the CEO. Moving on from AWS UK & Ireland to build SWIF. None of those decisions came with guarantees. But I've learned that fear is often a poor career adviser. Whenever I had to choose between comfort and growth, I tried to choose the path that expanded who I could become rather than simply protected who I already was.

Building a reputation in Lagos is one thing; doing it again in Dubai and London is another. What did you have to unlearn, and what turned out to travel better than you expected?

I had to unlearn the idea that credentials alone open doors. In every new market, nobody owes you credibility. You earn it again. And again. I had to become comfortable with reintroducing myself with confidence, building new relationships, asking better questions, and consistently delivering excellent work. What surprised me was how well certain qualities travelled. Curiosity. Preparation. Integrity. Reliability. Generosity. Those traits create trust in Lagos, Dubai, London or anywhere else. I've also learned that while contexts change, excellence is remarkably universal. And as a personal mantra, the favour of God stays opening doors for me, because God can ALWAYS be trusted!

Leaving a senior role at AWS to start SWIF was, in your own language, a big bet on yourself. What was the conversation you had with yourself before you jumped?

I asked myself one simple question. "What's the worst that could happen? And could I live with it?" I had my answer, and it fueled a lot of decisions that came after. Landing the UK Global Talent Visa as an Exceptional Talent in Tech Strategy was also a game-changer. AWS gave me extraordinary opportunities, brilliant colleagues and a front-row seat to global innovation. But when the opportunity presented itself to bet on myself, it was time to make room for something I believed could become great.

What is one belief about success or ambition you held early in your career that you've since completely changed your mind about?

I used to believe success was about collecting impressive achievements. I saw it work for so many. Today, I think success is about creating meaningful contribution. Earlier in my career, I measured progress by promotions, prestigious organisations and recognisable brands. Now I ask different questions. Who became better because I showed up? What problems did I solve? How am I helping founders build better businesses? What opportunities did I create for someone else? Achievements may open doors. Impact is what gives them lasting meaning.

Somewhere right now there's a young Nigerian lawyer who feels boxed in by the traditional path and is afraid to admit it. What would you want them to know?

First, you are not confused simply because your ambition looks different. A law degree is one of the most versatile foundations you can have. It's one of my biggest assets. It teaches analysis, communication, structured thinking, negotiation and judgement, skills that create value far beyond the courtroom. Don't abandon your legal education. Build on it. Learn so much emerging and future technology. AI is absolutely going nowhere! Become excellent at solving problems that matter. Most importantly, don't compare your beginning to someone else's middle. Sometimes the most remarkable careers are the ones nobody could have predicted at the start.

Ifeoluwayimika **Bamidele**, PhD



Ifeoluwayimika Bamidele, PhD is a Professor of Health Law, at the Afe Babalola University, Ado Ekiti. He had his degrees at the Obafemi Awolowo University, The Nigeria Law School, University of Liverpool and University of South Africa, Pretoria. He has about 15 years of experience in teaching and practice of Law, Medicine and Healthcare. His research focus spans Patient safety, AI, Tech and Law, Law and Medicine, Public Health Law, Family Law, Intellectual Property Law, Sports Law, Climate Change Law and other emerging areas of law. He has taught across disciplines with students in Law, Medicine, Nursing, Pharmacy, Public Health, and other Allied Health Professions at graduate and undergraduate levels.

He consults for tech startups in the digital health ecosystem. He also serves as consultant for education institutions and ethical disciplinary bodies across Nigeria and other African countries. Ifeoluwayimika is a patient rights advocate, developing Health Justice, a civic health tech initiative that amplifies patient and health workers feedback to transform healthcare in Nigeria. He is the Chief Impact Officer for the Drug Free Project, Nigeria's leading youth-led substance abuse advocacy and recovery support initiative.

> "...we need to be at the fore front of developing substance abuse policies that focus on support, rehabilitation, treatment and prevention."

You have built a career that combines academia, legal practice, public advocacy and social impact. Was this breadth intentional, or did these different paths emerge along the way?

The paths emerged along the way and they are still emerging. There's a quote "As you walk on the way, the way appears". It's been an experience and solving problems is one of the major justifications for the emergence of the various dimensions.

As a lecturer, what do you think law students today need to learn that cannot simply be found in a law textbook?

Human Relations, the value of people and how it directly influences both your law practice and your entire life. People often ask why there's this first class or second class upper student that seems not to be doing well and I point them in the direction of the so many things that are not taught in the four walls of a classroom. The human is multifaceted and wholistic learning can build better lawyers than just classrooms and textbooks. For me, people are the currency of the world.

You have academic interests spanning areas including medical law, health law and sports law. What drew you to these areas?

Credit to my teachers of law and medicine at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Prof A O Yusuff and Prof S B Odunsi. Shortly before taking Law and Medicine classes, I had already promised myself I was just going to complete my law degree and move on to some other fields but the intersection of law and Medicine caught my fancy, became an obsession and I decided to learn more. This interest further deepened when I moved to the University of Liverpool and met some of the gurus in Medical Law as my teachers. I saw the width and told myself, although this isn't where the money is yet, this is where my heart is. For Tech Law, Sports Law and some of the other areas I have had privilege to pivot, it has been more of real life experience and problem solving.

What personal experience, observation or conviction first made you decide to establish the Drug Free Project?

I saw a young person who had completed University, lose their life because they were celebrating completing their four year degree. I know of brilliant young minds including some who studied law who had to be sacked from work because they could no longer function at work. I know some who have been in and out rehabilitation centers for up to a decade. This generation has a battle to fight against substance use as it takes away life, health and hope. We cannot continue to complain. Someone has to take responsibility so I decided to. It's been over a decade of building in small spaces across educational institutions but now we have a global front that's doing great things across the nation.

What has been the most difficult part of building the Drug Free Project?

It is the reality of saving lives. People really want to stop abusing substances but cannot afford it. Rehabilitation is so expensive and there are no guarantees. So it's hard to see people who need help but cannot get it. We have limited resources and we can only help a few. That's why we have focused on prevention advocacy and building an army of drug free advocates in the War Against Drug Abuse.

What do you think the legal profession can contribute to the fight against substance abuse beyond litigation and criminal enforcement?

The Legal profession needs to do some introspection, how many legal practitioners currently require support for substance abuse recovery and why is this the case? Also, we need to be at the fore front of developing substance abuse policies that focus on support, rehabilitation, treatment and prevention. We need to signpost the nation to the National Mental Health Act and its enforcement as well as support organizations like ours. Some of the top sponsors that we have are law firms actually. Our Abuja, Lagos and National campaigns are fully supported by Neoteric LP and Strichland LP especially the production of our Information, Education, Communication Materials like coloring books, puzzles, etc.

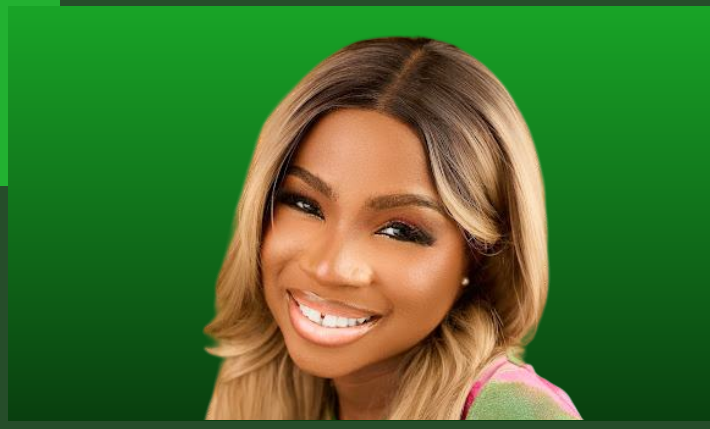
What is one lesson you learnt the hard way that younger lawyers could learn from?

Sadly, it was a lesson I learnt pretty early. I need to leave the country for my masters degree and I wanted to get a reference letter. At that time, you had to get a physical copy, so I tried to reach out to my teachers and one of them mentioned to me that the only time that students show up after uni is when they want a reference. It was not a nice experience. This was over 15 years ago. Years later I'm in his shoes and I understand how that feels. Keep some form of relationship with your lecturers, former bosses at workplaces and even colleagues. You never know which doors that relationship will open.

As new social and economic challenges emerge, which areas of law do you think are currently underestimated by young lawyers but could become major practice areas in the future?

It's Technology. Anything around Technology will change the world and find its way into every other sphere. Some years ago, I spoke at a branch of the NBA on Artificial Intelligence Tools for lawyers. On that panel of 5, I was the only one who was pro AI. They said lawyers will not use AI. In fact one person said only lazy lawyers will use AI. Today, that's not the case. Tech has found its way to Health, Law, Education, Sports, Government and all spheres.

Ikanna **Okim**



Ikanna Okim is a distinguished legal professional whose academic and professional journey reflects an unwavering commitment to excellence. She graduated with a First Class degree in Law from the University of Uyo, becoming the first student since the inception of the Faculty of Law (36 years) to achieve that distinction. She subsequently earned a First Class from the Nigerian Law School as well. She also holds the Bachelor of Civil Law (BCL) from the University of Oxford, where she studied as the only recipient of the Oxford-Hackney BCL Graduate Scholarship in 2024. She is qualified to practise law in both Nigeria and England and Wales.

As a corporate and commercial lawyer, Ikanna combines academic excellence with practical prowess, advising on complex climate-resilient business transactions. Beyond legal practice, she is deeply invested in mentoring and developing the next generation of lawyers. She is the founder of The Exceptional Law Students' Quarters (TELS-Q), a thriving community dedicated to raising well rounded law students who excel academically, professionally, and personally. She is also the host of the We Win Here Podcast where she explores conversations around faith, family, career, personal growth, and purposeful living. Through her platform, she has inspired and equipped students and young professionals with practical insights on academic success, career development, and excellence.

You made history as the first student in 36 years to graduate with a First Class from the Faculty of Law at the University of Uyo. What did you do differently from others?

Yes I did make history! I can't say for sure what my colleagues did from which I deviated but I can speak about the things I did. Firstly, I had (and still have) a penchant for doing everything well. If it's worth doing at all, it's worth doing excellently too. That meant that even the assignments and group presentations with the lowest mark allocation got my 100% devotion. Making a first class means making several A grades. Making an A means that the student takes every opportunity to gather marks, even if from a 5-marks activity. It's little drops that make an ocean. I would treat a small assignment like it was the main exam. In addition to God's help and studying hard, I think that mindset really helped me.

After making history at university, how did you prevent the pressure of living up to your previous achievement from becoming a burden at the law school?

I remember having a conversation with my mentor about this and he said (I paraphrase), "Ikanna, living up to other people's expectations of you is not sustainable. If you want a first class, make sure you want it for yourself". I followed that advice to the letter. I decentered everyone and centered my purpose in God. I remembered again that my reason for being excellent was not for public approval, it was because I wanted to live up to my full potential. I did not want to ever be less than I was created to be. That worked. I made another first class.

The BCL at Oxford is often described as one of the world's most intellectually demanding law programmes. What attracted you to it?

Exactly that attracted me to it. The BCL at Oxford is a rigorous program and I chose it for the rigour. I enjoy doing hard things, and even better doing it alongside the finest brains from around the world. The BCL is a very competitive program so I got to interact with really smart lawyers while pursuing the degree and that was really worth it.
I interacted with renowned professors, discussed with them, debated with them and that felt good! After the BCL, I noticed that I developed better communication and problem-solving skills. I was too busy on the BCL to have noticed that I was evolving daily into the Oxonian-bred lawyer I admired!

What's one moment early in your career that quietly shaped the lawyer you became?

> **"I don't get too emotional about feedback, no matter how it's delivered. I take the lessons and move."**

I started my career in a very busy top-tier law firm and that made me see the real-life impact of the transactions I was working on. That influenced my perspective on legal practice; helping me understand that I was not just drafting mere agreements on paper or doing meaningless routines. I am a problem-solver. I had that sudden realization when I worked on a transaction which I saw in the news soon after. I was proud to have worked on it, but more importantly, it helped me see that every time I double-checked a legal provision or took extra time to read an agreement 3 times over for typos, I was doing something that was worth it. I was contributing to building the economies of the world.

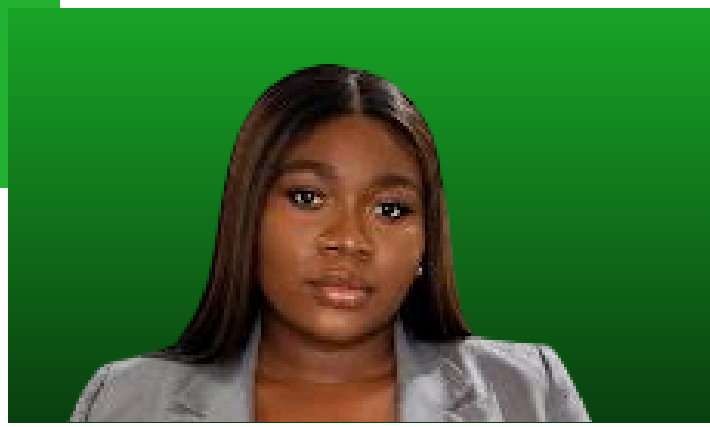
You founded the Exceptional Law Students Quarters over 3 years ago. What inspired that decision?

I wanted law students in Africa to have three things: community, information and leverage. They all flow into one another. It is different doing the LLB journey surrounded by like-minds and by seniors who are ready to mentor you and answer the questions that keep you up at night. That way, you have more information and information would always be leverage. I founded TELS-Q with other young lawyers at the time who shared the vision and have given their time and resources to ensuring that law students know about career-defining opportunities, can compete favourably with their counterparts from other regions and can take the world! We are active in about 5 African countries and we keep growing. Since we started in 2022, we have our TELS-Q alumni go on to be first class lawyers and have shone brightly in their endeavours.

Throughout your career, what habits have consistently helped you perform at a high level?

I don't get too emotional about feedback, no matter how it's delivered. I take the lessons and move. I am concerned about how to never be corrected about one thing more than twice. I believe that feedback is essential for growth in anything. If I don't get feedback, I go looking for it. Secondly, I am all about the smallest details. I make mistakes sometimes because I am still growing but I am the one who would see a missing apostrophe sign that everyone else might have missed. I've accepted that legal work can be boring and those details are boring but I don't mind. A good lawyer is one who is fine with boring work.

Jemilat **Ali**



Jemilat Kassim Ali is a legal practitioner with over five years of experience in dispute resolution, corporate and commercial advisory, regulatory compliance and legal operations. She has advised and supported businesses across sectors including international logistics, FMGC, healthcare, real estate, construction and other emerging businesses, with experience spanning commercial agreements, regulatory engagements, compliance documentation and corporate structuring.

Jemilat is the Managing Partner at Prime Shield Legal Partners, where her practice increasingly focuses on litigation, legal advisory, regulatory compliance and business operations. Her current professional interests include market-entry advisory, cross-border business operations and regulatory frameworks affecting businesses operating across African markets. She holds an LL.B. from Ambrose Alli University and a B.L. from the Nigerian Law School and is a member of the Nigerian Bar Association, including its Section on Law Practice.

> **"...Surround yourself with the voices you want in your head. Listen to people who are doing what you aspire to do. Ask questions."**

Your career has evolved from traditional legal practice and litigation into corporate advisory, regulatory compliance and legal operations. What inspired that evolution?

The evolution was really about using the oil I have in my jar. In 2 Kings 4, the prophet asked the widow, "What do you have in your house?" That question has stayed with me. I reached a point where I wasn't finding much fulfilment in a role that had become about 30% legal practice and 70% admin work. I started asking myself, "What can I do with what I already have?" I have always loved businesses, and I often say that if I were not in law, I would probably be in entrepreneurship. It felt less like changing direction and more like finally paying attention to where my strengths were already taking me.

How has your experience as a litigator helped you as you continue to build PSLP?

Litigation taught me that everything eventually has to stand somewhere. It either has to stand on a document or a process, an approval, an agreement or evidence of what was actually done. So, when I approach compliance, I'm not only asking, "Are we compliant?" I'm asking, "If someone challenges this tomorrow, can we defend what we did?" That changes how you advise a business. You start thinking about evidence trails, exposure, contractual protections and integrity. My litigation background allows me to see where a compliance failure can eventually become a dispute, while compliance allows me to stop some of those disputes before they happen.

What has been the biggest challenge of moving from practising law to building and running your own firm?

Learning that nobody is coming to make me do it. When you work under someone else's practice, it is easy to believe that the authority above you is what gives you structure. When you start your own practice, there is nowhere to hide. If the work needs to be done, I have to do it. If the standard needs to be raised, I have to raise it. If I don't know something, I have to go and learn it. Building Prime Shield has forced me to become much more disciplined and accountable to myself. I have had to stop waiting to feel ready and start becoming the person capable of carrying the vision I have.

For lawyers who aspire to build their own practices, what would you say are the most important things they should develop beyond their technical legal skills?

Your biggest asset is your mind. Protect it. Develop it. Curate what gets into it.

Surround yourself with the voices you want in your head. Listen to people who are doing what you aspire to do. Ask questions. Stay a student. But don't idolise people, you can learn from someone's wisdom without losing yourself in their personality. Build and maintain relationships. Learn how to give value before asking for it. And become your own biggest cheerleader because there will be seasons when nobody else understands the vision. Most importantly, fear is inevitable. You will feel it. The goal is not to become fearless; it is to learn how to move with fear without allowing it to drive the car.

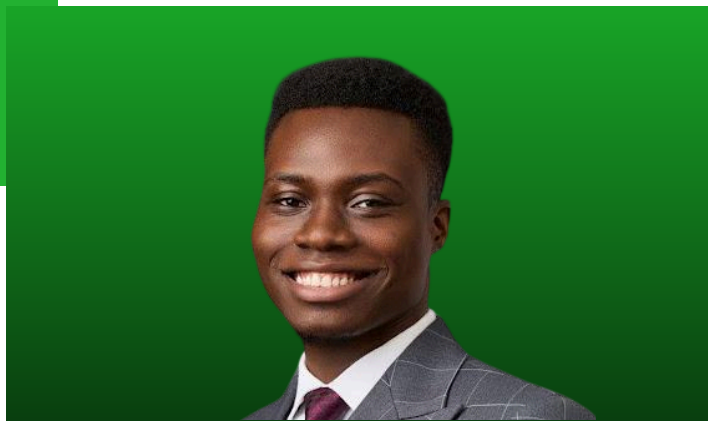
As more businesses look to expand across Africa, where do you see the greatest opportunities for lawyers?

Market entry and regulatory compliance. Absolutely. Businesses want Africa, but they don't want to spend their time figuring out every licence, filing, regulator and compliance obligation in every jurisdiction. And they shouldn't have to. That is where lawyers can become much more commercially valuable by taking the complexity off the client's desk and turning it into a roadmap. The opportunity is also bigger than Nigeria. Africa's regulatory landscape is fragmented, but intra-African trade and cross-border expansion are growing, and businesses increasingly need advisers who understand how those pieces fit together.

What has been the most significant challenge you have faced in your career, and how did you manage it?

I think the most significant challenge has been learning to trust myself enough to build something of my own. There is a certain comfort in being under someone else's practice; there is structure, direction and someone ultimately responsible for the outcome. Building Prime Shield took that comfort away. I had to learn that I could not wait until I felt completely ready. I had to make decisions, learn what I didn't know and take responsibility for the results. There were definitely moments of doubt, but I learnt to move with the fear rather than wait for it to disappear, because it never will. I think that has been one of the biggest shifts in my career: from proving that I can practise law to proving that I can build with it

Joseph **Owolabi**



Joseph is an Associate at KENNA LP, where his work reflects a strong commitment to litigation strategy, regulatory analysis and commercially focused legal advisory. He is an Associate of the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators (NICArb) and the Institute of Chartered Mediators and Conciliators (ICMC). He is also a member of the Nigerian Bar Association Section on Business Law (NBA-SBL) and the Association of Young Arbitrators (AYA).

He was called to the Nigerian Bar after graduating with a First Class from the Nigerian Law School, where he ranked among the top 1% of candidates nationwide and received the Director-General's Prize. He obtained his Bachelor of Laws from Olabisi Onabanjo University, graduating in the top percentile of his class.

Beyond law practice, he is committed to legal writing, mentorship, public speaking and continuous professional development.

You graduated with a First Class from the law school and now you work in a top law firm. Would you say your grade was a major factor in making that happen?

Maybe it played a role, especially because recruitment into top-tier firms is highly competitive and strong academics can get your foot in the door. But grades are only one part of the equation. A less impressive result does not shut the door on a successful legal career. Your competence, work ethic, judgment, relationships, consistency and the value you bring will ultimately matter far more over time – that is what the practice of law is about.

How will you advise law students to position themselves to work at top law firms in Nigeria?

Start early and be intentional. Strong grades may help, but top firms also look for understanding of the law, commercial awareness, research ability, confidence and professionalism. Take on internship and volunteering roles, participate in relevant activities, build genuine relationships and learn about the firms you desire to work at. Most importantly, become the kind of young lawyer who is curious, dependable and willing to learn. Those qualities will continue to matter even after your grades stop speaking for you.

What has surprised you most about the legal profession since you began practising?

What has surprised me most is how much of legal practice goes beyond knowing the law. You quickly realise that clients also need judgment, communication, commercial awareness, strategy and sometimes reassurance. The best answer is not always the longest or most technical one; oftentimes, it is the one that helps the client clearly understand the problem, the risk and what to do next.

What does intentional growth look like for a young lawyer who is still trying to find his or her place in the profession?

Intentional growth as a young lawyer looks like being deliberate about the lawyer you want to become, even while you are still figuring things out. It is choosing what to learn, seeking the right exposure, asking questions, finding mentors, building strong work habits and reflecting on your progress. You may not have the full picture yet, but you should be able to say that each year you are becoming more knowledgeable, useful and confident.

What were some of the challenges you had when you started working as a lawyer and how did you navigate them?

One of my biggest challenges was adjusting from studying law to actually practising it. The expectations are different, the pace is faster, and you quickly realise that knowing the law is only one part of the job. I am navigating it by asking questions, learning from feedback, paying close attention to how my seniors approach problems, and becoming more comfortable with the fact that growth takes time.

> **"...many young lawyers will relate to that tension between ambition and uncertainty. For me, the answer has been to keep showing up, keep learning, and trust that clarity comes with experience."**

What part of your journey do you think other young lawyers will relate to the most?

Probably the uncertainty that comes with starting out. You can be doing well on paper and still wonder whether you are learning fast enough, choosing the right path, or even keeping up with your peers. I think many young lawyers will relate to that tension between ambition and uncertainty. For me, the answer has been to keep showing up, keep learning, and trust that clarity comes with experience.

What values are you building your career around?

Excellence, primarily. I want to build a career where the quality of my work speaks for me almost more than anything. That means being thorough, dependable, constantly learning and refusing to become comfortable with mediocrity. I also value integrity and professionalism, because excellence is not only about being brilliant; it is about being someone clients, colleagues and the profession can trust.

You spent considerable resources supporting the committee to put this publication together, what do you hope readers will gain from it?

When I became aware of the project, I was really delighted because I am equally a young lawyer and I am aware that the majority of us do not even know where to start or what to do, especially when our life is not going as we had it in our heads while at the Law School. In essence, I hope readers find it practical, relatable and encouraging. More than anything, I want young lawyers and law students to see that there is no single path to building a meaningful legal career. If the publication helps someone make a better career decision, become more intentional about their growth, or simply feel more confident about what lies ahead, then the effort would have been worthwhile.

Karinate **Olali**



Karinate Deborah Olali is a legal and trade policy professional working at the intersection of law, regional integration and international development with the German Development Cooperation (GIZ Nigeria and ECOWAS) on Trade in Services within the ECOWAS Region. She is proficient in English and French languages and holds a Bachelor of Laws Degree (LL.B) from Rivers State University, a Barrister-at-Law Qualification (B.L) from the Nigerian Law School (Bagauda) and a Master's degree in International Affairs and Diplomacy, with a specialization in International Development from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Karinate is also Secretary of the Green and Digital Economy Sub-Committee of the European Union Youth Sounding Board (EUYSB) for the European Union Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, where she supports and advises on EU-funded projects within the Nigerian portfolio, particularly in investment, trade and related areas. She is also engaged in continental youth trade policy through the Independent Continental Youth Advisory Council on the AfCFTA (ICOYACA) and is a strong advocate for the youth dimension of diversity and inclusion, grounded in her belief that equipping young people to participate meaningfully is an investment in sustainable development. Outside her formal work, Karinate has also pursued her interest in ideas, climate action and community through TEDxPortHarcourt (TED Countdown), amongst others.

> "Explore deliberately, build your network and let your legal training become a bridge into the wider world of policy practice."

Unlike most lawyers, you never worked full time in a law firm after you were called to the bar, why is that?

Quite interestingly, post-call, I have only been robed for a funeral, the valedictory service of the Honourable Justice Kate Abiri, former Chief Judge of Bayelsa State; I admired her grace and charisma so greatly, some will even say we have similar physical features. But I had experienced traditional litigation practice as a student through internships and externship: courtrooms, briefs, client meetings, research, filings, cause lists, waiting endlessly for matters to be called. I enjoyed the exposure, but there, I realised litigation was not a sustainable venture for me. I am grateful I discovered that early.

Your work focuses heavily on intra-African trade, how did this interest develop, what intentional steps have you taken to deepen your technical skills?

The interest was always there, but it peaked when my final-year thesis focused on the AfCFTA. Since then, I have deliberately explored opportunities to work around regional and continental trade. To deepen my technical skills, I read—there is always a trade agreement/framework on my reading list, whether the WTO agreements, the AfCFTA & her protocols or relevant ECOWAS frameworks. I complement that with specialised courses and, most importantly, doing the work: listening in meetings, asking questions, attending workshops and learning from experienced colleagues. A colleague once told me that what you learn in three days of a workshop may take seven years to learn, sitting in an office. I see the logic. So, deepening technical skills is largely in the DOING, doing the work.

You have invested significantly in learning French, including spending time in Togo to deepen your language skills. Why is that?

I knew quite early that I wanted to speak more than one international language. French seemed particularly useful for the global career I imagined for myself, so after 100 level, I began taking French classes with money I had saved and some support from a senior friend and my parents. I spent my university holidays learning it and later went to Togo for immersion after Law School. That experience changed my command of the language considerably. Today, with eight Francophone countries in the ECOWAS region and Nigeria bordered by only Francophone neighbours, French is not merely an additional skill; it is practical. The learning and perfection never stops as with our first languages but it sure helps me navigate regional meetings, documents and, importantly, relationships in the discharge of my work and life.

You have pursued youth policy and advisory roles through various institutions, how can other lawyers be involved in policy advocacy?

I would say: apply until something happens. Build your skills, volunteer in related roles, join relevant platforms, attend events, network and keep an eye on opportunities locally, nationally, regionally, continentally and globally. You do not need to meet every requirement before applying. Volunteer roles have significantly strengthened my own portfolio. Before the EU Youth Sounding Board, for instance, I volunteered on TED Countdown curation in Nigeria, focused on climate change and related issues. That experience, complemented by my work in trade made my contribution to the EU's Green and Digital Economy work more intuitive. Efforts compound. Do the lawyering, volunteer in other regards - explore other interests - lawyers have range and it will come in handy.

What opportunities do you see for lawyers in the implementation of the AfCFTA and from Africa's economic integration?

Lawyers and economists are central to the provision of advisory to lawmakers and policymakers on the legal and economic implications of regional integration and liberalisation efforts, translating political commitments into workable frameworks for State Parties vis-à-vis supranational obligations and interests within & outside the continent. Beyond goods, trade in services opens significant opportunities for professional practice across borders. This includes the gradual liberalisation of the legal profession as a professional service and other services sectors through frameworks such as Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), which facilitate the recognition of qualifications, licences and professional certifications across jurisdictions. Lawyers will play a key role in negotiating, interpreting and operationalising these agreements, as well as advising professionals and firms on compliance and cross-border eligibility. In addition, businesses will require legal and business advisory support on cross-border expansion, regulatory compliance, contracts and market access.

What professional risk or unconventional decision has had the greatest impact on the trajectory of your career?

Leaving the prospects of a Tier 1 law firm and linearly serving our fatherland (NYSC) right after law school to pursue French, when my current career trajectory was nowhere near defined, was probably my biggest professional risk. I still do not know where the courage came from but it was definitely backed by faith in God. At the time, I simply knew that learning French and the immersion experience was important to me, even though the conventional choice would have been to pursue a seemingly more certain legal career path. Looking back, that decision has shaped the opportunities I have been able to pursue and the region in which I now work. I do not regret it. If anything, it taught me that an unconventional decision can become a very good investment. I am only hopeful and positive for the future. It's upwards from here.

You work in development cooperation, supporting the ECOWAS region. If a lawyer wants to build a career in this space, what advice would you give them?

Start with curiosity. Identify the field that interests you, trade, peace and security, health, agriculture, etc, and read widely around it. Follow the institutions working in that space, attend their open events, take relevant courses, reach out to people doing the work and, importantly, apply for opportunities even when you do not meet every requirement. International development is heavily policy-oriented, and lawyers have an advantage: we are trained to understand frameworks, interpret laws and navigate complexity. You can learn much of the sector-specific knowledge on the job. Explore deliberately, build your network and let your legal training become a bridge into the wider policy world. Learn a second language if you can.

Kate **Okoh-Kpina**



Kate Okoh-Kpina is an exceptional legal expert specializing in gender, diversity, equity, and social inclusion. With over a decade of experience spanning legal practice and international development, she has championed meaningful investments in justice sector reform, gender equality, and inclusive governance across Nigeria and West Africa.

Kate holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Benin and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2012. She earned her Master's in International Law from University College London as a distinguished John Carr Scholar. She began her career at TRLPLAW Solicitors and Advocates, as an integral member of the litigation and transactional teams. In 2017, she joined the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) as a Rule of Law Advisor for the Police Programme Africa.

Kate currently leads the Gender, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Secretariat for the GIZ Nigeria & ECOWAS Country portfolio. She collaborates with government institutions, development partners, private sector investors, and civil society organizations to design and implement just, inclusive, and transformative programmes.

> **"My legal training allows me to approach development work with a strong understanding of policy, rights, and institutional frameworks."**

How did your upbringing and early interactions with the legal profession influence your decision to pursue a career in law and later focus on gender equity and social inclusion?

Growing up, the law was not just a profession, it was a way of life. My father served as a High Court judge, and five out of my six siblings are lawyers. My mother, after retiring as a Permanent Secretary, also went on to study law. Watching my father dispense justice and engaging in conversations with my siblings created an environment that naturally drew me to the legal profession. I also excelled in the arts during my academic years, and with my mother's encouragement, the decision to study law felt both natural and intentional. Looking back, it was absolutely the right choice, and I have no regrets.

What experiences shaped your understanding of gender justice and influence the way you approach the Nigerian legal and policy framework today?

Gender justice, for me, is deeply rooted in equality, fairness, and dignity. My perspective has been shaped by confronting the realities of discriminatory laws and cultural practices—ranging from limitations on women's property rights to harmful widowhood practices and early child marriage. While Nigeria has made progress through reforms such as the Administration of Criminal Justice Act, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, and the Child Rights Act, implementation remains uneven. These laws often depend on like location, social background, and other contextual realities. A functional legal system forms the foundation of a safe and equitable society—one where rights are protected, especially for the most vulnerable. This continues to drive my commitment to advocacy, strategic engagement, and promoting equality in both public and private spheres.

How did you transition from legal practice into international development work, and what motivated that shift in your professional path?

It was a mix of preparation, opportunity, and what I would describe as divine timing. Although I had always been interested in international development, the opportunity came in an unexpected way. A former dispatch rider from my law firm—who had moved on to work as a security guard at an international organization shared information about a vacancy. I applied but did not secure the role initially. However, the interview panel later reached out to me for another opportunity. That moment changed the trajectory of my career. It opened doors I had not imagined and remains one of the most pivotal experiences of my professional life.

You are the Diversity Advisor and Gender Focal Person at GIZ Nigeria & ECOWAS. How has your legal background informed your work in that role?

My legal training allows me to approach development work with a strong understanding of policy, rights, and institutional frameworks. I work at the intersection of law, gender equality, and inclusion—supporting policy development, advising on reforms, and guiding implementation strategies. What makes this role particularly meaningful is seeing the real-life impact of these efforts—on individuals, communities, and institutions. It reinforces the importance of integrating legal perspectives into development programming.

You have achieved remarkable success in your career. Have you ever experienced imposter syndrome, and if so, how did you overcome it?

Absolutely and it is something I continue to navigate. Over time, I have learned to manage it by preparing thoroughly and reminding myself of my purpose and the value I bring. It is an ongoing journey, but with experience comes greater confidence and clarity.

GBV remains a persistent challenge in many societies. What practical steps should Nigerian lawyers and policymakers take to sustain momentum and drive meaningful change beyond the annual 16 Days of Activism?

Addressing GBV requires sustained, deliberate action like:

1. Ensuring strict enforcement of existing laws and penalties
2. Implementing tools like the Sexual Offenders Register
3. Reforming outdated and discriminatory laws
4. Eliminating harmful cultural practices
5. Expanding awareness of rights and legal protections
6. Strengthening political will
7. Encouraging peer learning from countries with lower GBV rates

Real progress comes from consistency and accountability, not just periodic awareness campaigns.

Kelechi **Ibe**



Kelechi is the co-founder and CEO of TaxStreem, an AI-powered Tax Compliance solution built for African businesses. He is a corporate and tax lawyer with over 9 years of extensive experience spanning Taxation, Mergers & Acquisition, Finance, and General Corporate Advisory. His career trajectory includes roles as a Senior Associate at Udo Udoma & Belo-Osagie and in the Deal Advisory and M&A Tax unit of KPMG in Nigeria. In recognition of his potential, he was seconded to Latham & Watkins in London in 2024 through the prestigious International Lawyers for Africa (ILFA) Flagship Secondment Programme.

He is ranked as a "Rising Star" in General Corporate Tax and Transfer Pricing by World Tax (International Tax Review). Committed to social impact, he also co-founded GreenRidge Foundation, Nigeria's first technology-enabled corporate pro bono organisation dedicated to providing free legal support to small businesses and founders.

> **"The first step to distinction is the quality of your work. I approached each task, each memo, each client as an extension of my personality - not my firm."**

What sparked your interest in taxation law? Did you develop this interest before or after you became a lawyer?

My love of taxation law did not have a plan behind it - it happened naturally once I was called to the bar. I started at KPMG, and lawyers usually work in the tax department. It started as a professional placement but then came to be a true passion. Tax is where law, commerce, and public policy meet, and the intellectualism required of it continued to attract me. It was, you might say, taxation that selected me, rather than I consciously selecting it.

What were the most formative lessons those experiences gave you as a young lawyer?

This was the most significant thing I learned during KPMG and UUBO: professional growth is your responsibility. Your career path will not be crafted by any employer. I also learned to pursue challenging assignments proactively, read widely, and position myself to be the best- informed individual in the room whenever there is a development in tax. That attitude - extreme proprietorship over your own development - is the cornerstone of all I have accomplished since then.

Did you ever consider climbing the ladder to become a partner, or did you always know you would start an organization like TaxStreem?

I was actually on the track of joint venture at UUBO- those discussions were in full swing. I have been an aspiring entrepreneur since I was a child, and a 2-year secondment in London in 2024 made it all clear. Using artificial intelligence tools to work on professional services given by law firms made me see a gap I can fill. By then, the lure of creating something new was greater than the lure of a partnership title. TaxStreem is a creation of that understanding.

For young lawyers interested in entrepreneurship or innovation, what skills should they start building early?

Three skills stand out. First, discipline - readiness to accept the cost of learning difficult, new things, be it technology, immediate engineering, or monetary modelling. Second, relationship capital - create relationships with as many people as possible: peers, seniors, juniors. No CV will open doors as your network will. Third, unquenchable curiosity. Knowledge is downstream to innovation; you cannot come up with what you have never even thought of. Read widely, watch carefully and be hungry.

You have been recognized in several legal directories (local and international). How did you distinguish yourself among a pool of lawyers?

The first step to distinction is the quality of your work. I approached each task, each memo, each client as an extension of my personality - not my firm. Beyond that foundation, I was conscious of visibility: speaking publicly, making contributions to industry-wide discussions, and undertaking assignments that others would have found intimidating. Good work talked about is work nobody notices. You have to combine the brilliance with the gall to be felt and heard in your discipline.

What is one misconception young lawyers often have about building a successful legal career?

The greatest fallacy is believing that money is the most important indicator of success. I have seen a good lawyer lose his way by moving through practice area to practice area in search of the most profitable specialization, and the consequence is nearly invariably a deficiency in breadth and purpose. The legal profession is essentially one of service. When you consider success in terms of the difference you make to your clients, to your community, and to the growth of the law itself, focus becomes a natural result, and money becomes a by-product, not an end in itself.

What stages of your life best illustrate the theme 'No Straight Line: 100 Lawyers, 100 Different Journeys'?

Three moments characterize my non-linear journey. First, I joined KPMG as a lawyer, which is not the normal approach, but it provided me with a commercial prism that few litigators would acquire. Second, quitting an accounting firm to go with UUBO, and that is something most of us in my shoes would not have assumed, since I would have gone back to start all over again in a new setting. Third, quitting a successful legal career on the verge of partnership to create TaxStreem. Every shift was as though a departure; hindsight shows that each was an indispensable stage in the same direction.

Dr. Kenneth **Okwor**



Dr. Kenneth O.D. Okwor is a Nigerian lawyer, policy expert, and international legal scholar with a distinguished track record in corporate and financial law, international economic and monetary law, project finance, and institutional reform. Kenneth's work spans sovereign and non-sovereign multilateral lending, financial reform, development finance, and regional economic and monetary integration.

Kenneth currently serves as Counsel at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), advising on IMF lending and surveillance operations across several countries in the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. He also advises on IMF policies on the Use of IMF resources and IMF Financial Issues. Before joining the IMF, Kenneth was Consulting Counsel on Non-sovereign and Private Sector Operations at the African Development Bank, he was a Bridge Fellow and Technical Anchor at the Nigerian Economic Summit Group, he was a Senior Associate in Finance and Projects at Templars, and was an Adjunct Lecturer of Corporate Law at the Nigerian Law School.

Kenneth holds a Ph.D. in International Economic and Monetary Law from the University of Cambridge, where he was a Rowan Williams Scholar and a Wolfson College Scholar. He also earned a Master of Laws (LL.M.) in International Finance from Harvard Law School and a Master of Corporate Law (MCL) from Cambridge. He earned his Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) from the University of Jos, and was the Best Student and Star Prize Winner of the 2015 set of the Nigerian Law School. Kenneth is a Fourth-Degree Knight of Columbus.

Immediately after you were called to the Bar, what did your ideal career path look like?

I wanted to become a litigator. In the University and at the Law School, I was very active in the Moot Court and at the Law Clinic. My early exposure to the practice of law in Jos, and at SimmonsCooper Partners, was with litigators. In my pre-call applications to law firms, I noted that I had "a passion for litigation in all its ramifications, international law, and corporate law...". So, on the day I was called to the Bar, and shortly thereafter, active litigation was the career path I had envisioned for myself. But that changed very quickly, thanks to timely advice and guidance from mentors. Within a month after my call to the Bar, I was on a different path. I wanted to develop expertise in corporate law and finance, become an excellent corporate lawyer, and combine practice with scholarship and teaching.

Your career has taken you from Templars to Harvard, Cambridge, and now the IMF. What principles have consistently guided your career decisions?

Honour, discipline, and duty are the three core principles that guide my life, my personal and professional relationships, and everything I do. In managing my career, these principles have required that I prioritise excellence above all else. My career has progressed the way it has, simply because God has blessed my pursuit of excellence. It would be difficult to pursue excellence if one is not intellectually curious. I am very curious and that curiosity has fueled my pursuit of excellence. Excellence and curiosity tend to open many doors and provide many opportunities. Choosing which door to walk through, and when, is usually a challenge. In my career, I have generally tried to choose opportunities that would make me a better lawyer while expanding, not narrowing, what I could subsequently do.

> **"Strong academic and professional backgrounds are important, but more important are judgement, communication, diplomacy, cultural and emotional intelligence, and the ability to work collaboratively with non-lawyers and lawyers trained in different legal traditions."**

You have developed expertise in international economic and monetary law, central banking law, sovereign debt restructuring. What first drew you to this area of practice?

Expertise is a moving target. While I have developed expertise in some areas, I am always developing it further and expanding into new areas. In retrospect, it is difficult to identify what first drew me to this area of practice because the seeds were planted much earlier than I realised. At university and law school, my best grades were in international law, corporate law, commercial law, and I have always enjoyed exploring intersections and where disciplines overlap. But I will say that the gradual convergence of these longstanding interests, propelled by curiosity and the desire to solve a problem, led me to my current practice. As a young lawyer in 2016, I was privileged to work on very interesting cross-border lending transactions. Then the recession hit and the foreign exchange market became painfully illiquid. Borrowers had revenue streams in Naira but debt obligations in US Dollars. In one of the transactions I was working on, conversations on currency swaps, convertibility insurance and ISDA agreements suddenly took center stage. I was very curious to know what these derivatives were and how they could solve the FX problem. I soon realised there was no legal framework for derivatives in Nigeria. My LLM at Harvard resulted in a dissertation on the regulation of derivatives in Nigeria. In writing that dissertation, I realised that derivatives and other market-based solutions to the FX problem in Nigeria were expensive and could make transaction costs prohibitively high. The sustainable solution had to be institutional: domestic and external price stability. This is a public good and a core mandate of a central bank, in exercising

the sovereign responsibility of a state. It raises questions of economic and monetary law. Pursuing this institutional solution and seeking out a stable system of exchange rates led me to a PhD in economic and monetary union law. Today, the clients are effectively sovereigns or teams dealing with sovereigns. The legal questions are about debt, money, central banks, financial systems, governance, and how they interact with economics, politics, and social issues. Intersections like this have always fascinated me.

What were some of the less visible challenges you encountered along the way, and how did you navigate them?

The less visible challenge that tormented me was the weight of the expectations created by my early successes. Graduating top of my law school class, breaking the existing prize records, securing a position at a tier-one law firm, and becoming a lecturer at the law school at 24 attracted considerable national attention. It was nice at first and felt like a fitting reward for years of hard work in university and law school. It soured quickly.
Everyone had expectations. I started to feel that every step must validate what people already believe about me. The result was a protracted case of impostor syndrome, which was exacerbated by my frequent transitions: from teaching and the law firm to different graduate schools at different levels, moving from teacher/practitioner to doctoral researcher back to practice; from technical law to policy work at the Nigerian Economic Summit Group; from private practice to international civil service and development finance at the African Development Bank; and now in a highly specialised international financial institution. I have navigated this principally by remaining teachable. Each transition required humility and acceptance that competence in one environment did not automatically translate into the mastery of another.

What has been the most difficult professional decision you have had to make, and what did it teach you?

The decision to leave Templars was the most difficult professional decision I have had to make. There is considerable psychological comfort in being good at something and gaining recognition for that. At Templars, I had excellent training, kind mentors and colleagues, a great work environment, challenging work, and a discernible trajectory. Simultaneously teaching at the law school also gave me an unusual platform and significant visibility in the industry. It was very difficult to walk away from the certainty and growth provided by Templars and the law school to pursue opportunities whose outcomes I could not guarantee. Looking at the varied experiences I have gained since I left, I now know that the opportunity cost of staying somewhere may sometimes be greater than the risk of leaving.

What drives your pursuit of excellence and how do you sustain it overtime?

I believe that if you pursue excellence, success will follow you, pants down. In addition to this, I think of excellence as being more useful as a discipline or a way of life, not as an achievement. This mindset accommodates present failures, setbacks, and delays, and treats them as ingredients for future excellence. I sustain it because I think of it as a way of life.

What are some of the biggest misconceptions you have observed that Nigerian lawyers have about working in international organisations?

The first is that people think there is an established route to a job at an international organisation: master's degree abroad in finance or human rights, good grades, job. International organisations employ lawyers with remarkably diverse backgrounds as long as those lawyers are able to translate that background into internationally intelligible expertise that meets the business needs of the international organisation. The second is that good grades are sufficient. Strong academic and professional backgrounds are important, but more important are judgement, communication, diplomacy, cultural and emotional intelligence, and the ability to work collaboratively with non-lawyers and lawyers trained in different legal traditions. The third is that many Nigerian lawyers romanticise international organisations. They are not places where you come to relax and live the 'civil service' life while earning in US dollars. They are demanding and high-risk professional environments requiring sound technical knowledge, tact, skill, and good judgement.

For lawyers who aspire to build careers at the IMF, the World Bank, or other multilateral institutions, what practical steps should they begin taking early in their careers?

I will not advise anyone to build a career around getting into the World Bank, IMF, AfDB, etc. My advice would be that they should build legal expertise that would be valuable anywhere in their chosen fields or specialisations. In terms of practical steps: First, become a very intelligent person and an excellent lawyer wherever you are now. International organisations take references and recommendations seriously. Second, continuously develop substantive expertise in areas relevant to the target international organisation. Third, understand subjects outside law and how to interact with specialists in other fields. Work in international organisations is routinely done with non-lawyers or lawyers trained in different legal traditions. Fourth, build relationships and develop your networks without treating people transactionally, and then seek work with an international or comparative dimension to start developing your experience.

Looking back, is there anything you would deliberately have done differently?

Yes. I would have invested earlier in understanding other disciplines, particularly economics and sociology. My personal experience has shown me how much better a lawyer can become if he understands the economic, social, political and institutional contexts in which the law operates. I would also have worried less about moving quickly or early successes. Even though a good professional career normally lasts about 35 to 40 years, early recognition can distort one's sense of time and make you unconsciously place yourself on an accelerated timetable. So, I would have worried less about the early recognitions as there is considerable time to explore, fail, step back, change direction, and achieve success. In all, I will not fundamentally change my own journey. I will simply approach most of it with less anxiety about destination and a greater appreciation of the process.

If the 24-year-old lecturer at the Nigerian Law School could meet the IMF Counsel you are today, what do you think would surprise him the most?

He would be surprised that I have not announced my appearance in court in many years, and that I now practice areas of law that I barely knew existed when I was called to the Bar. He would be surprised by how geographically, institutionally, and intellectually expansive the career journey has been in just 10 years. But I think he will recognise the underlying motivations: the curiosity, the scholarship, the service, and the desire to become an excellent lawyer.

Chief Ledum **Mitee**



Ledum Mitee is a private Legal Practitioner of repute, a renowned Human and Environmental Rights activist who has spent a greater part of his life to lead the struggle for community rights to a healthy environment and natural resources as well as to agitate for prudent use of extractive resources revenue to improve the lives of the citizenry.

He was, until recently ,the President of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the grassroots mass movement founded by the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, whom he deputised and with whom he shared the prison cells and trial dock in that infamous show trial that precipitated the execution of Ken and 8 other Ogoni activists of Nigeria's Niger delta, which he was lucky to survive.

He is a recipient of a couple of national and international honours including, Member of the Order of the Niger (MON), Commander of the Order of the Niger (CON); and United Nations Adopted Defender of Human Rights as well as a former President of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO)– an international membership Organization based in the Hague. He was the past Chairman of National Stakeholders Working Group – the Board of NEITI (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative and until recently , a member of the Board of Directors of NNPCL. He has also served in several Nigerian Government Committees on conflict prevention, management & resolution as well as Resources management and governance. Ledum is married to Leziga Mitee, also a lawyer, and they have three children- Lesere, Ledum Jr and Lemona.

What first inspired you to study law, and what did you imagine your legal career would look like when you began your journey?

During my secondary education, I was basically a science student and fascinated with courses like Medicine and Engineering, which I saw as courses for the brilliant. An event that changed my focus was when my elder brother , who was doing his HSC in Baptist High School, lost his book, and went to Aba to buy another copy. The seller had offered him a used copy of the book, and on examination , my brother discovered it was his stolen book. A report was made to the police which led to the prosecution of the person(a fellow student) whom the trader alleged sold him the stolen book. We were always in court on court days, and I was fascinated by the court processes and particularly cross examination. The accused was set free eventually due to what seemed like magic-a difference or contradiction in the name of the accused and that on the receipt he issued to the book seller. My fascination changed my trajectory.

Your career has been closely associated with human rights, environmental justice, and public interest advocacy. How did you arrive at this area of focus?

Growing up in my oil producing community, I was confronted with egregious cases of rights violations, and I became increasingly concerned that law must be a tool of social engineering to get justice for these violations. Increasingly I became a victim of one of the worst violations of rights. My life and practice became inextricably linked to human and environmental rights causes.

Was there ever a moment when you questioned whether the personal cost of your advocacy was worth it? What helped you continue?

The pains inflicted by the system against which we fought, especially when innocent family members are targeted can be unbearable. For instance, even after I was discharged by the infamous military tribunal that tried us, I had gone into exile. But because of a press statement I issued from Geneva about the repression in Ogoni, soldiers invaded my residence in Port Harcourt and evicted my old mother in the dead of a rainy night, and that's how my mother had a heart attack and died. By this time, my family members including my younger brother, even my elder sister, her husband and children were already in detention by the soldiers. My strength always anchored on the moral superiority of the cause for which one fought for, and the realisation that I was not alone-we had profound local and international support.

> "...wherever, we find ourselves, we should ask what cause will my advocacy advance-to better society or worsen it?"

What qualities do you believe distinguish lawyers who become effective advocates for justice from those who merely possess technical legal expertise?

Advocates for justice must, in my view, have two things-courage and the contentment that the cause for justice is enduring, and cannot be quantified in monetary terms.

How should young lawyers think about the role of law in addressing broader societal challenges?

The role of law that young lawyers should think of in addressing broader societal issues is already provided by what we all know-"where there is a wrong , there is a remedy". That enjoins us to see the law as an instrument for societal improvement, and not as an impediment to it. So wherever, we find ourselves, we should ask what cause will my advocacy advance-to better society or worsen it?

You've spent much of your career representing a cause bigger than any single client — an entire people's survival. What did you have to give up personally?

My professional career has virtually been sacrificed, family life as except in recent years I never had the luxury of being with my family under the same roof for a continuous period of one year. This is in addition to loss of personal liberty and freedom. My family house has been burnt twice.

What role do you believe lawyers should play in holding governments and corporations accountable?

Lawyers, whether working inside or outside government, must see themselves as ministers, not passive participants, in the temple of justice. That imbues in us the responsibility and indeed the duty to the cause of justice. Nowadays, I see the sad trend that many lawyers are ready, either because of the lure of benefits or otherwise, to stretch the law to support obvious wrongs by governments and corporations.

Prof. Lukman **Abdulrauf**



Lukman Abdulrauf is a Professor in the Department of Public Law, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, where his teaching and research focus on the intersection of law, technology, and governance. His core areas of specialisation include data privacy, AI governance, digital constitutionalism, and selected aspects of comparative constitutional law, with a particular emphasis on African legal systems. He earned his LLB from ABU Zaria in 2009, graduating as the 2nd overall best graduating student. He earned his LL.M from Unilorin in 2013 and his LL.D from the University of Pretoria in 2016. Prof Abdulrauf previously held research fellowships at Stanford University's Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) and at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS), South Africa, where his work engaged critically with questions of digital governance, human rights, and institutional design in emerging and transitional democracies. His research has attracted competitive external funding, including his role as Co-Investigator on a United States National Institutes of Health (NIH)–funded project examining the Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications (ELSI) of the use of genomic data in health research in African contexts.

Professor Abdulrauf recently completed a fellowship at the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Studies (FRIAS), University of Freiburg, Germany, where he researched digital constitutionalism and AI governance in Africa. He was previously the Subdean of the Postgraduate School of the University of Ilorin, among other administrative positions. Born on February 23, 1987, he was appointed to the prestigious rank of Professor on October 1, 2025, at the age of 38, and he stands as the youngest among the current professors.

> "I wish I could say I had a clear career plan after law school, but I honestly did not."

Was the plan after law school to become a lecturer, or did you consider other options available to you at the time?

I wish I could say I had a clear career plan after law school, but I honestly did not. What I knew was that I loved teaching and research from an early stage, even though I had no clear roadmap for getting there. I saw pursuing an LL.M. as the natural next step, so I applied during my NYSC and resumed the day after my Passing Out Parade. Like many young lawyers, I also considered joining a leading commercial law firm, particularly as a solicitor rather than a courtroom advocate. Ultimately, academia offered the fulfilment I was seeking.

What factors guided your career decisions between 1–7 years post-call, and have those factors changed since?

Between 1-7 years post-call, my career decisions were guided by a commitment to teaching, research, and exploring emerging areas of law. I consistently prioritised opportunities for scholarship, professional development, and intellectual growth over immediate financial rewards. Equally important was the guidance of mentors whose example and encouragement reinforced my confidence that I had chosen the right career path. Since then, my priorities have expanded to include international engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, policy impact, and mentoring the next generation of scholars, while advancing digital rights, AI governance, and legal reform in Africa.

You've held fellowships at Stanford, Stellenbosch, and Freiburg — each a very different intellectual environment. Did any of them change your mind about something you'd been sure of?

Each fellowship shaped my thinking in different ways. Stanford strengthened my appreciation for interdisciplinary research and the importance of the social sciences to Law. Stellenbosch deepened my understanding of African perspectives and the importance of context-sensitive regulation. Freiburg reinforced the value of rigorous doctrinal analysis and comparative legal scholarship. Together, these experiences convinced me that effective digital governance requires neither copying foreign models nor adopting an exceptionalist stance, but rather carefully adapting global principles to local constitutional and societal realities.

What is the single most valuable piece of advice that influenced your career trajectory?

The most valuable advice I received was that not every career decision should be driven by money. I was encouraged to pursue fulfilment rather than wealth, trusting that excellence and commitment would eventually bring financial stability. That advice gave me the confidence to choose academia over a more lucrative legal practice. Looking back, it was the right decision. A meaningful career is measured not only by income, but also by the lives you influence, the ideas you shape, and the new frontiers you help open for future generations.

What emerging areas within the legal profession do you believe young lawyers should begin preparing for today?

Young lawyers should prepare for fields such as artificial intelligence, data protection, cybersecurity, digital platforms regulation, fintech, intellectual property, and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) law. Equally important is developing interdisciplinary skills by understanding technology, economics, and public policy alongside the law. The future belongs to lawyers who can adapt to rapid change, solve complex problems across disciplines, and anticipate emerging legal challenges rather than merely responding to them.

For a young law graduate who wants to build a research career in an emerging field rather than chase the conventional litigation-to-SAN track, what would you tell them about the actual costs of that choice?

I would tell them to count the cost before making the choice. A research career in an emerging field demands patience, continuous learning, and a willingness to accept uncertainty. You may earn less than your peers in the early years, your work may not be immediately understood, and recognition often comes slowly. However, if you remain committed to excellence, build genuine expertise, and pursue work that matters, the long-term rewards- intellectual fulfilment, global opportunities, and meaningful impact- can far outweigh the early sacrifices.

Was there a mentor, rejection, or moment of real doubt early on that could have taken you down a completely different path than the one you're known for now?

There was no single defining rejection, but many moments of doubt. As a scholar from this part of the world, you compete in a highly competitive global environment where fellowship, grant, consultancy, and publication applications are often unsuccessful. Those setbacks can make you question your path, but they also force you to improve. I learnt to treat rejection as constructive feedback rather than failure. In my view, resilience or the ability to keep learning, refining your work, and trying again, is one of the defining qualities of a successful scholar.

Mary-Anne **Momoh-Ige**



Mary-Anne Momoh-Ige is a lawyer and policy strategist whose work sits at the intersection of law, regulation and the digital economy across Africa. She currently leads Public Policy and Government Affairs for Sub-Saharan Africa at inDrive, where she shapes regulatory engagement, licensing strategy and stakeholder diplomacy across multiple African markets.

Mary-Anne holds an LL.B from the University of Benin and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2014. She earned a Master of Laws in International Business Law, a Postgraduate Diploma in Corporate & Commercial Law, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Economic Regulation, all from the University of London.

Her career spans private practice, the development sector, government regulatory agencies and the technology industry. She began at Babalakin & Co. and has since held senior legal and policy roles at the Abuja Technology Village Free Zone Company, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) and the Society for Family Health, before transitioning into platform regulation and mobility policy.

> **Discipline keeps procrastination at bay and sets you up to deliver great results.**

How much of your career trajectory has been deliberate strategy, and how much has been instinct or chance?

I have always been a planner mapping out my career clearly. But as the saying goes, "man proposes, God disposes." My plans rarely unfolded as envisioned, yet every turn led me exactly where I needed to be. I started in litigation, pursued a Master's in International Business Law to pivot into corporate practice, and moved through in-house roles I never anticipated, from management consulting and foreign investment to regulatory work, oil and gas, non-profits, and now tech and public policy. Strategy gave me direction, instinct kept me open to opportunities.

What would you describe as one of the most difficult decisions you have had to make in your career?

Leaving traditional legal practice was a difficult decision. I had spent a year in litigation, was learning fast, and was on a clear path to grow there. Walking away felt like giving up too early, and the job search that followed was long and uncertain. But my heart was set on corporate practice, and I am glad I trusted that conviction.

Are there aspects of your career story that you feel are rarely acknowledged or understood?

Two things. First, my early litigation experience often gets overlooked, even though it shaped how I think and how I argue and advocate today. Second, people see the current role but not the long, uncomfortable journey it took to get here. Career pivots look clean in hindsight, but they are almost never easy or straightforward in reality.

What have been the main factors influencing your career decisions?

Two things have shaped almost every choice I have made: a hunger for knowledge and a refusal to plateau. Many of my roles were comfortable, some came with the certainty most people chase, but I have never been willing to trade growth for ease. Stretching myself has cost me comfort more than once, but it has never cost me direction.

What drew you to inDrive, and what does your role at the company demand of you that previous roles didn't?

In a capitalist world, few companies challenge injustice. inDrive's unique story attracted me, emerging against exploitative taxi fares with a low-commission bidding model. The company legal structure excites me, coming from a generalist background, each practice area in its own department deepens expertise. The role is unlike any I have held: legal argument became policy advocacy, negotiation became lobbying, advisory work became regulatory monitoring and compliance. Stakeholder engagement sits at the centre, pulling me out of my shell, sharpening my public speaking and forcing strategic thinking about crises in real time.

What do you wish you had understood earlier about building a meaningful and sustainable legal career?

I wish I had understood sooner that experience compounds more than pay does. Too many lawyers stay frustrated because their current role is not lucrative, and they miss the experience quietly setting them up for a bigger future. Once I shifted my focus from what a job was not giving me to what it was teaching me, everything changed. The skills I picked up in roles I felt indifferent about became the very reasons I qualified for the ones I actually wanted. Do not sacrifice your destination for short-term gratification.

What personal principles, habits, or values have been most instrumental in shaping your professional growth and success so far?

Discipline and diligence, above everything else. Discipline keeps procrastination at bay and sets you up to deliver great results. Diligence is the difference between average and excellent work. My personal rule is simple: whether anyone is watching or not, I work as unto the Lord. I do not give my best because I am expecting praise or reward, but because excellence has become a habit. Your values shape your reputation, and your reputation determines how far you go.

Motunrayo **Ope-Ogunseitan**



Motunrayo Michelle Ope-Ogunseitan is an internationally recognized attorney, privacy leader, and technology advisor whose work sits at the intersection of law, artificial intelligence, data protection, and digital governance. Combining legal expertise with an MBA and global experience, she advises organizations on navigating complex regulatory landscapes while enabling innovation, responsible AI adoption, and sustainable business growth. Her career has spanned leading institutions, including Aluko & Oyebode | ALN, Dubai's government ecosystem, and one of the world's leading airlines, where she advises on complex privacy, technology, and regulatory matters.

A Fellow of Information Privacy (FIP) - the highest professional designation awarded by the International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP), Motunrayo is recognized among an elite group of privacy professionals worldwide. She serves on the IAPP Women Leading Privacy Advisory Board and has held leadership roles within the global privacy community, contributing to the advancement of privacy leadership and helping organizations build trust through strong governance, ethical stewardship, and responsible innovation.

> **My experience has taught me that specialisation doesn't limit you when it is built on self-awareness and intentionality.**

Looking back, choosing privacy and technology law at a time when few lawyers saw it as a career path now seems remarkably forward-thinking. What inspired the decision?

This is spot on. When I developed a keen interest in privacy and technology law, it wasn't nearly as popular as it is today. Most lawyers gravitated towards Capital Markets or Banking & Finance, but I've always preferred to chart my own course. I was fascinated by the field because it made me constantly think outside the box, sparked my curiosity, and I could see it becoming central to every aspect of our lives. Looking back, trusting that instinct has been one of the most rewarding decisions of my career. If there's one lesson I've taken from that journey, it's that we should always pay attention to the opportunities that the future is quietly creating.

How did you know it was time to build your career around privacy?

I started my career at Aluko & Oyebode | ALN, where I worked across different practice areas, but I knew early that privacy and technology was where I belonged. It came naturally to me - I grasped complex concepts quickly, often with ease, and genuinely enjoyed the work. I also found that technology clients appreciated my practical, business-focused advice rather than legalese. From then on, I intentionally pursued roles and certifications that deepened my expertise and reinforced that path.

You have built a career across Nigeria and the United Arab Emirates. What professional lesson has working in different jurisdictions taught you that you couldn't have learned by staying in one country?

This is an interesting question. Working across jurisdictions reinforced something I already believed: I never saw myself as just a Nigerian lawyer - I saw myself as a global professional. Even before relocating to the UAE, I advised multinational technology companies and held myself to global standards, despite only having Nigerian qualifications. That mindset made the transition seamless. I've learned that opportunities must meet you prepared, and that your impact is defined more by the quality of your work than where your degree was earned. Stand tall.

Looking back, what decision has had the greatest influence on your career?

Without question, the most significant decision I've made is choosing to trust God with my career. Every major move I've made has been guided by that conviction. It hasn't always made sense on paper, but it has consistently led me to opportunities I couldn't have orchestrated myself. I believe excellence and hard work are my responsibility, but direction, favour, and the doors that have defined my career have come from God. My journey is living proof of that.

Many young lawyers fear specialising too early because they worry about limiting themselves. Has your experience taught you the opposite?

My experience has taught me that specialisation doesn't limit you when it is built on self-awareness and intentionality. I strongly encourage young lawyers to begin in a full-service environment, gain exposure, and discover what truly excites them. The goal is not to specialise because a field is fashionable, but because you have developed the depth and conviction to pursue it. I took the same approach with my MBA, waiting until it aligned with my journey. There should be no rush - only intentional choices.

Beyond your professional achievements, your journey reflects a visible commitment to faith and purpose. How have your values influenced the way you make career decisions?

My values are the foundation of how I approach my career. My faith shapes my work ethic, my pursuit of excellence, and my desire to be a problem solver, because I see my work as an opportunity to honour God. It also reminds me of the importance of kindness and impact - leaving people and places better than I found them. Ultimately, I believe every aspect of life is better when anchored in God, and my goal is for even my work to reflect that.

If you had to start your legal career again in 2026, knowing everything you know today, would you still choose privacy and technology law? Why or why not?

Absolutely. I would choose privacy and technology law all over again. It continues to excite me because it keeps me learning, curious, and connected to work that has real-world impact. Every project introduces me to something new, and seeing solutions I've helped shape come to life is incredibly fulfilling. I can't predict exactly where my career will take me forever, but I have no regrets about this journey. These years have been deeply rewarding, and I would make the same choice again.

Naomi **Ekop**



Naomi is a legal executive with a record of academic and professional recognition and extensive experience advising boards, C-Suite executives and senior management across financial services businesses. She currently leads the inhouse legal team of Piggytech Global Limited, with experience spanning strategic legal and product advisory, corporate governance, regulatory compliance, disputes management and more.

Before moving inhouse, she gained foundational experience at ÆLEX Legal Practitioners; Arbitrators. At that early career stage, she was shortlisted for the Private Practice Most Promising Newcomer Award Category of the African Legal Awards 2020, signalling her robust career potential. She has also demonstrated a sustained commitment to developing the next generation of lawyers and advancing the legal profession through academic mentoring and contributions to discourse in the industry. She holds First Class degrees from both Afe Babalola University and the Nigerian Law School where she emerged the overall best graduating student at the 2018 Call to Bar Ceremony, receiving over fourteen awards, including a secondment at Stephenson Harwood LLP, London.

You have excelled at almost every stage of your journey, from graduating as the Overall Best Student at the Nigerian Law School to leading a legal team within a few years of practice. What has been your constant source of inspiration?

The living possibilities I see, particularly women thriving whether in career or business with full lives and experiences. In law school, I would read profiles of prior best graduating students and follow their journeys post law school. I still enjoy reading the profiles/biographies of people I admire and current-day impact on the people around them. Knowing that it is possible to be in a position of influence through a sustained drive for excellence, not just for the sake of it, but to lead a life worthy of emulation by others is what keeps me going.

What belief did you hold as a law student that experience has completely changed?

I believed if I did excellently well, it would undoubtedly be obvious to everyone without more from my end. From experience, that may not always be the case as there is so much good work you could do that would go unnoticed. You have to be intentional about documenting your progress and wins, presenting them to the right audience and advocating for yourself.

If a young lawyer wanted to have your career ten years from now, what would you tell them not to do?

Don't let doubts, insecurity and fear fester. Sure, you may have those moments of uncertainty but you need an unwavering positive mindset, confidence and a healthy self-esteem to go after your goals. Also, don't compromise on excellence, values or good character. These matter to ensure you're not just completing tasks but building a long-lasting legacy and stellar reputation.

> **"...you may have those moments of uncertainty but you need an unwavering positive mindset, confidence and a healthy self-esteem to go after your goals."**

When young lawyers think about building meaningful careers, what qualities do you believe matter more than brilliance or technical expertise?

Being reliable and able to effectively manage relationships. You have to be a lawyer that clients or other stakeholders can count on to get the work done excellently and in time. You need to show up when you say you will and not be known for making excuses. Beyond completing tasks, those you work with will remember your attitude, poise, how you treated them, handled conflicts and resolved competing interests and priorities, which would determine how long and well you sustain those relationships, which you need in the long run.

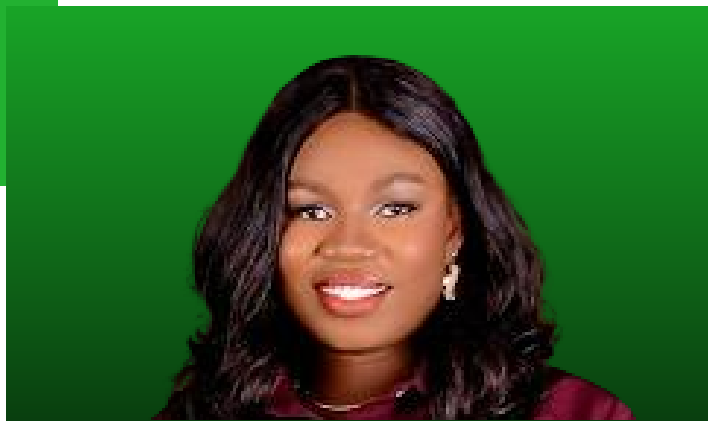
What's one career decision that looked risky to people around you but made perfect sense to you?

Taking a short career break quite early on without an immediate plan, just to rest and recharge. While I may not advise anyone to do so without planning, I am of the opinion that breaks are needed to avoid burnouts and evaluate one's priorities and alignment with future goals.

Of all your achievements, which are you most proud of and why?

There's still much more to come, but so far, it's being the Best Graduating Student at the Nigerian Law School because it's been one of the major opportunities I've had to connect with people and make an impression on those coming after me. Years after, I still get to speak to students on making the most of the law school experience, combining faith with academics and acing bar finals. I also still get feedback on how my tweets at the time were really helpful which feels good to hear truly.

Nonyelu **Ogechukwu**



Nonyelu Kosiso Ogechukwu is a lawyer from Anambra State who was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2017 after studying Law at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. She began her legal career in litigation practice before transitioning into legal freelancing and remote legal support. She currently provides paralegal and legal assistant services to international law firms, particularly firms in the United States.

Her experience spans legal drafting, e-filing, legal research, case management, exhibit organisation, case updates, client communication and general litigation support. Through remote practice, Nonyelu has combined her legal expertise with technology to provide efficient and reliable legal support to firms across jurisdictions. Her career reflects the evolving opportunities for Nigerian lawyers to leverage technology and remote work to contribute to the global legal services ecosystem.

You transitioned from practicing law in Nigeria to working remotely as a paralegal and legal assistant for international law firms. What inspired that transition?

Interestingly, the person who inspired my transition was a friend of mine. At the time, we were both practicing law and experiencing many of the challenges that young lawyers commonly face, particularly financial challenges and the difficulty of building a sustainable practice early in our careers. My friend eventually started working remotely. I remember noticing a significant change in her life. She became much more financially comfortable and independent. I remember looking at her and thinking, "This is possible. There is another way to use my legal skills." That experience opened my eyes to the possibilities of remote legal work. So, my friend was the catalyst. She showed me that there was an alternative career path within the legal profession—one that could give me greater financial independence while still allowing me to use my legal training.

What was the biggest challenge you faced when you first started working with U.S. law firms, and how did you overcome it?

One of the biggest challenges I faced when I started pursuing work with U.S. law firms was overcoming the assumptions and concerns that some international clients had about hiring professionals based in Africa. There were practical concerns about things like internet connectivity, electricity, security, and whether I would be able to work reliably from Nigeria. I also encountered situations where people had preconceived ideas about African professionals or made comments that could have been discouraging. Those challenges were difficult because I knew that I was capable of doing the work, but I still had to prove that my location did not determine the quality of my work. I refused to allow those challenges to define my opportunities. I kept applying, kept learning, kept improving my skills, and kept putting myself forward.

What has been the most difficult part of working across jurisdictions?

The most difficult part for me has probably been working across different time zones. There are times when people in my household are asleep, but I am awake and working because I need to align with the working hours of the law firm or the court system I am supporting. It requires discipline and the ability to structure your life around a schedule that may be completely different from the one around you. There are also practical challenges, such as electricity and internet connectivity, which are realities of working remotely from Nigeria. You have to be prepared and have systems in place to ensure that those challenges do not affect the quality or timeliness of your work.

How have you learned to communicate your value and negotiate for fair compensation?

> **“...Mentorship and tutelage can significantly shorten the learning curve.”**

When I first started, I was still building my confidence and learning how the international market worked. But after working with several U.S. law firms and gaining practical experience, I became much more confident in the value I bring to a firm. When discussing compensation, I focus on my experience, my skills, the quality of my work, and the results I can deliver rather than simply thinking about where I am located. I consider my experience and the value of the services I am providing, and I communicate my rate with confidence.So, for me, negotiating fairly is not about trying to convince someone that I am valuable.

What skills have been most important in helping you build credibility with international law firms?

The two skills that have been most important to me are legal drafting and communication. Legal drafting is important because a significant part of my work involves preparing legal documents, correspondence, motions, pleadings, and other litigation-related materials. So, being able to produce clear, accurate, and professional work is essential. I would say that communication is equally important, especially when you are working remotely. When you work remotely, the attorneys and clients are not physically with you. That is why I make communication a priority. I provide regular updates and, where required, end-of-shift reports so that the attorney knows what I worked on, what I accomplished, what is still pending, and whether there are any issues that require their attention.

What advice would you give a young Nigerian lawyer who wants to build a global career but does not know where to start?

My first piece of advice would be: find someone who has already done what you are trying to do and learn from them. You do not necessarily have to figure everything out on your own. Mentorship and tutelage can significantly shorten the learning curve. Find someone who understands the industry, who has successfully transitioned into international or remote legal work, and learn from their experience. I want to be honest about this because sometimes people see someone who is already successful and assume that the journey was easy. Breaking into the international legal market as an African professional is not always easy. There are challenges, rejections, competition, and times when you may question whether it is even possible.

Obinna **Udochukwu**



Obinna Udochukwu is a lawyer and software engineer working at the intersection of innovation, policy and operations. He practices with Olisa Agbakoba Legal, providing corporate and commercial legal advisory, particularly across the sports, entertainment and technology sectors.

Previously, he served as Chief Operations Officer of the Institute of Law and Professional Development, where he led the development of practical post-call training programmes for over 1,000 lawyers and helped grow revenue from zero to multiple seven figures. As a full-stack software engineer, he has led ChetamTech in delivering technology solutions for over 100 brands across commercial and non-profit sectors.

He served on the NBA YLF Committee on Projects, Policies and Programmes, contributing to the National Young Lawyers Survey and five-year strategic plan.

You founded ChetamTech while you were still a law student. What inspired you to start a technology business at that stage?

I grew up handy early on, this drove me to learn interesting skills to solve problems. What started as a hobby / passion developed over time to an entrepreneurial engine that could earn me a side income.

You currently work across sports, entertainment and technology sectors. What attracted you to these areas?

I am an ardent Sports , Entertainment and Technology fan even outside of legal practice . It was always a running curiosity on the type of legal practice that powers those sectors of society . Pursuing practice in that area was a no brainer and I thoroughly enjoy interfacing and supporting the Industry players in an industry I love naturally.

Your career has seen you move between entrepreneurship, legal practice, technology, operations and leadership. How do you manage these different responsibilities and interests?

I think passion has been a big factor in helping me navigate these responsibilities. If I don't like what I do I imagine it would be a gruesome chore. Nonetheless I have certain systems in place which also help me schedule myself and maintain focus on one area per time.

For a young lawyer who is interested in technology but feels they lack the technical background to get started, where would you advise them to begin?

The barrier of entry for technology is lower than before. There are core tech roles with little technical requirements and even the more technical ones have become easier to learn . Choose a platform and learn but remember to pace yourself and give it grace. Like with all transitions it is tougher at the beginning but worth it later on.

> **"...Like with all transitions it is tougher at the beginning but worth it later on."**

You have taken on significant leadership responsibilities while building your own career. What keeps you motivated to serve others?

Service fulfills me and has overtime been my biggest training hack. In service I gather a lot of experience that transfers to my personal endeavors.

Looking back at your career so far, what is one decision that initially seemed risky or unconventional but ultimately yielded positive results?

Pursuing a technology business as a law student . At some point I had real doubts on how far off the business can take me away from Legal practice but I am grateful to work right at the intersection of it and the experience has made me more comfortable in doing legal work in the same areas.

What is one setback that significantly shaped the professional you are today?

I have experienced two major educational gap years . The one year before Uni - which led me to invest more time in technology training and the one year right after Uni before law school which led me to volunteer and service positions that laid the foundation for the leadership opportunities I have now. They felt like setbacks back then but have been critical in shaping the professional I am today.



Special Feature: Couple

BABATUNDE & MARY-ANNE IGE

Babatunde Ige is a Managing Associate in Olaniwun Ajayi LP's disputes resolution practice and has over 13 years of significant experience in handling complex commercial litigation and arbitration. He routinely provides strategic advice on, and represents a myriad of clients in, matters arising from contractual breaches, land disputes, corporate governance disputes, and debt recovery, among others. He also regularly interfaces with law enforcement agencies on behalf of clients.

Mary-Anne Momoh-Ige is a lawyer and policy strategist whose work sits at the intersection of law, regulation and the digital economy across Africa. She currently leads Public Policy and Government Affairs for Sub-Saharan Africa at inDrive, where she shapes regulatory engagement, licensing strategy and stakeholder diplomacy across multiple African markets.

Mary-Anne holds an LL.B from the University of Benin and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2014. She earned a Master of Laws in International Business Law, a Postgraduate Diploma in Corporate & Commercial Law, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Economic Regulation, all from the University of London.

Her career spans private practice, the development sector, government regulatory agencies and the technology industry. She began at Babalakin & Co. and has since held senior legal and policy roles at the Abuja Technology Village Free Zone Company, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA) and the Society for Family Health, before transitioning into platform regulation and mobility policy.

Questions for the Couple

Babatunde, what is something about Mary-Anne's career journey that you deeply admire?

What I deeply admire about Mary-Anne's career is her willingness to keep learning and reinventing herself. She has moved from a disputes practice to consulting, then to a regulator, a public health NGO, and now to a public policy role in the technology and mobility space. What stands out to me is that she has never allowed herself to be defined by one role or one area of expertise. Each transition has required her to learn a new industry, understand a different set of stakeholders and adapt her skills to a completely different environment. I admire that because it takes courage and curiosity to step outside what is familiar. Her journey shows that a legal or professional career does not have to follow a straight line. The skills you develop in one role can become valuable in ways you may not have anticipated.

Is there a professional opportunity either of you had to give up because of your relationship?

Yes. Mary-Anne and I met at Babalakin & Co. while she was undertaking her NYSC programme. After her service, she had the opportunity to continue with the firm, but there was a policy that did not permit a married couple to work in the same office. We knew that, if we were to get married, one of us would eventually have to leave. Mary-Anne made the decision to leave and pursue opportunities outside the firm. That was a significant sacrifice, especially at that early stage of her career, when she was just beginning to establish herself professionally. I remain deeply grateful for that decision. But what means even more to me is that this was not an isolated sacrifice. Over the years, Mary-Anne has continued to make sacrifices and compromises that have allowed both of us to pursue our careers and grow. I will always be grateful for the sacrifices she made then, and for the many sacrifices she continues to make today.

What does genuine support look like between two high-performing legal professionals?

Genuine support means no one carries the family unevenly. Some days one of us is busy in court or boarding a flight, and the other quietly picks up everything else so the house keeps running. It also means being the loudest voice in the room when your spouse wins, and standing behind their ambitions even when those ambitions cost you something in the short term. You cannot build two careers under one roof if either party is quietly keeping score. In addition, there are no gender specific roles in our home. Whoever is free steps in, whether that is in the kitchen, school runs, grocery runs, the kids education/ homework, extracurricular activities, etc. That single habit has taken the weight off both of us more than any grand gesture ever could.

What does the less glamorous side of building two careers together actually look like?

Two demanding careers cost you time, and time is the currency that family runs on. Long hours at work, travel that lands on the wrong weekend, calendars negotiated like contracts, wishing yourselves happy birthday across a video call, or missing your kids events at school. Nobody photographs that part. So we protect the time we do have. Weekends belong to the children, and we take family holidays seriously, not as a luxury but as maintenance. That is where we recharge before the next busy season, and it is what makes the demanding stretches survivable.



Ofovwe **Aig-Imoukhuede**



Ofovwe Aig-Imoukhuede is a committed philanthropist and social impact leader whose career bridges the worlds of finance, law, governance and human development. She possesses over three decades of experience across the financial services and non-profit sectors. A Chevening Scholar and lifelong learner, Ofovwe holds an LLB from King's College London, an MBA from the University of Cambridge, and an MSc in Development Management from the London School of Economics. She is also a qualified development coach, reflecting her commitment to shaping values-based leadership across Africa.

As Co-Founder and Executive Vice-Chair of the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation, she leads an ambitious agenda to close the gap between Africa and the rest of the world by improving lives through strengthened public institutions. She oversees the Foundation's strategy and execution, guiding a team dedicated to catalysing governance reforms, and expanding the reach of leadership and scholarship programmes in partnership with global institutions such as Oxford University's Blavatnik School of Government. Ofovwe's philanthropic influence extends to multiple platforms advancing education, equity, and inclusion. She is Co-Chair of the Africa Advisory Board of The King's Trust International and a board member of Women's World Banking.

> "A legal education develops far more than legal knowledge; it teaches you how to think."

Many young lawyers struggle with the fear of stepping away from traditional career paths. Why did you choose to be a banker earlier in your career?

From a very young age, I was convinced I would become a litigator and I often imagined myself arguing complex cases in front of a judge in court. However, during my Nigerian Law School internship, I had the opportunity to observe proceedings in a courtroom and I realised that the reality did not quite match the picture I had built in my mind. Because of my interest in commercial law, I decided to explore opportunities in the legal department of a corporate organisation instead and I was eventually posted to a bank for my NYSC. Unfortunately, there were no openings in the legal department and so I was offered a role in commercial banking instead, which I reluctantly accepted. What I thought would be a temporary detour became the beginning of a career that exposed me to strategy, leadership, finance and institution building. Looking back, it was one of the best decisions I never planned to make.

What role can lawyers play in driving public sector reform beyond serving in the legal departments of government institutions?

A legal education develops far more than legal knowledge; it teaches you how to think. Lawyers are trained to analyse complex issues, weigh competing interests, interpret evidence and construct logical, well-reasoned arguments. Those are precisely the capabilities required to lead effective public institutions. Public sector reform is ultimately about solving complex problems: improving policy implementation, strengthening institutions, managing competing stakeholder interests and making decisions that serve the public good. Lawyers are well equipped for this because they are trained to think systematically and anticipate the wider implications of decisions. Some of the most effective public sector leaders I have worked with are not necessarily practising lawyers, but they share the disciplined, analytical mindset that legal training develops. Lawyers therefore have an important contribution to make, not only in providing legal advice, but in leading reforms, managing institutions and shaping public policy.

What have been some of the most rewarding moments in your work with the Foundation, particularly where you have seen lives, institutions, or systems transformed?

Two examples stand out for me. The first is our partnership with the Office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation to support the digitalisation of the Federal Civil Service. What began as a pilot has evolved into a model that is being scaled across the Service. By replacing manual processes with digital systems, the initiative has improved collaboration, increased efficiency and strengthened the capacity of the civil service to deliver better services to citizens. The second is seeing alumni of our Aig-Imoukhuede Public Leaders Programme return to their institutions after the programme and implement meaningful reforms. Across sectors such as healthcare, education and public administration, they have introduced innovations that have improved service delivery, strengthened policy implementation and modernised organisational processes. Those moments remind us that leadership development is most valuable when it translates into tangible institutional change.

In your experience, what qualities distinguish leaders who create lasting impact from those who simply occupy positions of influence?

The leaders who create lasting impact are distinguished by the clarity of purpose with which they lead. They have a clear understanding of what they want to achieve and are intentional about translating that vision into action. In the public sector particularly, effective leaders never lose sight of who they serve. They recognise that policies, processes and institutions ultimately exist to improve the lives of citizens. They are therefore willing to make difficult decisions, build capable teams, strengthen institutions and remain focused on long-term outcomes rather than short-term visibility. Lasting impact is rarely the result of one bold decision. More often, it comes from consistent leadership, disciplined execution and an unwavering commitment to public service.

As a woman with great influence in Nigeria and beyond, what lessons have you learned about leadership, and what advice would you offer to young women aspiring to lead across various sectors?

First, develop a "can do" mindset. Every leadership role brings unfamiliar challenges, and the most successful leaders are those who approach them with curiosity, resilience and a willingness to learn. Second, benchmark all the time. Look beyond your immediate environment, identify individuals and organisations that are doing exceptional work, and learn from them. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Third, be clear about your objectives but remain flexible about how you achieve them. Circumstances can change, and effective leaders adapt their approach without losing sight of their destination. Finally, develop your emotional intelligence. Technical competence will open doors, but your ability to understand yourself and other people, communicate effectively, manage relationships and build trust, will often determine how successful you are as a leader.

Ogechi **Kasie-Nwachukwu**



Ogechi Kasie-Nwachukwu is a brand specialist, communications and planning expert/strategist with over two decades of hands-on experience spanning legal practice, brand management, corporate communications, media relations, and project planning and management, gained across two of Africa's leading financial institutions.

She earned her law degree from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, and was called to the bar in 2003. She went on to obtain an MSc in Media and Communication from Pan-Atlantic University, and has since benefitted from numerous executive and middle management training programmes, both locally and internationally. Mrs Kasie-Nwachukwu began her career at Jachin & Boaz before moving into banking at Guaranty Trust Bank Plc, where she started in communications and later moved into legal, serving as a Legal Officer. She subsequently joined the Corporate Communications Group of Access Bank Plc, where she went on to head the Events and Sponsorships Unit before assuming her current role leading Marketing and Communications at Africa's largest retail bank. In this capacity, she has combined her legal grounding with a genuine passion for marketing communications, directly overseeing high-profile projects both in Nigeria and abroad — most notably, over the past three years, one of the biggest corporate sponsorships in Nigeria, the Access Bank Lagos City Marathon.

What initially inspired you to study law?

My interest in law took root early in life. I was never one to stand by and watch someone being mistreated or oppressed, I always felt compelled to speak up and defend people. This trait was so consistent that by junior secondary school, my classmates had nicknamed me "Baby Lawyer." The name stuck, and from that point on, I simply knew I was going to become a lawyer.

You began your professional journey in Corporate Communications and have since risen to senior leadership positions within Access Bank. How did that transition unfold, and what initially attracted you to communications and brand management?

My journey into corporate communications wasn't planned, it simply happened. But once it did, I took a liking to it and began to find my own voice within it. Has it been an easy journey? No. It's been one marked by challenges, growth, and continuous learning. That said, the transition itself was relatively smooth, and I credit that largely to a supervisor I had in my early years in the department, Muyiwa Moyela. He was kind, receptive, and saw potential in me that I didn't yet see in myself. At the time, I wasn't particularly happy to be in communications; I had my heart set on the legal department, or failing that, full-time advocacy. But he helped me understand that communication wasn't a step down, it was an opportunity. He gave me hope and broadened my horizons. I only worked with him for a short period before he left the institution, but the impression he left on me has been indelible.

> **"...Once a lawyer, always a lawyer, nothing can ever take that away."**

Career pivots often come with uncertainty. What fears, doubts, or external pressures did you face when charting a non-traditional path, and how did you navigate them?

Career pivots typically come with uncertainty, and mine was no exception. Moving away from law practice into a non-traditional path in communications came with real fears and doubts, I genuinely wasn't sure what the future held. One of my major fears was not being respected as a lawyer. Having gone through the rigours of legal training, there's a certain mutual respect that exists within the profession, an unspoken code, almost. It would be unusual for one lawyer to overtly disrespect another; the legal profession is highly regulated, and that regulation shapes how lawyers relate to one another. My worry was whether that same regard would follow me outside a legal environment. If I had gone into the legal department, I'd have been working with like-minded people who understood that code. Instead, I was moving into a space with people who had little or nothing to do with law. So I wasn't sure I'd be respected in the same way, or what my growth trajectory would even look like there. I also had doubts about my own ability. I was confident I could do well as a lawyer, that had never been in question. But communications and brand management were entirely new to me. I hadn't done anything like it before, and that uncertainty created real internal pressure. There was also the pride factor: I couldn't fail, because I was a lawyer first and foremost, and it felt unthinkable for a lawyer to fail at anything. Interestingly, that same pressure became my strength. The mindset that "I cannot fail" cut both ways, it was a source of anxiety, but it also became the very thing that pushed me forward. I reasoned that if I had made it through the rigour of legal training, then I could certainly master this too. That belief, that there was nothing I couldn't do, is what carried me through the early challenges of that transition.

Having led strategic communications, sponsorships, and marketing initiatives for a leading financial institution, how has your understanding of success evolved throughout your career?

When I was starting out, I think success looked like proving myself, proving that a lawyer could thrive outside the courtroom, that the pivot wasn't a mistake. It was very much about competence and validation: delivering the campaign, getting the sponsorship right, organizing successful events, and being seen as capable in a room full of people who came from a completely different professional background than I did. Over time, my definition of success has matured further. It's less about individual proof and more about impact and legacy. It's seeing a campaign shift how people perceive a brand, watching a sponsorship or an event create genuine goodwill for the institution, and seeing the people I lead grow into their own strength and confidence. I have come to measure success by the rooms I can open for others, not just the ones I've earned a seat in myself. I would also say success has become less about the absence of setbacks and more about how I carry myself through them. Early on, I thought success meant getting it right the first time. Now I understand it as resilience, the ability to learn, adjust, and keep building, especially in a fast-moving industry like financial services where the ground shifts constantly. So if you asked me to define success today, I'd say it's less a destination and more a practice: showing up with integrity, building things that outlast me, and helping others find their own version of "Baby Lawyer" moment, that early spark that tells them exactly who they're meant to become.

What do you think young lawyers often misunderstand about careers in banking, corporate communications, marketing, and other law-adjacent fields?

I think the biggest misconception is that stepping into these spaces means stepping away from law, that it's somehow a lesser path, a plan B, or simply where you go to earn more money. I understand that thinking because I held some of it myself in the early days. But I've come to see it differently. Your legal training doesn't leave you when you leave the courtroom or chambers. It shows up in how you structure an argument, how you manage risk, how you read a room, how you negotiate, how you hold your ground under pressure. Those are not skills you set aside in banking or communications; they're skills that make you exceptional at it.

I also think young lawyers underestimate how much regulated industries like banking need people who think like lawyers, people who can see around corners, who understand compliance not as a constraint but as a discipline, and who can communicate complex, sensitive information without exposing the institution to risk. That is a legal mind at work, even if the job title says "communications" or "marketing."

What I would tell a young lawyer considering a path like mine is this: don't measure your worth by your job title. Measure it by whether you're still solving problems the way your training taught you to, with rigour, with advocacy, with integrity. If you are, then you haven't left the profession behind. You've simply found another courtroom.

Many young professionals struggle with the fear of deviating from their original career plans. What advice would you give to lawyers who feel drawn to non-traditional paths but are uncertain about taking the first step?

First, I would tell them that the fear is normal, it doesn't mean you are on the wrong path, it means you are stepping into something unfamiliar, and that's simply what growth feels like. I had those same fears: would I be respected outside a legal environment, would I still be seen as a lawyer, would I be starting from zero in a field I knew nothing about. Those doubts didn't disappear before I moved, they moved with me. What changed was that I stopped waiting for the fear to leave before I took the step.

In my early years, I had every reason to run back to legal practice. It would have been the easier, more familiar choice. But I stayed, because running back would have meant letting my fears and challenges take over me, and I wasn't willing to let that happen.

Second, I would tell them not to see their legal training as something they are leaving behind, but as something they are taking with them. Once a lawyer, always a lawyer, nothing can ever take that away. You are not starting from zero. You are bringing years of discipline, structure, and advocacy into a new room, and that is an advantage, not a liability, even when it doesn't feel like one at first.

Third, find the people who can see what you can't yet see in yourself. I would not be where I am today without a supervisor who believed I could do more before I believed it myself. Sometimes the first step isn't something you take alone, it's something someone else helps you see is possible.

And finally, give yourself permission to be a work in progress. You don't have to have it all figured out before you begin. I certainly didn't. What matters is that you start, stay honest about what you are learning, and trust that the discomfort of the unfamiliar is temporary, but the growth from it isn't.

Looking back on your journey, what is one lesson about career growth and professional development that you wish you had understood much earlier?

If there is one lesson I would pass on to my younger self, and to any young professional today, it's this: do not be afraid to take risks, to explore new territories, and to stay open to opportunities beyond the walls of a single organisation. Growth often comes from exposure, to different environments, different challenges, and different ways of doing things. Staying alert to that exposure, and being willing to pursue it when the moment calls for it, matters just as much as working hard.

My own career has given me room to explore, expand, and reinvent myself across communications, events, sponsorship, and marketing, and that breadth has shaped how I think about growth generally. Not every professional will find that same breadth within one organisation, and that's simply the reality of different industries, different roles, and different seasons of a career. What matters is being intentional: new environments bring new problems to solve, new networks, and new versions of yourself to discover, and there is real growth that comes from stepping into the unfamiliar, wherever that unfamiliar territory happens to be.

So if there is one thing I would tell any young professional today, it's this: don't let comfort or fear be the reason you stay stagnant. Career growth rewards those who are willing to move and evolve, whether that movement happens within your organisation or beyond it.

Ogenetega **Adedipe**



A seasoned lawyer specializing in entertainment and sports law, with a strong focus on film and the broader creative economy. He advises creatives, brands, artists, athletes, and media companies on a wide range of transactions, including music clearances, publishing, recording, live performances, distribution, licensing, and brand representation.

Oghenetega is an alumni Adeleke University and the Music Business Academy for Africa. He has worked on album clearances, movie projects, live event performances, publishing deals, brand endorsements, influencer deals, music businesses and distribution deals for leading African artists, producers and creatives where he ensured their rights, royalties, and agreements were properly drafted.

He worked in the legal team of Africa's leading and Grammy-winning act Wizkid, contributing to negotiating agreements connected to Grammy-nominated tracks, he also cleared the S2 EP and Morayo Album. He has also led and advised on major brand endorsement deals involving Burna Boy and Ayra Starr for Oraimo and Infinix, respectively, as well as providing legal advisory services on film projects, live events, and marketing campaigns involving brands like Moniepoint, Coca-Cola and Infinix mobile. He is a Future Awards Africa winner of the Prize for Law (2025) in recognition of his impact and experience within the creative industries.

He also practices sports law, providing comprehensive legal support to athletes, scouts, and organisations. He advises on contract negotiations, endorsements, image rights, sponsorship agreements, and regulatory compliance, ensuring that clients' commercial and legal interests are effectively protected.

The Nigerian entertainment industry has become a global cultural force. What first drew you to the industry?

To be honest, I have always been surrounded by creatives. However, during my undergraduate years, I identified a gap and a growing need for lawyers within the entertainment space, and I decided to position myself to fill that gap. What draws me the most is the opportunity to contribute to the creative process from a legal and business perspective.

For lawyers trying to choose a speciality, what signs should they look forto know they have found an area worth committing to?

Law is dynamic and cuts across every field of life. My advice is to follow what genuinely interests you, but also pay attention to gaps within that space. If you can position yourself as a solution to a real need, you become valuable and ultimately, indispensable.

You have worked on deals involving artists such as Wizkid, Burna Boy, Ayra Starr and Vector. What has it been like contributing to the legal and business structures behind these kinds of collaborations?

I see those experiences as part of a continuous learning curve. While I'm grateful for the opportunity to work on high-level deals, my broader goal is to also support emerging talents who may not yet be in the spotlight. I don't take my experience for granted, but I'm equally aware that there is still a lot more to be done.

Before your legal career, you were actively involved in leadership during your university years. How did those early experiences influence the way you approach opportunities and professional growth today?

Leadership teaches you how to understand people and navigate differences. At its core, leadership is about people management, and that has significantly shaped how I approach both opportunities and relationships. It also helped build my mindset, understanding that with the right combination of pressure and passion, a lot is achievable.

> "I've always focused on doing the work and delivering value, without necessarily seeking visibility."

You were awarded the Future Awards Africa Prize for Law in 2025. What did that recognition mean to you, and how has it shaped your perspective on impact within the profession?

That recognition affirmed that I am on the right path. It also shifted my perspective. I've always focused on doing the work and delivering value, without necessarily seeking visibility. However, receiving an award on such a platform showed me that impact does not go unnoticed. It gave me a renewed sense of confidence and responsibility.

When you were making your early career decisions, how much did financial considerations influence your choices compared to opportunities for learning and professional development?

Finance matters; no doubt it drives a lot of decisions. However, if you focus only on immediate financial gain, you risk limiting your long-term growth. In the early stages, prioritising learning and value creation is key. If you put in the work, the financial rewards will follow your value.

You have a strong digital presence. How important do you think personal branding and digital visibility are for lawyers today?

Personal branding is important for everyone, including lawyers. In today's world, digital visibility helps people identify credibility and expertise. Particularly in my field, it makes it easier for clients and collaborators to find and engage with the right professionals.

Olabisi **Afolabi**



Olabisi Afolabi is an award-winning social development lawyer, child rights advocate, and safeguarding expert with nearly a decade of experience building safer systems for children and vulnerable populations.

She works at the intersection of law, policy, and practice, bridging the gap between children's rights and their lived realities through child rights and child protection advocacy.

She has worked with national and international organisations such as the Freedom Fund and Save the Children International, AFEX, Taiwo Akinlami Academy, among others, on safeguarding systems, SEAH investigations, and safe programme design and implementation.

Named one of 30 women globally in child safety, she has contributed to media platforms and expert panels on safeguarding and child rights. She also serves on multiple boards, providing governance and safeguarding leadership to social impact organisations.

Did you ever consider starting your career in a law firm?

Yes, I did. In fact, I interned in law firms immediately after university and before law school. I also worked with the Ministry of Justice during my National Youth Service year. I had heard the advice that a young lawyer should have some law firm experience before moving into a niche area of practice, so I considered that route and tried my hands on it. Those experiences were useful because they gave me exposure to conventional legal practice. But they also helped me realise that I was more interested in using law to solve broader societal problems. So yes, I considered it, but eventually found my own route.

Child rights and safeguarding isn't the most conventional path for Nigerian lawyers. What first drew you to this area of practice?

My passion for solving real societal problems with law drew me to search other areas. Then I came across the work of Mr Taiwo Akinlami, a veteran lawyer in the child rights and protection space, and it resonated with me. I then began to see more clearly the impact of abuse and the challenges around securing justice for children. My experience at the Ministry of Justice showed me that even when there is a conviction, justice for the child is not necessarily complete. The child still carries the impact of what happened. That made me think differently. I became interested in prevention and spreading awareness about children's rights.

What is a safeguarding "win" that most people never hear or talk about?

A safeguarding win that most people never hear about is a risk averted. We hear a lot about abuse and what happens when things go wrong, but we rarely hear about the practitioners whose work helped prevent harm in the first place. Every time someone makes a better decision for children, we have reduced the risk of abuse. Every time an adult changes how they relate to children, or an organisation adopts a more rights-based approach, that is a win. It may not make the news because bad news travels faster, but prevention matters. Sometimes the biggest safeguarding success is simply that something harmful did not happen.

What is one misconception about safeguarding or child protection that you wish more lawyers, organisations and policymakers understood?

One misconception is that people who work in social development or child protection must always do free work and therefore cannot be financially stable. That is not true. The primary motivation may not be money, but there are different ways to earn while solving real problems for organisations and people. Another misconception is that this is less technical work. It is not. It requires research, strong legal knowledge, objectivity and advocacy. It is technical work and can be financially and personally rewarding. I also wish more organisations understood that wherever people gather, there is potential for rights to be violated. Dignity and rights matter everywhere, even in law firms.

> **“My experience at the Ministry of Justice showed me that even when there is a conviction, justice for the child is not necessarily complete.”**

Were there moments when choosing a less conventional path made you question whether you were progressing as quickly as your peers?

Yes, absolutely. Especially in the early days, where it didn’t appear very rewarding, I questioned myself and wondered whether it was worth it. People around me also asked questions like, “Why are you not practising?” or “Why are you not going to court?” Even family members sometimes took pride in seeing someone practise law conventionally. But I kept coming back to why I chose this path. Over time, I learned how to communicate my professional value properly. I also realised that my expertise allows me to answer questions that some other lawyers cannot. Ultimately, I learned to shine in my area of expertise.

For younger lawyers who are passionate about child protection, international development or social impact, what would you advise them to do in their first three years after the Bar?

In their first three years after the Bar, I would tell young lawyers to learn from people who are doing the work well. Do not jump into advocacy because social media makes it easy to share thoughts. Learn first. Understand which areas of law apply to the social issue you want to solve, then find people doing that work and learn from them. Take relevant courses and understand international best practices. Do not rely on passion alone. Learn the rules and ethics of the profession. And document your work. Talk about what you are learning and contributing. Over time, that record becomes evidence of your growth and contributions.

Looking back, what is one career decision you would make differently?

Looking back, I think I would have started applying to international organisations earlier. I would have put myself out there more and started building visibility sooner. I also would have applied for opportunities without disqualifying myself before anyone else had the chance to do so. Sometimes we decide that we are not qualified because we do not meet every requirement, but opportunities can also be how you discover what you need to learn next. I value the path I took, but I would have been more intentional about making myself visible, applying earlier and giving people the opportunity to decide whether I was a fit.

Olabisi Shamusideen **Makanjuola**



Olabisi Makanjuola is a graduate of Obafemi Awolowo University and an of the Lagos Business School. He is a Partner at Olaniwun Ajayi LP (OALP) and leads the Dispute Resolution and Arbitration Practice Group. With nearly two decades of experience, Bisi has built a strong reputation for his expertise in high-stakes litigation and arbitration, especially in matters involving banks, corporate shareholding, capital market regulation, commercial contracts, fraud, white-collar crimes, and infrastructure projects.

Bisi's competence has earned him wide industry recognition including being recognised in April 2026, as a Next Generation Partner in Dispute Resolution by Legal 500. Bisi has broadened his global legal perspective through a secondment to the London and Paris offices of Herbert Smith Freehills, further deepening his understanding of international legal systems and cross-border disputes. Bisi is an avid sportsman who believes strongly in the power of sports to unite and empower individuals and communities. He is also the erstwhile Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), Lagos Branch, the largest in the country. He is a distinguished lawyer and a visionary leader committed to using the law as a tool for positive impact and societal advancement.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced as a young lawyer, and how did you overcome them?

Early in my practice, the sheer scale of transactions and high-stakes dispute resolution at a tier-one firm felt overwhelming. The biggest hurdle was transitioning from a student who absorbs information to a professional who must provide actionable, risk-insulated advice. How I overcame it was that I stopped viewing ambiguity as a threat and started treating it as an assignment. I overcame the learning curve by embracing extreme thoroughness—becoming the person who read the footnotes of the statute and the record of appeal back-to front. I also realized that as a young lawyer, you don't have to have all the answers immediately, but you must have a relentless work ethic and a structured approach to finding them.

What do you think about young lawyers specialising early in their careers?

Specialization is inevitable, but premature specialization is a trap. I often caution young lawyers against boxing themselves into a hyper-niche practice area in their first two or three years. The most successful partners are "T-shaped" professionals: they possess a broad, deep understanding of general legal principles, civil procedure, commercial law, and statutory interpretation (the horizontal bar), combined with deep, world-class expertise in a specific vertical, like project finance, fintech, or international arbitration (the vertical bar). Without that broad foundation, you cannot spot the collateral risks in a complex matter—for instance, how an infrastructure transaction might collapse under an unforeseen constitutional or public law challenge. Spend your early years building the horizontal bar; the vertical specialization will follow naturally as you discover your strengths and market demands.

What do you believe were the most important habits or decisions that contributed to your rise to partnership at a tier one law firm?

The single most transformative habit was moving from an "execution" mindset to an "ownership" mindset. A junior lawyer waits to be told exactly what to do, drafts the specific clause requested, and hands it back. An owner steps back and asks: What is the client's ultimate commercial objective here, and does this document actually achieve it? When a partner hands you a problem, they aren't just looking for research; they are looking for a solution they can confidently pitch to a board of directors. Once you become a reliable solution-

> **"The single most transformative habit was moving from an "execution" mindset to an "ownership" mindset."**

provider, you become indispensable. Partnership is ultimately a business. I made a conscious decision early on to invest in relationships—treating my peers with collaboration rather than cutthroat competition, and treating clients not as one-off files, but as long-term institutional partners. Those relationships I cultivated many years ago are still coming through for me today.

What common mistakes do you see young lawyers make in the first five years of practice, and how can they avoid them?

The most frequent mistake is the rush to be fast at the expense of being right. In a digital world, junior lawyers often feel pressured to reply to emails instantly, leading to sloppy drafting, unverified citations, or half-baked opinions. A partner will forgive a delay of an hour if the work is flawless; they will rarely forgive a fast response that exposes the client to liability. Avoid this by building a rigorous self-review mechanism. Another mistake is transactional cynicism—viewing tasks like indexing a volume of documents, organizing a trial bundle, or filing a corporate return as "beneath them." They fail to see that these operational tasks are the foundational building blocks of procedural mastery. If a partner cannot trust you to accurately compile a record of appeal, they will never trust you to argue the brief before the court.

For a young lawyer who feels uncertain about their future or is struggling to find their footing in the profession, what message would you like to leave with them?

To anyone struggling right now, feeling swallowed by the demands or uncertain if they belong in this profession, my message is simple: Do not judge your lifetime career by the chaos of your current season. The legal profession is built on the law of compound interest. In the first few years, you put in massive amounts of energy, late nights, and stress, and the visible returns can feel dishearteningly small. You might feel like you are just moving paper or fighting an uphill battle. But I assure you, nothing is lost. Every hour spent researching, every draft revised, and every setback endured is quietly compounding into institutional wisdom, intellectual muscle, and professional gravitas. Have patience with your own development. Keep showing up, keep refining your craft, and trust that the foundation you are building right now in the shadows will comfortably sustain the success you will achieve in the light.

Olugbenga **Olatunji**



Gbenga is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney Law School. He is the coordinator for IP: Trade Marks and Patents and one of the teaching team for Contract. Before now, he lectured at the Faculty of Law, University of Ilorin, where he taught Contract and IP law. Gbenga obtained his LLB degree from the University of Ibadan, his LLM from Cambridge University, an MIP (Master of Intellectual Property) degree from Africa University (Zimbabwe), and a PhD degree from the University of Tasmania (Australia). His research interests include the interphase between patent protection and access to medicines, trademarks, impact of TRIPS-plus provisions in free trade agreements on access to medicines, etc.

Was the plan after law school to become a lecturer, or did you consider other options available to you at the time?

Not really! Throughout my LLB and BL years, the plan was to practise law and become a renowned legal luminary within the shortest time possible. Service year, my place of primary assignment, and the Dean of the Law School I was posted to, changed all that.

What factors guided your career decisions between 1–7 years post-call, and have those factors changed since?

First year post-call was my service year. The Dean of Law (under whom I served) was an excellent mentor and a veritable advocate for the academic profession. Working as his research assistant and as a 'corper' lecturer laid a solid research and teaching foundation for me that I became sold on this new professional pathway within a year. I importantly enjoyed the flexibility and the self-motivating opportunity that the academic profession offers. I formally joined the academia third year post-call after completing my LLM.

Your research in intellectual property law — particularly patent law — has made a significant contribution to the field. What first sparked your interest in this area?

My LLM at Cambridge sparked the interest: I had the honour of being taught International IP law by Prof Bentley. His seminars left me with more questions on the delicate but fascinating intersection between innovations and accessibility. Thus, when WIPO announced a fully-funded Master of Intellectual Property (MIP) program, I jumped on the opportunity and spent another year understanding the different interphases of IP. The MIP years opened my eyes to the serious access-to-medicines concerns facing people in low-and-middle-income-countries. This eventually motivated me to complete my PhD in this area.

For young lawyers interested in IP and access to medicines, how would you advise them to build a career in the space?

As IP is an elective in many universities, the starting point is to sign up for some of WIPO's introductory courses on different aspects of IP law – these courses are free and are available on WIPO's website. If interested in taking things even further, the MIP program—fully-funded by WIPO and the hosting universities—is an excellent next step. You may discover that your interest lies elsewhere as IP offers numerous opportunities spread across patents, trademarks, copyrights, geographical indications, among others.

> **"I am motivated by the urge to do right by my profession and students."**

How different or similar was your experience teaching at Unilorin and at Sydney Law School?

At both universities, I have had the opportunity of teaching and mentoring exceptionally brilliant students who are now excelling in their chosen fields. One difference though, is the role publications play in promotion process: in Nigeria more emphasis is placed on numbers, whereas abroad, the opposite is the case. It doesn't matter whether you have published ten (10) or three (3) papers; what really matters is the impact those papers have in your field as evidenced through national and international recognition among others.

What emerging areas within the legal profession do you believe young lawyers should begin preparing for today?

Generative AI tools: universities and law societies in many developed (and some developing) jurisdictions already permit the use of AI tools to complete unsecured/take-home assignments; to conduct research; and as an assistance during legal brief writing. Law faculties/the Nigerian law schools and Nigerian Bar Association branches should strategically mainstream the use of AI tools into legal education and practice. This will guarantee ethical and responsible use of these tools as opposed unethical use which is certain to result if this emerging technology is left unregulated.

You have excelled across several academic endeavours. What motivates you to sustain that standard of excellence?

Self-preservation and the need to maintain high standards for which my alma maters (University of Ibadan and University of Cambridge, for instance) are known. Essentially, I am motivated by the urge to do right by my profession and students—as a student, I disliked when lecturers cancelled lectures without notice or missed classes without explanation only to rush through course materials few weeks to exams. I am always reminded that I do not want to be the lecturers I detested as a student.

Olusoga **Aderemilekun**



Remi Olusoga is the Legal Manager at Bisedge, providing legal and regulatory guidance across departments. She is a legal and policy professional with experience across public and private sectors, and with work spanning contract negotiation, policy advisory, and regulatory compliance. She has worked with and supported the legal or policy departments of governments, international, and multinational organizations, including Daystar Power Group, the Lagos State Ministry of Justice, Africa Centre for Energy Policy, the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network CIC, and the Netherlands Environmental Agency.

Remi is a first-class graduate of the Nigerian Law School and holds a master's degree in Energy and Climate Policy with distinction, from the University of Sussex. Her work sits at the intersection of law, sustainability, and policy development.

When you completed law school, did you already have a clear vision for where you wanted your career to begin? If so, did things unfold the way you expected?

Yes, I had a clear vision. Like many young lawyers, I wanted to start in a top-tier firm. I got the opportunity twice and declined both times- first because it clashed with my NYSC camp reporting date (in hindsight, not my finest call), and the second out of loyalty to the firm I was already with. Looking back, it may have been naivety or misplaced loyalty. But I also think it was confidence- the belief that if I wanted that path later, I could still access it.

Your career has taken you through private practice, public service, and the private sector. How did you navigate these transitions, and were there any unexpected challenges along the way?

I carried the same standard of excellence into every transition. For example, moving into the public sector did not mean doing less; if anything, I leaned in more. The biggest challenge was not the work itself but resisting the subtle pressure to lower expectations or hold back so as not to be perceived differently. I chose early on that my output would not be defined by the system I entered.

How did you recognise that it was the right time to pivot in your career, and what factors guided that decision?

I knew it was time to pivot when my role no longer stretched me and did not feel like the best use of my abilities. I was in the public sector at the time and while it was a good run, something felt missing. After a 6-month stint in energy and extractives at a major think-tank in Ghana, I returned and from then on, chose to focus fully on the energy sector. My decisions were guided by instinct, curiosity, and the confidence in my ability to figure things out.

You now serve as a policy adviser in energy and climate policy with the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network. What drew you to policy advisory work, and what is the relationship between legal practice and policy advisory work?

My appointment as Adviser to the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network came unexpectedly. Advisory work feels like a natural extension of how I think. I have always questioned systems, spotted gaps, and thought beyond the obvious. This voluntary role enables me do that for Commonwealth countries.Legal practice and policy are intertwined. A lawyer's job would usually include understanding regulatory landscapes. This means you interpret, apply, and sometimes shape policy. My cross-sector legal experience prepared me to anticipate reactions, resistance, and real-world implications relevant for policy advisory.

How do you envision the next five years of your professional journey? Are you planning another evolution or deepening your current path?

> **"Like many young lawyers, I wanted to start in a top-tier firm. I got the opportunity twice and declined both times."**

If I am honest, my career has constantly evolved. For instance, I have recently begun consultancy in energy policy research for international government bodies, which was not something I anticipated this early. Over the next five years, I see myself deepening my work at the intersection of energy, policy, and people- particularly energy access and its human impact.

What were the greatest challenges you faced at the start of your career, and how did those experiences shape you?

I initially wanted to pursue litigation. I excelled at it in university, winning moot competitions and earning best counsel recognitions. It felt like a natural path to continue. However, on getting into practice, a difficult working dynamic diminished my interest almost immediately and so I chose not to pursue it. Perhaps things would have been different under other circumstances, but I have no regrets. My career unfolded differently and I love it.

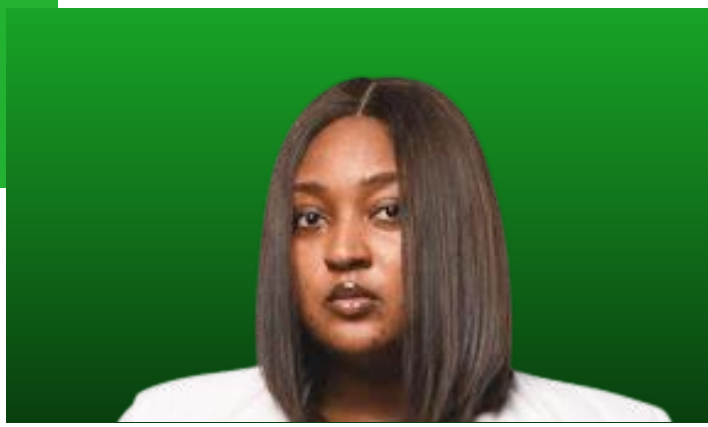
What factors would you say have contributed most significantly to your sustained career growth?

Excellence has been foundational. It is consistent, visible, and non-negotiable in my work. Beyond that, I have an unshakable sense of self-belief. I have never seen spaces as too big or tables as too large. From a young age, I carried a deep awareness that I was meant to stand out and do meaningful work. That belief has shaped how I show up, the risks I take, and the standards I maintain.

In your experience, what skill and personal qualities are most critical for building a successful and enduring career in the legal profession?

Analytical thinking, adaptability, excellent communication, confidence, and unending curiosity.

Omobolanle **Dada**



Omobolanle Dada is a corporate, commercial and litigation lawyer passionate about using the law as a tool for business growth, value creation and economic development. She is Counsel in a top-tier litigation law firm in Abuja, where she is involved in civil and commercial litigation, advocacy and dispute resolution.

She also provides legal and commercial advisory and consultancy services to high-net-worth individuals, companies and organisations, with experience spanning corporate governance, contract drafting and review, real estate transactions, regulatory compliance, trust and wealth management, and general commercial advisory. She has contributed to advisory engagements for leading Nigerian institutions, including the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited and Premium Pension Limited, and has prepared legal opinions and transaction documents for local and multinational clients.

Omobolanle holds an LL.B from the University of Ilorin and an LL.M in Financial Law and Policy from Nile University of Nigeria. She is committed to continuous learning and professional development and is passionate about applying her legal expertise to create meaningful value for individuals, businesses and society.

> **"...Reading widely, taking courses, and exposing myself to different areas of practice have helped me identify and gradually streamline my areas of interest."**

What were the early years of your career like?

My early years of practice were quite remarkable. I started my career at a top-tier litigation law firm, and it happened to be an election year, so we were immediately plunged into work. Within my first year, I was appearing in court, leading colleagues in court, drafting originating processes, and even handling matters assigned to me. Looking back, I realise that the strong foundation I received there continues to shape the lawyer I am today. I will always be grateful for the experience and training I received at D. D. Dodo & Co.

Why did you decide to study law?

It was simply something I had always wanted to do. As a child, I admired my father's wig and gown and was fascinated by his law library. Looking back, I realise that I was probably influenced by my father more than I knew at the time.

What challenges have you faced in your years of practice, and how have you managed them?

One of my biggest challenges has been figuring out exactly what area of law I want to practise and ultimately be known for. I believe this is a challenge many young lawyers can relate to, and that is why I think this magazine is such a great initiative. I am still on that journey of discovery, but continuous learning has helped me navigate it. Reading widely, taking courses, and exposing myself to different areas of practice have helped me identify and gradually streamline my areas of interest.

What motivated you to pursue postgraduate education?

For me, pursuing my master's was about recognising that there was still so much more to learn. I wanted to broaden my knowledge beyond my undergraduate and professional training. I chose Financial Law and Policy because I wanted to develop myself as both a financial adviser and a corporate lawyer, while gaining a better understanding of the bigger picture and how I can use that knowledge to create meaningful value.

Omokayode Adebayo **Dada, SAN**



Omokayode Adebayo Dada, SAN is the Principal Counsel of O. A. Dada & Co. and a distinguished Nigerian legal practitioner with over three decades of courtroom experience. Called to the Nigerian Bar in 1989, he is a seasoned litigator, accomplished election petition lawyer and Notary Public, renowned for his exceptional courtroom advocacy, incisive legal reasoning and mastery of complex legal issues.

Mr. Dada remains committed to continuous learning, recognising that excellence in law demands constant engagement with an evolving legal landscape.His elevation to the prestigious rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), following more than a decade of applications, reflects his remarkable resilience, perseverance and unwavering faith in God. He continues to lead his Firm's litigation practice while mentoring young advocates and upholding the highest standards of professional excellence.

> **"An exceptional litigator is distinguished by the ability to think and reason on their feet."**

Litigation demands consistency over decades, what personal habits, disciplines, or routines have enabled you to remain effective throughout your career?

Passion for litigation has been my greatest driving force. Beyond that, consistency, proactiveness, and hard work have kept me going throughout my career. One habit I have never abandoned is research. Even after many years in practice, I still conduct legal research myself because I believe that staying at the top of your game requires continuous learning. The law is constantly evolving, and if you stop learning, you begin to fall behind. I have always believed that every brief is an opportunity to learn something new and become a better advocate.

How have mentors, colleagues, clients, and professional relationships shaped your career, and what advice would you give young lawyers about building meaningful professional networks?

No man is an island, and that is especially true in the legal profession. Throughout your career, you will find yourself working for others, learning from others, and collaborating with teams, especially in high-profile matters such as election petition cases. I have been blessed with friendships and professional relationships that have stood the test of time. Many of the colleagues I work with today are people I have known for over thirty years, dating back to my university and Law School days. My advice to young lawyers is to build genuine relationships and, more importantly, sustain them. Character, loyalty, and respect often open doors that competence alone cannot.

You applied to be a Senior Advocate of Nigeria for over a decade before eventually succeeding. How did you navigate that prolonged season of waiting?

My faith in God sustained me throughout that journey. There is a philosophy I have always lived by: once you enter a vehicle, no matter how rough or turbulent the journey becomes, do not get off until you arrive at your destination. That was exactly how I approached my pursuit of the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria. I kept moving forward. I continued building my practice, improving myself, and serving the profession without allowing the delay to discourage me. When the rank eventually came, to the glory of God, I was ready for it. Looking back now, I believe the waiting period was not wasted, it was a season of preparation.

What first drew you to litigation, and what has kept you passionate about advocacy after more than twenty-seven years in practice?

What first drew me to litigation was my passion for advocacy and the defence of human rights. From my early days, I admired the courtroom and aspired to present arguments and defend the rights of others. What has kept that passion alive is the intellectual challenge that litigation presents. There is something deeply fulfilling about carefully analysing a case, developing sound legal arguments, and seeing the court appreciate the reasoning behind your submissions. Every case presents a new challenge, and every victory reinforces my commitment to the profession. That sense of purpose has remained with me throughout my career.

What distinguishes an exceptional litigator from a merely competent one?

An exceptional litigator is distinguished by the ability to think and reason on their feet. Courtroom advocacy often requires you to respond to unexpected questions, arguments, or developments instantly, and that ability only comes through preparation and experience. Equally important is staying abreast of the law. The legal profession is dynamic, a lawyer who is not committed to continuous learning will struggle to remain effective and consistent. Exceptional litigators never stop studying because they understand that knowledge is one of their greatest tools.

Of all the matters you have handled, which case has had the greatest impact on the legal profession or on society, and why does it stand out to you?

One case that stands out in my career is Mohammed Jafaru v. Executive Chairman, EFCC & Anor (2022) LPELR 58538 (CA) I consider it the most impactful because it established an important precedent on the jurisdiction of the courts over a serving military officer accused of committing a criminal offence, and powers of prosecuting agencies such as the Police, EFCC, ICPC and so on. To the best of my knowledge, it remains the leading authority on the interpretation of Section 123 of the Armed Forces Act in relation to the powers of prosecuting agencies and the jurisdiction of the courts. Contributing to a decision that has become a reference point for the interpretation of the law is deeply gratifying. It reminds me that, beyond representing individual clients, lawyers also have the privilege of shaping the development of our jurisprudence for future generations.

Omotayo **Dada**



Omotayo Dada is a lawyer and public policy professional working at the intersection of law, governance, youth development and policy. She holds an LL.B. from the University of Ilorin and a First Class B.L. from the Nigerian Law School, where she emerged as the overall best graduating student among 5,802 students. She subsequently earned a Master of Public Policy from the University of Oxford as a Commonwealth Shared Scholar.

She began her legal career at Olaniwun Ajayi LP, working on legislative drafting, regulatory reform and policy advisory projects for government institutions, international organisations and private-sector clients. She has also worked in management consulting, providing legal and policy advice on national and continental matters. Omotayo is the CEO of OMT Advisory Limited and heads the Market Intelligence and Research Unit at Govtech Africa Inc.

> **"I joined one of the best law firms in Africa, and my sign-on bonus as an NYSC associate was about 300% of my "dream salary."**

What did you imagine your career would be while you were at Law School?

Before the latter part of Law School, my dream was to work in the firm of an SAN in Abuja for about ₦100,000 a month. At the time, that felt like a lot, and working with an SAN seemed like the ultimate career goal. I certainly did not get what I imagined. I got better. After my call to Bar, I joined one of the best law firms in Africa, and my sign-on bonus as an NYSC associate was about 300% of my "dream salary."

You emerged as the best student from your set at the Nigerian Law School. What did that achievement mean to you?

It felt like a love letter from God. Even now, when I face difficult seasons, I think back to my Law School result and my faith is strengthened. I did not do anything extraordinary that, in my mind, justified being the best of over 5,000 students. It was purely an extension of God's grace. That achievement also strengthened my faith and made me believe that God can do difficult things. Before becoming BGS, I never imagined applying to schools like Oxford or Harvard. Afterwards, I had the faith to apply, and I eventually received a fully funded scholarship to study at Oxford, something I had never imagined.

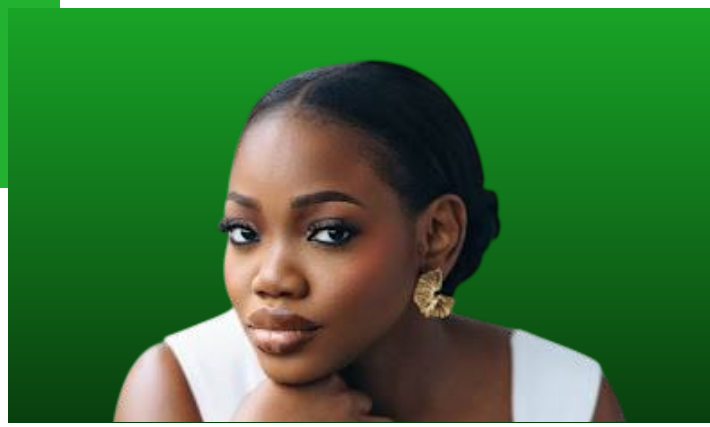
What principles have guided your career choices since your call?

Two things: trust in God and being honest with myself. Before I became the BGS God had already told me that I will work in Olaniwun Ajayi LP. I did not look like the obvious candidate at the time, but it happened as God said. So, when I received multiple offers from top firms after, and people gave me valid reasons to choose other firms, I trusted what I believed God had told me and never regretted the decision. It was at Olaniwun Ajayi that I was exposed to public policy, which I am now deeply passionate about. Beyond faith, I have always tried to be honest with myself: Do I like this? Can I genuinely devote myself to it? These two principles have helped me avoid following paths simply because they appear successful to others and instead trust God to lead me as I forge my own.

A few months after graduation, you started OMT Advisory Limited. What prompted that decision?

Put simply, I did not get the type of job I wanted, so I decided to create my own company. More seriously, I never imagined taking such a step so early. I used to tell people that I did not have an entrepreneurial bone in my body. By God's guidance, I joined a great management consulting firm - Preston Consults Ltd, and the experience stirred something in me. After praying and seeking advice from my parents and mentors, I decided to start my own firm. Rather than focus on the type of role or organisation I wanted to build, I decided to focus on the problem I wanted to solve. With OMT Advisory, that problem is youth unemployment. I did not have everything figured out when I registered the company, and I still do not. But as I have trusted God and the process, the details have gradually become clearer.

Omotosho **Dolapo**



Dolapo Omotoso is Head of Growth at MonieWorld (Moniepoint UK), an FCA-regulated remittance product serving the African diaspora in the UK. She has built growth across seven markets and four remittance products — LemFi, TransferGo, SendSprint, and MonieWorld — and speaks on the trust, pricing, and distribution decisions that make Africa–Europe corridors actually work.

What inspired your pivot from law to tech, and how difficult was that transition?

Honestly, I just realised I was more interested in how businesses worked than in practicing law itself. I cared more about how companies grow, how decisions get made, and how products actually reach people. The transition wasn't smooth. I had to take a step back and start in customer-facing roles, which wasn't exactly the plan when I studied law. But that experience ended up being the most useful part of my career. It was uncomfortable at the time, but looking back, that reset gave me an edge.

How did your early customer service roles shape your leadership style?

Customer service humbles you very quickly. You can't hide behind strategy — you're dealing with real users, real problems. It made me very practical in how I think: I care a lot about what's actually happening, not what we think is happening. I like things to be clear and actionable. And I don't really believe in overcomplicating problems. Even now, I still think from the customer first before anything else

What mindset shifts helped you embrace a non-traditional path?

I had to let go of the idea that my career needed to "look right" on paper. At some point, I stopped chasing what sounded impressive and started focusing on where I could actually learn and grow. I also started thinking less about job titles and more about skills. Once I made that shift, decisions became easier.

What legal skills have been most valuable in fintech growth?

Law trains you to think properly — that's the biggest thing. Breaking down problems, structuring your thoughts, communicating clearly those are skills I use every day. Also, in fintech, you can't ignore risk and compliance. Having that background helps you balance growth with responsibility.

> **Law trains you to think properly — that's the biggest thing. Breaking down problems, structuring your thoughts, communicating clearly those are skills I use every day.**

How did customer-facing roles shape your view of growth?

They made it very clear that growth isn't just about getting users it's about what happens after. You can acquire people, but if the experience is bad or confusing, they won't stay. Working close to users helped me understand where things actually break, and that's what really drives retention.

What was the biggest challenge you faced early on and how did you overcome it?

Credibility, 100%. Coming from law into tech, then into growth, I didn't have the "expected" background. So I had to prove myself a bit more. I focused on doing the work properly understanding the numbers, being clear in my thinking, and being consistent. Over time, results make the conversation easier.

What advice do you have for young lawyers considering a career in tech?

Don't overthink it. You don't need everything to line up perfectly before you move. Just start somewhere — ideally close to the customer or the product. Also, focus on building skills. That matters way more than having a "perfect" career path.

What principles have helped you progress in your career?

A few simple ones: Stay curious — always ask questions. Don't wait too long to act. Take ownership of whatever you're doing. Be okay starting again if needed. And honestly, just staying close to the actual problem you're trying to solve — that's where everything comes from.

Omoyemi **Akerele**



Omoyemi Akerele is the founder and CEO of Lagos Fashion Week and Style House Files, a fashion business development agency that has played a pivotal role in shaping and advancing the African fashion industry. With over two decades of experience, she has created platforms that support emerging designers, foster market access, and integrate sustainable practices across the textile and apparel sectors.

Through Lagos Fashion Week, Omoyemi has elevated African talent on the global stage, offering designers a platform to showcase their work while providing advocacy, masterclasses, and incubation support. Her work has opened doors for designers across Africa, connecting them to international markets and promoting the continent's creativity and craftsmanship.

Omoyemi's work interfaces with organizations such as Prosper Africa (USAID), the United Nations SheTrades Initiative, and the Nigeria Export Promotion Council to strengthen Africa's creative economy. As a member of the Business of Fashion's Global 500, Omoyemi continues to influence the future of fashion globally.

> **"Today, I think more about success through the lens of impact and systems change. It's about building platforms and creating structures that empowers others."**

Was the pivot easy for you, or did you have to justify the shift from being a legal counsel in Olaniwun Ajayi to being a Fashion Consultant to a lot of people in your life?

It was definitely not an easy pivot, especially at the time. Moving from a seemingly highly respected legal career into fashion, which was largely seen as a hobby, was seen by many as unconventional and even risky. Thankfully I always had the support of my husband and my father was very supportive too. My support system was very strong. For a long time though it took quite a bit of convincing for people to see fashion through a different lens from entertainment and vibes. There were and there are still questions, doubts, and concerns from people who struggled to understand the vision initially. Over time, people began to see the that this was about building an industry and contributing to a broader creative economy.

As the founder of Lagos Fashion Week, which has grown into one of Africa's most influential fashion platforms, what were some of the early challenges you faced in building something entirely new?

One of the biggest challenges was building belief, convincing people that African fashion deserved investment, structure, visibility, and long-term support. At the time, there was and to a large extent, there's still limited infrastructure for fashion businesses, very few commercial pathways for designers, and almost no ecosystem connecting creatives to buyers, media, manufacturers, or investors. Funding was another challenge, as creative industries were often underestimated in terms of economic potential. We also had to build credibility while simultaneously strengthening local systems. It's required a lot of persistence, consistency, and long term vision because we are essentially helping to shape an industry that's relatively still in it's nascent stage.

What impact did you hope to create when you first started Lagos Fashion Week?

From the beginning, the vision was always bigger than visibility. Of course, we wanted African designers to be seen globally, but more importantly, we wanted to help create pathways for growth, sustainability, and economic opportunity. The goal was to contribute to building an ecosystem that connects creativity to commerce and ensures that African designers can compete, scale, and thrive on their own terms. We also wanted to challenge outdated perceptions of African fashion and position the continent as a source of innovation, craftsmanship, and cultural leadership.

In what ways has your legal background helped you navigate the business, partnerships, and global expansion of Lagos Fashion Week?

My legal background equipped me with a strong sense of discipline, attention to detail, and strategic thinking, which have all been invaluable. Whether negotiating international partnerships, structuring collaborations, managing sponsorships, or engaging institutions and policymakers, my legal training has helped me approach opportunities with clarity and professionalism. It also shaped the way I think about sustainability and long-term ecosystem development. Building Lagos Fashion Week was never just about producing events, it was about creating a platform with systems, partnerships, and frameworks that could contribute meaningfully to the growth of the industry.

How do you define success today compared to when you first started your career?

My understanding of success has evolved significantly. Earlier in my career, success was more connected to achievement and recognition. Today, I think more about success through the lens of impact and systems change. It's about building platforms and creating structures that empowers others. It means contributing to industries and communities in ways that are transformative and enduring. Most importantly, it means ensuring that the next generation has stronger foundations, greater opportunities, and the ability to build even further than we did

For young lawyers who may feel drawn to industries outside traditional legal practice, what advice would you give about leveraging their legal education in unconventional spaces?

I would encourage them to see legal education as a transferable foundation rather than a limitation. Law equips you with skills that are valuable across virtually every industry: problem-solving, negotiation, research, communication and strategic thinking to name a few. The world is evolving, and careers are becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. If you are passionate about another field, do not see your legal background as something you are leaving behind. Instead, think about how it can strengthen your perspective and create unique value within that space. Sometimes your unconventional path becomes your greatest advantage.

Opeyemi Blessing **Adesegun**



Opeyemi Blessing Adesegun is a First Class lawyer and an emerging legal professional committed to academic excellence and mentorship. She obtained her Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.) degree from the Faculty of Law, Olabisi Onabanjo University. She subsequently attended the Nigerian Law School, Lagos Campus, where she graduated with a First Class grade.

Driven by a passion for supporting the next generation of legal professionals, Opeyemi founded Wisdom Ignite Academy in August 2024. Through the academy, she has provided academic guidance and mentorship to law students across Nigeria, contributing to their educational and professional development.

Opeyemi currently serves as a Junior Associate at Pinheiro LP, where she is building her legal career and gaining practical experience across diverse areas of legal practice. Her commitment to excellence, continuous learning, and service reflects her dedication to making a meaningful impact within the legal profession and beyond.

Can you share a challenge you faced either academically or professionally and how you overcame it?

One of the most difficult seasons of my life was during my university years when I had a spillover. I had to retake my final-year examinations, and unfortunately, I failed again. It was painful watching my friends proceed to the Nigerian Law School and get called to the Bar while I remained behind. During that period, my faith in God became my greatest source of strength. I also came to understand that everyone's journey unfolds differently. Looking back, that difficult chapter makes my First Class at the Nigerian Law School even more meaningful. It constantly reminds me that perseverance, faith, and resilience can transform even the most painful setbacks into remarkable victories.

Many students believe that graduating with a lower class limits their future. How does your story challenge that perception?

My journey is proof that a lower class does not determine your destination. I believe in failing forward. Every setback presents a choice. You can either allow it to define you or use it as a steppingstone to greater heights. I chose the latter. I turned my setbacks into motivation, my obstacles into opportunities. Don't remain trapped by disappointment. Learn from it, grow through it, and keep moving. Your academic result may be part of your story, but it does not have to define your future.

Looking back, what were the most effective study habits and strategies that helped you achieve a First Class at the Nigerian Law School?

Consistency was my greatest study strategy. I made it a priority not to let my reading pile up. Rather than procrastinate, I studied daily, taking one topic at a time. I also accepted that understanding doesn't always happen instantly. If I didn't fully grasp a topic today, I simply returned to it the next day. Over time, I realized that excellence is built through consistent effort. It is the discipline of showing up every day that ultimately produces outstanding results.

> **“My journey is proof that a lower class does not determine your destination.”**

What has the transition from law school to legal practice been like?

Legal practice is very different from law school. Working in a fast-paced environment requires competence, adaptability, and a willingness to keep learning. Thankfully, my transition was relatively smooth because I focused on understanding the law rather than merely memorizing it. That foundation made it easier to adapt to practice. Equally important was remaining teachable, being open to feedback, accepting corrections, and continuously improving.

You founded Wisdom Ignite Academy in August 2024 while still early in your legal journey. What inspired you to establish the Academy?

Wisdom Ignite Academy was born during my time at the Nigerian Law School. As I navigated the demands of the Bar programme, I developed a passion for helping others understand what we were being taught. I began by teaching my classmates, and eventually expanded to virtual classes. As our students began recording outstanding Bar Final results, it became clear that the Academy was meeting a real need. Those successes encouraged us to keep growing. Today, with the support of our dedicated tutors and volunteers, Wisdom Ignite Academy has become more than an educational platform, it is a legacy dedicated to raising excellent lawyers.

Where do you see Wisdom Ignite Academy in the next five to ten years, and what legacy do you hope it will leave?

I often say that Wisdom Ignite Academy is not just another academy—it is a legacy. Over the next five to ten years, I envision establishing a physical study centre where scholars can access a world-class library, participate in physical tutorials, and connect with thousands of other students through virtual learning platforms. Beyond infrastructure, our greatest vision is to transform the culture surrounding the Nigerian Law School. We want to replace fear with confidence, failure with excellence, and hopelessness with encouragement. Our dream is to help produce generations of lawyers who approach the Bar with competence, confidence, and the belief that success is attainable through diligent preparation.

Orowhuo **Okocha**, Esq., PhD



Dr. Orowhuo W. A. Okocha is a proud alumnus of both the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi, Ghana, where he obtained his LLB in 2007, and Brunel University, London, United Kingdom, where he obtained his LLM in 2010, and a PhD in 2020, in the area of Comparative Criminal Justice, with a thesis titled "The Detention Rights of Suspects and Accused Persons in England (and Wales) and Nigeria: Rights Development As A Work In Progress".

He was called to the Bar in Nigeria in 2008, and was also certified as a professional Negotiator and Mediator in the same year. He was appointed as Lecturer I, Department of Public Law, Faculty of Law, Rivers State University, in August, 2022.

He specializes in General Litigation and Conveyancing, and his teaching and research interests include: Criminal Law and Procedure, the Law of Evidence, Human Rights, Comparative Law and Comparative Criminal Justice.

> **"...Success is personal, so you must work hard at it."**

What made you choose to study law in Ghana instead of Nigeria?

In all honesty, I missed the JAMB cutoff mark for admission to the Faculty I had always wanted to go to. I had a good result, but I missed the cutoff by five (5) points. Then my parents and I heard that the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), where my older brother was already studying for a degree in Building Technology, was setting up a Faculty of Law and was offering admissions for the next academic year, and so I simply applied for, and gained admission, and that was that! Fortunately, it turned out to be a wonderful decision, as the four years of my study at KNUST turned out to be the best four years I could have wished for.

What factors guided your decision to pursue a Master's degree and a PhD when you did?

Supportive parents, who had the mental and financial wherewithal to support the pursuit of my academic dreams, and the desire to get it over and done with, after I came to the realization that if I got too entrenched in charting a career path, it would be more difficult to take a study break in the bid to acquire, not one, but two additional degrees. I also, by my own admission, did not have the best results in WAEC that I had hoped for, so aspiring for a PhD was my own way of proving to myself and the world at large that I was as intelligent as I made myself out to be.

Did you ever feel that becoming a lawyer was a choice you were expected to make rather than one you were free to make?

Not at all. I do not recall my father, or anyone, trying to push me to make the choice to study law. In fact, it was after that stage in every young boy's life where he dreams of being an astronaut one week, and an Army General the next, somewhere around the age of 7, that I decided that I wanted to become a lawyer, and I kept to my ambitions. As I have gotten older, I am awake to some of the subtle influences I may have picked up from watching my father, but I still make bold to say that I would probably have still studied law even if my father had followed a different professional path. Even my guidance counsellors at school tried to convince me to consider a career in Engineering or the Sciences, because I was, and still am, very good in mathematics, but I stuck to my dreams! I became a lawyer of my own free will and volition.

How did you decide which area of law to specialise in?

Academically speaking, Criminal Law and Human Rights were the easiest for me to study and understand, so it seemed natural for me to pursue my PhD in Comparative Criminal Justice, as it did not seem as abstract as some other subjects to me. Professionally, I realized early on that I have a flair for litigation, and I genuinely liked being in and around courtrooms, so it was a no-brainer that I would strive to build a career in it. A little lightheartedly also, I hate being confined in one place for too long, so I could never fathom the idea of sitting at a desk every day, week in, week out, without the opportunity to occasionally go and announce my appearance in one court or the other.

What advice would you give a young lawyer who is passionate about both lecturing and litigation but feels pressure to pick just one?

Hard work has never killed anyone, so while you are still young or "young-ish", go for it! If the pressure comes to pick one, however, go for the one which seems more natural to you. Both are distinguished career paths, but one will feel more comfortable for you. Personally speaking, I try my hardest to straddle both, but I would abandon teaching for litigation in a heartbeat.

Oyetola **Atoyebi**, SAN



Mr. Oyetola Muyiwa Atoyebi, SAN, FCIArb. (UK) is the Managing Partner of O. M. Atoyebi, S.A.N & Partners (OMAPLEX Law Firm). He holds the distinction of being the youngest lawyer in the history of Nigeria to be conferred with the highly coveted rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN).

Mr Atoyebi is also a Notary Public and has completed numerous high-profile litigation, commercial arbitration and negotiations. He has a vast understanding of the Oil & Gas industry, Corporate, Securities & Finance matters and routinely provides transactional and general legal advisory services in Tax related issues. He has built expertise in Technology law and has core competencies in Data Protection and Privacy, Cyber Security, FinTech, Blockchain, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence and other emerging areas in the technology space.

The Learned Silk, is a writer who is widely published in both domestic and international academic journals. Beyond his interests in law, the Learned Silk is an avid golfer, researcher, writer and a tech enthusiast.

> **“...Building a successful career meant choosing, again and again, to put in the extra hour when I could have gone home.”**

You became a Senior Advocate of Nigeria at 34 - the youngest SAN at the time. Did you set out to attain that milestone so early?

Reflecting on the path to becoming Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), several pivotal moments and key experiences stand out. My aspiration was largely shaped by the influence of exceptional legal minds like Prof. Kayode Olatoke, S.A.N., and Prince Lateef Fagbemi, S.A.N., who is now the Honourable Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation (AGF). Becoming an SAN was a goal that felt both daunting and inspiring and by God's grace, my dream materialized in 2019, exactly my 10th calendar year post-call and at the age of 34.

What did you do differently in the early years of your career that you believe accelerated your professional growth?

In my early years, I focused on building a strong foundation through hard work, discipline and continuous learning. I worked late into the night and returned to the office early in the morning, a discipline I learnt from mentors like Prof. Kayode Olatoke, S.A.N. I also dedicated significant time to studying, research and gaining practical experience. I understood early that the formative years are the time to develop your skills, gain experience and establish your reputation. I also learnt from successful senior colleagues and allowed their work ethics to influence my own.

Your practice spans litigation, arbitration, corporate governance, regulatory compliance, etc. . How did you develop a broad range of expertise while maintaining depth in your practice?

Early in my career, I made a conscious decision not to restrict myself. When an opportunity came up to work on a matter outside my comfort zone, I took it, learnt from it, and that is really what opened the door to each new area. Most importantly, I refused to treat any of them as secondary. Whichever matter I was on: litigation, arbitration, regulatory work- I approached it with the same diligence. This diligence, sustained over a long career, is really what built the practice I have today.

Looking back, which habits or disciplines have contributed most to your success as a lawyer?

A few disciplines stand out. The first is simply hard work. Early in my career, I made it a habit to never leave a stone unturned: if there was one more case to read or one more angle to check, I did it. That habit of hard work never left me.

The second is diligence. Diligence, to me, is about precision and follow-through. It's the discipline of doing the unglamorous parts of the job properly, every single time, even when no one's checking. Third is dedication: showing up fully for the work and for the people relying on you, over the long run.

Your career has progressed remarkably quickly. What sacrifices or trade-offs did that level of ambition require?

Obviously, no good thing comes easy. The most obvious trade-off was time: evenings, weekends, moments with family and friends that I couldn't always get back. Building a successful career meant choosing, again and again, to put in the extra hour when I could have gone home. That was a real sacrifice, and I don't say this lightly. I also gave up a certain amount of balance for a long stretch of my career.

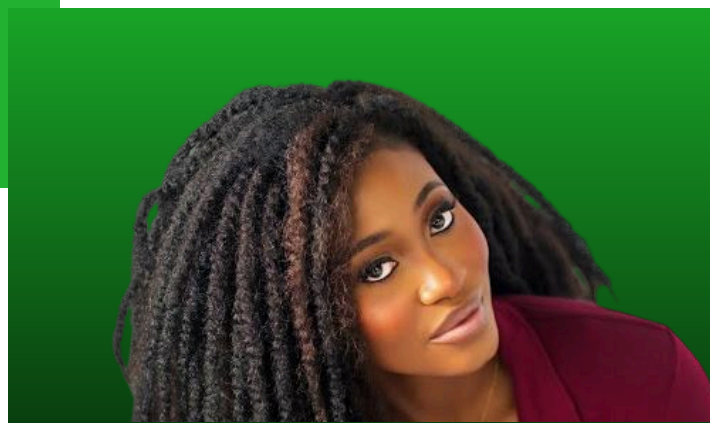
If you were called to the Bar in 2026 rather than when you were called, what would you do differently in your first five years of practice?

If I were called to the bar this year, I would approach the profession with deliberate effort and commitment to continuous learning. Beyond mastering legal principles, I would be intentional about cultivating complementary skills in areas such as technology, business, and emotional intelligence to optimise my efficiency and create time for my personal growth. I would also seek guidance from the success stories of seniors. Their experiences can provide valuable insights and strategies for managing the pressures of the profession.

What qualities do you look for when identifying young lawyers with the potential to become exceptional practitioners?

When I think about young lawyers who go on to become exceptional practitioners, a few qualities consistently stand out to me. The first is a genuine work ethic; not just long hours, but a willingness to dig into the details others might skip. Second, I look for people who always aspire to give value wherever they are and understand that this profession rewards long-term investment. Finally, I pay attention to the lawyers who diligently invest significant time in their own personal growth outside of work.

Pamela Victor **Ibitamuno**



Pamela is a lawyer, working at the intersection of law, technology, data protection, cybersecurity, AI, space technology and digital regulation. Her work spans legal advisory, consulting, research, and thought leadership on how emerging technologies shape business, rights, and the future of cyberspace. Her international engagements have included having a seat in global conversations connected to the United Nations Internet Governance Forum and the Council of Europe, which reflects the global lens she brings to my work.

You can engage with her work and follow her insights on LinkedIn under **Pamela Victor-Ibitamuno** and on Instagram at **@legal_pamela**, where she shares reflections on cyber law, digital policy, innovation, and the evolving technology ecosystem.

What drew you to the legal profession, and at what point did you begin to develop an interest in technology and cybersecurity?

What first drew me to law was its power to shape lives, systems, and outcomes. I have always been impact-driven and thought about how my knowledge of law can benefit others. I was interested not just in advocacy, but in impact. My interest in information security started at age 17, which was during my 300 level. In many ways, my journey has been an exploration of different parts of myself. I was a science student who was strong in mathematics and computer science, yet I also deeply enjoyed literature and government. Law gave me one language, technology gave me another, and I have spent the years since building at that intersection. That realisation led me to intentionally build at the intersection of different areas I was passionate about, where I now do much of my work and thought leadership.

When you were making your early career decisions, how much did financial considerations influence your choices?

Financial considerations mattered, but they did not lead my earliest decisions. At that stage, I was more interested in whether an opportunity would sharpen my thinking and stretch my capacity. I understood early that certain experiences compound far beyond immediate income. So I paid close attention to the rooms. Some of my best decisions came from choosing rooms that stretched me, not necessarily rooms that paid the fastest.

How have professional communities shaped your career journey, and how can young lawyers make the most of such networks?

Professional communities have shaped my journey in meaningful ways, they gave me perspective, language, and proximity to conversations that were shaping the future. Some of the most important shifts in my career were influenced by the rooms I entered and how I showed up there.

> **“Professional communities have shaped my journey in meaningful ways, they gave me perspective, language, and proximity to conversations that were shaping the future.”**

You have contributed to conversations around cybersecurity and digital regulation through your research. How important is thought leadership for young lawyers, and how can they begin to build a voice in areas they are passionate about?

I have found that thoughtful contributions can create credibility, attract serious opportunities, and position a lawyer within wider conversations. In my case, it also opened pathways into international spaces connected to cybercrime, digital governance, and internet policy. My published work on cybersecurity regulation in Nigeria is one public example of that.

You positioned yourself early in an emerging and future-focused area of practice. What deliberate steps did you take to do that?

I wouldn’t say I positioned early enough. Honestly, it was God leading me and me following His directions, even when I didn’t know where I was going, as far back as 2019. At the beginning, I didn’t know there was going to be a space for someone like me because I had a science background. My WAEC was basically in sciences, but when I look back, I see the hand of God leading me. So honestly, there was no practical step I took, It was basically alignment into what God wanted for me. One thing led to another that led to me seating in rooms like the Council of Europe’s Octopus Conference and the United Nations Internet Governance Forum.

The title of this publication is “No Straight Line: 100 Lawyers, 100 Different Journeys.” What moment in your life best illustrates that idea?

For me, “No Straight Line” is the story of becoming. I began as a science student with dreams in one direction, then discovered that I carried strengths across different worlds. Choosing law while still feeling drawn to logic, technology, and systems could have looked like a contradiction, but it was not. It was preparation. Even now, I see my journey as one of continual exploration. What seemed unusual at one point has become the very thing that distinguishes my practice and voice today.

Pearlé **Nwaezeigwe**



Pearlé Nwaezeigwe is a lawyer and global tech policy professional with experience spanning Safety, Public Affairs, and Partnerships at companies including TikTok, Twitter, and Meta's Oversight Board. She is also a keynote speaker and founder of Lagos Model United Nations, committed to advancing visibility, access, and global opportunities for the next generation.

You began your legal career in a law firm in Lagos before moving into tech-focused roles. What inspired this shift?

I started my legal career in a traditional law firm in Lagos, but I was always deeply interested in international human rights. That curiosity led me to study at UC Berkeley, where I began to see how rapidly technology was shaping rights, speech, and access on a global scale.I realised that some of the most important human rights questions of our time were no longer happening in courtrooms, but on digital platforms and I wanted to be at the center of that intersection.

What steps did you take to help you build credibility in the space that positioned you to work with top technology companies?

I was very intentional about building credibility early on. I spent time researching the industry, identifying key players, and consistently showing up, through events, conversations, and online engagement. I also leveraged my legal training as a foundation, but didn't confine myself to traditional paths. Instead, I positioned myself at the intersection of law, policy, and technology, allowing my curiosity and consistency to compound into opportunities with global companies.

As a global voice on career visibility, how important would you say personal branding is to help lawyers build worthwhile careers nationally and internationally?

Personal branding is essential, especially in today's global, digital economy. It's not about
followers or vanity metrics. It's about ensuring your work speaks for you when you're not in the room. Opportunities often come from who knows you and how clearly they understand your value. A strong personal brand creates visibility, builds trust at scale, and allows your reputation to compound over time, making it easier for the right opportunities to find you.

What tips can you share with young lawyers who want to better position themselves for opportunities within and outside the legal industry?

Young lawyers should start by identifying what genuinely interests them, both within and beyond the legal field. A law degree is incredibly versatile, so the key is to align it with a problem or industry you care about. Once that clarity is established, invest time in research, skill-building, and building relationships with people already operating in that space. Positioning is not accidental, it comes from intentional curiosity, consistent effort, and surrounding yourself with the right networks.

> **"I see myself as a multi-hyphenate, and I've been intentional about exploring opportunities aligned with my evolving interests."**

As a global keynote speaker, what has been your most memorable experience moderating or speaking at conferences, and what effect did it have on you?

I've had several memorable speaking experiences, but two stand out. The first was addressing young people aged 6 to 18 at an AI and Children Summit, where I had to simplify complex ideas and meet them at their level. It was both challenging and deeply rewarding. The second was returning to the University of Lagos for the 10th anniversary of Lagos Model UN, which I founded. That moment felt full circle, as I was able to inspire and empower students in the same position I once was.

Describe the most impactful project that you have worked on

One of the most impactful projects I have worked on is Lagos Model United Nations, which I founded as a law student at the University of Lagos. It was driven by a desire to make global opportunities more accessible, particularly for students who may not have the means to attend international conferences. Over the past decade, it has impacted over 5,000 students as delegates and organisers. Beyond its reach, it shaped my leadership journey and continues to empower young people to see themselves as global citizens.

You have a lot of titles, and you are skilled at quite a lot of things. Did you ever consider just focusing on one thing and sticking to it for a long time?

I've thought about it more recently, but early in my career, I never felt compelled to focus on just one path. I see myself as a multi-hyphenate, and I've been intentional about exploring opportunities aligned with my evolving interests. For me, it was important to build a well-rounded, non-linear career rather than follow a single track. While that path can be less predictable, it has been deeply rewarding. I believe there is value in exploration, especially in the early stages of one's career.

Philip **Omoke**



Philip Chimobi Omoke is a Professor of Economics at the Department and Development Studies of Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ebonyi State. He has served variously as Head, Department of Economics, Dean faculty of Management and Social Sciences, Deputy Vice-Chancellor(Administration) and currently the Director Distance Learning Institute of the University. He was called to Bar in 2024

You are a renowned economist with over 20 years of experience working as an economics lecturer, administrator, researcher and consultant. Why did you choose to study law?

After over 2 decades as a Lecturer, University administrator, Consultant and Researcher. I decided to go the Legal route because I wanted to be 'Learned'. I loved the way lawyers speak, I loved the logic behind their arguments and I wanted to be like them.

Did you ever question whether the investment of time and energy required to study law at this stage of your career was worthwhile? What kept you going?

You can imagine a Professor who is used to standing in front of a lecture hall giving lectures, order, and assignment to students, going back to student status, with late night reading assignments is a moment of intense reflection. What kept me going was the saying that 'intellectual curiosity should not have an expiration date' so I kept my ego in check, and saw the investment of time and energy as an opportunity to challenge my mind in a new direction. So I have to keep my focus on the goal.

Do you think lawyers would make better decisions if they understood economics more deeply?

I seriously think so because Economics and Law shares some common focus of regulating human behaviour, creating rules and maximising social welfare. A lawyer with deep understanding of economies concepts like opportunity cost, risk allocation, and market dynamics can draft better contracts, craft more pragmatic regulations and argue public policy matters with greater foresight

What have you come to appreciate about the legal profession through studying law that you perhaps did not fully appreciate as an economist?

I have come to have a deep appreciation of how lawyers think, and present their arguments logically based on legal principles. I have also come to appreciate how the legal system can create stable rules, property rights and contract enforcement required for our markets to function properly and our institutions to run efficiently. Most importantly, I have come to see how legal rules, institutions, and the rule of law can drive social, political and economic progress and development in modern societies.

> **"...if the desire to study law is genuine, don't let age deter you, look at the desire as an evolution of your intellectual journey."**

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for professionals who can bridge economics, law and public policy?

Legal professionals with economic background have greater opportunities in legal areas that deals with Finance, Public Policy, Market Competition and corporate transactions. Key practice areas include: Competition Law, Contracts, Merger and Acquisition, Tax Law, Property Law, International Trade, Regulatory Compliance and Development Law

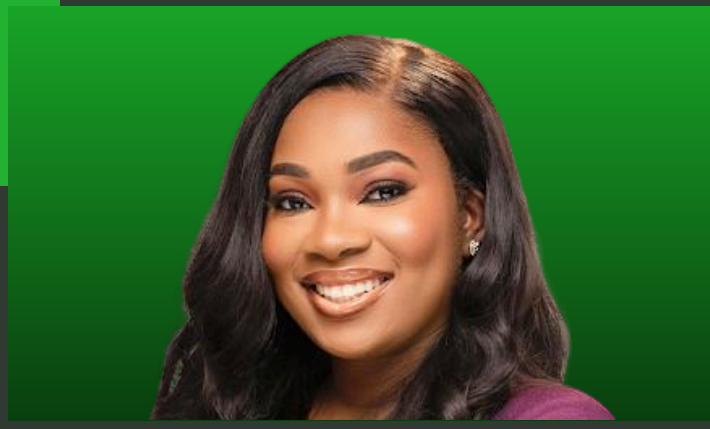
What advise will you give older people who have had a deep desire to study law but haven't been able to do so?

Age is not a barrier to the study of law, in Law School, I met former Governor, former minister, former Deputy Governor, former Speaker of a House of Assembly, former National Legislators, Retired Brigadier General, Assistant Inspector General of Police, many Professors and other distinguished personalities who were advanced in age. Learning does not belong to young people alone. Age brings an extraordinary advantage to the study of law. Life experience, mature critical thinking are essential to the study and understanding of law. So, if the desire to study law is genuine, don't let age deter you, look at the desire as an evolution of your intellectual journey.

After being called to bar you began an LLM, what inspired that decision?

I am a Professor, Lecturer, and a Researcher. An LLM and subsequently a PhD in Law will allow me to specialise, conduct high level research and academic inquiry into specific areas where Economics and Law intersect, and publish rigorous research.

Prada **Uzodimma**



Prada Uzodimma is a distinguished legal practitioner and governance strategist operating at the intersection of corporate law, public policy, and institutional reform. Her expertise spans complex commercial litigation, regulatory advisory, contract structuring, and high-stakes dispute resolution. Recognised for analytical precision and courtroom strategy, she has represented high-profile clients in precedent-setting matters, building a reputation for disciplined excellence and institutional insight.

Prada is also the founder of Principle Legal Consult, a legal and strategic advisory practice established prior to her public sector appointment. The institution has supported legal scholarship initiatives, governance engagement, and professional development programmes focused on expanding access to legal education and institutional excellence.

How do you personally define "being a lawyer" beyond courtrooms and client representation?

For me, being a lawyer means being a solution provider. The law is not merely a profession; it is a framework for solving complex human, social, and institutional problems. While courtrooms remain important, they represent only one room in the larger house of justice. A lawyer's responsibility extends beyond litigation to shaping policies, strengthening institutions, mentoring future leaders, and designing systems that prevent disputes before they arise. Whether I am advising on governance, advocating for disability inclusion, or expanding access to legal education, I view legal training as a tool for creating order, opportunity, and dignity. Ultimately, being a lawyer is not simply about defending rights when they are violated; it is about building a society where those rights can flourish.

Was there ever a tension between expectations (family, society, or professional) and your chosen path within the legal space? How did you navigate it?

Yes, there was. Like many young lawyers, I encountered assumptions that youth equates to inexperience and that legal success must follow a conventional path. My interests in policy, education equity, and disability inclusion were sometimes viewed as departures from traditional legal practice. As a young woman, I also learned that credibility is often tested before competence is acknowledged. I navigated this by focusing on excellence, preparation, and consistency. Expectations will always exist, but purpose must remain your compass. Lasting impact comes from solving problems, not fitting a mould.

How would you advise younger lawyers to navigate it assuming you were in their shoes?

If I were advising a younger lawyer facing similar challenges, I would encourage them to focus first on competence. Excellence remains the strongest response to doubt or scepticism. Be patient with your journey and resist the temptation to measure your progress against someone else's timeline. Seek mentors who will challenge and guide you, but do not allow external expectations to define your purpose. Most importantly, build a reputation for integrity and results. Careers are not built in a moment; they are built through consistent excellence over time.

Can you share a moment where your legal knowledge directly influenced a social or institutional outcome outside the courtroom?

A recent example was my participation in advocacy engagements with members of the Borno State House of Assembly on the domestication of disability rights legislation. Drawing on my legal background, I emphasised that passing a law is only the first step; real impact depends on implementation, accountability, and enforcement mechanisms. I carried a similar message into the Global Policy and Inclusion Convening (G-PIC), where we brought together global experts to discuss translating legal and policy commitments into measurable outcomes. In both instances, legal knowledge served as a bridge between legislation and practical change.

> "Start small, listen carefully, take action, and allow the solution to evolve. Impact often begins with observation followed by consistent action."

Many young lawyers want to create impact but don't know where to start. How can you navigate them on how they can identify problems worth solving within their immediate environment?

My advice is simple: just start. Many young lawyers spend too much time searching for the perfect idea when the problems worth solving are often right in front of them. Pay attention to the frustrations people repeatedly experience in your community, workplace, or profession. The best initiatives are usually born from problems you have personally witnessed or encountered. You do not need a large platform or significant resources to begin. Start small, listen carefully, take action, and allow the solution to evolve. Impact often begins with observation followed by consistent action.

How do you balance sustainability and scalability when designing social impact initiatives?

I view sustainability and scalability as closely connected but distinct goals. Sustainability means designing an initiative to thrive beyond its founder. At PUSG, beneficiaries are encouraged to become mentors, creating a cycle of leadership and support. At TALI, we focus on policy advocacy and institutional reforms so that inclusion does not depend solely on annual donations. Scalability, on the other hand, comes through partnerships. By collaborating with government institutions, private-sector organisations, and civil society actors, we create systems that allow impact to grow beyond what any single organisation could achieve alone.

Have there been failures or initiatives that didn't go as planned? What did they teach you about impact and leadership?

Yes. One of my earliest lessons came from assuming that financial support alone would be enough to transform outcomes. While scholarships removed a significant barrier, some beneficiaries still struggled with confidence, professional navigation, and long-term career planning. That experience taught me that access without support is often incomplete. It also reinforced the importance of listening to the communities you serve before designing solutions for them. Today, mentorship is embedded within our programmes because I have learned that sustainable impact requires both opportunity and guidance. Failure, in my view, is simply data that helps us build better.

Rex **Uwadoka**



Rex Uwadoka is a Nigerian lawyer, legal and compliance professional, and founder of Law School Paddi. He graduated with a First Class LL.B. from Imo State University, where he served as LAWSA President and emerged Best Graduating Student. He was called to the Nigerian Bar after completing the Nigerian Law School with strong academic performance. Rex currently works across legal, regulatory, compliance, finance, technology, and legal education, with a growing focus on building systems that expand access and opportunity.

> **"I have learned that sustainable ventures begin with real problems, not just exciting ideas. Passion may start the work, but systems sustain it."**

As a young lawyer, how have you navigated the pressure to "have it all figured out" while remaining open to unexpected opportunities and career evolution?

I have learned to treat my career as a journey of alignment rather than a fixed script. There is pressure on young lawyers to know exactly where they are going from day one, but exposure often refines ambition. I try to remain excellent wherever I am, while staying open to growth. Rather than defining myself only by a title, I ask what skills I am building, what problems I am solving, and what kind of lawyer I am becoming.

What inspired your decision to transition from working as an associate in a law firm to an in-house role?

Law firm practice gave me a strong foundation in legal reasoning, drafting, client service, and discipline. However, I became increasingly interested in seeing how legal advice translates into business decisions in real time. Moving in-house allowed me to work more closely with product, strategy, regulation, compliance, finance, and operations. It also helped me appreciate that modern lawyers must do more than identify risks; they must help structure practical, responsible, and commercially sound solutions.

Many young lawyers enter the profession with an idealistic view of what legal practice should be. What realities have surprised you most since joining the profession?

One reality that surprised me is that good lawyering is not only about knowing the law. Technical competence is important, but judgment, communication, emotional intelligence, commercial awareness, discretion, and timing are equally critical. I also learned that legal problems rarely exist in isolation. They often involve business, financial, human, reputational, and regulatory considerations. Sometimes, the best legal answer is not the most useful answer unless it helps the client or organisation make a practical decision.

Looking back, was there a moment when your understanding of success shifted from simply achieving personal milestones to creating value and impact for others on a larger scale?

Yes. I think the shift happened when both my work at Law School Paddi and my role as Head, Legal and Compliance began to affect people and organisations beyond me. At first, success was about personal milestones: good grades, awards, leadership roles, and career progress. But over time, I saw that work becomes more meaningful when it solves real problems, supports others, and strengthens systems. That made me realise that true success is not just personal advancement, but useful and sustainable impact.

What have been some of the challenges you have faced in managing Law School Paddi, and how have those experiences shaped you as a leader and entrepreneur?

Managing Law School Paddi has come with challenges such as building the right team, maintaining quality, handling technology issues, funding growth, improving the product, and managing user expectations. It has taught me that good intentions are not enough. You need structure, consistency, feedback, execution discipline, and humility. The experience has made me a more practical leader. I have learned to listen better, delegate more intentionally, take responsibility quickly, and keep improving even when things are difficult.

Many young lawyers have brilliant ideas but struggle with execution. What lessons have you learned about turning an idea into a sustainable and scalable venture?

I have learned that sustainable ventures begin with real problems, not just exciting ideas. Passion may start the work, but systems sustain it. Execution requires discipline, user feedback, good people, and the willingness to keep going and improving. Many people wait for perfect conditions before starting, but clarity often comes from building. I have also learned that unglamorous work matters: planning, fixing issues, responding to complaints, studying data, and making difficult decisions behind the scenes.

If you could change one thing about how young lawyers are prepared for practice in Nigeria, what would it be?

I would make legal education more practical and commercially aware. Many young lawyers leave school with strong theoretical knowledge, but limited exposure to practical skills such as drafting, negotiation, client communication, regulatory interpretation, transaction management, legal technology, and business literacy. The law does not operate in a vacuum. Young lawyers should be trained to understand how law interacts with business, finance, technology, governance, public policy, and society. That would make the transition into practice smoother.

Selbol **Langyi**



Selbol Audu Langyi is a Nigerian lawyer and migration governance professional with over 15 years of experience spanning criminal justice, human trafficking, migrant smuggling, organised crime, victim protection and international cooperation. He currently serves as a Project Officer with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), where he supports migration governance and anti-trafficking initiatives, capacity building and stakeholder coordination across project locations.

Prior to joining ICMPD, Selbol spent over a decade with Nigeria's National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), working across investigation, prosecution, legal advisory and victim protection. He holds an LL.B, a Barrister-at-Law qualification and an LL.M, and received a Certificate of Commendation from NAPTIP for his outstanding contributions to combating human trafficking, migrant smuggling and related crimes.

You moved from private legal practice to criminal justice, anti-trafficking, migration governance, and international development. At what point did you realise that your legal training could be applied beyond traditional legal practice, and what influenced that direction?

I will start by saying that, I have been in litigation with experience across all levels of Court in Nigeria through most part of my professional life. I left litigation on 15 September 2024 when I took the role of a Project Officer. Now to the question, I read broadly and I realised my legal training could achieve broader societal impact. Beyond litigation, I saw how legal expertise shaped investigations, policy development, victim protection, and international cooperation. That experience convinced me that lawyers can influence justice not only through courtrooms but also by strengthening institutions and advancing public policy. This was possible through self-awareness and deliberate efforts to explore other sectors and learn from others.

You have spent over a decade working on human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and organised crime cases. How has working on these issues shaped your understanding of justice?

Working on human trafficking, migrant smuggling, and organised crime has taught me that justice extends beyond the courtroom. It includes preventing exploitation, protecting vulnerable persons, supporting survivors' recovery, and addressing systemic factors that enable crime. I think true justice is achieved when legal interventions improve lives while strengthening institutions and public confidence in the rule of law. Thus, seeking justice is not confined to the courtroom.

Your role at NAPTIP has involved prosecution, investigation, victim protection, and legal advisory work. How has this combination of responsibilities influenced the way you approach the relationship between law enforcement, human rights, and access to justice?

Serving in prosecution, investigation, victim protection, and legal advisory roles taught me that effective justice requires balance. Law enforcement must be firm against offenders while safeguarding the rights and dignity of victims and suspects. Upholding due process, protecting vulnerable persons, and ensuring accountability are complementary principles that strengthen public trust in the justice system.

You transitioned from prosecution into migration governance and project implementation with ICMPD. What skills from your previous roles have been most valuable in this new phase of your career?

The analytical thinking, advocacy, stakeholder engagement, negotiation, and problem-solving skills I developed in prosecution have proved invaluable in migration governance and project management. They help me design practical interventions, build partnerships, coordinate diverse stakeholders, and translate legal and policy frameworks into programmes that create measurable and sustainable impact for vulnerable communities.

What gaps do you believe exist in preparing young lawyers to contribute effectively to areas such as criminal justice reform, human rights protection, and international development?

> **"Looking back, embracing unfamiliar opportunities rather than remaining comfortable opened doors that allowed me to contribute more meaningfully to society."**

I think Young lawyers need greater exposure to practical legal skills, policy development, project management, technology, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Law schools should complement legal theory with experiential learning that prepares graduates to solve emerging challenges in criminal justice, governance, international development, and human rights through innovative and evidence-based approaches.

What moments or decisions have had the greatest impact on shaping your career?

The decision to leave private legal practice for public service and later transition into international development significantly shaped my career. Each move challenged me to grow professionally and personally. Looking back, embracing unfamiliar opportunities rather than remaining comfortable opened doors that allowed me to contribute more meaningfully to society.

What opportunities do you think young lawyers should explore outside conventional practice?

Young lawyers should explore opportunities in international organisations, policy development, migration governance, compliance, cybersecurity, development programming, legal technology, academia, and a host of others. These sectors demonstrate that legal training is versatile and can be applied creatively to solve complex national and global challenges beyond traditional courtroom practice. Once you are interested in a particular area and you noticed, no such mentors exist internally or nationally, you can connect with people on LinkedIn and other professional platforms from other climes. I have mentors both within and outside Nigeria. Most of my mentors outside, we have never met physically, but they have shaped my life.

On a lighter note, what is one fun fact about you that would surprise people who know you only through your professional accomplishments?

First, my calm disposition also deceives many people; they sometimes mistake it for weakness until I firmly call them to order when the situation demands. Again, what may surprise many is that I was once a primary school dropout. That experience shaped my resilience, strengthened my determination, and reminds me that your beginning never determines your destination. You can start over and over again; you can learn and unlearn to grow professionally.

Shehu **Popoola-Taiwo**



Shehu Popoola-Taiwo is the Founding Partner of Popoola-Taiwo LP and a distinguished maritime lawyer, dispute resolution specialist, and Notary Public of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with over a decade of legal practice experience.

He currently serves as Chairman of YoungShip Nigeria and Executive Coordinator of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Working Group, contributing to maritime policy and industry development.

Shehu holds an MSc in Maritime Administration and Management from the University of Lagos. His practice spans maritime law, alternative dispute resolution, commercial litigation, and corporate advisory, with a strong commitment to advancing legal excellence and the growth of Africa's maritime sector.

What factors guided your career decisions between 1–7 years post-call, and have those factors changed since?

During my first seven years post-call, my decisions were primarily guided by a desire for specialization and autonomy. I realized early that general practice, while foundational, wouldn't offer the depth I craved. I sought to master niche areas like maritime law and explore the intersection of law and technology. While my commitment to excellence remains constant, my focus has shifted from personal growth to institutional building and mentorship, ensuring that Popoola-Taiwo LP and Court86 create lasting value for the Nigerian legal ecosystem.

What drew you specifically to maritime law, a niche that not many young Nigerian lawyers gravitate toward early in their careers?

Maritime law fascinated me because of its international character and its critical role in Nigeria's economy. Unlike more saturated fields, maritime law offered a unique blend of complex international conventions, local regulations, and tangible physical assets. I saw a significant gap in indigenous expertise and realized that the "blue economy" held immense untapped potential. The challenge of navigating such a technical and globally connected field was exactly what I needed to build a distinctive and impactful legal career.

What made you decide to found your own firm, Popoola-Taiwo LP, rather than build your career within an established chambers?

Founding Popoola-Taiwo LP in 2018 was driven by a vision to build a modern, agile, and tech-driven practice. While established chambers offer stability, I wanted the freedom to experiment with Online Dispute Resolution and focus intensely on maritime law without the constraints of traditional hierarchies. I believed that setting up my firm could offer more personalized, specialized services to clients. Building something from the ground up allowed me to cultivate a culture of innovation and excellence that aligns perfectly with my professional values.

As Chairman of Youngship Nigeria since 2022, what's the biggest challenge you see facing young professionals trying to break into the Nigerian maritime industry?

> **Managing these roles requires disciplined time management, a capable team, and a deep-seated passion for what I do.**

The most significant hurdle is the high barrier to entry caused by the industry's technicality and a lack of structured mentorship. Many young professionals struggle to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and the practical realities of maritime operations. Furthermore, the industry can be quite insular, making networking difficult for outsiders. Through Youngship Nigeria, we are working to dismantle these barriers by providing platforms for networking, specialized training, and advocacy to ensure that young talent can thrive in this vital sector.

For a young Nigerian lawyer considering maritime law, what would you tell them about the realities of the practice that they won't find in a textbook?

Textbooks focus on statutes and conventions, but the reality is about logistics, relationships, and rapid problem solving. You must understand the business of shipping, how ports operate, how freight forwarders work, and the nuances of international trade finance. It is a field where a single delayed vessel can cost millions, so responsiveness is paramount. You also need to be comfortable with multi-jurisdictional issues and realize that your role often involves being a commercial advisor as much as a legal practitioner. There is a general saying that the currency in Maritime is the people, membership and participation in key cross-broder maritime organisations is a catalyst for growth in the industry.

If you were graduating from law school in Nigeria in 2026 with the knowledge you have today, how would you approach building your career?

I would prioritize technological literacy and early specialization. In 2026, a lawyer who cannot navigate AI and digital dispute resolution platforms will be at a disadvantage. I would also focus on building a strong digital brand and networking beyond the legal profession, particularly in the sectors I wish to serve. Most importantly, I would seek out mentors early and remain adaptable, recognizing that the legal landscape is changing faster than ever. The key is to be a problem-solver first and a lawyer second.

Hon Shehu **Tijjani**



Hon. Shehu Ahmad Tijjani is a Senior Area Court Judge at the Shari'ah Court of Appeal, FCT Abuja, with a career spanning judicial service, legal research and professional development. Born in Yola, Adamawa State, he memorised the Holy Qur'an by age 11 and later obtained an LL.B. and Shari'ah (Hons) from the University of Maiduguri in 2021, with interests in Oil and Gas Law and Islamic Banking and Insurance (Takaful). He was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2022.

His judicial career began in 2011 as a Court Clerk/Bailiff, rising through various registrar and legal research positions within the Adamawa State Judiciary. He has also been actively involved in the Nigerian Bar Association and Young Lawyers Forum. Appointed Senior Area Court Judge in 2025, he was sworn in that August and currently presides over Gwagwa II Area Court, Abuja.

> **"...It doesn't matter the number of mistakes you are laughed at, or the number of times you failed whilst trying; it is the lesson learned from those mistakes that build you up higher."**

You were called to the Nigerian Bar about five years ago and have now been appointed as a Senior Area Court Judge. Did you ever imagine that you would be on the Bench this early in your career?

Honestly, I prayed for it but did not expect it at five years post-call. My plan was to serve diligently wherever placed. Starting as a Court Clerk in 2011 taught me patience. The appointment as a Senior Area Court Judge in July 2025 to the Shari'ah Court of Appeal, FCT Abuja came as a test of faith, tenacity and preparation. However, it was not entirely out of contemplation. Like the saying goes, "the journey of 1,000 miles begins with 1 step." I see it as Allah's timing.

What did your first few years after call to Bar look like, and what experiences most significantly shaped the lawyer you became?

My first years after my call to bar in 2022 were in public service. I had served 11 years as Clerk and Registrar. But Post-call, I served from 2022 as Legal Research Assistant to Hon. Justice Evaristus Paul and Hon. Justice Hafsat Abdulrahman (Chief Judge, Adamawa State HC). In 2023, I worked closely with I. S. Barde ESQ, Ministry of Justice Yola, and Yahaya Mohammed ESQ, Federal Ministry of Justice, as State Counsel during youth service. Both trained me until I could advise Police and prosecutorial authorities, and handle matters at FHC, SHC, NICN and Court of Appeal Yola. Bar service as Assistant Secretary, Welfare Committee, Publicity Secretary YLF Yola Bar, NBA Yola Branch also shaped me to see law as service to people.

What do you believe prepared you for the responsibilities of judicial office, and were there experiences or opportunities that accelerated your professional development?

Fourteen years across three courts diversely prepared me. As Assistant Registrar 2014, Registrar 2017, and Senior Registrar 2020 in the Customary Court of Appeal, I managed litigation and saw how delay affects justice. Serving across Shari'ah, Customary, and High Court gave me broad exposure. Proficiency in Arabic and Researching for two Hon. Justices accelerated my reasoning. NJI training and 35+ certifications in mediation, arbitration, and HR also helped. Active participation in NBA affairs and volunteering in humanitarian services prepared me. Mentorship from elders taught me a judge must be competent, compassionate, and accessible.

There is a significant difference between practicing law and deciding cases. How did you prepare for the transition from an advocate to an impartial adjudicator?

I was not a career advocate but a court officer and legal researcher. My advocacy was for the system. I have been mentored by highly experienced Judges and Lawyers. Although appearances I made in Courts as State Counsel for just one year during youth service significantly sharpened my prosecutorial and defence roles representing the government, my in-court experience as active court staff paved the way. I studied judicial ethics, NJI bench books, and observed judicial temperament. My Qur'anic background grounds me in fairness and accountability to Allah. I remind myself daily: I am here to do justice, not win arguments. Impartiality and humility guide me.

Looking back over the five years since your call to the Bar, what decision, opportunity or turning point had the greatest impact on the trajectory of your career?

The decision to remain in public service and accept postings as Legal Research Assistant after my call. Many colleagues went into private practice, but I chose to serve

the Bench directly. Working with Hon. Justice Evaristus Paul and Hon. Justice Hafsat Abdulrahman (Chief Judge, Adamawa State) exposed me to high-level judicial reasoning, Administrative functions, Policy makings and implementations, etc. My contact with Hon. Justice Hussaini Abubakar, FCT High Court, who recommended my nomination for appointment as a judge here in the FCT, was pivotal. Active Bar service in NBA Yola also positioned me. That combination of service to the Bench and the Bar, by Allah's grace, led to this appointment.

Was there ever a point in those early years when you felt uncertain about your career direction or questioned whether you were progressing quickly enough? How did you navigate that period?

Yes. Starting as a casual Clerk in 2011, I wondered if I would ever rise. Watching mates in private practice, I questioned my pace. I navigated it with prayer, mentorship, and focus. My Dad's guidance immensely helped keep me on track, and the mentorship of Hon. Justice Hussaini Abubakar, FCT High Court, Hon. Ibrahim Tahir ESQ, Life Bencher & Former AG Adamawa, and senior lawyers like I. S. Barde ESQ, Yahaya Mohammed ESQ, and M. M. Tumba ESQ., current NBA Chairman Yola Branch, kept me grounded. Each promotion came gradually. The lesson: Allah's plan is better than my timeline.

What has been the most challenging part of your legal career so far?

Balancing service across Shari'ah, Customary, and High Court systems while pursuing academic and professional growth was challenging. Each court has different procedures. The workload as Registrar and Legal Research Assistant was enormous and intense. Another challenge is being a good Dad, a better Husband, and an elder brother with limited available resources to cater for family needs & necessities combined with the office demands. I overcame this by seeking knowledge, attending trainings, and relying on Allah. The challenges taught me resilience, organization, and empathy.

For other young lawyers who are desirous of beginning a career of service from the lower bench, what practical advice would you give them?

Start with humility and learn the system from the ground up. Volunteer in court registries, do research, and attend court sessions daily. Build relationships with judges, academicians, and Practicing lawyers based on respect and competence. Take NJI training seriously. Join NBA committees - service is noticed. Be diligent and punctual. It doesn't matter the number of mistakes you are laughed at, or the number of times you failed whilst trying; it is the lesson learned from those mistakes that build you up higher. Most importantly, protect your name. Integrity is your currency.

What do you hope your judicial career will contribute to the administration of justice in Adamawa State?

Though I now serve in FCT Abuja, my roots and 14 years of service are in Adamawa. I hope my career contributes by promoting speedy, fair, and accessible justice. I want to model a judge who is knowledgeable in Shari'ah and Common Law, Customary Law, Labour Law and Industrial Actions, Environmental Law, and a Judge who respects litigants. I hope to mentor young lawyers from Adamawa and beyond and show that service from Yola to Abuja is possible. I could still be appointed to the Higher Bench in Adamawa if God Almighty permits. If my story encourages one young person from Adamawa or any part of Nigeria, to stay diligent in the judiciary or any Public Service, then I would have contributed meaningfully.

In 10 years from now, if God spares our lives, what type of judge would you like to be known as?

In 10 years, I hope to be known as an erudite judge of knowledge and expertise, a jurist with humility, integrity, empathy, and compassion. A judge who decides cases fairly without fear or favour. A judge who is accessible to the Bar and kind to litigants. A Tech-savvy judge who uses technology (being Millennial) and a Judge who uses ADR for speedy justice. I also hope to be known as a judge that is calculative, precise, and methodical in reasoning and rulings. Most importantly, a judge who feared Allah in judgment and indeed all his dealings, and a judge who left the Bench better than he met it. If young lawyers say "he was fair and he mentored us," then my journey would have mattered. I will consider my career a success, no matter the challenges.

Sopuruchi **Rufus**



Sopuruchi Rufus is the Director of Operations at BlackCrest. In this role, she supports the Managing Partner in the day-to-day management of the firm, helping to translate BlackCrest's vision into structured workflows, efficient internal processes, and well-executed client and ecosystem initiatives. Her work cuts across the operational backbone of the firm and the execution of firm-led engagements.

Before assuming her current operations role, Sopuruchi built and managed an independent legal advisory portfolio, providing practical and commercially sound counsel to startups, founders, and businesses across corporate, commercial, regulatory, and operational matters. Sopuruchi also plays an active role in strengthening BlackCrest's visibility within the startup ecosystem. Sopuruchi holds an LL.B from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and a B.L from the Nigerian Law School, where she graduated with First Class Honours. She is also the Founder of LawxTech, Nigeria's foremost law and technology community, and currently serves as Vice Chairman of the Nigerian Bar Association, Lagos Branch, Young Lawyers Association.

> **"The space is already open; the key is to find your corner and build your practice there."**

Your journey into law appears to sit at the intersection of legal practice, technology, and entrepreneurship. How would you describe the path that brought you here?

Honestly, the path has been shaped by a mix of curiosity and an entrepreneurial instinct I've had for a while. Even back in university, I was already building things, so I've always been wired to identify gaps and develop effective solutions. When I started practising, that instinct only intensified. Law touches everything, and working in sectors that are improving how it works isn't just interesting; it's impactful.

What early experiences shaped the kind of lawyer you are becoming today?

Early on, I was given opportunities that pushed me out of my comfort zone; being trusted with responsibilities, recognised for my ideas, and expected to deliver. At the same time, I've had a few tough moments that shook my confidence, especially around criticism and high expectations. Those experiences taught me to be resilient, more self-aware, and to balance competence with empathy in how I work and relate with people.

What advice would you give to a young lawyer who is talented but unsure of where they fit within the profession?

This question is dear to me, so I'll answer it as though I'm speaking to my younger self. Your law degree is a means to an end, not necessarily the destination. It opens doors across industries (technology, fashion, entertainment, health) and equips you with the confidence to contribute meaningfully anywhere. If you discover your true passion along the way, don't feel boxed in. Explore it, connect it with your legal training, and build something unique. And if you choose to pivot entirely, that's okay too—you only live once, so choose a path you truly enjoy.

What role did financial considerations play in the early years of your career?

It really wasn't rosy at the start. I did my NYSC in Jigawa at the Ministry of Justice, earning ₦5,000 monthly, sometimes delayed, alongside the monthly ₦33,000 allowance from the government. It was financially tough, but I chose that path for self- discovery. With support from family and friends, I got through it. That season reshaped my mindset about money. It no longer drives my decisions; I pursue work because I genuinely want to, not just for the pay. I know everyone's reality differs, but that experience grounded me.

Can you share a professional disappointment or challenge that ultimately became one of your greatest lessons?

Being posted to the Kano campus for Nigerian Law School felt disappointing at first; I had hoped for Abuja or Lagos. But in hindsight, it was exactly where I needed to be. As an extrovert, I might have been easily distracted elsewhere, but Kano gave me the focus I needed to excel. The environment, my roommates, friendships, and even the lectures all aligned in my favour. It taught me a powerful lesson: sometimes you don't get what you want, but you get what is best for you if you choose to embrace it and make the most of it.

You currently advise startups, SMEs, and corporate clients. What can a young lawyer do to break into spaces where these entities are and ultimately represent them?

The space is already open; the key is to find your corner and build your practice there. If it is an area that interests you, seek out mentors in the field, follow their work closely, and look for opportunities to gain experience from them, whether as a personal assistant, intern, or associate. Invest in self- development and build a visible body of work. Unlike more traditional clients, startups and SMEs are often drawn to lawyers who can demonstrate practical knowledge, proof of work, and a credible social footprint.

What has helped you remain grounded while exploring emerging areas of law and practice?

Continuous learning and curiosity have helped me stay grounded. LinkedIn has become my favourite social media platform because there's always something new to learn there. Whenever I come across something related to my field, I get curious and want to understand it better. At my firm, we also have monthly knowledge-sharing sessions, which serve as an informal learning forum for everyone. So, while I remain open to emerging areas of law and practice, I do not lose sight of what is currently relevant or the work I am doing now.

Temijuopelo **Alufa**



Temijuopelo Alufa is a legal and policy specialist who has been at the forefront of Nigeria's digital transformation and financial sector modernization over the past five years. He has drafted first-of-its-kind regulatory frameworks, culminating in some of Nigeria's most critical digital and economic laws. He was one of the principal drafters of Nigeria's pioneer Data Protection Act, regulations establishing Nigeria's Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System, and the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation Act (as amended). He also advised on the operationalization of Nigeria's National Credit Guarantee Company and the landmark corporatization of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation.

A recent LL.M. graduate of the Harvard Law School, he previously served as a Senior Associate at Olaniwun Ajayi LP. His career demonstrates how young professionals can accelerate institutional transformation in emerging markets.

In your experience, which non-academic skills and personal qualities have been most critical to building a successful and enduring legal career?

For me, the skill with huge ROI has been effective communication. It's easy to conflate having deep knowledge with the ability to communicate it effectively. I learned early on that my capacity to think through abstractions and articulate them clearly is a defining asset. I find that there's a temptation for high achievers to become reliant on (and indirectly work for) the constant affirmation of their brilliance. So, regarding personal qualities, I would say grit and grounded ambition are paramount. It's understanding that your drive isn't for external validation, but from an intrinsic conviction in your quality, and an obsession with excellence in anything that has your name on it.

What role has mentorship and professional relationships played in your career journey?

I definitely think mentorship can be the difference between having raw potential and having a platform. It's the reason I seek out mentors who provide active sponsorship rather than just passive advice. My mentors have been essential in providing me with opportunities to showcase my skills, pushing me to build technical expertise and social networks. However, professional relationships run on the currency of reliability. Senior folks will invest in you, but only if you can truly provide value and deliver when it matters.

You stepped away from practice to pursue a Master of Laws at Harvard University. What motivated that decision? and how do you expect the programme to shape your career?

I felt I had reached a point in my career where I wanted to understand how mature jurisdictions engineer their systems and upgrade my technical skillset for complex markets. The Harvard admissions process is rigorous because it fundamentally tests your "why". I think Harvard is unparalleled in building world leaders committed to making practical impact. So, my expectation is that this experience will equip me to operate beyond just being an excellent legal practitioner and refine me into someone primed for meaningful impact with hopefully global relevance.

Since your call to the Nigerian bar, what would you describe as the most impactful work that you have done?

> **"...my candid advice is to reject the hyper 'pleased to announce' culture. Social media creates an illusion of constant momentum, pressuring you to brand every activity as a massive win."**

I measure impact by how quickly a mandate transforms from being purely a legal project to serving ordinary citizens who honestly don't care about fancy legal jargon. Sitting with government and international stakeholders on different projects (often the youngest voice in the room), my focus was human outcomes. Whether advising on establishing the National Credit Guarantee Company for MSMEs, drafting Nigeria's pioneer Data Protection Act, or regulations for Nigeria's Electronic Civil Registration and Vital Statistics System to modernize birth registration impacting mothers and children, I am grateful to have worked on mandates that empower citizens.

To what extent has your career unfolded as you initially envisioned?

By the providence of God, my career is unfolding as I had initially planned but the pathways look nothing like my initial plan. I never envisioned executing national mandates or sitting in high-stakes rooms, definitely not in my twenties. In essence, they weren't scheduled milestones. My advice to young lawyers is to have structured goals and an obsession for excellence based on global standards but keep your roadmap flexible. A clear plan focuses your energy, and flexibility means you are ready to seize unexpected opportunities when they appear.

If you could offer one candid piece of advice to a young lawyer in their early years of practice, what would it be and why?

As difficult as it may be, my candid advice is to reject the hyper 'pleased to announce' culture. Social media creates an illusion of constant momentum, pressuring you to brand every activity as a massive win. While visibility has value, it must be justified by undeniable substance. Do not let the noise convince you that your quiet, foundational work doesn't count. Breathe, block out the noise, and craft your own path. Ultimately, true success is being genuinely happy with your own life.

Timilehin **Abimbola**



Timilehin Abimbola holds an LL.B (Hons) from Adeleke University. While at university he served as Director of Protocol for the Law Students Association of Nigeria (Adeleke University Chapter). His early experience included internships at Adewale Afolabi & Co and Kunle Kalejaiye, SAN & Co, as well as a stint teaching history.

Since March 2024 he has practised independently, advising founders on company formation, governance and compliance; drafting and reviewing commercial, employment and property agreements; and engaging regularly with regulators. He also handles dispute resolution and day-to-day business legal support. Outside work, Timilehin enjoys watching NFL and NBA and loves traveling.

> **"...Young lawyers should develop strong writing, communication, technology and commercial skills, while building expertise in a clear area."**

What inspired you to pursue a career in law, and what has kept you motivated throughout your journey?

I was attracted to law firstly because I was impressed by how early lawyers like late Gani challenged status quo and fought against oppression. When I became older and I was awakened to the range of possibilities and how many great men in various fields are lawyers, I locked in.

What has been one of your greatest disappointments since you started practicing?

One of my greatest disappointments has been seeing how much of the Nigerian legal system is still not sufficiently digitalised, particularly in minor cities. Processes that could be completed or tracked digitally can still require physical visits, paperwork and long waiting periods, which affects efficiency for lawyers and clients.

As a new wig, how did you navigate networking, personal development and career building?

I made networking intentional, built relationships and deliberately developed both legal and commercial skills. I also started sharing my thoughts online and creating opportunities rather than waiting for them. My biggest lesson is simple: your career begins when you start behaving like the professional you want to become.

When you face setbacks, how do you find the courage to rise again after a setback?

I have learnt not to see setbacks as a verdict on my ability. I ask what went wrong, what was within my control and what I can learn. When I started I already knew there will be hard times and tough times, setting personal goals helps; one rejection cannot define the entire journey.

What's the most unexpected challenge you've faced as a lawyer, and how did you overcome it?

The unexpected challenge was realising that being a good lawyer does not automatically make people know you exist. I had to develop visibility, communication and business-development skills, particularly by learning to explain complex legal issues simply. That has helped with both content and clients.

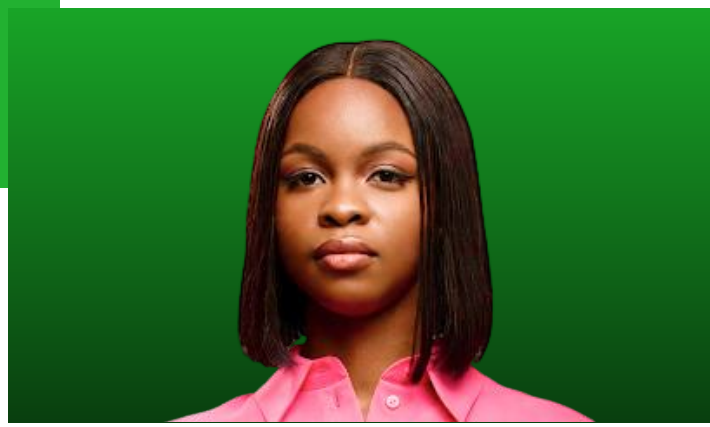
What opportunities exist for Nigerian lawyers globally, and how can young lawyers position themselves to access them?

Opportunities exist in international organisations, technology, compliance, data protection, intellectual property, arbitration, legal operations and cross-border business. Young lawyers should develop strong writing, communication, technology and commercial skills, while building expertise in a clear area. Visibility also matters: your LinkedIn, publications and online body of work can become a global CV.

What inspired your decision to establish your own firm, and what challenges did you encounter in the first year?

The biggest motivation was independence. I wanted to determine the direction of my career, develop my own ideas and build something of my own. The first year was challenging because I was responsible for finding clients, delivering quality work, managing finances and building my reputation. But it was also rewarding because every client and relationship became part of something I was building and it was pure profit. You do not have to wait until you feel completely ready. Start, learn and improve.

Tolulope **Awoyomi**



Tolulope Awoyomi is a lawyer and technologist. She is the founder of Young VIP TV, a platform that inspires law students across Nigeria, and AI & Law Bridge, an initiative focused on bridging the gap between law and artificial intelligence. She advises businesses at the intersection of law, technology, and innovation.

What did you imagine your career would look like?

I imagined myself working as a corporate lawyer, handling transactions and steadily building my career within a reputable law firm. That was the path I had envisioned. However, I began my career in litigation, which gave me a very different foundation. It exposed me to advocacy, legal research and courtroom practice, and shaped how I approach problems today, even as my career has expanded into media, technology and advisory work.

What inspired you to create Young VIP TV?

I have always been passionate about media, so creating Young VIP TV felt like a natural outlet for that interest. I launched the YouTube channel three days after my Bar Finals in 2018, initially featuring young people from different backgrounds doing remarkable things. In 2019, I created a one-off interview series with my Call to Bar set. The response was so encouraging, which is why I decided to make it the channel's core focus.

Having interacted with thousands of law students, what challenges do you believe are most often overlooked in Nigerian legal education?

I believe mental health and practical mentorship are often overlooked. Students face intense pressure to excel, yet many receive little guidance on how to study effectively, manage that pressure or translate what they learn in the classroom into practice. There is also not enough emphasis on preparing students for life beyond Law School, including networking, personal branding and technology. As a result, many brilliant students graduate with strong academic records but still feel unprepared for the realities of building a career.

How do you measure impact beyond subscriber numbers and online engagement?

Impact is in the messages we receive from students. Some tell us they were close to giving up or did not believe they could achieve their goals, but a Young VIP TV video encouraged them. Since the channel began, almost every Best Graduating Student (BGS), alongside top scholars and thousands who are now lawyers, has watched Young VIP TV during their educational journey. That kind of impact means more to me than numbers. Ultimately, I believe God's metrics differ from ours and knowing I am fulfilling purpose gives me peace.

You founded AI & Law Bridge about a year ago. What are you hoping to achieve through the company?

My goal with AI & Law Bridge is simple: to bridge the gap between lawyers and those building AI technologies. I want lawyers to better understand AI and the legal and regulatory issues that come with it, while helping technologists become more aware of those risks as they design and deploy AI systems. In many ways, I am helping both sides understand each other. Ultimately, I hope to contribute to more responsible innovation and a safer, more accountable AI ecosystem.

> **"...I have learned not to be afraid of changing direction when something aligns with my interests, values, and purpose."**

As technology continues to reshape education, what opportunities do you see for lawyers who are willing to innovate?

The opportunities are enormous. Legal training gives us a strong foundation for learning, adapting, and solving complex problems, which makes it easier to build expertise in new areas. Lawyers who embrace technology can create educational platforms, develop legal tech solutions, teach emerging areas of law, or advise businesses navigating new technologies. For me, innovation does not mean abandoning law. It means being open to expanding what your legal training allows you to do and the problems you can help solve.

The theme of this publication is No Straight Line: 100 Lawyers, 100 Different Journeys. How does that phrase reflect your own career journey?

It reflects my journey remarkably well. I started out with a clear idea of what my career would look like, but over time, I learned to remain open to opportunities I had not originally planned for. That openness led me into media, business, and technology, while still building on my legal foundation. I have learned not to be afraid of changing direction when something aligns with my interests, values, and purpose. My journey has certainly not been a straight line, but I would not have wanted it any other way.

You have taken up both conventional and non-conventional roles since becoming a lawyer. What core principles guide your career choices?

Three principles guide me: curiosity, impact, and growth. I often ask myself: Will this opportunity help me learn something new? Will it allow me to make an impact beyond myself? Will it stretch me? I do not chase titles; I pursue opportunities that align with my values and allow me to grow. I also try to remain open-minded and flexible because some of the best opportunities have come from paths I never originally planned to take.

Special Feature: Sisters

OMOTAYO DADA
OMOBOLANLE DADA

Omotayo Dada is a lawyer and public policy professional working at the intersection of law, governance, youth development and policy. She holds an LL.B. from the University of Ilorin and a First Class B.L. from the Nigerian Law School, where she emerged as the overall best graduating student among 5,802 students. She subsequently earned a Master of Public Policy from the University of Oxford as a Commonwealth Shared Scholar.

She began her legal career at Olaniwun Ajayi LP, working on legislative drafting, regulatory reform and policy advisory projects for government institutions, international organisations and private-sector clients. She has also worked in management consulting, providing legal and policy advice on national and continental matters. Omotayo is the CEO of OMT Advisory Limited and heads the Market Intelligence and Research Unit at Govtech Africa Inc.

Omobolanle Dada is a corporate, commercial and litigation lawyer passionate about using the law as a tool for business growth, value creation and economic development. She is Counsel in a top-tier litigation law firm in Abuja, where she is involved in civil and commercial litigation, advocacy and dispute resolution.

She also provides legal and commercial advisory and consultancy services to high-net-worth individuals, companies and organisations, with experience spanning corporate governance, contract drafting and review, real estate transactions, regulatory compliance, trust and wealth management, and general commercial advisory. She has contributed to advisory engagements for leading Nigerian institutions, including the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited and Premium Pension Limited, and has prepared legal opinions and transaction documents for local and multinational clients.

Omobolanle holds an LL.B from the University of Ilorin and an LL.M in Financial Law and Policy from Nile University of Nigeria. She is committed to continuous learning and professional development and is passionate about applying her legal expertise to create meaningful value for individuals, businesses and society.



Omotayo

What do you remember most about being in the same class with your sister at the university?

I remember at least 15 people telling me they had seen someone who looked exactly like me in the Faculty when my sister resumed. For the first few days, we had to explain that we were siblings, not twins. I was initially worried that being in the same class as my older sister might be a little uncomfortable for me, but it really wasn't. Her admission was also a testimony our entire family had prayed for, as she had initially been admitted to study another course and later changed to Law. I got a very good package deal: I got to have her as both my big sister and my colleague. I thoroughly enjoyed her sisterly care throughout our time together.

Was there a particularly difficult period during university or Law School when having your sister beside you made a difference?

500 Level was a particularly difficult period for me, both physically and emotionally. I wanted to graduate with a very high CGPA, so I put a lot of pressure on myself. Bola and I stayed in the same hostel, and having her around made a huge difference. I remember the many times she would cook for me, her roommates and friends, and we would all gather in her room and have a great time. Having my sister in the same hostel made it feel like I was home, and that helped me through some really difficult days.

What is one professional quality you see in your sister that you admire?

Bola is incredibly proactive. She is a natural leader and steps effortlessly into leadership roles. She has held leadership positions since secondary school, and I remember her taking on several roles at university and doing exceptionally well. I always admired how confident and natural she was in those positions. I sometimes wish I had participated more in extracurricular activities at university. I think it would have strengthened my communication and interpersonal skills, so that is something I admire about her journey.

Omobolanle

You went through university and Law School at the same time. What was the experience of navigating such demanding stages of your education together?

I honestly don't think I could have navigated some of those periods as comfortably without my sister. She was always willing to help, especially whenever I struggled with a course or didn't quite understand something. She was patient enough to sit with me and explain things until I got it. I'll never forget her "star girl" moment in 200 level when she got the highest score in Law of Contract, and we all had to go to her for explanations. I had direct access to the star girl!

What is one professional quality you see in your sister that you admire?

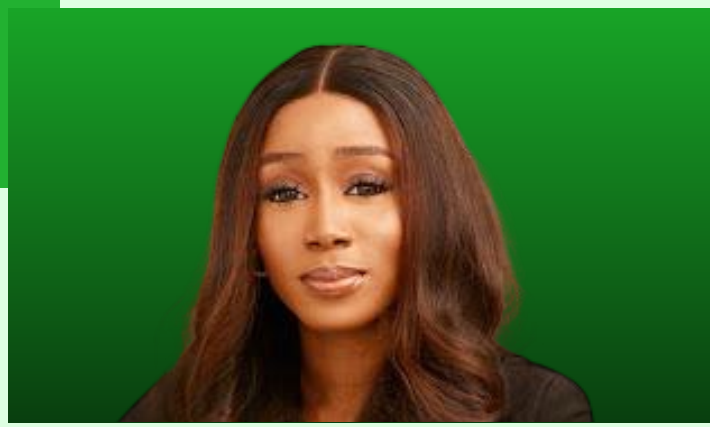
Tayo knows how to get things done and she knows how to get them done quickly. She is also someone who can walk into almost any boardroom or conversation and find her place. Give her an idea or introduce her to a business opportunity, and she somehow finds a way to connect it to creating value for the organisation or the people involved. I really admire that about her. She has this ability to see possibilities and turn conversations into opportunities. It is a quality I genuinely wish I had more of.

Having shared so much of the journey, what would you like your sister to achieve in the future?

My sister has big and amazing dreams. One of her biggest aspirations is to use her expertise as a policy analyst to advise countries, governments and organisations, particularly on issues surrounding youth unemployment. I would love to see her take that dream beyond what she currently imagines. I want to see her use her brilliance, excellence and passion to influence policy and create opportunities for young people on a transcontinental scale. More than anything, I want to see her become everything she has dreamed of becoming. And when she does, I want to be there just as I have always been to watch my sister make an impact and proudly say, "That's my sister."



Toyosi **Onikosi**



Anuoluwatoyosi "Toyosi" Onikosi is a development finance lawyer and an author. She began her career as an associate at Banwo &Ighodalo in Lagos, advising on commercial, energy, and project finance transactions, before earning an MSc in Law and Finance at Oxford as an AfOx (Africa Oxford Initiative) and Standard Bank Africa Chairman's Scholar, among others. Upon completing a work programme with Afreximbank under her Oxford scholarship, she was immediately appointed to her current role.

She now serves as the first-ever Legal and Governance Manager of the Alliance of African Multilateral Financial Institutions (AAMFI) — a coalition of African owned multilateral and development financial institutions, now numbering over a dozen members including Afreximbank and Africa Finance Corporation, with the African Union as the key patron. She works with and across these institutions — structuring the legal and governance frameworks that let them cooperate and coordinate capital to strengthen Africa's financial architecture and advance debt sustainability, in support of Agenda 2063 and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Beyond her legal and policy work, Toyosi is also the author of two children's books — What Happens When I Read and When You See The Red Sea — the proceeds of which fund scholarships and support for children in Lagos from an after-school programme she created and taught before relocating.

How did you discover your preferred area of specialisation?

I've always been drawn to energy, power and oil and gas law, probably because I have roots in the Niger Delta and grew up seeing first-hand how poor electricity affects people's lives. That said, I didn't specialise immediately. For my first two-plus years at the firm, I rotated through almost every practice area. When I eventually joined the Energy team in my third year, it felt like a natural fit. My advice: try as many areas as possible; it makes you more dynamic.

In 2023, you stepped away from practice to pursue a Master's in Law and Finance at the University of Oxford. How did you decide it was the right time, and what motivated that decision?

I decided to do the MSc in Law and Finance at Oxford when it became clear that the questions I cared about sat between law, finance and policy. I'd done enough years in practice to understand real-world issues, but I also felt ready for a reset. Oxford gave me space to deepen my technical knowledge, think more broadly about development finance, and re-align my career. It wasn't an escape from practice; it was a deliberate step to refine my direction.

Was the plan after Oxford to work at Afrexim, or did that happen?

Working at Afreximbank felt like a natural continuation of something I'd wanted for a long time: a career in development finance. I'd worked on Afreximbank-related/financed transactions while at B&I, and even mentioned in my scholarship interview that I'd love to work at a leading African multilateral institution. My Oxford scholarship included a 6 months fully-funded placement at an institution of my choice after my studies. I chose Afreximbank and they were pleased to welcome me. That experience, combined with my background, eventually opened the door to a subsequent substantive role.

Looking back, are there decisions you would reconsider or things you would do differently?

> **"One lesson I wish I understood early is that progression will not always be fast or neat, and other people's timelines are not your benchmark."**

Looking back, there are only a few things I would do differently. I would study more economics earlier, because it underpins so much of finance and development work. I would also be far less sentimental about certain decisions and stand up for myself more. There were moments when I stayed in situations longer than necessary or downplayed my own needs. The lesson for me is: protect your future self, even if it means making harder, less comfortable choices in the present.

What is one lesson about career progression that you wish you had understood early on, and how did learning that lesson change the way you approach your professional growth?

One lesson I wish I understood early is that progression will not always be fast or neat, and other people's timelines are not your benchmark. I spent a few years at Banwo & Ighodalo watching peers leave for master's degrees and advanced programmes. Some even made comments about me not having a master's given the amount of time post-call. Ironically, my future role at Afreximbank and other opportunities came from the combination of those years of solid experience and my Oxford degree—not the degree alone.

In your experience, what skills and personal qualities are most critical for building a successful and enduring career in the legal profession?

Technical skill matters, but it's not enough. Emotional intelligence, gratitude and maintaining good relationships are crucial. Be known as someone who works hard and delivers quality. Don't be shy about sharing your work appropriately so people actually know what you do— there's a difference between visibility and empty noise. Also, don't rush into an advanced degree just because others are doing it. Today's market values solid, adaptable experience. Build depth in your area, but stay open to evolving and learning new things

Tsintop **Karma**



Tsintop Karma is a lawyer, entrepreneur and content creator with a passion for fashion, creativity and business. She holds an LL.B (Hons) from Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, and a BL (Hons) from the Nigerian Law School, Lagos, and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2024. She is also a Certified Associate Member of the Nigerian Institute of Chartered Arbitrators.

Rather than following the conventional path into legal practice, Tsintop chose to explore her entrepreneurial and creative interests, founding Thee Good Karma, a fashion brand focused on helping women express confidence, femininity and individuality through style. Her legal background continues to shape her approach to entrepreneurship, particularly in areas of critical thinking, negotiation, discipline and business decision-making. Through her journey, she hopes to inspire young lawyers to recognise that a legal education can open doors beyond traditional practice and that it is possible to build a career that reflects both professional training and personal passion.

What career plan did you have in mind when you were at the law school?

When I was in law school, my plan was quite straightforward. I expected to graduate, get called to the Nigerian Bar, and begin my legal career, most likely in a law firm. At the time, I thought that was the natural next step and the path I was expected to follow. However, as I got closer to graduation, I began to realise that while I loved studying law, I was also very interested in creativity, fashion, business and content creation. I started asking myself what I wanted my career to look like beyond simply following the conventional path.

You were called to the Nigerian Bar in 2024 and you immediately ventured into entrepreneurship and content creation. What inspired that decision?

I think it was a combination of self-awareness and the courage to explore something that genuinely excited me. I had always been interested in fashion and creativity, and I realised that I didn't want to put those interests aside simply because I had studied law. Being called to the Bar was a huge achievement for me, but I also understood that it didn't mean I had to immediately put myself in a box. Entrepreneurship and content creation gave me the opportunity to build something of my own, express my creativity and learn about an entirely different side of myself. I decided that rather than wondering what could have happened, I wanted to give myself the opportunity to find out.

Did you ever struggle with the expectation that, after being called to the Bar, you "should" practise law? How did you navigate those expectations?

Absolutely. There is definitely an expectation that once you study law and get called to the Bar, the next logical step is to practise. For a while, I questioned whether I was making the "right" decision by taking a different path. There is also the fear that people may see you as wasting your degree or not living up to your potential. I eventually realised that my legal education is something I carry with me regardless of the career path I choose. I didn't spend years studying law for it to become irrelevant simply because I decided to explore entrepreneurship. Instead, I chose to see my legal background as an advantage.

In what ways has your legal education influenced the way you approach business, branding, and content creation?

My legal education has influenced my business more than I initially expected. Law taught me to pay attention to details, think critically, research properly and, most importantly, understand the importance of protecting your interests. Those skills are extremely useful in business. Whether I am reviewing an agreement, negotiating with someone, making a business decision or simply trying to understand an issue, I find myself approaching it with the analytical mindset that studying law gave me.It has also taught me discipline. Law school required consistency, and I have carried that same discipline into entrepreneurship, even on days when motivation isn't there.

> "...I think there is so much value in simply starting, learning from your mistakes and adjusting along the way."

Can you share a challenge that ultimately became a turning point in your entrepreneurial journey?

One of the biggest challenges has been learning that building a business doesn't happen overnight. There were moments when I questioned whether I was doing enough or whether people were even paying attention to what I was building. Social media can make it especially easy to compare your journey to someone else's highlight reel. Eventually, I learnt to focus less on immediate results and more on consistency, learning and improving. That shift in mindset was a turning point for me. I realised that a slow season doesn't necessarily mean you're failing. Sometimes, you're simply building the foundation for what comes next.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently in the early stages of building your business and personal brand?

I would probably have started sooner and worried less about getting everything perfect. When you're starting something new, it's easy to spend too much time trying to figure everything out before taking action. Looking back, I think there is so much value in simply starting, learning from your mistakes and adjusting along the way. I also would have invested more time in understanding the business side from the beginning—things like systems, financial planning, customer experience and clearly defining the brand.

If you had the opportunity to work in a typical law firm today, would you take it?

I wouldn't completely rule it out. I think one of the beautiful things about my journey is that I don't have to decide that I am either a lawyer or an entrepreneur forever. My legal education and qualification will always be a part of my identity, and I remain open to opportunities where my legal background and entrepreneurial interests can intersect. If the right opportunity came along particularly one that aligned with my interests and allowed me to grow—I would definitely consider it.

Umoh **Edet**



Umoh Edet is a government affairs strategist and public policy professional working at the intersection of governance, technology and institutional transformation across Africa. He serves as Head of Government Affairs and Public Policy at Govtech Africa and as a Lobbying, Policy and Government Relations Consultant at Viisaus Limited, advising on digital government, legislative affairs, political intelligence and strategic government engagement.

As Chairman of the Policy, Programmes and Projects Committee of the NBA Young Lawyers Forum, he coordinated an Access to Justice initiative that contributed to the release of nine inmates and helped develop a digital professional development platform accessed by over 2,000 young lawyers. He co-founded the Federation of African Law Students Associations, a pan-African platform advancing legal education, youth leadership and policy innovation.

Upon becoming a lawyer, what did you imagine your career would look like?

I imagined myself going to court, standing before a judge and making arguments. I wanted the courtroom experience. But during my NLS externship, I saw some of the realities of practice—the adjournments, technicalities and delays—and I began to question whether litigation was where I would thrive. I realised that my strengths and interests extended beyond the courtroom. I had always had a flair for diplomacy, international affairs and engaging people around ideas. I found myself more attracted to the boardroom, where policy, strategy and institutions are discussed and decisions are shaped. That led me to start a career in government affairs and public policy, where I could combine my legal training with my interest in diplomacy, governance and problem-solving.

You've taken on several leadership roles. What keeps pulling you toward service?

What keeps pulling me towards service is the desire to do more to solve problems. I have never been comfortable simply identifying an issue and leaving it there. I am interested in asking: how can we creatively advance this, and how can we make things easier for the people who come after us? Service gives me an opportunity to contribute beyond myself—to improve systems, create opportunities and help institutions work better. Whether through the Young Lawyers Forum, public policy or technology governance, I have found meaning in bringing people together around problems and trying to move things forward. For me, leadership is ultimately about usefulness.

What is one lesson you wish someone had taught you during your first three years at the Bar?

I wish someone had told me earlier that your career is a marathon and not a race against the people around you. In the early years at the Bar, it is easy to look at colleagues who appear to be progressing faster and conclude that you are falling behind. But careers develop differently. What matters is whether you are building competence, character, relationships and a reputation for doing excellent work. The Bar rewards those who remain committed to learning and who can be trusted with responsibility. I would therefore tell a young lawyer not to be distracted by another person's timeline. Focus on becoming very good at what you do and remain open to where that competence may take you.

What mistakes did you make early in your career that you would advise younger lawyers to avoid?

One mistake I made early was sometimes placing too much emphasis on immediate opportunities and not enough on the long-term value of experience.

> **“...The Bar rewards those who remain committed to learning and who can be trusted with responsibility.”**

Not every opportunity will look impressive when it first appears. Some of the assignments that seem small may expose you to people, institutions and problems that later become very important. I also learnt that competence alone is not enough. You must learn to communicate, build relationships, keep your word and understand the wider environment in which your profession operates.

Beyond technical legal competence, what qualities have been most important to your growth?

The qualities that have mattered most to me are curiosity, resilience, humility and the willingness to work with people. The law gives you a professional foundation, but the problems you will encounter rarely fit neatly within legal textbooks. You need to understand economics, politics, technology, institutions and, most importantly, people. Curiosity keeps you learning. Resilience keeps you moving when things do not go according to plan. Humility allows you to learn from people who may know something you do not. And collaboration allows you to achieve things that would be impossible alone. I have found that the strongest professionals are not necessarily those who know everything, but those who remain willing to learn.

What opportunities exist for lawyers in Nigeria's digital transformation agenda?

There is an extraordinary opportunity for lawyers in Nigeria's digital transformation. Technology is creating new questions around artificial intelligence, data protection, digital identity, cybersecurity, digital public infrastructure and the regulation of emerging technologies. These are not purely technical questions; they are fundamentally questions of law, policy, rights and governance. At Govtech Africa, my work in Government Affairs and Public Policy has reinforced for me how important lawyers can be in helping governments design responsible technology policies and institutions. Young lawyers should therefore become comfortable working across disciplines. The lawyer of the future will not only interpret legislation; they will help shape the rules and institutions through which technology is deployed for public value.

Uwemedimo **Nwoko**, SAN, Life Bencher



Uwemedimo Nwoko, SAN, born on the 27th of October, 1964 in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria, is a distinguished legal practitioner and a Life Bencher. He attended the University of Calabar and the Nigerian Law School, was called to the Bar in 1992, and founded Nwoko & Co Law Firm in 1993. He served as Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice in Akwa Ibom State (2015–2021) and was elevated to the rank of Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN) in 2020.

Renowned for his work in Constitutional Law, Human Rights Law, Electoral Law, Commercial and Industrial Law, and Maritime Law, Nwoko, SAN, is widely known as "THE VOICE OF THE VOICELESS" for his dedication to justice for the poor and less privileged. He has mentored over one hundred lawyers and continues to shape the legal landscape in Nigeria.

What were the greatest challenges you faced as a young lawyer, and how did you navigate them?

I had right from the onset prepared my mind for a very rough start. I knew I had no space for office accommodation and I had no money to rent one. I used my brother's residence address (he was a tenant in a small two-bedroom Boys' Quarters) in Lagos as my address. I printed my Headed Papers with that address and hit the road. Of course, there was no client. During this time, I used to go to one office, Stella Dafinone & Co., where my friend was working to help them go to Court and handle some simple, non-contentious cases in Court. They usually gave me transport money of about N200.00. But the benefit I took was that I always made photocopies of all Court processes in most of the cases to build up precedents for myself. In a nutshell, the biggest challenge was lack of office space and lack of any client at the onset.

You founded your own law firm at a remarkably early stage in your career. What gave you the confidence to take that step?

I should start here by mentioning that I had the privilege of a free offer to join AFRIBANK PLC through my sister-in-law, who was working there, but I turned it down. I took that decision not because I had a softer option or choice in life, but because I actually wanted to avoid any "soft life" in a comfort zone. I had seen that life offered no direct assurances, but you had to demand what you want and viciously fight for it. What gave me the confidence to start my practice the way I did was just raw and crude determination buoyed up by my trust in God. I had made up my mind not to fail. So, I was ready for any challenge. Maybe I should add that I paid the price of going hungry for four consecutive days without any kind of food in my system. Not even Ijebu garri to drink.

Looking back, do you believe that starting your own firm so early accelerated your growth as a lawyer, and would you recommend a similar path to young lawyers today?

It helped me. But I will not readily recommend the same approach to younger Lawyers. Mentorship is very important. I did not submit myself for mentorship, and I committed many blunders along the way. There are things I learnt late and the hard way, which errors I could have avoided if I had been tutored by a senior. The other truth is that life has no scientific formula. Success can come by accident, but sustaining it requires careful and structured efforts and planning.

> **"...Without God, one cannot get anywhere."**

You have distinguished yourself as a Senior Advocate of Nigeria, a Life Bencher, and a former Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice. Looking back, which achievement are you most proud of, and why?

I am proud of all the achievements and elevations that God has graciously bestowed on me. Each comes with a different glory and satisfaction. In 2003, as a young Lawyer of about twelve years at the Bar, I was offered an appointment to the Bench in my State, but I turned it down with humility. I had always wanted to wear the Senior Advocate of Nigeria Silk. I did not get it till the year 2020, when I was twenty-eight years at the Bar. I still relished it with gratitude to God. And the year, 2020, came with double honour. I was also appointed a Life Bencher that same year. I think I am the only person to have bagged both elevations in the same year. I stand to be corrected. And these were because God had graciously given me the appointment as Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice in 2015.

What is the most important message you would like this generation of young lawyers to remember as they build their careers?

My advice to young Colleagues is that they should focus on hard work, build character and good reputation and trust in God in all things. Without God, one cannot get anywhere.

How did your areas of practice and specialization evolve over time?

My areas of specialization and practice evolved by divine providence. You can say "accidentally." My first major litigation was a case which bordered on corporate management where the Directors and Shareholders disputed over the affairs of the Company they jointly incorporated. I gained a lot of experience from there. The second major case bordered on Constitutional Law and Human Rights. I also gained a lot of experience from this. My experiences in this field exposed me to impeachment cases and later Electoral Matters – Pre-Election and Election Petitions. All of these came by divine providence.

Valerie **Arikpo-Ettah** Esq.



Valerie currently serves as the Women, Youth Peace and Security (WYPS) Advisor with Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ Nigeria & ECOWAS) GMBH within the ECOWAS Peace Security & Governance (EPSG) Project, where she plays a central role in supporting various departments of ECOWAS, National Governments in ECOWAS and institutions in the implementation of regional frameworks and initiatives relating to conflict prevention, women and youth participation, peacebuilding, and inclusive governance.

She was called to the bar in 2009, and is a graduate of the prestigious University of Aberdeen, United Kingdom (LL.M Oil & Gas Law 2013), and the University of Jos. Prior to her current role, Valerie was a Technical Advisor on Electoral Affairs, with which she contributed significantly to strengthening electoral institutions and supporting civil society organisations to promote credible, peaceful, and inclusive electoral processes.

She previously served as Chief Magistrate with the Cross River State Judiciary. She began legal practice with a brief stint at O.N. Agbor & Co in Ikom, CRS before joining the firm of LegalMax Solicitors in Abuja, soon after NYSC at the Enugu State High Court, Judiciary headquarters. Valerie began her development career as a Programme Officer with a gender-focused organization in Abuja where she implemented programmes across multiple sectors in pursuit of women's socio-economic advancement. She is a member of various professional bodies, a BRIDGE-accredited facilitator and sits on the Board of the Centre for Women Studies and Intervention (CWSI). She is married and blessed with three children.

When you became a lawyer in 2009, what did you imagine your career would look like, and how different has reality been from that early vision?

Like most young lawyers, my ideas revolved around the courtroom. I imagined I would join a progressive law firm to learn the rudiments of litigation and then transition into a specialization in Oil and Gas law – and this actually informed my decision when I proceeded for my LLM in 2012. Well as you can see from my current work, the vision has morphed into a path in international development, very far from the courtroom indeed.

What core principles have guided your career decisions?

I have always been a firm believer that God is the source of all success, and relying on his guidance along every step of my path has remained paramount. Along with this, have been my desire to also contribute to the achievement of an idea bigger than myself – typical in the field of development – , aligning my decisions with my values, personal integrity and staying adaptable.

What professional risk have you taken that, in hindsight, changed the trajectory of your career?

I have taken quite a few risks along my professional journey, but I have to say leaving the magistracy for international development was my biggest yet. The path of the bench is so clearly defined and secure, and many people already imagined me at the superior courts. That singular decision to take what seemed like the unpopular road at the time, changed the entire trajectory of my career, and gave me the equally fulfilling opportunities which have led me to where I stand.

You became a Chief Magistrate relatively early but later chose a different direction than the bench, what prompted that turn?

I had two reasons, one personal, the other professional. On a personal level, my immediate family were in another city when I first took the appointment back in Cross-River State and this consideration was a contributing factor to my final decision. Professionally, I also

> "I have taken quite a few risks along my professional journey, but I have to say leaving the magistracy for international development was my biggest yet"

realized my growing interest in international development would need to find expression sooner rather than later, or I would lose the entry points available for mid-career transitions. Although it's never too late to make that turn, it is always wise to be guided as to the timing of major career decisions, and this was one such case.

What is one misconception about gender equality that you encounter frequently, even among highly educated professionals?

That gender equality means disadvantaging men or treating everyone equally. Or that because discrimination is no longer explicit, then gender equality has already been achieved. But inequality lives in social norms, economic structures, institutions and unfair systems which were not designed with everyone in mind and equality is rather about removing artificial constraints, structural barriers, and giving fair opportunities to achieve equitable outcomes for both men and women.

For young lawyers interested in international development and gender inclusion, what practical steps would you recommend to enable them enter and build credibility in these fields?

Given how broad the field of international development is, they should first determine what aspects appeal most to them amongst the humanitarian, economic, environmental sustainability or Governance & Human Rights sectors, to mention a few. For most people pivoting, volunteering part time in an organization is a good entry-point, until you build requisite experience sufficient to make you brave enough to land a job and take the leap. Frontline experience – whether at national or sub-national context is critical in the sector, whilst taking relevant paid and free courses to improve your knowledge in the chosen area.

Finally, what advice will you give young Lawyers as they navigate their paths across various sectors and fields of work?

That it all comes together in the end. The common misconception is to see the various roles along one's career journey as stand-alone experiences but our training as Lawyers prepares us adequately for versatility and success in many fields of life. So before specialization, I would advise young lawyers to think critically about what value they want to add in their careers, examine the job market within our legal context, remain adaptable, take unpopular but informed risks if needed, and to believe in themselves whilst on that journey.

Victor **Ekpo**



Victor Ekpo is an entertainment lawyer specialising in intellectual property, music licensing, and artist representation. Called to the Nigerian Bar in 2021 after graduating from the University of Uyo, Victor has amassed experience at various entertainment law firms and companies and currently serves as the Senior Legal and Business Manager at Zaeda Oracle Limited. His practice focuses on all matters relating to the music and Creative industry at large, and through his representation, he has negotiated deals that have broken out talented creatives in the Nigerian Industry in the last 5 years. Victor's standout would be that his firm stands on principles with respect to transactions, clients and the industry in general, as he puts his clients first before everything else.

> "I had to look for the only interest I had in law, and find a way to make it work."

Immediately after you were called to the Nigerian Bar, what did your ideal legal career look like? Did you envision becoming an entertainment lawyer?

Prior to my call, I was already destined to practice in the entertainment industry because I had already started taking lessons, attending bootcamps, reading and researching about the entertainment Industry. I had already begun an internship with a law firm whose practice was solely in entertainment law just a few weeks after my Bar finals and months before my call.

What kind of young lawyers would you happily choose to mentor?

I love to mentor lawyers who want to conquer the entertainment space. I also love mentoring lawyers who are hungry to make a difference in the entertainment space. People see the lifestyle and think it's all glamorous, but dealing with creatives takes a whole lot of patience and wisdom, so when I see lawyers who are interested in navigating how to deal with such challenges, then I am happy to mentor them.

What achievement gives you the greatest sense of fulfilment?

Seeing advice or strategies I planned out for my client work out in real time. Anytime my clients heed my advice, and such advice propels them to the next stage in their career, or even prevents certain negative things from happening, this excites me, because it shows that I am doing my job right.

On a lighter note, what is one fun fact about you that would surprise people who know you only through your professional accomplishments?

I love Manchester United so much- since 2011, I have not missed up to 30 games. GGMU for life. I also love to play FIFA (FC 26) with my boys. I host a FIFA day with my boys once a month.

How did you go about building expertise in an area that was still emerging and relatively underserved within the Nigerian legal market?

I had to look for the only interest I had in law, and find a way to make it work. I was a rapper for most of my teenage and early 20s, so I knew that if I was not going to end up as an Artist, I had to find a way to play behind the scenes as a lawyer who was making an impact in the creative space.

Looking back, what were the biggest challenges you faced in establishing yourself as an entertainment lawyer?

The inspiration was people reaching out to mentor them; there was a knowledge gap, and that was what I was trying to address. I also noticed a lot of young lawyers coming into the space making a lot of mistakes because there is not much to learn from or learn with, and this, in return, affects the quality or output of their services.

You have become one of the most recognisable voices in entertainment law in Nigeria. How intentional were you about building a personal brand alongside your legal practice?

I did not want my brand to be determined by a particular client, so I had to develop a brand around my ex-music career turned lawyer. I have always been intentional in ensuring that I stand out as a lawyer who is known in the creative Industry. Although I have to be careful a lot of times not to end up wanting to be the star at the end of the day, because only one person can be the star- and that is the Artist or talent, as the case may be.

Looking back on your own journey, what professional risk are you most grateful you took?

The biggest risk I took was declining all possible opportunities to ensure I worked with an entertainment law firm. I knew that no other area of law was of much interest to me, and at that time, you did not have a lot of firms practicing solely entertainment law. So, I had to decline all offers from family to carve a pathway that never existed around me.

Victor **Nnebe**



Victor Nnebe is a lawyer and Master of Laws student at the University of Calgary, Canada. As a legal practitioner in Nigeria, Victor practiced at the country's largest Tier 1 law firm, where he routinely advised clients on public policy and legislative drafting.

He is the founder of the Emerging Scholars Institute, which mentors and supports law students through academic guidance, career development, and professional mentorship.

Victor is passionate about legal education and creating opportunities for law students to excel academically and in the legal profession.

You have achieved academic excellence at several stages of your education. What has been your greatest motivation for maintaining that standard?

I get motivated by the need to live up to my own precedent. For instance, I needed to make a first class at the university because I had made 7 A1s in WAEC, and I had to make a first class at the law school because I had made a first class at the university. My greatest motivation is the need to compete with or keep up with what I had achieved previously.

What were some of the biggest challenges you faced during the two years of legal practice, and how did you navigate them?

Barely one month into my time at Nigeria's largest law firm, I lost my dear father, Rt. Hon. Anayo Nnebe. Naturally, I was thrown into grief, right at a time when my career was only gearing up. I had to navigate a fast-paced legal environment while dealing with this personal burden, but I coped by confiding in the right people. To the credit of my superiors and colleagues at the time, they were very supportive, and eased me into the role, regardless of the normal pace of work at the firm.

You founded Emerging Scholars Institute in 2024. What inspired you to start the initiative?

Emerging Scholars Institute is a platform where a group of excellent lawyers provide advice and mentorship to law students, both at university level and at the Nigerian Law School (NLS). My inspiration was the fact that when I was at NLS, I benefitted greatly from a webinar where Mr. Olalere Yusuf spoke at length to law students. I immediately knew I had to pay it forward when I finished school, and 2024 was the perfect time to set it up.

What prompted your decision to pursue an LL.M. in cybersecurity, privacy and health information at the University of Calgary?

I am very forward-looking in my career and constantly ask myself what the next step should be. During my legal practice in Nigeria, I had the opportunity to work on a piece of legislation for the Nigerian Data Protection Commission, which sparked my interest in privacy and data protection law. I had also developed a longstanding interest in health law, so I became particularly interested in exploring the intersection between privacy and the protection of health information. The University of Calgary was a natural choice because it provided the opportunity to study under one of Canada's foremost health law scholars.

> **"...Academic excellence is still given priority by law firms/organizations when recruiting first-year associates, although it is not the only factor considered."**

How did you know it was the right time to step away from practice and pursue a master's degree?

I knew even before I started practice that I would pursue a master's degree eventually. One needs to plan their career path as much as they possibly can, and this is a principle I live by. I always intended to practice briefly, take a break to further my education, and then return to practice with a new degree to my name and much more knowledge.

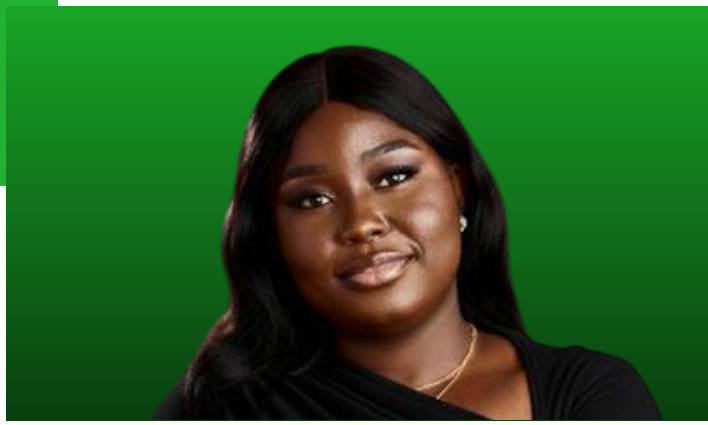
After law school, you received offers from several top law firms in Nigeria. What advice would you give law students seeking to position themselves for opportunities at top firms?

If I were to advise a person who is still in school, my foremost advice would be for you to graduate with the best result you can graduate with. Academic excellence is still given priority by law firms/organizations when recruiting first-year associates, although it is not the only factor considered. For a candidate already in the process of applying, always have a second set of eyes to carefully look through your application packages, take a bold step to cold-email lawyers already in the firms/organizations, and do your research before any interviews. Finally, applications can be a game of numbers; apply to as many places as possible.

What aspects of your Nigerian legal education have given you an advantage as a student in Canada?

Nigerian legal education is somewhat cutthroat in the sense that you either learn to swim, or you sink. Being in that environment toughened me academically and ironically made the Canadian academic environment appear a bit lighter in comparison (although it is not). As a student in Nigeria, I also learned that I do not need any special motivation to study; sometimes, the simple fear of failure is enough to spur you into action.

Victoria **Oloni**



Victoria Oloni is a lawyer turned technology policy leader. She currently serves as Public Policy Manager for Anglophone West Africa at Meta, where she leads regulatory engagement with governments and policymakers across the region. Her career began at Detail Commercial Solicitors and Templars, where she advised global companies on data protection, artificial intelligence, content regulation, intellectual property, and regulatory compliance. Victoria holds an LL.B from the University of Ilorin and a B.L (First Class) from the Nigerian Law School, Bwari. She is a Fellow of Information Privacy (IAPP), a certified AI Governance Professional, and has authored over 15 publications on data protection, digital policy, and technology law across Africa.

> **Three things: communication, adaptability, and the ability to work with non-lawyers.**

Was there a particular risk you took in your career that, at the time, felt uncertain but ultimately proved worthwhile?

I left a full-time role at a law firm where I was on a fast track. Good work, clear trajectory, stability. I took a contract role at a technology company that had just gone through a major layoff the year before. My contract was for a maximum of two years with no guarantee of conversion. On paper, it was a big risk and I generally consider myself to be very risk averse. But that decision introduced me to the intersection of technology, regulation, and policy, and it changed everything.

How have mentors, colleagues, or professional networks shaped your journey?

I have been extraordinarily lucky with mentors and sponsors. I often say I am "community-made," not self-made. I have had leaders who believed in me more than I believed in myself, who mentioned my name in rooms I didn't know existed, and pulled me through doors before I thought I was ready. The distinction between mentorship and sponsorship matters: mentors advise you, sponsors bet on you. I have been blessed with both.

Were there moments when you encountered self-doubt, rejection, or professional setbacks? How did you overcome them?

After law school, even after making a first class, the offers did not come. I watched people in my position celebrate ten, thirteen offers on social media. Law firms did not come calling the way I had seen it happen for others I really looked up to. I got one offer and that was the one I took. It was humbling. But I put my head down, did excellent work, and let the results speak over time. After 1 year (post NYSC) I was head hunted by tier 1 firms and it felt nice (lol).

What personal values have anchored you through the highs and lows of your career?

Do the grunt work. Put your head down and do the non-glamorous, thankless work that nobody will clap for. Hard work is a test of character. It shows whether you only perform when there is an audience. Beyond that, I believe in follow-through. Do what you say you will do, when you say you will do it. And be generous: with your knowledge, your time, your platforms. These three things have never failed me.

What skills or mindsets do you believe will be indispensable for the next generation of lawyers?

Intellectual curiosity and comfort with ambiguity. The profession is evolving fast. AI, digital regulation, cross-border data flows. The lawyers who will thrive are those who can learn quickly without waiting to be formally taught. Not every question has a precedent. Sometimes you are the one building the framework, not applying one.

Pair that with strong writing and the ability to translate complex technical concepts into plain, actionable language, and you will always be relevant.

Many law students and young lawyers view legal practice through the lens of litigation or corporate transactions. What opportunities do you think they are overlooking?

Quite a lot, actually. Regulatory affairs: advising companies on how to comply with and shape new laws. Public policy: representing organisations before government and influencing legislation. Privacy and data protection. Content moderation and platform governance. Compliance programme design. Technology transactions. Even within corporate practice, areas like competition law in digital markets or fintech licensing are expanding. The common thread is that none of these sit neatly in "litigation" or "transactions," but they all require solid legal thinking.

What skills have proven most valuable in your journey that were not necessarily taught in law school?

Three things: communication, adaptability, and the ability to work with non-lawyers. In my day-to-day life, I work with engineers, policy researchers, trust and safety teams, and communications professionals. None of them speak "lawyer." The skill is translation. Making the policy and regulatory issues intelligible to people who need to act on it but did not go to law school. Beyond that, learning how to be comfortable when there is no precedent, no textbook answer, and you have to figure it out in real time. Secondly, prompt engineering (IYKYK)- because it's AI's world and we are just living in it.

How can young lawyers position themselves for emerging sectors while still building strong legal foundations?

Build your foundation first. You cannot advise on data protection if you do not understand basic regulatory interpretation. You cannot draft a technology agreement if your contract law is shaky. Then pick one emerging area that genuinely interests you, whether that is data protection, AI governance, or fintech regulation, and go deep. Write about what you are learning. It clarifies your thinking and makes you visible. Volunteer for projects outside your comfort zone. And be sturdy. Be someone people can rely on. That consistency, more than anything.

Vivian **Nkemdilim**



Vivian Nkemdilim started out as a Virtual Legal Assistant supporting law firms in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, and has since grown into paralegal work while also offering legal technology consulting services. Two weeks after writing her bar examinations, she stepped away from the traditional legal career path and built a practice serving international firms remotely from Nigeria. She was called to the Nigerian Bar in July 2025. She is the founder of aLegalVA Academy, where she teaches people with legal backgrounds how to build careers as Virtual Legal Assistants, and has trained hundreds of students who have gone on to launch legal VA careers across 12 countries. She is also the founder of Barristr, a startup agency providing offshore legal support to law firms abroad.

Did you ever imagine that you would build a profession around virtual legal assistance and remote work?

Honestly, no. When I finished law school, the picture in my head was the traditional one: chambers, court appearances, a nameplate on a door. Virtual legal assistance was not a career anyone around me could name, let alone recommend. What I did know was that I wanted flexibility, global exposure, and work that was not limited by geography. So I took chances, made mistakes, and learned on the job. Today I support U.S. law firms remotely on estate and probate matters, and hundreds of people have started their own VA journeys with my guidance.

What was the biggest risk you took in pursuing a non-traditional path?

The biggest risk was time, not money. When people talk about risk, they look mostly at the outcome. For me, the real exposure was the process. I had a law degree and a conventional path available, and I chose instead to spend months learning U.S. legal procedure, drafting standards and software that nobody was paying me to learn, with no guarantee that a single firm would ever hire me. If it had not worked, I would have lost months that my peers spent building careers.

You work with U.S. law firms while being based in Nigeria. How did you secure your first international opportunity?

Before I applied anywhere, I built a portfolio that showed U.S. firms exactly what I could do. It included sample pleadings, correspondence, case summaries and file organisation, formatted the way an American firm expects. Then I applied consistently, on remote job platforms, on LinkedIn, and through referrals, long after it stopped feeling encouraging. My first engagement was challenging and impactful. I was handed real matters straight away, learned quickly, delivered early, and made myself easy to work with. That client became a reference, and the reference became the next role.

What challenges did you face in convincing international clients to trust a professional they had never met in person?

The challenge is that you begin with nothing that reassures a client. They cannot meet you, cannot check your references locally, and cannot verify your credentials in a system they recognise. Some hesitated over confidentiality and data security. Others assumed distance meant slow turnaround, or that someone abroad would need heavy supervision. Many simply never replied, and I never learned why. Early on, I could not tell whether I was being screened out for skill or for geography, which is its own quiet discouragement. What eventually worked was proof. Work samples, clear scope, a small paid task first, and deadlines met early, until distance stopped being the question.

> **When I finished law school, the picture in my head was the traditional one: chambers, court appearances, a nameplate on a door.**

How can young lawyers position themselves for opportunities beyond the borders of their home country?

Positioning is mostly about being findable and being legible. Findable means your LinkedIn, portfolio and any public work say clearly what you do and who you do it for, in the language international firms use. Legible means removing the friction of hiring you. Understand the jurisdiction's terminology and procedure, communicate professionally, and be explicit about your working hours and overlap. Beyond that, build proof publicly. Write, share what you are learning, and contribute where lawyers gather online. And invest in one skill your local peers do not have, because that is your differentiator.

What is something people see in your achievements today but do not see in the journey that got you here?

People see the client list and the students. They did not see the applications that were never answered, the months of learning that paid nothing, or the nights I worked around power cuts while promising an attorney the document would arrive on time. Someone once told me I was "just an assistant." I sat with that for a while, then remembered that I earn seven figures monthly doing work that carries real consequences for real families. I recovered from that statement quickly. But it taught me that the hardest part of this path is not the workload. It is holding your own definition of yourself while other people offer you smaller ones.

What misconceptions do people have about remote work and international service delivery?

The biggest one is that remote support work is low-skill administrative help. The firms I work with rely on me for document drafting, probate filings, case management and client correspondence, which is substantive work with real consequences. The second misconception is that flexible means casual. Court deadlines do not adjust for my time zone. The third is that international clients simply want cheap labour. The ones worth keeping want reliability, judgement and low supervision, and they pay accordingly.

Wisdom **Echefula**



Wisdom Echefula is a governance practitioner based in the UK. He holds an LL.B from Rivers State University and an LL.M. from Coventry University. His professional interests span law, corporate governance, public policy, technology and leadership.

Beyond his professional career, Wisdom is passionate about community service and has undertaken several initiatives supporting education, young people and community development. He is committed to continuous professional development and building a career that combines legal expertise, effective governance and meaningful public impact.

You have consistently combined professional development with community service. How do you balance building your own career with creating impact for others?

I do not necessarily see professional development and community service as competing priorities. For me, they are aligned. Developing professionally gives me knowledge, networks and experience that I can ultimately use to support other people, while community engagement keeps me grounded and reminds me that professional success should have a wider purpose. I have tried to contribute through professional networks, diaspora initiatives, community service and mentorship in some cases while continuing to develop my own career. It requires discipline and prioritisation, because there is never enough time for everything.

When you look at your journey so far, what achievement are you most proud of?

My National Youth Service year in Gombe State, Nigeria, immediately after law school, remains the period of my journey I am most proud of. It was a year in which I was able to ensure my desire to serve produced tangible impact. I donated learning desks to students who had been squeezing together to study, provided learning materials to students who needed support to continue their education, and paid the fines of young inmates, helping secure their release from the correctional centre. I also visited an orphanage and constructed a traffic booth for the Gombe State Police Force. It was a year filled with immense pride and gratitude for what God helped me accomplish.

What motivated your decision to move to the UK, and what were your expectations before making the move?

My decision to move to the UK was driven largely by the desire for professional development, international exposure and the opportunity to broaden my experience beyond the Nigerian legal and social environment. I wanted to experience a different system and challenge myself personally and intellectually. Before moving, I expected it to be demanding, but I underestimated how much flexibility would be required beyond the academic or professional aspects. Building a career in a new country involves a thorough understanding of the culture, professional networks, expectations and opportunities. The experience has therefore been both challenging and rewarding, and it has expanded my understanding of what is possible professionally.

What have you found most challenging about building a professional network and establishing yourself in a new country?

The biggest challenge has been moving from having an established professional identity and network in Nigeria to effectively rebuilding that network in the UK. In a new environment, your previous experience does not always automatically translate into professional opportunities because people may not yet know your work or understand your background. I can remember nights that I have had to question whether I was in the right place because of application rejections from roles I know I could confidently execute which led to a delay on how I could establish myself properly. I have also learned that networking is about building genuine relationships and consistently demonstrating value. I now focus on professional organisations, workplace relationships, church, football community, the gym, local community networks and opportunities to contribute.

> “The biggest challenge has been moving from having an established professional identity and network in Nigeria to effectively rebuilding that network in the UK.”

Beyond traditional legal practice, what alternative career paths do you think Nigerian lawyers can explore in the UK?

There are considerably more opportunities for Nigerian lawyers in the UK than traditional private legal practice alone. Sectors like governance, compliance, risk management, policy, regulatory affairs, data protection, lecturing, contracts, procurement, mediation, project management, public-sector administration and corporate roles. Our training allows us to analyse complex information, interpret rules, identify risks, communicate clearly and make structured decisions. I would encourage colleagues moving to the UK to look beyond job titles containing the word “legal” and instead identify roles where their analytical and professional skills can create value.

For Nigerian lawyers considering a move to the UK, what do you wish you had known before making the transition?

I wish I had understood earlier that professional experience does not automatically translate into professional recognition in a new jurisdiction. Moving to the UK requires patience, valuable networking and a willingness to understand the system before expecting it to reward your previous experience. I would also advise fellow lawyers to research qualification requirements, immigration options, professional pathways and realistic entry points before moving because this was an area I didn’t pay attention to, and I could keep on regretting but have chosen to move on. Most importantly, do not define success solely by securing a traditional legal role immediately. Be prepared to take opportunities that build relevant UK experience and transferable skills.

Wolemi **Esan, SAN**



Wolemi, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria and the Deputy Managing Partner of Olaniwun Ajayi LP, is widely recognized as one of Nigeria's foremost transaction and dispute lawyers, with an exceptional reputation across the commercial and energy sectors. Wolemi advises extensively on energy and infrastructure asset development, privatization, acquisition, financing, and operations. He regularly advises on complex corporate and commercial transactions, including financing deals, mergers, and acquisitions across Nigeria's economic spectrum. This dual expertise cements his position as one of the rare Nigerian lawyers seamlessly straddling both arbitration and transactional advisory work, making him a trusted counsel for clients navigating intricate disputes and sophisticated commercial mandates. Wolemi has played pivotal roles in sector-shaping disputes and complex restructurings, where he has been instrumental in safeguarding stakeholder interests in high-stakes matters. He has acted in significant arbitrations arising from energy and infrastructure transactions, including disputes connected to a US$371 million facility involving a syndicate of banks, a US$180 million utility restructuring, and a US$114 million power financing transaction. His advocacy is distinguished by precision, commercial acumen, and a deep sectoral understanding of the industries in which his clients operate.

> "...law is not a jealous wife; it is a possessive mistress: it consumes all of you, especially in those early days"

You have spent virtually your entire professional career at Olaniwun Ajayi LP, rising from a young lawyer to Deputy Managing Partner. What convinced you to build your career within one institution?

Honestly, when I joined Olaniwun Ajayi straight from law school, staying was the furthest thing from my mind. I had a plan: to practise law for only a few months, simply to bridge the period between my Call to the Bar and the commencement of the NYSC scheme, and then move into investment banking. Fortunately, a number of my seniors saw potential in me and encouraged me to stay, believing I could become a good lawyer if I committed to the profession. I took their advice, and the rest, as they say, is history.

The legal profession appears to have undergone a shift. Unlike when you started, young lawyers today prioritise mobility, exposure, and faster progression. What is behind this change, and how can lawyers balance ambition with the benefits of stability?

I am not sure I accept the premise that something has fundamentally changed; to my mind, it has always been this way. When I joined, twelve of us came in together from law school, and I was the only one who stayed long enough to make partnership, so mobility has always been part of legal practice. Everyone's story is different, and I want to be clear: there is nothing inherently virtuous in staying with one firm, just as there is nothing inherently wrong in moving. What matters is clarity of vision. Every decision to stay or to leave should be driven by your long-term objectives rather than the excitement of a new opportunity or the pursuit of experiences for their own sake. A successful career is rarely accidental; it is carefully curated.

You are one of the few Nigerian lawyers who have excelled in both transactional practice and dispute resolution. Was this dual expertise intentional from the outset?

I began as a pure litigator and, after a few years, was moved to a team that handled only transactions. Like any young lawyer, I was seduced by the glamour of transactional practice, always in and out of London for meetings. But the firm's leadership kept insisting that I maintain both practices, much to my frustration at the time. My father added his own pressure, urging me to keep up litigation because, to his mind, that was what real lawyers did. I did not agree with him then, but I obliged for the sake of peace. In hindsight, I am grateful I listened.

Many young lawyers feel pressured to specialise early. Looking back, how should young professionals think about the balance between developing broad competence and building deep expertise?

In my view, the future belongs to the specialist. That said, the specialisation should not be too narrow, as our market is not yet deep enough to sustain highly specialised practices. So, in an ideal world, I would have ayoung lawyer begin as a generalist for a few years, not so much to know everything, but principally to discover what they are naturally better at. Over the years, I have observed that certain areas of law come intuitively to some lawyers and remain foreign to others; some simply possess the natural building blocks that suit a particular kind of practice. Broad competence first, then deliberate depth.

What qualities enable lawyers to remain effective in industries defined by constant regulatory and economic shifts?

For me, the key is a genuine interest in your craft. The regulatory and economic landscape in sectors like power and finance shifts constantly, and there is no shortcut to staying current. But if you are truly interested in what you do, and if you aspire to be a trusted advisor to your clients, then keeping abreast ceases to be a chore and becomes second nature: you will have no choice but to keep learning, and, more importantly, you will want to. That, above all, is what keeps a lawyer effective when the ground beneath an industry will not stay still.

Was there a professional setback, missed opportunity, or difficult period that, in hindsight, proved essential to your development as a lawyer and leader?

There have been many: setbacks, missed opportunities and difficult seasons, each in their turn. But the most testing were the early years. Law practice has always been a labour-intensive calling, and far more so when we began. Some of us started when the internet was only just finding its feet, before electronic legal databases existed, so research was done entirely by hand. I would sit on the floor of the library, working through law reports one after another to find a single authority. What made it harder still was watching some of my contemporaries who seemed to have an easier path, earning more, spared that kind of toil.

What qualities do you look for in young lawyers whom you believe have leadership potential?

Above all, I look for imagination: the ability to see beyond the obvious. Technical competence can be taught and refined over time, but the lawyer who instinctively looks past the surface of a problem, who can imagine a solution others have not yet seen, is the one I believe carries real leadership potential. That quality of mind is difficult to manufacture, and wherever I find it, I pay close attention.

Yusuf **Olalere**



Yusuf is a dual-qualified corporate lawyer with cross-border experience and a Corporate Associate at Greenberg Traurig. He holds an MSc in Law & Finance from the University of Oxford, where he developed a strong grounding in the legal and financial frameworks shaping corporate transactions, markets, and economic development.

He began his legal career at Olaniwun Ajayi LP, where he trained and practiced in a demanding commercial environment, advising on complex transactions and supporting high-profile clients. After completing his postgraduate studies, Yusuf worked in law-and-policy roles at the European Climate Foundation and Oxford University Press, and later as a policy researcher for COP 28 and 29, contributing to initiatives on voluntary carbon markets in Africa and the securitisation of carbon credits in the Global South.

Yusuf's academic record reflects sustained excellence. He graduated as the Overall Best Student at the Nigerian Law School with a First Class degree, earning the Council of Legal Education Star Prize. He also graduated with First Class Honours from the University of Ibadan, receiving multiple awards, including Best Graduating Male Student and Best Student in Public Law.

Many young lawyers focus heavily on grades and credentials. Looking back, what non-academic skills proved equally important in your career?

Networking, honestly. I was not naturally good at it and I had to learn it deliberately. In many cases, beyond being academically sound, people hire someone they have heard of, or someone another person vouched for. Related to that is putting yourself out there. I started writing and sharing my work on LinkedIn, and a good number of the opportunities I have had came from people who only knew me from there.

Were there periods of uncertainty that made you question some of your decisions or career direction? How did you navigate those moments?

Yes. We finished Law School in January and results only came out in July, so all through service I had no results, no job, and Covid had shut everything down. I started wondering whether all the reading had been worth it, and whether I had chosen the right profession. Then at Oxford, a promised scholarship fell through and I nearly lost the place, and I wondered whether I had reached too far. Both times I stayed, and I asked for help.

What do you wish you had understood earlier about building a meaningful and sustainable legal career?

That it is a marathon and not a sprint, which sounds like a cliché until you are the one running it. For a long time I thought the job was to keep proving myself. It changed how I choose to work. I stopped chasing whatever looks impressive quickly and started taking on the things that would make me better in five years. And I now guard my rest, my health and a few real friendships as seriously as I guard deadlines.

> **"I would have opened my mind to non-litigation practice much earlier."**

If a young lawyer reading this publication is trying to define their own path, what mindset would you encourage them to adopt?

Stop looking at where everybody else is. Somebody will always be ahead of you on paper and it really does not tell you much about where either of you will be in ten years. Find the thing you want to be known for and give it a few boring years. And be a decent human being while you are at it, because this Bar is small and people talk.

If you could go back to your first year after being called to the Bar, what is one decision you would make differently and why?

I would have opened my mind to non-litigation practice much earlier. Where I come from, being a lawyer means the courtroom, and nothing around me suggested otherwise. University reinforced it, with moots and mock trials at the centre of everything. I only met corporate practice properly at Law School, and even then it took a while to see how much of the work is finance, regulatory, transactions that never enter a courtroom. Try things first, before deciding what kind of lawyer you are.

The theme of this publication is "No Straight Line: 100 Lawyers, 100 Different Journeys." What moment in your life best illustrates that idea?

July 2020. I was at home, service almost over, no job, no plan, the country still under lockdown, when the Law School results came out and I had come first. Nothing about that felt like a straight line. The best thing that had happened to me arrived in the flattest season of my life. Most of the important turns since then have come the same way, out of nowhere and out of order.

Zaenab Olawunmi **Adams (A.K.A Yettydlaw)**



Zaenab Olawunmi Adams is popularly known as Yettydlaw. She is a lawyer and an entrepreneur whose work sits at the intersection of law, real estate, and public relations. Her professional journey reflects a deliberate blend of legal training and practical experience in public relations, marketing, and sales, which has shaped her strategic approach to legal practice and business advisory. She is also actively involved in legal communications and young lawyers' initiatives, where consistently contributes to advancing conversations around professional development, visibility, and innovation within the legal space.

She is the founder of Yettydlaw Properties, a real estate brand focused on providing legally informed guidance in property investment and advisory services. She is also the founder of Lawrified through which I consistently emphasizes the importance of legal due diligence, and law in our everyday life.

Your academic journey from a 2.96 CGPA at university to finishing in the top 17% at the Nigerian Law School reflects a powerful turnaround. What specific intellectual habits and study frameworks enabled that transformation?

Graduating in the top 17% in Nigerian Law School certainly took a lot of sacrifices from me. Back in the university, I barely attended classes and only read when tests/ exams were already at my doorstep. So going to law school, I decided to change that at the law school. I studied for a minimum of 6 hours daily. I made friends with people who were more academically sound than I was, so they pushed me beyond the limits I had set for myself. I was active in group discussions with my friends both online and offline. During the externship, I maximized the externship period to the fullest, burying myself in books, and I was lucky to have been posted to a good court and firm.

Why did you decide to start Yettydlaw Properties instead of working with a law firm as most people would have done

I had started Yettydlaw Properties since my 3rd year in the university, so it was imperative for me to continue in that line considering the fact that being a lawyer is an advancement in the career path I currently am on.

As the founder of Yettydlaw Properties, how do you integrate legal due diligence, regulatory compliance, and risk assessment into real estate investment advisory?

As the founder of Yettydlaw Properties and a legal practitioner, I approach real estate investment advisory from both a commercial and legal-risk perspective. My philosophy is simple: real estate should not only be profitable, but it must also be secure, compliant, and sustainable. I integrate legal due diligence by ensuring every property undergoes a detailed verification process before it is recommended to a client. Beyond documentation, we also examine the practical realities surrounding the asset to determine whether the investment is genuinely viable. Ultimately, our role is not simply to sell property but to guide clients into making informed, legally secure, and commercially sound investment decisions with confidence and peace of mind.

What gap in legal education or practice were you trying to address when you started Lawrified?

Founding Lawrified, I was trying to address the legal illiteracy predominant in our society of today and also help people understand that law affects their daily activities and actions. I believe legal innovation in Nigeria should focus on accessibility and trust; law should feel like a practical tool they can undoubtedly rely on to build and protect all that matters to them.

To what extent should lawyers embrace personal branding, and where should the line be drawn between professional ethics and public visibility?

Lawyers should embrace personal branding fully to build trust and credibility, enlightening the laymen without undermining the dignity, clients' confidentiality, or ethical obligations of legal practice. The line should be drawn when the personal branding tends to be in conflict with the laid-down professional ethics. In short, lawyers should brand boldly and credibly; however, lawyers should keep in mind to remain ethical and propagate the goodness of the legal profession.

> **"Lawyers should embrace personal branding fully to build trust and credibility, enlightening the laymen without undermining the dignity, clients' confidentiality, or ethical obligations of legal practice."**

In a profession that often rewards linear career paths, how have you navigated doubt, external expectations, and the risk of being "unconventional" while building your career?

Often times I have self-doubt and ask if I am doing the right thing, but what keeps me grounded is the fact that I am in close contact with friends and colleagues who are in the conventional line of practice, and I borrow a leaf or two from them. I am breaking out from the terrain of being known as just a property lawyer and also currently in the entertainment space gathering my certifications and also trying to branch into the cybertech space, as I hold two certifications in cybersecurity.

Having served in communications at your NLS Campus and NBA Young Lawyers Forum, how important is strategic communication to legal practice in the digital age?

From my experience in communications in both positions, which builds on the experiences I garnered as the 30th public relations officer of the Lagos State University Students' Union, I have come to learn that strategic communication is a lifeblood to legal practice in this modern age and also in the digital age of today. Legal information needs to be understood, contextualized, and duly communicated.

Your career reflects a blend of law, media, and real estate. How do you decide which skills to develop deeply versus those to maintain at a working proficiency?

My approach to skill development is guided by clarity of purpose and alignment with the direction I want my career to evolve into. I don't see my career as separate silos of law, media, and real estate; I see them as interconnected tools that serve a broader professional identity focused on legal practice, communication, and value creation in real estate advisory. When deciding what to develop deeply versus what to maintain at a working level, I first ask myself a simple question: Is this a core pillar of my long-term positioning, or is it a supporting competency that enhances my effectiveness in that pillar? On the other hand, skills like strategic communication, media engagement, and branding are also very important to my work; however, I approach them as enabling skills. Above all, my strategy is intentional depth over scattered expertise. I prefer to be deeply competent in a defined core while maintaining enough breadth in complementary skills to remain adaptable, relevant, and effective in a modern multidisciplinary environment.

Zinami **Iwariso**



Zinami Iwariso is a Corporate Legal Consultant, Compliance Professional, and Research Writer with experience providing remote legal, compliance, and research support to clients through online platforms. His areas of focus include corporate and commercial legal matters, regulatory compliance, legal research and writing, and paralegal support. With a strong track record on Upwork, Zinami has completed more than 20 projects and continues to build extensive experience working with clients across different jurisdictions.

Zinami is currently a PhD research candidate at Rivers State University, where his research focuses on the intersection of Technology and Law, reflecting his interest in how emerging technologies are shaping legal systems, regulation, and contemporary legal practice.

What did you initially imagine your career would look like, and how different is the path you are on today?

I imagined that I would become a serious litigator because, at the time, I primarily associated legal practice with the courtroom. However, about two years after my call to the Bar, I began to realize that the legal profession offers far more than courtroom advocacy. That realization opened me up to other areas of practice, particularly legal research, writing, regulatory compliance, and advisory work. Today, my career is gradually becoming more focused on these both locally and internationally.

You provide professional services through international platforms to clients outside Nigeria. How can other lawyers take advantage of this opportunity?

There are platforms where lawyers can offer services such as legal research, contract drafting and review, regulatory research, compliance support, legal content writing, document review, and administrative legal support. My advice would be to first learn how these platforms work. There is a great deal of free information available on YouTube and other learning platforms explaining how to create a professional profile, search for opportunities, submit proposals, communicate with international clients, and deliver projects remotely. Most importantly, develop a specific skill that clients are willing to pay for rather than simply presenting yourself as a lawyer.

How should lawyers go about learning these platforms?

Learn how the platform works, how clients search for professionals, how proposals are written, how profiles are ranked, and how successful professionals position their services. YouTube is a very useful starting point, alongside blogs, courses, platform guides, and even studying the profiles of people who are already doing well in your area. Then you have to actually start using the platform. There is only so much you can learn theoretically. A significant part of the learning comes from applying, observing what works, improving your profile and proposals, and remaining consistent.

Which platforms have been most useful in accessing international clients, and what have you learnt about positioning yourself effectively on those platforms?

The platforms that have been most useful to me so far are Upwork, Hubstaff Talent, and LinkedIn. One major lesson I have learnt is that positioning matters a lot. Simply stating that you are a lawyer is usually not enough. Clients want to understand exactly what problem you can solve for them. For example, instead of presenting yourself only as a lawyer, you might position yourself around specific services such as legal research, regulatory compliance, contract review, legal content writing, or document review. Your profile, skills, experience, proposals, and portfolio should all communicate that value clearly. I have also learnt that credibility takes time to build, so consistency and continuous improvement are very important.

“...There is only so much you can learn theoretically. A significant part of the learning comes from applying, observing what works, improving your profile and proposals, and remaining consistent.”

For a young lawyer who wants to earn from international clients, what practical steps would you recommend they take in their first 12 months?

First, learn workplace tools such as Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Google Workspace, videoconferencing tools, collaboration platforms, and AI tools. Secondly, identify one or two areas of legal practice that genuinely interest you and develop deeper expertise in them. Thirdly, invest in professional training and certifications where possible. Platforms such as Coursera and LinkedIn Learning provide access to courses in areas ranging from compliance and technology to project management and business skills. Finally, start applying what you learn. Build sample projects, improve your LinkedIn profile, create profiles on relevant platforms, network, apply for opportunities, and continue improving based on feedback.

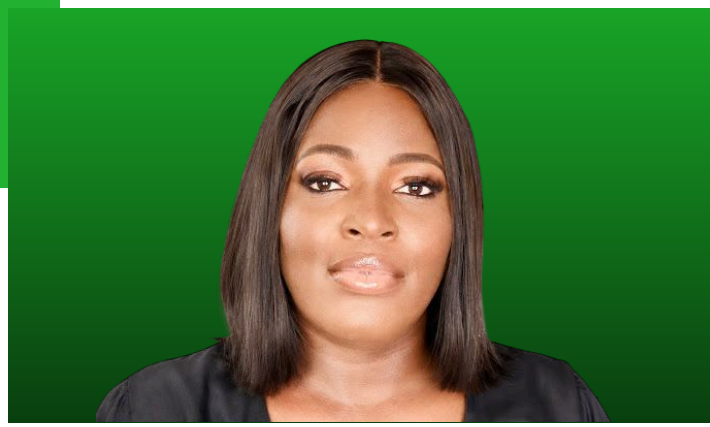
What should a young lawyer start learning about AI today if they want to remain commercially relevant over the next decade?

I would start with AI-assisted legal research and prompt engineering, but I would not stop there. Young lawyers should understand how to communicate effectively with AI systems, structure good prompts, verify AI-generated information, protect confidential client information, and recognise the limitations of the technology. Most importantly, they should develop the mindset that AI is a tool rather than a substitute for legal knowledge. The lawyer who understands both the law and how to use technology intelligently will be much better positioned commercially over the next decade.

What are the biggest mistakes lawyers make when trying to position themselves for international opportunities?

One major mistake is accepting assignments they do not yet have the competence to handle simply because they want to secure an international client. That can damage your reputation very quickly. Another mistake is being legally knowledgeable but not sufficiently equipped with the digital skills required in a modern workplace. There is also the mistake of trying to offer everything. I think lawyers have a better chance when they understand their strengths, develop a clear area of expertise, and position themselves around the particular problems they can solve.

Buki **Ogunsakin**



Buki Ogunsakin, is the Principal and Head Satoshi (Thinker) at BBO Solicitors. She is focused, creative, extremely professional, and value-driven with highest standards of integrity.

Buki is a skilled and seasoned strategy and project management professional, with legal knowledge in the new emerging areas of law [and has taken on advising clients from business start-ups to entrepreneurs, enterprises, and multi-national companies].

She is a member of the Nigerian Bar Association, and the International Association of Privacy Professionals.

You are known today as a blockchain and emerging-tech lawyer, but that field barely existed when you qualified. How do you explain your work and its connection to the traditional legal framework for those interested in this space?

I tell people: I simply followed where the law was going. In the earlier days, when I said I was an Emerging Technologies lawyer, people thought it meant a lawyer just emerging. They couldn't comprehend that there was a new practice area called 'Emerging Technologies.' I am always excited when I see other lawyers now add Emerging Tech to their profile. My work is about building bridges. Traditional legal frameworks still apply. Contract law, Tort law, Property law and more still apply. The question is: how do these frameworks apply to systems that did not exist when they were written? That is my job. Not to abandon the old. To translate it for the new.

Working at the intersection of AI, blockchain, and chips policy means operating in areas where the law is still being formed. How do you advise clients when there are no clear rules to rely on?

I do not wait for the rules or regulation to be written as stated earlier. I ask: "What is the traditional principle behind the rule that will eventually be written?" Then I advise clients based on that principle. If a regulator has not yet spoken, I look at what regulators in other jurisdictions are doing. I look at policy papers. I look at enforcement actions. I look at what the global industry itself is adopting as best practice. I do not guess. I triangulate, and I document everything. Every assumption. Every risk. Every recommendation. When the rules eventually come, my clients will not be caught off guard. They are already aligned.

Being early to a new field often means working without established colleagues or certainty. How did you handle that season, and what did those early years teach you?

It was very lonely (and still is sometimes). I will not pretend otherwise. I read everything I could. Countless hours online and offline researching. I connected with people in other jurisdictions who were doing similar work. I built a network outside Nigeria before I built one inside. There are days when the few of us in the industry have to give ourselves pep talks. As I said previously, when I questioned if I was building something real or just chasing a trend, I further dug my heels in the sand; through prayer, work, education, and strategy. I just kept showing up, and I will continue to do so. The early years in the industry taught me:
(i) Being early is not comfortable. But it is valuable;
(ii) Certainty is overrated. Curiosity is more important; and
(iii) You do not need a crowd to validate your path. You need conviction.

What is the one lesson from your journey you would most want a future reader to take away?

> **...There is only so much you can learn theoretically. A significant part of the learning comes from applying, observing what works, improving your profile and proposals, and remaining consistent.**

You do not have to choose between being a lawyer and being a builder. I used to think I had to pick: traditional practice or something else. Law or tech. Stability or adventure. That is a false narrative. You can be a lawyer and build something new. You can uphold the law and help create the rules for the future.

You moved into blockchain, crypto, and NFT law when very few lawyers in Nigeria were paying attention to the field. What did you see in the space that signaled it was time to commit?

I spent a lot of time researching and asking God for direction. As I shared at the NBA Lagos Conference earlier this week, what helped frame my thinking was Amara's Law, which states: "We tend to overestimate the effect of a technology in the short run and underestimate the effect in the long run." It took the internet 10 years from commercialisation in 1993 to become truly economically transformative (early 2000s). During those 10 years, thousands of dot-com companies burned billions and failed. Then from 2005–2015, it reshaped virtually every industry on earth, faster than almost anyone predicted in 1999 birthing the Amazons', YouTube, WhatsApp, Tiktok, Meta/Instagrams' of this world. When I discovered Web3, I saw founders building without legal foundations and speaking about new areas of tech that did not need lawyers. I saw tokenization projects with no custody framework. I saw founders raising millions with no legal wrapper. The technology was moving faster than the law, and some of us needed to bridge that gap. I also knew that the long-term effect would be underestimated as stated by Amara. We are seeing that happen. In the short term, NFTs reigned, some tokens reigned but many fell by the wayside. However, the underlying use cases like tokenization, blockchain technology, autonomous AI, quantum computing and more will end up being the long-term winners. No one knows exactly how this will play out in 10 years, but I am convinced it will transform the world as we know it. It was all fascinating to me. I had to commit.

What advice do you have for lawyers who want to build their own practice?

My advice for lawyers who want to build their own practice: (i) Always start with a problem, not a title; (ii) Seek to be valuable and not to be famous. Show up. Answer questions. Share insights. Build trust; (iii) Learn the technology. You do not need to code. But you need to understand enough to ask the right questions; (iv) Build a network outside your geography. The best mentors and collaborators may not be in your geographical location. Find them; (v) Embrace the uncertainty. If you need clear rules and established precedents, emerging tech is not for you. If you are comfortable building as you go, welcome.

Femi **Gbede**



Femi Gbede is a Partner at GAB Sterling LLP in New York and a Director and Co-Founder of the Africa Arbitration Academy. He began his legal career at Olaniwun Ajayi LP, one of Africa's leading law firms, where he gained extensive experience in corporate transactions and dispute resolution. He has worked at a top multinational bank in New York and at prestigious global law firms including Fried Frank LLP and Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP, advising major clients such as Goldman Sachs, KKR, Blackstone, Brookfield, Permira, Genstar Capital, HPS and PSP Investments. He was also a Senior Investment Funds Consultant at A&O Shearman and has collaborated with Sidley Austin LLP on matters involving African clients. He serves as a Patron of the Justice Udo Udoma Chambers at the University of Uyo, Nigeria.

Femi holds a law degree from New York University School of Law, where he was an Arthur Vanderbilt Scholar, a Graduate Editor of the Journal of International Law and Politics and a student leader at the Students' Bar Association. He is a Weinfeld Fellow at NYU and an alumnus of the University of Cambridge, where he also served in student leadership.

> **Technical skills gets you in the room, it won't be what sets you apart anymore. The lawyers who really stand out will be the ones who adapt quickly, read people well, understand business beyond just the legal angle, and can explain something complicated without losing the room.**

What is one orthodox practice in Nigerian legal practice that you believe young lawyers should challenge or rethink?

Honestly, the one thing I'd push back on is this idea that seniority alone earns you the final word. Experience matters, I'm not knocking that. But some of the best ideas I've seen in practice came from junior colleagues who simply asked "why do we still do it this way?" The profession grows when people are free to think independently and bring something new to the table, regardless of how many years they've put in.

If you had the power to redesign legal education in Nigeria from scratch, what would you remove, what would you retain, and what would you add?

I'd keep the rigor, that discipline of thinking carefully through a problem is something law school actually does well. What I'd cut down is the obsession with memorising cases and statutes word for word. And I'd add a lot more practical training, negotiation, drafting, how to actually run a client relationship, some exposure to business and tech too. Lawyers don't operate in a bubble anymore, and our training should stop pretending they do.

In an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, automation, and alternative legal service providers, what aspects of legal practice do you believe will remain distinctly human?

I'd say judgment, empathy and the kind of trust that makes someone pick up the phone and call you, not just send an email. People usually come to lawyers when something's gone wrong, or something big is on the line, and at that point they're not only looking for the correct legal answer. They want someone who understands what's actually at stake for them. AI can process information faster than any of us. It can't sit with someone in that moment.

Young lawyers frequently hear that they must "pay their dues." In your view, where is the line between necessary sacrifice and unhealthy exploitation within the profession?

Every profession asks something of you, long hours, hard assignments, the grind of learning on the job. That's normal, and honestly, it's how you grow. Where it goes wrong is when "paying your dues" becomes an excuse to treat young lawyers badly, deny them real opportunities, or strip away their dignity. Hard work should leave you sharper and more capable. It shouldn't just leave you tired and undervalued with nothing to show for it.

Beyond technical competence, what qualities do you believe will distinguish the next generation of exceptional Nigerian lawyers from merely competent ones?

Technical skill gets you in the room, it won't be what sets you apart anymore. The lawyers who really stand out will be the ones who adapt quickly, read people well, understand business beyond just the legal angle, and can explain something complicated without losing the room. They'll use technology instead of being threatened by it. And honestly, they'll just stay curious. This profession is moving fast, and curiosity is what keeps you relevant.

When future generations look back at your contribution to the legal profession, what legacy would you hope they associate with the name Femi Gbede?

I'd like to be remembered as someone who made room for others, not just someone who did well for himself. If younger lawyers look at my path and think "okay, that's possible, I can build something like that too," that would mean more to me than any title. Excellence, integrity, mentorship, and proof that you can stay grounded while still being genuinely ambitious, that's the combination I'd want attached to my name.

Many young lawyers today struggle between pursuing passion and pursuing financial security. Did you ever face that dilemma, and how did you navigate it?

I didn't really wrestle with that one, if I'm being honest. I started out at one of Nigeria's elite firms, and even as a junior lawyer I was earning what many senior lawyers elsewhere made, partly in dollars too, which wasn't common back then. So security came early for me. What I had to learn instead was not to coast on that. I had to keep building competence and treat that early advantage as something to grow from, not relax into.

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