



# The Thrive Guide

A Trailblazer's Toolkit for Career  
Ignition and Progression

# Editor's Note



There is almost no Nigerian who has not heard of the “Mammy Market,” a staple inside or near every Nigerian military barracks and National Youth Service Corps camp. This market plays a significant role as a social and economic center for military personnel and their families, yet, only a few know that the name of the market can be credited to its founder, savvy entrepreneur and business woman, Mammy Maria Ochefu.

Stella James Thomas. It is unlikely that the name rings a bell, yet she received a law degree from Oxford University and in 1943, became the first woman magistrate in Nigeria. A name like that should be general knowledge to both young and old alike.

Oftentimes, the success stories of women go untold or, at best, ‘under-told’. Now, that story is changing, and we at Olaniwun Ajayi LP are happy to be contributing to the plot.

For International Women’s Day 2024, themed #InspireInclusion, our Firm is celebrating the vibrant, brilliant and trendsetting #WomenOfOA with the launch of this “Thrive Guide” knowing fully well that their stories of courage, doggedness, and success will be an inspiration to female professionals across the globe who aspire to be included in history alongside the greats- known and unknown.

With this Guide, we hope to correct the narrative that success is a novelty when it comes to women by showcasing stories that prove that women are in fact wired for success and have all it takes to excel in any field of their choosing. And who is better suited to tell our story than we, the women who do it all?

We implore you to turn the pages and take this rare opportunity to hear from our amazing women who have given us invaluable insight into their odd-defying journey to the pinnacles of career success. There are stories for every phase. Whether you’re still walking the worn grounds of a university, putting together your resumé to take on the workforce, working your way up the corporate ladder in stilettos, or already established in your field of choice, you will find these stories to be as inspiring as they are insightful. You will find these stories to be your story.

It is my hope that by reading through Anastasia, Ikanna, Omotayo, Halimat, Demilade, Toyin, Abiola, Chinenye, Fikayo, Tewogbade, Toyosi, Yewande, Tosin, Anu, Ibi, Busola, Ogechi, Abi, Ganiyat, Hibbatun and Ife's experiences, you glean useful nuggets to help you thrive and become the woman of your dreams.

**Happy International Women’s Day!**

*Yimika Phillips*

Partner, Olaniwun Ajayi LP

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- Ikanna Okim
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- Toyosi Alabi,
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- Ifeoluwa Omisope





CHAPTER ONE:  
EXCELLING AS A  
LAW STUDENT

# Meet Our Contributors

## Anastasia Nwoye

Anastasia currently practices as an Associate in the Tax Business Unit of the Firm. Having worked across the Firm's Oil and Gas and Dispute Resolution Business Units, she continually brings to bear her experience in advising on market-defining transactions in both the energy and dispute resolution space.



## Ikanna Okim

Ikanna is an Associate at Olaniwun Ajayi LP where she routinely advises on mergers, acquisitions and private equity investments. She is an icon of academic excellence and pacesetter having graduated Summa cum Laude from both the University of Uyo and the Nigerian Law School, breaking a 36-year academic record at the university.



## Omotayo Dada

After her call to the Nigerian Bar in 2022, Omotayo joined OlaniwunAjayi LP as an NYSC Associate. Thereafter, she transitioned to the role of an Associate in the Firm. She works with the Government Business and Policy Making Unit of the Firm. In the unit, she routinely advises a diverse range of clients, including government agencies, prominent corporations, and esteemed international organisations.



# 01

**While an undergraduate in school, what were the factors that propelled you to stand out amongst your peers?**



I knew first-hand the perks that came with being academically outstanding. Also, knowing that I rarely had the luxury of second chances made me unapologetic and undaunted in my quest for knowledge and answers.



I did not intentionally seek to stand out amongst my peers. I only sought to do my very best, give my all and be better than I was yesterday. I believe that in a quest to outdo your own best, standing out amongst other people happens by the way. It is a natural reward for excellence. Therefore, my major propellant was a desire to outdo myself and break my own records.



As an undergraduate law student at the University of Ilorin, I stood out on some days and blended in on other days. The main factor that motivated me to do well in school was the feeling of pride and satisfaction I had when I did well. My academic performance also always made my parents proud too.

# 02 How were you able to efficiently excel in your studies given the workload structure/pressure of Law School?



To excel in any undertaking, one must first strive to win over the mind. Once you are armed with the knowledge that Law School is ‘doable’ (we would have fewer legal practitioners if it were otherwise), everything falls into place because you know that any challenge you face is simply part of the process and not peculiar to you.



This boils down to effective time management. I discovered very early that time is priceless and time management makes the difference between success and failure. Procrastination and indulging in general time-wasting habits cost more than we think they do.



The short answer to this is “God helped me, I prayed, and I worked hard”. I will elaborate. Before proceeding to the law school, I had a strong feeling that I was going to do well. The conviction was strong. I knew whatever grade I desired was attainable if God helped me. I prayed about every single aspect of my Law School journey.

The second reason why I was able to excel at the law school can be broken into these bits:



## 03

## Did you develop relationships with your professors and lecturers in school, and if you did, how were you able to establish such and what strategies have you deployed to sustain those relationships after graduation?



I must state that I did not actively seek to establish any sort of relationship with my lecturers beyond the student-lecturer dynamic. Any connection or relationship that I had formed with them began within the lecture halls. I became known for detaining the class with my post-lecture questions (lol). Additionally, my research skills and writing style were recognized at some point, earning me a rewarding position with a senior lecturer in my school. My preference, which you may call a strategy, has always been to leave a lasting impression rather than merely making a first one. This approach fosters an understanding that enables both parties feel welcome to initiate further contact in the future.



It was easy to notice me in class because I participated actively. I was known generally by my lecturers, but I did not develop relationships with many of them until I got to work with them on executing student programs. These relationships were established in my capacity as a student leader, and I enjoyed the attendant mentorship which came with such familiarity.

In sustaining those relationships, I offered to assist with research and even co-authored some legal articles with two of them. I believe that in assisting your professors or superiors generally, the ultimate beneficiary is yourself. You get the rare opportunity to learn at a very high level and you are exposed to advanced processes.

My advice is to genuinely seek opportunities to learn from your professors in every way possible. It improves your personality as well. What is said about dining with kings again? Yes, that is it.



During my undergraduate days I did not have much of a relationship with my lecturers. The faculty of law, Uni-Ilorin had brilliant lecturers, but I never felt a need to develop relationships with my lecturers.

## 04

## How significant was the impact of networking and cultivating relationships with professors and peers on your academic achievements as an undergraduate and during law school?



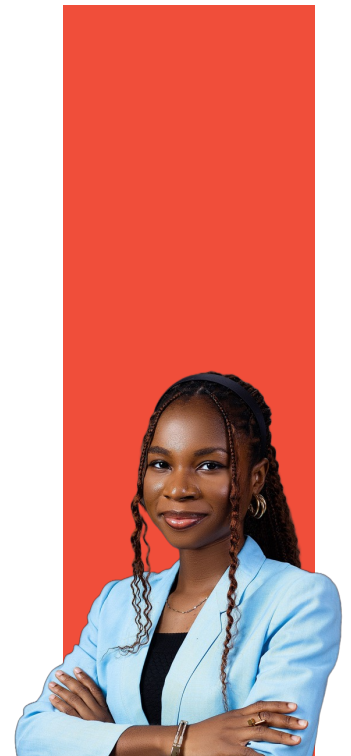
It was only Adam of old who took his first steps without previewing the Garden of Eden. But even then, he had God's directives. Having friends, seniors, lecturers or professors you could talk to, was a blessing. They were my 'bare your troubles, find your strength' combo recipe for dealing with academic pressure. Nothing gives comfort than knowing that there are people who faced similar circumstances and overcame them, and that you are not alone on your journey.

As a Law undergraduate, I was actively involved in other endeavours outside my study of the law, so I had ample opportunity to network with peers, even from other schools, as well as professors in my school. While I acknowledge that this impacted my social skills more directly than it did my academics, I believe that it made me a faster learner.

Networking horizontally and upwards exposed me to more conversations than a regular law student in Nigeria. Through horizontal networking, I got wind of extra-curricular courses on ADR and corporate law which broadened my knowledge base on these topics. Having discussions with my professors boosted my understanding of legal concepts and prompted me to read more, work harder and generally amass more knowledge.

I recall an instance where I had a conversation on international law principles with my long essay supervisor and used my learnings from that discussion in my International Law test. Long story short, I emerged as the International Law prize winner. It is important for us to see that the rewards of knowledge may not be immediately visible. They have effects which stand the test of time.

In law school, I also belonged to a group of students who would study for hours (usually minimum of 6 hours) every Saturday. I practiced drafts with them, revised with them and solved past questions with them. Five of us made first class grades and it was not a surprise because we were almost always together. You should ensure that you are not the only smart person amongst your friends. Instead of being unnecessarily competitive, seek to learn from your peers and be glad to teach them what you know too. Iron still sharpens iron today.



I believe I felt a significant impact of networking and relationship during Law School. Lecturers in my law school campus were very brilliant and easy to relate with. My group had a mentor whom I always reached out to, to ask questions. Having the access to asking my lecturers questions helped me get clarity on areas I was confused about during my study. Other lecturers were also kind too. I still call and text some of my lecturers till today. I am currently a volunteer in a research centre led by one of my lecturers from law school.

One of the things I am most grateful for in my law school journey is the kind of people I had around. I had great friends, I had brilliant roommates, great group members. I externed with wonderful people too. I always say that a good part of what I learnt at the Law School was from my interaction with these people. Both formal and informal discussions with them helped me retain information better. I was motivated by how brilliant they were, and I wanted to be as good.

## 05

## What are the defining experiences you had as an undergraduate or Law School that shaped your view about the legal profession?



I had always embraced any opportunity to argue either for or against a position, and our student Bar activities provided a good platform. It afforded me the exciting taste of courtroom victory, which could only have been a testament to persuasive advocacy, critical thinking, and hours of research and preparation. I also embraced the opportunity to handle real-life issues as a clinician in the law school. Once, I challenged myself to embark on an internship program in a reputable legal environment. That singular experience opened my eyes to the level of analytical reasoning and mental energy involved in the day-to-day tasks of lawyers. A singular or seemingly small mistake could greatly impact your client's business. It was scintillating as it was shocking. These experiences have solidified my perception of the legal profession as one that reinforces values, builds capacity, and challenges norms.



Honestly, I had no strong motivation to study law before taking the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) examinations. I only filled "Law" in the form as a choice course because I thought I was intelligent and that is what intelligent people from Arts and Humanities class in secondary school instinctually opted for.

However, my view changed when I began to explore my legal analytic mind through a course called "Legal Methods" which we usually referred to as "baby Jurisprudence" in year one. From taking that course and beginning to know what Law really is, I was settled that this is what I wanted to do.

Learning about old legal philosophers, reading old English and Nigerian case law, I saw the nobility of the profession and desired to be a part of that. Moving forward, I began to develop interest in it and the rest, they say, is history.



What I would tag a defining moment did not happen in my undergraduate days as a law student. It happened in one of the classes I took as an English student. Brief background, immediately after secondary school I gained admission to study English education in the University of Ilorin. A year after, I wrote another JAMB exam and got in to study law.

I was in one of the classes taught by the lecturers in the faculty of education. I recall feeling out of place throughout my year first year in the university. I knew it was not for me and I could not wait to take another jamb and be where I should be.

I recall just being generally fascinated and intrigued by many of the things that were taught when I joined the faculty. I felt like I was where I ought to be. I enjoyed constitutional classes and looked forward to them.

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## 06

## How have the extracurricular activities you participated in as a student impacted your growth and reach in your career?

Three superpowers – multitasking, speed, and self-leadership. These attributes are some of the gains of being able to be part of impactful activities, whilst striving hard to get excellent grades. Today, I believe I am great at safe multitasking because I am used to it. As a lawyer in Olaniwun Ajayi LP, a Firm where you must bring your best game on every day, I still am able to sit on advisory boards, lead an organisation of 600+ people, take extra courses, execute social impact projects, write, play instruments and so on. I believe that versatility is a genius' major makeup, and I am glad to see the woman I am becoming. I used the present continuous tense because although I am thought fit to contribute to a project like this #ThriveGuide, I am not there yet.

In addition to speed, I mentioned self-leadership. Leading anyone or anything else is rooted first in leading oneself. How can one give what they do not have? That push you give yourself to prepare for a moot and mock competition after a long day's academic work would teach you how to show up on days when you are tired and justifiably cannot do anything else. Self-leadership is important for discipline and the rewards therefrom. I think this is something I learnt as a student who participated in many extracurricular activities.



The extracurricular activities I participated in have blessed me with some great interpersonal skills, including knowing when to be firm in my decision-making, when to improvise, and when to simply let go. They have gifted me with camaraderie, the benefit of foreknowledge of certain knotty issues, and the mindset that every problem has a solution, even if not immediately apparent. These soft skills make navigating life and my legal career much easier.

In the university, I was an active member of several value-adding groups. I was a member of the intellectual property club and the human rights chamber. I always loved and enjoyed the sensitization programs held for secondary school students. At the Law School I was the head of the SDG Clinic, the law clinic also had sensitization programs for members of the community and secondary school students. These extracurricular activities have helped me identify what I am passionate about – education of students. After the Law School and even up till now, this interest has spurred me to have and organise several initiatives for students in my community to encourage and motivate them to excel in their careers. These initiatives have left me very happy and fulfilled. I have also sought to source for funds from individuals and organisations, so lack of resources will not hinder them from learning.

My role as an associate in the government and policy making unit of the Firm has afforded me the opportunity to meet ministers, commissioners, head of government agencies and several other parastatals in the country. It has also given me sort of an insider view of what working with government is like. For someone that intends to work with the government later in her career, the experience I have had is priceless.

Another aspect of the work that intrigues me is the fact that rules, laws, or policies that we draft contributes to shaping the legal and regulatory framework in Nigeria. The skillset and knowledge I have gained from working in Olaniwun Ajayi has proved useful in several areas even beyond my work at the firm.

## 07

## What tips and tricks did you discover were useful in achieving a distinctive academic grade, and what strategies would enhance a student's probabilities of securing a First Class degree?



My tips? They are quite simple: **God, routine and discipline**, in that order. For the tricks, that was easy as well. I understood what worked for me which was note-making and active class participation and stuck with those. To sum it up, all I had to do was commit my law school journey to God, then work with Him as we navigated through its murky waters. I assure you, there were indeed some murky waters. I also mapped out a reading-and-note-making routine. It took every ounce of discipline to follow my reading routine to the letter and I incentivised myself with some 'feel-good' weekend goodies for being such a good girl (lol). Also, I actively participated in class and to the extent possible, solved each course task before lectures.

Whilst I do not regard active participation, repetition or even having a routine as tricks I discovered, as they are the norm, they were my tools for achieving academic excellence.



I discovered that almost every student will understand legal principles if the lecturer does his/her job well. However, what tells a distinction student apart from an average student is presentation of legal knowledge. Make your script an interesting and memorable script, of course within the precincts of what is acceptable.

Do a good introduction. Use your IRAC rule comprehensively. This means that you should first identify the legal issue, recall what the law says about it, apply the law to the scenario/question and proceed to conclude.

Read intensively from the beginning of the semester as if the exams would hold the following day, and try to get ample rest during examinations period. That's how to win in school and life generally - **prepare**. Writing exams with a relaxed and well-rested mind is crucial, especially in law school where you have too many things to assimilate over a short period of time.

Additionally, especially if you are just starting your legal studies (first or sophomore year), endeavour to set good records for yourself. If you start school by making excellent grades in year one, no matter how challenging subsequent years are, you must have already developed some level of confidence in yourself which will help you tackle challenges. Your records give you assurance in your abilities and boost your morale to outperform yourself.

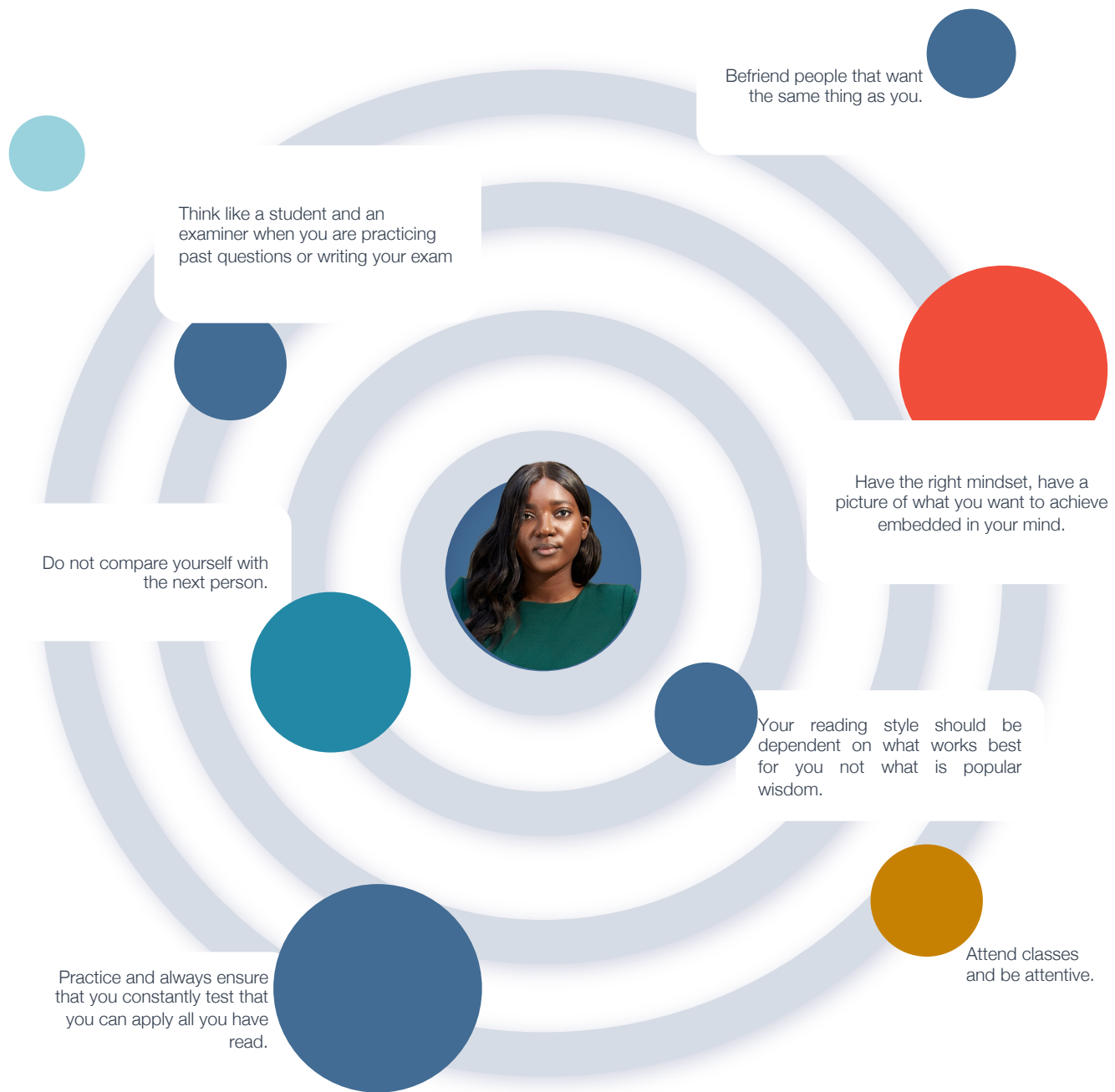
In conclusion, surround yourself with the right people. If you are friends with five unserious persons, the number will soon become six because you will join them. **Protect your circle**. Sieve it, purge it, prune it, ensure that only people with the right mindset can influence you.



First thing I would advise which may not qualify as a tip or trick is to *pray*.

Pray that you get the best out of the Law School. The truth is that a student could engage all the tips and tricks mentioned by students that have had the best result from the law school, but that does not guarantee success. Pray that the grace of God will be sufficient for you to achieve your goal.

That said, I would set out some tips that I think would be useful.



## 08

## What are the errors you made as an undergraduate that had an impact on your academic achievements? How could they have been avoided?



**Procrastination** was a thief of my time, that I fought for years. I found myself always making silly excuses and delaying my school tasks until the last minute. As a result, I often submitted rushed assignments or suffered through night classes in order to prepare for quizzes and tests. There were also fearful tales of certain courses nobody dared to cinch an 'A', courses that I could have given serious consideration to by developing a unique assimilation strategy but which I neglected. Trust me when I say I could have avoided some of these errors if I had practiced self-discipline early enough.



I made one major error. The error of having 'favourite' courses based on a litany of reasons including whether I liked the lecturer or not, even the time of the day they were taught. I hated afternoon classes. However, the impact on my academics was not severe because I still had good grades and still made a first class from undergraduate school

However, if I had given myself to all courses, whether I liked the course or not, I probably would have won more awards and had an even better cumulative grade point average.

I encourage people not to have favourite courses just yet. In law school, this may even cost you more because of the way the grading system is structured.



I think one error I made as an undergraduate was that I did not aim for the best. I was content with "good enough". This was a mistake I vowed never to repeat again. For some reason, I did not think I could get a first class from the university. Looking back now, I wonder why I put such a limit on myself. It was so bad that every time my Mum prayed for me that I would graduate with a first class, I always told her not to bother, all I wanted was a CGPA above 4.0.

The other mistake I made as an undergraduate was that I did not participate in enough extracurricular activities. I wish I participated in more extracurricular activities. It would have been very useful to hone my soft skills. Even when I had the opportunity to hold leadership position in some clubs in the university, I turned it down. I always thought that being actively engaged in extracurricular activities would be difficult to balance with my academics. Proper time management would have allowed me to enjoy the best of both worlds.



## CHAPTER TWO: SECURING A REWARDING CONTRACT

# Meet Our Contributors

## Halimat Busari

Halimat is an IFLR-recognised Associate working primarily with the Oil and Gas Practice of Olaniwun Ajayi LP. She has been with the Firm for almost 3 years and has worked on several landmark finance, M&A and energy transactions.



## Demilade Adedeji

Demilade is an Associate in the Dispute Resolution Practice (DRP). With a focus on resolving legal disputes, she has gained a wealth of experience in her role, demonstrating a keen understanding of the complexities of dispute resolution processes.



## Toyin Ihinmikalu

Toyin is a motivated and astute Associate in the Dispute Resolution Business Unit of the Firm where she handles litigation and international commercial arbitration cases and advises clients on legal strategy. She has appeared before superior courts in Nigeria including the Supreme Court.



## 01

**What would you consider to be the top 3 qualities or skills that Tier 1 law firms in emerging markets look for in candidates, and could you provide insight into how candidates can best present these qualities during the job application process?**

I would say **innovation, confidence, and speed**. Of course you are smart, brilliant, etc – those are already expected. But what separates you from a pool of applicants of similar standing? I think these 3 items will be particularly useful for applicants at the interview stage. You want to show that you are eloquent, quick on your feet and able to defend your positions.



The top qualities or skills that I believe tier 1 law firms look for in candidates are: **strong legal knowledge, determination, and a willingness to learn**.

Candidates should highlight their academic achievements in their applications, prepare for the written tests, and read up on recent transactions and cases handled by the firm they are applying to. It is also important to show a determination to be a lawyer. Firms are more likely to hire candidates that can truly represent their desire to practice law and show long-term commitment to a legal career. These firms understand that entry-level applicants do not know everything; a candidate who is open to learning and willing to be mentored/taught about the firm's practice areas is more likely to get a place than a candidate who pretends to know everything.

To me, Tier 1 law firms in emerging markets often prioritize the following qualities or skills in candidates: **legal expertise, cultural fit, and communication**. To best present these qualities during the job application process, I recommend tailoring your resume and cover letter to fit, preparing well for interviews, demonstrating a cultural fit for the firm and showcasing a commitment to ongoing learning and development.

- Innovation
- Confidence
- Speed
- Legal Expertise
- Cultural fit
- Communication
- Strong Legal Knowledge
- Determination
- Willingness to learn

## 02

How can a law graduate prepare for an interview with a tier-one law firm in an emerging market like Africa? Give 2 strategies that helped you succeed.



Play to your strengths. Two strategies that were useful for me were: (a) speaking with alumni of prospective tier 1 firms for information; and (b) gathering information from the firms' website and social media to get a glimpse of activities the firms are into.



Before the interview, thoroughly research the tier-one law firm and the legal market in Africa. This includes understanding the firm's practice areas, notable cases, and recent developments in the legal industry. Emphasize your transferable skills and experiences that align with the firm's requirements. This could include legal research, writing, negotiation, and communication skills gained through internships, moot court competitions, or legal clinics.



A law graduate can apply for internships and research the practice areas of the partners at the firm.

If a graduate knows who would constitute the interview panel, it is advisable to research the practice areas of the interviewers especially announcements on deals, transactions, or cases relating to their practice areas which the firm has been involved in. If the identity of the interviewing panel is not revealed prior to the interview, the graduate should still research the practice areas, partners, and recent deals, transactions, and cases handled by the firm. The graduate may also intern at the firm she intends to apply to understand the culture of the firm and make meaningful connections with the associates and partners.

## 03

## What are common mistakes that applicants make during an interview and how can these be prevented?



I think a lack of professionalism, especially in speech, is a common shortcoming. You should learn to address people in a professional setting, avoid noisy backgrounds and other distractions, and respect timeslots allocated to you.

Common mistakes that applicants make during an interview include:

- applicants may not adequately research the company or job role, leading to generic or irrelevant responses;
- applicants may struggle to articulate their experiences, making it difficult for interviewers to assess their suitability for the role;
- applicants may fail to ask questions about the company, role, or interview process, which can suggest a lack of interest or preparation; and
- applicants may exhibit poor body language, such as slouching, avoiding eye contact, or fidgeting, which can convey nervousness or disinterest.



A common mistake applicants make at interviews is to rush into answering the question. If the question is not clear, it is okay to ask for clarification to ensure that the right question is being answered. If the question is clear, it is still advisable for the applicant to take a moment to gather thoughts and formulate a coherent response before answering.

Another common mistake is reciting answers that have been crammed in response to commonly asked questions. While it is good to prepare responses to frequently asked questions, such responses should be a guide, not a rigid answer to be delivered. An interview is a conversation meant to show the applicant's suitability for the role to the firm and the firm's suitability for the applicant's professional development and career growth; *remember an interview is a two-way street!*



## 04

**Kindly share a mentor-given piece of advice that has contributed to your career excellence.**

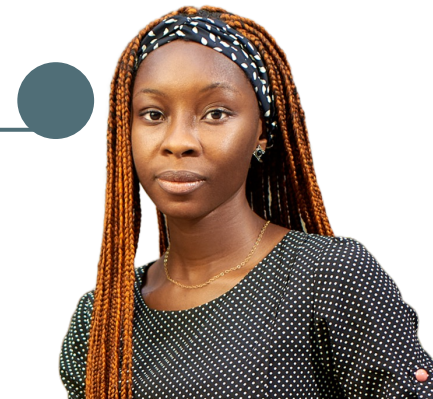
MEN  
TOR  
SHIP

Though I'd say I do not particularly have a mentor; I have been told by some successful women to prioritize advancing my skillset and being steadfast. It sounds simple, but applying this to my professional life has yielded fruitful results for me.



AND  
ADV  
ICE

Always ensure you are adding value to the organization you are a part of, and make sure your growth is marked by more than financial success.



## 05

**Do you think an individual can capture the interest of a tier 1 law firm and secure a job offer without formally applying? If so, what distinguishing factors or actions could set such an individual apart right from their undergraduate days?**



I am confident this is possible. Many people are referred for tier 1 jobs through their activities on social media, or even contacted directly by these firms because they have recorded landmark achievements. On a practical note, for undergraduates, I would say internships, publishing articles, relevant extracurricular activities may also be most useful.

Yes, it's possible for an individual to capture the interest of a tier 1 law firm and secure a job offer without formally applying. Distinguishing factors or actions that could set such an individual apart include exceptional academic performance, relevant internships and experience, networking.

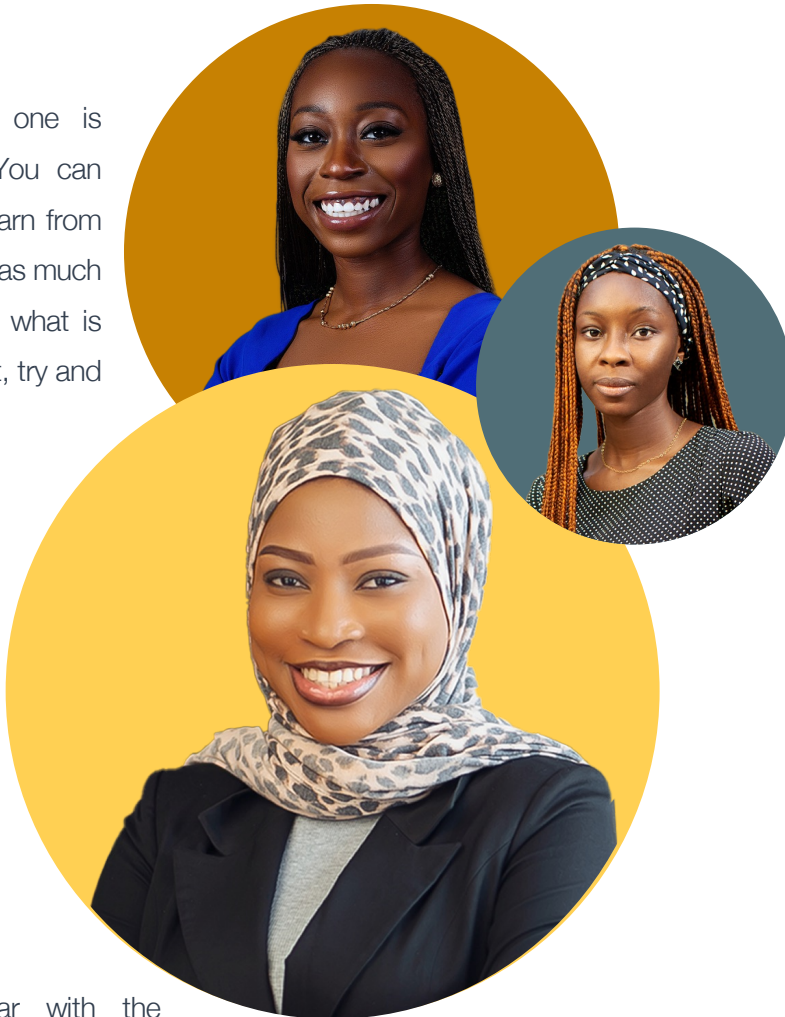


A formal application is always advisable. Even if an individual captures the interest of a tier 1 law firm outside the application process, it is still important to send in an application. Some ways an individual can set herself apart from her peers include: (i) interning in the legal field, particularly in law firms or chambers, (ii) taking part in competitions including legal essay competitions and moot court competitions especially those organized or sponsored by tier 1 law firms, (iii) writing articles for student-run publications on legal issues, and (iv) getting involved in leadership positions in student clubs and societies.

# 06

## In your experience, what are the key things to watch out for and learn during the internship or probationary phase before one is retained with a firm?

During those years, one is considered “green”. You can make mistakes and learn from it. So, I will say take in as much as possible and learn what is taught. Aside from that, try and network, high and low.



Becoming familiar with the culture of your workplace and being intentional with this. You have to learn how the work is done and you must be humble and open enough to ask for help.

One thing to watch out for are the metrics used by the firm to measure how much value a person is adding to the team, or how effective an associate is at their job. This may be obvious in systems such as periodic appraisals or one-on-one performance review meetings. It may be subtle e.g., comments made in passing by senior colleagues. This will allow the applicant to know what areas are likely to be assessed in the decision-making process for retention with the firm.

Another key thing is what practice area the candidate is most interested in, especially if the internship or probationary period allows rotations amongst different practice areas. While the applicant would not have to decide for a while about which area to specialize in, it would be useful to know which areas the applicant finds exciting or challenging.

## 07

Can you recount a challenging experience you encountered as a trainee associate and the valuable lesson you gained from overcoming it which ultimately strengthened your chances of being retained at a tier 1 law firm?



I initially struggled with feeling like I knew nothing. I spoke with a trusted associate at the time who encouraged me not to compare myself to people who had decades of experience on the job. What I got from that was to work very hard to become the best version of my professional self.



My first time appearing in the court of appeal. LOL. I wish I could explain the feeling through text I really wish I could. Anyway, one thing I have noticed with this profession, if you can do it one time, you can do it over and over and over again. Then, you acquire the confidence and get better at doing it.



As a trainee, you will get the opportunity to work with many wonderful people with brilliant minds. These people would also have different working styles. It was challenging to work simultaneously with different people that have very different working styles. The valuable lessons I learned were flexibility and how to compartmentalize more effectively to ensure that the different senior colleagues were satisfied with the work I produced for them. This in turn resulted in good reports from them when it was time to be evaluated for retention.

## 08

**What opportunities have you encountered while working at a tier 1 law firm that, when you took advantage of, contributed significantly to your advancement within the firm and your overall career progression?**



Being thrown into the work at an early stage. I was responsible for a number of key things as a trainee associate, and while it was scary at first, looking back, it was super helpful in accelerating my professional development. So I think, sometimes, be ready to just do it afraid!



I would say the caliber of cases I'm working on. I can't get such exposure at just any firm. Also, it's usually humbling when little me appears against a Senior Advocate.



There are multiple avenues to learn and expand my knowledge in different areas of the law. I joined some sessions led at first by senior colleagues, then by peers on topics ranging from fundamental principles to complex issues. I also contributed by presenting some sessions. This ensured I was constantly learning. I plan to continue attending and contributing to these sessions for continuous professional growth and knowledge development.

# 09

## Can you share a specific instance where your strategic approach to a project proved instrumental in achieving notable success in your professional endeavour?

I have a thing for organization and structure. So, on every instruction, I help structure the work allocation to ensure that there are no silos in preparing deliverables. I have learnt that a diverse but coordinated team can produce exponentially better results than a single talented individual. I try to bring this with me on any instruction.



During a case review session, I suggested an alternative approach that would result in less litigation - saving the client's time and money. My suggestion was developed by the team and presented as an alternative to the client. The client agreed to adopt the approach which was successful in achieving most of the client's requests in a manner that was cost-effective and speedy. This encouraged me to be more vocal in sharing my ideas with the team, and my participation was a strong point during performance review.



# 10

**Based on your experience in distinguishing yourself within the firm, what advice would you offer aspiring legal talents, particularly female trainee associates, who want to stand out and be retained by their employers?**



Do the work! Sometimes, this will be proofreading documents for consistency and typos – it will not always be glamorous, but how do your supervisors trust you with big ticket items if you don't prove you are reliable on the seemingly little things? Be open to challenges. Ask yourself at the end of every task "have I done my best?" – if yes, go ahead. Press on!



I will advise aspiring legal talents to not be afraid to make mistakes. Don't come in thinking you know it all because no one does. Ask questions and be ready to learn. Also, criticism is not an insult.



I would advise aspiring legal talents to carefully document tasks that have been assigned and completed. This ensures you have a log of achievements for performance review. It also allows you to keep track of what remains uncompleted and tasks that are yet to be done. I would also advise female trainee associates not to be afraid to speak up or be creative in contributing ideas and suggesting solutions to problems faced in a transaction or case. Doing this often will result in refined ideas as such ideas would be interrogated by senior colleagues which will encourage the trainee to research more and provide well-reasoned arguments in support of her ideas.



**CHAPTER THREE:**  
**YOUR MINDSET AS A  
PROFESSIONAL**

# Meet Our Contributors

## Abiola Tella

Abiola is a Team Lead and Senior Associate in the Firm's Dispute Resolution Practice. Prior to joining the Firm, she had spent a decade in a leading law firm in Nigeria where she garnered significant experience in advising and representing numerous corporate clients including multi-nationals, individuals and government agencies on diverse areas of complex civil litigation including commercial cross-border litigation, shareholders' disputes, aviation and general admiralty claims, debt recovery/insolvency matters and labour/employment actions.



## Fikayomi Ogunrinde

Oluwafikayomi is a Team Lead in the Firm's Dispute Resolution Practice Group where she focuses on providing bespoke advice on complex commercial disputes and representing the Firm's clients in numerous litigation and arbitration proceedings. She is a Henry John Carr scholar of University College London. Oluwafikayomi obtained her Bachelor of Laws from Buckingham University and graduated top of her class at Babcock University. Oluwafikayomi has more than 13 years' experience working in fast paced environments.



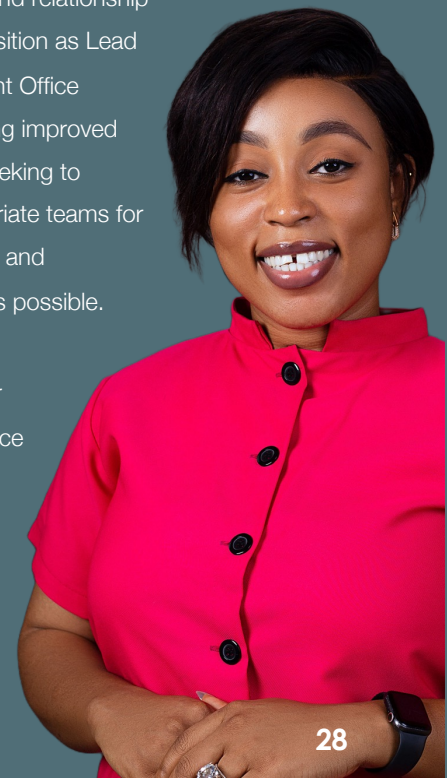
## Chinenye Ajayi

With over a decade experience, Chinenye is a versatile commercial lawyer with core expertise in electricity law, infrastructure, deal structuring and project finance. She provides business and legal advisory services to existing and emerging companies in the power sector, particularly in the renewable energy space and strives to bring life to infrastructure projects that promote energy access and economic development in Africa. She is currently a managing associate and the team lead of the Power and Infrastructure Practice at Olaniwun Ajayi LP.



## Tewogbade Olatona-Olotu

A professional with many hats, Tewogbade is a Business Analyst, with extensive project, product, and relationship management experience. Her position as Lead of the firm's Strategy Management Office involves mapping and coordinating improved service delivery methods while seeking to connect and manage the appropriate teams for product development, marketing, and deployment to run as smoothly as possible. Tewogbade also straddles as a Project and Relationship Manager within the firm's Consulting Practice and ensures satisfactory client interaction by communicating effectively and strategically with clients from the initial engagement to project conclusion.



## 01

## How would you describe the nexus between having a positive mindset and its influence on your growth as a legal professional?



In the words of Williams James, “the greatest discovery of any generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude”. As a professional, having a positive mindset or attitude cannot be overemphasized. I call this the “I can do it spirit”. Maintaining a positive mindset and facing challenges with optimism, especially in the workplace, helps in reducing my level of distress and anxiety; it boosts my resilience and enhances both my physical and mental wellbeing. With a positive attitude, I am better able to see opportunities and solutions whilst faced with a grim situation. This better helps my decision-making ability, innovative thinking, and problem-solving skills, all of which play a major role in increasing my productivity which translates to career growth and advancement as a professional.



Light attracts light. Having a “can do” spirit transforms ones’ life generally and specifically helps to shape ones’ belief in self, commitment to career goals, actions and outcomes. The totality of this is that when you have a positive approach to everything, even in the face of challenges, you are focused on the goal. Thus, one can keep pushing till the goals are achieved. Positivity helps to beat the feeling of helplessness and dejection when goals don’t materialize in time or at all.



Growth as a professional, particularly in the legal career is not always a jolly ride, hence imbibing a positive mindset will unlock your full potential and position you to achieve success as a legal professional. I remember the first few weeks after joining OA, I felt like running away amidst the fast-paced work, the high expectations from seniors and the mental rigor expected, given that these experiences were not anything I was used to. To get through that phase, I reminded myself that I had the ability to do anything I set my heart to and this mindset alone instilled confidence in me and stirred the inner strength to make the necessary changes.



I believe one’s mindset is reflected in their attitude to work, approach to new assignments and success or lack thereof in whatever organization they find themselves. My career as a Business Analyst has been a journey through industries, and I’ve found that my willingness to embrace change, learn from setbacks, and persevere in the face of inexperience has been purely driven by my mindset. Essentially, this has been the driving force behind every decision I have taken or not taken in my life and career; and I’ve found that when I stay positive and put in the required effort, I am able to achieve goals I set out to achieve with deterrents having minimum impact on my growth.

## 02

## Tell us about a mistake you made that reshaped your mindset.



A major mistake I made as young lawyer was my naivete about opportunities that could boost my career, and this was largely due to lack of information and mentorship. Before and during Law School, I never sought for opportunities or bothered about developing my skills beyond classroom lectures. Did that affect my professional growth? A big YES. In my view at the time, aiming for the top was a lot of stress and the resultant effect was that I missed out on vital knowledge and experiences that would have set my career on a positive trajectory. Having learnt from my mistakes, I am committed to self-development in terms of acquiring knowledge to boost my career whilst positioning myself for the right opportunities.



With the benefit of hindsight, I would say that one career mistake I made was not taking the opportunity to develop a certain skillset when I had the chance to. Procrastination is a bane I'm not proud to admit I've often tackled but I've discovered on more than one occasion that it's unwise to assume tomorrow would always come around with the same opportunities today did. Knowing this, I'm more eager to take on new opportunities for self and career development.

# 03

## How did you build mental grit? Kindly share some tips on this.



I develop mental grit by staying positive even when faced with difficulties; continuous learning and self-development; listening to my body, socializing/unwinding when I need to; accepting the things I have no control over; being contented and focusing on my achievements.



I develop mental grit by being self-aware, reading widely and being observant of my environment. I deploy my strengths and weaknesses as necessary to achieve this for each objective. I like to test my limits sometimes and I believe that having great mentors helps too. I have great mentors in my parents, and I also have professional friends who I look up to for career and personal advice and guidance.



Amongst many things, here are a few tips:

**Focus:** What do you want and why do you want it? Gaining clarity on these points will keep you going in face of difficulties.

**Consistency:** Keep at it, do it repeatedly because the great result you seek lies in the consistency.

**Get comfortable with being uncomfortable:** Building mental grit is not usually a pleasant process. Greatness lies outside your comfort zone.

**Hang around** persons with mental grit and it will boost yours.

**Be careful and selective** about what you see, hear and speak because they influence who you become.



The usual tips given in response to this question are often the most guaranteed tips for results. There's something to be said about consistency. The tips that have helped me build grit are staying positive (things tend to work when I believe they would), staying focused and determined, staying committed, building a solid support network, and constant self-reflection.

## 05

Which would you consider more important, the consistency in the quality of output generated or having a “Positive and Can Do” attitude to work? How are these relevant to success?



I believe both are important. From my experience, consistency in turning in quality work carves a niche for me, establishes my reputation as a professional and makes me a reliable team member. Consistently generating high-quality work establishes trust with my superiors. Likewise, keeping a positive attitude to work enables me to face challenges with a problem-solving mindset and this propels me forward towards achieving success.

In my view, both traits are fundamental to success in the workplace. A positive can-do attitude catalyzes growth, it makes you a pleasure to work with and encourages supervisors to assign more tasks to you. Consistency in the quality of work delivered is proof of your growth and guarantees your progression through the ranks. Simply put, it is not enough to have a positive attitude to work, it must be backed by consistently delivering good work.



I'll start with the quote "Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much you are willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it." ~ Lou Holtz.

While consistency is great, a positive attitude means you are able to stretch yourself by going above and beyond to get the job done. I believe a positive attitude trumps consistency in this sense. Both are, however, very important to achieve and maintain success in any endeavor.



Both are crucial. And I do believe a positive can-do spirit can be a tool for ensuring consistency in the quality of output.

## 06

**What's your view on balancing ethical standards with integrity in the legal profession especially when difficulties or conflicts arise? In circumstances where personal values contradict with your professional responsibilities, how were you able to navigate such hurdles?**



As a noble profession, balancing ethical standards in the legal profession is critical as it instills honesty and integrity in the way we conduct ourselves as lawyers, strengthens the public's confidence in the administration of justice and builds trust and credibility with clients, colleagues and the wider community. Fortunately, I have never been faced with any situation where my personal values conflict with my professional responsibilities – all thanks to my upright employers. Notwithstanding, my advice to any professional in this situation will be to engage in constructive dialogue with relevant parties without compromising your values, establish clear boundaries, seek appropriate guidance, and portray a professional image by acting appropriately.



If there is anything a professional should strive for; it is to have your reputation untarnished no matter the circumstance. Even in instances where it appears the lines are blurred; one should not compromise on what is ethical and acceptable within the profession. I have not found myself in any challenging situation and I am unable to think of an instance where my personal values competed with my professional responsibilities.



In a sensitive profession like ours, the need to balance ethical standards with integrity is critical to maintaining the trust of clients and complying with the provisions of the law. Our clients' interest is paramount, and we must seek to seek to serve them within legal and ethical boundaries. In situations where my personal values contradict with an action required in the course of my work, my approach is to apply the ethical test. If what is required of me aligns with the ethics of my profession, I am happy to set aside my personal views and serve the client. Thankfully, the ethics of the legal profession are consistent with generally acceptable moral norms.

## 07

## To what extent have you found adaptability to be a critical attribute in the legal field based on your professional experience, and how do you actively foster a mindset that welcomes and embraces change?



Being adaptable helps to boost personal growth by making one invaluable and better equipped to face challenges. It paves the way for learning new things, embracing new ideas, developing new skills and expanding capacity to handle change. In the legal profession in Nigeria, I have seen adaptability play a huge role with the advent of virtual court hearings, electronic filing of court processes, electronic law reporting and promulgation of the Evidence Act 2023 which sought to bring the process of taking evidence in conformity with digital realities. All these underscores the importance of being adaptable as a lawyer.

The Nigerian legal system requires a high level of adaptability, be it in the use of the court system, client management or interacting with regulators. I find that having an open mind helps to surmount any challenges. And personally, I see each change as an opportunity to build relationships with the key players which may come in handy if the need for this recurs in future



The world is evolving and the only way to remain relevant in the legal profession is to stay abreast of these changes, equip yourself with the relevant skills and move along with the change to the extent that it aligns with your values and professional goals. Fifteen years ago, lawyers relied mostly on referrals from previous clients for new engagements or mandates. However, in today's world and in the face of tight competition, proper positioning through social media is fundamental to attracting new clients and remaining top of mind for existing clients. With this understanding, it is part of my routine to read up resources around my area of interest and make changes where necessary whilst building a good network of top professionals and potential clients.

The way the business of law is managed has constantly evolved through the times. To highlight a few- technology, social media, and COVID have had tremendous impact on operations, service delivery, and business management within the sector. As Andy Grove said, "there are two options- adapt or die". Perhaps, not wanting to "die" professionally is just the push required to develop a mindset that embraces change and adapts as required.



## 08

## What are the critical qualities or habits a young female professional requires to build a reputation for herself?



For me, I would say integrity/honesty, willingness to learn and dedication, maintaining a positive attitude, exhibiting confidence even whilst under pressure and distinguishing yourself from your peers.



- **Dress the part.** The saying “dress the way you want to be addressed” still holds true to date.
- **Own your mistakes** but don’t dwell on it. Mistakes are learning opportunities and acknowledging them by making amends shows a teachable spirit. This helps you to stand out and keep your head high.
- **Communication is key.** Not only does it show confidence, it helps to push your personal brand, signify your interests and goals. Be confident yet humble. Be knowledgeable. Don’t stop honing your skills and developing your mental capacity.
- **Imbibe soft skills.** Soft skills are very crucial in today’s professional world. Time management, problem solving, interpersonal skills, teamwork, attention to detail, etc.



First, you need to get clarity on what you want to be known for. Secondly, be determined to be good at what you do. Go the extra mile to improve your skill and to know more than an average person in your field, and you can achieve this by personal research or obtaining relevant certifications. Furthermore, engage in activities that will put you forward.



Consistency is the primary ingredient for building a reputation. If you do a good or bad thing once, it’s only a memory and not necessarily what you’re known for. But to build a solid reputation as a good/excellent/outstanding professional, one has to be consistently dependable, knowledgeable, honest, professional, expressive and hardworking.

# 09

**Reflecting on your career journey, have you ever experienced impostor syndrome particularly when applying for or taking on new responsibilities? If so, how did you overcome it?**



Oh yes, I have faced that time and again. I believe we all do (no matter how slight), especially when faced with tasks or roles that are unfamiliar. However, the key is to face your fear headlong and never run away. Whenever the impostor syndrome storms, I remind myself that I have the innate capacity to do anything I set my heart to, and I then interrogate the feeling. Why do I feel inadequate, is there a knowledge or skill gap? Where the answer is in the affirmative, I begin to make efforts to bridge the gap. Speaking to colleagues who have undertaken that task has proven to be helpful in relation to providing guidance and boosting my confidence. In the end, I do it afraid and though it may not be perfect first time, but with consistent practice, I become good at it.

Impostor syndrome is a feeling that is all too familiar. My career has been a transition across several specialties- each a build-up to the next, and I've often felt like a Jill of many trades and master of none. This is very far from the truth. It takes hard work and diligence to deliver on each role and being assigned new responsibilities is a testament and acknowledgement of that. Whenever the feeling comes up, I try to understand what exactly is making me anxious and why I feel inadequate or undeserving. Figuring this out often helps me take the necessary steps to move past the feeling



## 10

## What strategies or techniques have you found helpful in combating impostor syndrome and building confidence in your abilities as a qualified professional?

All Contributors agree that it helps to:

Daily affirmations work for me. I tell myself every day, "I am great, smart, full of wisdom and deserving of every good thing". As you speak to yourself consistently, your mind begins to take the shape of those things you say.

Have a firm grip on your personal identity as it all starts with your perception of who you are. "I believe God made me in His image and I have been endowed with wisdom, strength and all I need to live a successful life."

Decide to live free of people's opinion or perception of you (good or bad). If you are driven by positive compliments of people, it is very likely that you will be greatly impacted by their negative criticism. In summary, accept compliments, but do not let them constitute the foundation of your self-esteem.

Never let your mistakes, weakness or flaws define you. "I have made mistakes, but I get myself off the ground and launch out again. You are not your past.

Be committed to growth and self-development so that the feeling of inadequacy ebbs away. Preparation and competence sponsors confidence.



# 11

**Reflecting on your interactions with difficult bosses or supervisors during your career, what insights or personal growth have you gained from these experiences? How have they shaped your approach to leadership and mentorship as you've progressed in your career?**



As a rule of thumb, no two bosses will have the same personality or leadership styles. Understand the style of and personality of your boss and work within the strengths of their personality and style of leadership.

When it comes to working with difficult supervisors, my approach is to focus on their positive traits and ensure that I do not hold any ill feelings towards them. Next is to understand their style of work and comply; accordingly, pay attention to actions that trigger the unpleasant traits of that supervisor and avoid it; and finally, find out what enlivens that supervisor and do it. During my most challenging times, my friends suggested resignation, however, I have learnt from experience that there is no perfect workplace and adaptability in any work environment is key to thriving. My experiences with difficult bosses have enabled me to treat younger colleagues better by avoiding attitudes that I found unpleasant with my supervisors.



In my experience, dealing with a difficult boss is an extremely unpleasant, yet valuable learning experience. The default human nature is to avoid unpleasantness and to protect one's mental health. Yet, I have found that finding mechanisms to cope and thrive in these situations often builds grit and strengthens once resolve to succeed despite the difficulty. As a result of my personal experience and the impact leadership (good or otherwise) has played on my career growth, I have taken intentional effort to lead better than I have been led on occasion. I try to always be respectful, understanding and accountable while being firm, resilient and focused. You have to be the change you want to see.

# 12

## What strategies have you found effective in managing and communicating with difficult bosses to maintain a positive working relationship?

All contributors agree that managing a difficult boss is not a walk in the park and the strategies for dealing with this depends largely on the type of boss and situation. The following techniques could however prove helpful:

Understand your supervisor and his/her style of work.

Focus on your work and deliver excellently. Friendship with your supervisor is not compulsory.

Have a mindset of growth and learning. Everyone has something to offer. Keep a positive mindset and learn all you can from that supervisor.

Escalate to a superior person at the office where it become critical, toxic or impedes your productivity.

Focus on the good traits in your supervisor and avoid amplifying his/her shortcomings.

Avoid actions that trigger the unpleasant attributes of your supervisor.

Avoid being disrespectful no matter what. Speak and relate with your supervisor politely.



CHAPTER FOUR:  
A SUCCESSFUL CAREER  
AND YOU

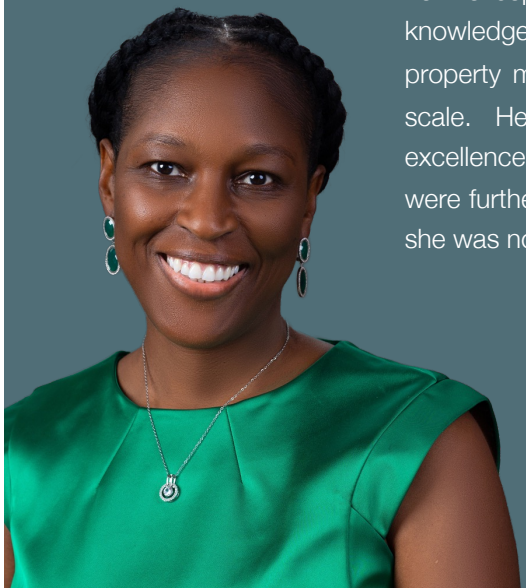
# Meet Our Contributors

Toyosi is a seasoned legal professional with an impressive track record of over two decades in intellectual property law. She is a Partner at Olaniwun Ajayi, LP where she oversees and directs the affairs of the Intellectual Property Team. She holds a master's degree from King's College London, which has shaped her well-rounded approach to intellectual property.

In recognition of her outstanding contributions to the field, Toyosi achieved the prestigious title of "Trademark Star" by Managing Intellectual Property (MIP) in 2023, a testament to

her exceptional skills and knowledge in intellectual property matters on a global scale. Her dedication and excellence in the industry were further highlighted when she was nominated as

the Practitioner of the Year for Nigeria at the MIP Awards in the same year.



**TOYOSI ALABI**  
Partner



**TOSIN AKINGBADE**  
Chief Innovation Manager

Tosin currently holds the position of the Chief Innovation Officer at Olaniwun Ajayi, LP, a Firm acknowledged by numerous international directories as the premier full-service law firm in Nigeria. With experience spanning over 25 years, she has assiduously refined her managerial skill in the consulting and operational landscapes. She holds an MSc (with distinction) from Kings College London, where she specialized in Computing and Internet Systems. With a cross-functional perspective, Tosin has been intimately involved in business consulting, project/program management, consultative sales, and business development within the spectrum of strategic projects. She seamlessly applies her profound strategic business management skills with a comprehensive understanding of technology and digital innovations.



**YEWANDE SENBORE**  
Partner

Yewande is a distinguished legal practitioner and a leading figure in the field of finance and capital markets. With over two decades of experience, Yewande has established herself as a trailblazer in the industry, garnering recognition for her exceptional expertise and contributions to the legal profession. In addition to her professional achievements, Yewande is also a champion for gender equality and women's empowerment in the legal profession. She has been honored as an IFLR Women Leader in Nigeria, recognizing her as a role model and inspiration for women in the legal industry. Yewande has been consistently ranked by IFLR as "highly regarded" in four practice areas: Capital Markets – Debt and Equity; Banking; Mergers and Acquisition as well as Energy and Infrastructure.

# 01

**What is the significance of your personal background to your professional success? What about your upbringing made you believe it was possible to fly high as a woman?**



A godly training growing up influenced and still influences my professional success till today.

I came from a family where my mother and grandmother were strong (spiritually and emotionally) and driven career women. My grandmother was a trained mid-wife in Iwo, Osun state, with her own maternity home and I saw her in action when I visited Iwo, where an influx of women in labour thronged her premises and she and her trained girls and girls-in-training, will attend to all manner of labour matters.

My mother, third child of her family, was many firsts: first female Federal Permanent Secretary in Oyo state, first female Federal Civil Service Commission Chairperson and currently the first female Pro Chancellor of Bowen University, Osun state. She worked in the presidency under 4 presidents and held sensitive positions such as Special Assistant in the Ministry of Special Duties, was in charge of the Presidential Fleet and also a Senior Special Assistant to the National Security Adviser.

My mum and grandma's trajectory never made me believe that women were in any way disadvantaged.

Beyond this, my father never discriminated between us – daughters and sons – and he pushed us all to be the best, believing that we could attain the top position in all we do. He used to say; “if you are going to be a sweeper, be the best sweeper in town”. My father consistently told me I was intelligent, had a good command of English and so will make a good lawyer. He believed I was Cambridge material and pushed for me to get into Cambridge, got me a mentor in Wale Babalakin SAN, an old boy of his secondary school who graduated from Cambridge University and was a renowned silk. Though I was not admitted, I was privileged to sit the interview to Cambridge. I heard accolades about my capacity from my dad so often, that I believed them and gained a high level of confidence which made me face my academics with a determination to make the top.



My background is rooted in a supportive upbringing, which instilled the belief that gender should not limit professional aspirations. I grew up as the last of four children, born to strict educationist parents, to whom hard work and striving for excellence were non-negotiable. It was communicated verbally, as well as demonstrated through their work ethics. Statements like, “the heights that great men attained, was not by sudden flight...” or the song, “work, for the night is coming when no man shall work” were mantras that I grew up with. So much so, that one of my favorite hymns in the songs of praise hymnal used in both primary and secondary schools, is the song, “Come, labour on! Who dares stands idle on the harvest plains, while all around him waives the golden grain, and to each servant does the master say, go work, today.” Beyond my parents, I was always fascinated by stories of accomplished people, and I thus wanted to attain professional success, and God has been faithful through the journey.

Growing up, I never looked at life through the gender prism. Everyone was a human being made equally and blessed with talents to excel. I was taught to do my best wherever I found myself, and I honestly never considered myself disadvantaged by being a female (of course, until I grew into adulthood and had a better understanding of gender dynamics in society). It just was never an issue for me, as all I was taught was that you could achieve anything, so far you consistently work hard and have faith, and that was my approach.

My background has played a significant role in my professional success. My parents supported me, provided me with all that I need to succeed. They withdrew me from my secondary school in Lagos to Mayflower School in Ikenne setting me on the path to where I am today. I consider my time in Mayflower as my most formative years. I became self-reliant, more competitive, and saw myself as having what is required to lead, succeed, and overcome challenges. I recognized the importance of Knowledge and the need to equip myself for the future by learning and excelling at whatever tasks I’ve been given. I don’t see myself as a woman who should have the back seat, I collaborate and if required, compete head-to-head with both men and women.



## 02

**Was female representation in professional climates important to you when you were younger? Were there sufficient female role models for you to emulate and was there an impact in the presence or absence of these “figures”?**



I had more than enough role modeling at home: my mother, my grandmother and two sisters ahead of me who are medical doctors today. My mother's sisters were also very driven and successful women. I thus never felt or suffered a victim complex in this regard.

I never looked at life through the gender prism. Instead, when I was much younger, I read up stories of different key achievers across different spheres of life, regardless of their gender. Biographies and autobiographies and historical texts held great fascination for me. I should however say that growing up around strong women within my family and getting close to highly successful women in the judiciary, international affairs, and business, helped strengthen my resolve to excel in whatever field I chose.



I studied computer science, which is a field where we did not have a lot of women in the 90s. When I was with PwC, I was the only female among the senior management members of the Technology advisory team. So, I'm used to being one of the very few women in a group. I don't see this as a disadvantage. I'm used to collaborating, competing, managing, driving, and leading both genders.

## 03

## What did 'success' in your career look like to your 20-year-old self and how has this view evolved over time? What were the experiences, pivotal moments as a young professional that led to your success?



Success as a 20-year-old would be me in 1991. Graduating with a 2:1 from the London School of Economics was psychologically comforting, and the race ahead turned out to be very different from the intensity and expectation of my undergraduate studies. As I began practice as a lawyer in 1997, the realization that beyond the knowledge of the law and its application, I was entrusted with real-life matters, the success of which, people's businesses and lives hung on, was pivotal. I soon understood the responsibility I now had and the impact of costly errors, and both touched deeply on my faith and integrity. I imbibed a great sense of responsibility and diligence that I may not have afforded myself as a student. These experiences shaped me and prepared me for leadership and developed me into a Christian at the workplace which God had been seeking to make me. Another pivotal point came sometime in the late 2000s when I switched jobs and discovered that this intelligent, well-spoken, LSE/Cambridge material was seemingly just a regular part of a large group with more talent than I had ever interacted with. That realization humbled me, almost to a crushing point. But by far the most pivotal moment would be as I approached 40 and it dawned on me clearly that law was never my passion or real dream, but rather, a challenge I adventurously embarked on and was very proud to succeed at. Beyond the achievement of success, what seemed like passion had now plummeted and I only hung on to law because of a high sense of responsibility while the desire for other passions lingered. The lesson I learnt at this time is to never mistake 'drivers' for passion and to spur me on, I created niches within my legal career that were exciting, and which heightened my sense of responsibility for the uninteresting or unpalatable aspects of my work.



At the age of 20, success to me was purely about accomplishments. I measured success in terms of academic degrees, as well as types of jobs and positions held. Over time, I realized that success encompasses personal fulfilment, living a life of impact and contributing to positive changes in my community, which includes the legal space. I have realized that making a positive impact in the lives of people who work with me and providing them with a role model to assist them on their career journey is really success. Being fortunate to have started my career journey in Olaniwun Ajayi LP, I was promptly introduced to the concept of service to God and humanity through the work we do. I realized early on that the benefit of good mentors and leaders in the professional sphere cannot be over-emphasized. I also learnt that to be successful, you have to be passionate about what you do and derive fulfilment from same. The sacrifices required, the relentless hard work and the satisfaction of the impact your contribution makes on the society, is unquantifiable for me. From working on reforms in the banking sector, to drafting legislation which changed the financial services landscape and advising on transactions which birthed critical infrastructure, which improved the lives of people within the relevant communities and strengthened financial stability in Nigeria, these early experiences shaped my perspective.



As a 20-year-old first class computer science graduate, and an enthusiastic programmer, I had a strong desire to create applications that would bring about positive change in the world. Over time, my aspirations evolved from simply wanting to work with the best companies in Nigeria to leading one of these companies. My definition of success has evolved over the course of my career. Success, to me, is multifaceted. It means being able to take care of my family and parents, ensuring that my children are doing well, positively impacting the business I work for, and working with a team of individuals who share a similar passion for innovating, driving change and impacting the lives of others.

I thrive when I make positive impact on the lives of those around me. Even from a young age, I recognized how important this is. I remember being in a meeting with our Senior Partner where my contributions resulted in the firm changing its policy on maternity leave for women. I am proud to have made a positive contribution that led to a significant policy change.

Over the years, I have mentored, coached, and collaborated with individuals who have given me positive feedback on the impact I have had on their lives. Additionally, being financially stable enough to contribute to society, provide for my family's needs without worry, and enjoy vacations without financial hardship are all examples of success.



“...the most pivotal moment would be as I approached 40 and it dawned on me clearly that law was never my passion or real dream, but rather, a challenge I adventurously embarked on and was very proud to succeed at.



...The lesson I learnt at this time is to never mistake ‘drivers’ for passion and to spur me on...”



“Over time, I realized that success encompasses personal fulfilment, living a life of impact and contributing to positive changes in my community, which includes the legal space. I have realized that making a positive impact in the lives of people who work with me and providing them with a role model to assist them on their career journey is really success.”



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## 04

## How do you set and prioritize your career goals while navigating the dynamics, misconceptions and “politics” of career progression (within a law firm) as a (legal) professional?



Fortunately, politics has not been much of an issue to contend with where I have worked.



Navigating career dynamics involves setting clear goals, prioritizing tasks strategically, and diplomatically handling office politics. The privilege of working in a merit-based organization where your work speaks for you is very critical; so is ensuring that you keep your eyes on your goal without allowing distractions to take you off your path as there will always be distractions. Consistency, flexibility, and resilience are crucial in achieving your goals. I do not pretend to be unaware of the potential challenges that young professionals face in the workplace, and which can sometimes interfere with their goals. However, one must always remember that your career is yours and your goals are valid; and whilst these may be shaped, tweaked, and guided by input from others, you must always keep them in view and continue to work towards achieving them. Career progression for some is rapid, but for others, it is a more gradual process. Either way, ensure you keep building competence and honing your skills as you progress.



I have a clear understanding of what interests me, and my goals are well-defined. Fortunately, I have had the opportunity to work in organizations where I can do what I enjoy doing the most. Although politics may affect career progression in some companies, I have never felt disadvantaged due to my gender. I have been privileged to work with firms that promote and reward based on performance irrespective of the gender.

## 05

## What challenges have you faced as a female lawyer in the corporate world, and how did you overcome them? Can you share a personal story of a time when you successfully asserted your authority?



At one of my former workplaces, I was selected to represent my firm at a conference in Europe. I was pregnant but had not disclosed to my employers as it was the early days. Rather shockingly, whilst in transit, I had a scare – spotting – which eventually meant (on quick medical advice from my sister-doctor) I had to abort the trip, see a doctor urgently and convalesce in London. I felt guilty; guilty that I had disrupted the firm's business plans, guilty that conference fees will not be recovered in full and guilty that it happened abroad, in which case, I had procured a vacation abroad at the expense of my employer. I thought about reimbursing the firm, a chunk of the cost of expenditure lost, though I could not afford it. The guilt turned to discomfort and subsequently a level of disdain when, on my return to work, hale and hearty and zygote too, my employer, naturally, had put in place contingency plans to ensure that my new state of being will not hamper the business anymore. A back up male senior had been told to handle my work. I took it personally and decided to confront the managing partner about what I thought was a vote of no-confidence. He however calmed my fears and things smoothed out. My less mature 29-year-old self didn't know better.



I will dimension this into two buckets – personal challenges and professional challenges. With the former, I refer to navigating the challenges brought on by marriage and motherhood, the effect of the time-offs due to illnesses and the impact that had on my career growth. For every female lawyer, it is important to make clear that in order to succeed, you will need to commit significant hours to honing your craft and that requires sacrificing personal time to develop yourself. To do this, you need a supportive family and community of friends who hold things down for you when you are not available. On the professional challenges, the gender biases and stereotypes and irrational expectations which are sometimes pinned on females in the corporate world, requires wisdom and asserting one's authority. I remember leading my team to a negotiation meeting with the counterparty being represented by a male senior lawyer. Upon getting there and introducing myself and the team, comprising two females, I was asked if anyone else was coming. I answered in the negative and was asked who was going to handle the negotiation to which I responded that I was. You could see the look of disappointment and near derision. Of course, before the meeting ended, the perspective had changed and that was the beginning of an impactful relationship with the client. The often-assumed leadership role in favour of a male colleague with whom one is attending meetings is also an example of gender stereotypes that I have encountered but in respect of which I have been able to successfully navigate with courage by setting the record straight, demonstration of knowledge and competence, which are critical for the corporate world.



In the past, I have faced situations where there were pushbacks on some of my recommendations. However, I never tied it to my gender. I always stood my ground and worked towards a compromise with my colleagues. My approach has always been to focus on the work and find a solution that works for everyone involved. I don't believe in behaving like a woman or a man in the office. I think it's important to just be there to do the work. Over time, my colleagues have gotten to know me and my work, and they often forget that I'm a woman. I've been fortunate to work in firms where my teams and leaders are not sexist. Despite this, I still recognize that gender bias exists in many workplaces, and it's important to continue to work towards creating a fair and equal environment for everyone. I am committed to being an ally and advocate for diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

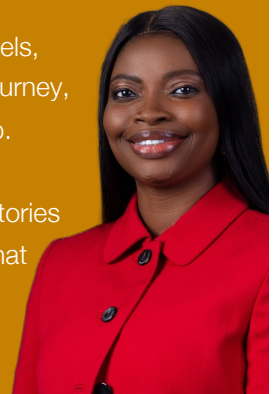
## 06

## What role has mentorship and/or sponsorship played in your journey to partnership? How do you mentor others to follow in your footsteps or carve their own paths?

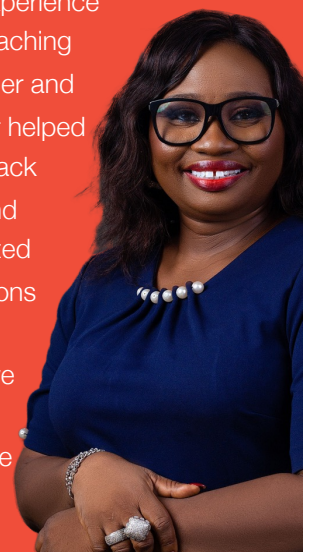
I regret not taking advantage of opportunities to learn from others directly, by pouring out my heart of challenges. I however learnt through their example, for instance, my mother's way of navigating and juggling her role as wife, mother to 5 children and diligent employee on a career path, was very helpful and a propeller. I learnt a whole lot from her life. I also had female partners where I worked as an associate who, unsolicited many times, gave practical examples of how to navigate motherhood and work and marriage. All the women who I learnt from were very strong, courageous, and forward looking. Most of them were also Christians, helping me to also learn to continue to put my Father, God, first in all situations. I mentor others informally for the most part and the solicited but mostly unsolicited and feedback from them has been great. One thing I discovered very quickly is that I get on very easily with younger people and I have seen that they have a lot to teach me as they believe I have to teach them. I thus have a symbiotic mentorship relationship which, on account of my passion for people (and for gist), has been mutually fruitful and beneficial. Importantly, I am fond of teaching through my errors. I find it easy to teach, push and champion what I would have loved to have done or become. That makes mentorship easier, fruitful and most rewarding.



To be honest, I would not say that I had any particular mentor in my career journey. I however had role models, coaches and sponsors who looked out for me and provided me with guidance and support on my career journey, and who spoke for me when I was not in the room; these were invaluable in my journey towards partnership. As a leader now, I strive to provide mentorship to younger lawyers both within and outside my organization. I have realized that discussing their goals and plans and learning about their challenges, whilst sharing my stories and how I overcame the various challenges I faced in my career assists younger lawyers in understanding that they are not alone, and others have journeyed through the same path so it doesn't have to be so painful or grueling.



Coaching and mentorship can make a huge difference in one's professional journey, and my personal experience has taught me that finding the right coach or mentor is critical. As a leader, I have had the privilege of coaching others, but I still see myself as a mentee, constantly seeking guidance and support from those with deeper and richer experiences. Through my journey, I have had both fantastic and not-so-good coaches. The former helped me reduce the learning curve and avoid potential mistakes while the latter failed to provide honest feedback and guidance. I had to be brave enough to end the coaching relationship with the not-so-good coach and seek out a better one. The good coach that I had took me through a thorough coaching session that lasted longer than I had expected. He was able to elicit responses from me that helped me articulate my decisions properly, and I am still implementing those decisions today. I believe that coaching should be a lifelong experience, and as leaders, we must find the right coaches and mentors to guide us on our journey as we continue to coach others. While coaching and mentorship are important, we must also exercise caution to ensure that we are not imposing our will and experience on our mentees. We must allow them to make their own decisions and learn from their mistakes while guiding them through the process.



## 07

**How do you prioritize between personal professional development and work-sponsored workshops/conferences in your career growth as a (legal) professional? What types of technical and non-technical skills do you believe are essential for success (in the legal field), and how do you actively work on developing these skills?**



Firstly, I typically use my work time for work-sponsored events and my annual leave or non-work hours for the personal passions. That way, I avoid cheating my employer and myself. Very difficult to separate personal professional from work sponsored as both are for the benefit of the Firm. The technical skills I believe are relevant are substantive law of contract, tort, evidence and core areas of the law in corporate and commercial law and litigation are very key. For non-technical skills, communication Skills, Interrelation Skills, Team Building, Market Making are relevant.

The key here is balance as both are important. Balancing personal and professional growth involves strategic prioritization and this will vary from time to time depending on my career goals and requirements and personal circumstance. To build a successful legal career, both technical and soft skills are required. Gone are the days when the entire focus was on technical skills; today, a lawyer must possess the following, strong research and analytical skills, excellent and effective verbal and written communication skills, creativity, confidence and stellar interpersonal skills, attention to detail, commercial awareness, ability to multitask and to work under pressure, and of course, knowledge of, and passion for the law.



## 08

## Reflecting on your own journey of continuous development, what advice would you offer to younger professionals on finding the right balance between honing technical skills and nurturing broader competencies such as leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence?

Strive for the ratio between both: Between NYSC and 5 yrs. PQE: 65:35 and thereafter, 50:50 and towards partnership, 30:70. Take every aspect of your KPI and feedback on appraisals seriously and importantly, do not just go away with the “what” but also ask your supervisor for the “how” to improve. Lean on them or any other person to enable you achieve same. Secondly, get a Coach/Mentor in the firm.



In the early days of my career, great prominence was given to technical skills and a lot of my focus was devoted to that. However, whilst not so greatly emphasized, I was also fortunate enough to have begun my career under the tutelage of outstanding leaders who by their example taught me a lot about leadership, effective communication, and emotional intelligence. Whilst some would argue against the “sink or swim concept”, I would say it contributed greatly to shaping my career and when I look back on my journey, I am amazed at my growth over the past years. My advice to young professionals is thus to focus on continuous learning, building emotional intelligence, and leadership development. These will assist them in honing their technical skills whilst developing broader competencies. A key to doing this, is starting off your career in the right institution and taking advantage of various learning tools which are readily available today.



As a young graduate, I focused mainly on developing my technical skills. However, I quickly learned that technical skills alone were not enough for a successful career. I realized that other skills such as communication skills were also essential. Without the ability to effectively communicate my deliverables, my career would have been negatively impacted. To move forward in my career, I had to demonstrate the ability to deliver technical work at the next level continuously. This meant constantly developing my technical skills and taking on additional soft skills, such time, people and project management. In summary, a balance between technical and soft skills is crucial for successful career growth. Serious organizations recognize this and offer a learning and development curriculum that addresses both areas. It is important to note that the required skills change as one advances in their career. What is required as a junior staff is different from what is required at the intermediate, senior, and executive management levels.



## 09

## Can you share an example of how you've adapted to a significant change (in the legal industry) to stay at the forefront of your field?



One significant change in IP which is the core of my practice is Technology. I have had to move beyond traditional IP to digital creativities. I also deal with creatives, notably in the entertainment industry which was a big jump for me as that aspect of social life did not come naturally to me. I however adapted by relying on my formidable team of young adults to keep abreast and take the heat off the contemporary whilst I deal with the know-how and leadership of it all.



My career journey has been an interesting one and I joke about the fact that in my firm, I am one of the few people who have traversed virtually all the business units within the firm. Starting off as a litigator which I thought was my glove fit, I moved on to corporate law and then to banking and finance, infrastructure and projects, and then I was asked to move to oil and gas. By the time I was moving to oil & gas, I felt I had already matured as a lawyer and oil & gas being a fully developed sector would be tough to navigate as it involved new learning. Together with the team, we began the journey and just as I began to settle into it and we had started gaining traction, I was asked to go and lead our finance and capital markets practice. This was a clear departure from the path I had recently started pursuing and involved a clear 360 degree move. This was tough and I was confused at the rationale behind this and thus resisted the change. When it became clear that the change was going to take place nonetheless, I embraced it and focused my energy on developing my capacity further in that space and creating a presence for my firm in that segment of the economy. I am recognized as an IFLR Women Leader, which according to IFLR, is an "elite group of female lawyers with outstanding reputations within their markets who either have expertise and experience of working on complex deals, or who have risen to hold leadership roles within their firms or practice" and our finance and capital markets practice has been consistently ranked Tier 1 across legal directories.



The path to success is not always a straight line, and for me, it certainly wasn't. After completing my undergraduate degree in computer science, unlike many of my peers, I didn't immediately pursue a master's degree. Instead, I decided to work and get industry experience first. I immersed myself in my career, working for a leading firm, which allowed me to gain a lot of on-the-job training in my field. However, the tech space evolved rapidly, and I soon realized that there was a gap between what I knew within the tech space and the cutting-edge innovations and technologies in the field. So, I decided to enroll in a master's program in the UK and gain international experience at the same time. The international experience and exposure I gained had a significant impact on my growth and development. I have evolved over the years to become more than just a tech specialist. Today, I am focused on strategic business management, leveraging technology to achieve optimal business performance. I am still tech-conscious, but my focus is on managing business operations and achieving significant and sustainable business growth. My journey has been an evolving one, and I am proud of where I am today.

## 10

**What has your experience been as a female professional in securing mandates and acquiring new clients (in the legal industry)?**

I would say that the success or lack of has not been hinged on my gender. However, I have learnt to watch out for the pitfalls: giving a potential client I am marketing the impression I “am coming on too strong”. I once received feedback in that regard and learnt a lesson on self-restraint.

This is an area where I would say it has not been very easy. The gender biases and the socio-cultural nuances sometimes get in the way of being able to pursue opportunities aggressively while trying to secure mandates. However, one thing that I will always emphasize, is that securing mandates as a female professional requires competence, reliable relationships, networking, and demonstration of value. Authenticity and credibility are essential and these have gone a long way in assisting me in onboarding new clients. It is also important to emphasize the role of referrals, which is where intentional networking is beneficial. The relationships you build go a long way in feeding the pipeline of mandates.



## 11

## How have you approached building a sustainable network (within the legal community), and what advice would you give to younger female professionals seeking to expand their professional connections?

Sustainable networks are built through genuine connections, being intentional and taking advantage of every opportunity to display competence. Through the years, I have found that work colleagues who have moved on to other things, clients and industry associations have afforded me a reliable network which has been immensely beneficial. In addition, I realize that taking every opportunity given for thought leadership through presentations at conferences and seminars where I am able to demonstrate competence as well as meet like minds has also been helpful in expanding my network. For younger professionals, I will say, start with your colleagues with whom you work daily. Oftentimes, what we find is that these colleagues go on to do other things, as the practice of law can be adapted into other fields, these colleagues then become useful resources and sometimes, great clients. Also, build a relationship that transcends work with industry colleagues and clients from the early days of your career; these are easy relationships to build and though these may not yield any returns immediately, these relationships are the first ones you fall back on as you settle into leadership positions. Attend industry events and join professional associations, whilst actively engaging within professional communities.



By volunteering to attend or accepting directives by partners that I attend a variety of events the firm or its partners have been invited to.



## 12

**Can you share a turning point in your career that led you towards a path to partnership?**

In 2010, I took a career turn in my current firm, stepped out of law (for the most part) and took on a role as “Head of Corporate Affairs, Planning & Strategy”. It had its own challenges but was a nice escape route from law which as I said earlier, I clearly never had a passion for. In 2014, I was faced with the reality that my trajectory in the firm was limited on this account and I took a leap back into law in order to be (back) on partnership track.



This is a difficult one to say for me as I would say given the way I envisaged my career; I was clear I wanted to practice law in a law firm and to reach the pinnacle of my career. Of course, that meant different things at different times. At some point it was to be an outstanding litigator who then becomes a silk following in the footsteps of the likes of Mrs. Folake Solanke, SAN, Mrs. Funke Adekoya, SAN. Then I considered practicing for some years and heading over to the judiciary (this dream is still somewhere on my list of goals, lol). However, my career journey has taken me through the various cadres of the Firm and on to partnership and to be honest, I cannot say that there was a particular turning point per se, but rather, it was a continuous trajectory for me.

# 13

## How do you stay true to your own style and values as a woman and a leader?



I would say I became very self-aware and to be proud of my God given personality, giftings and His calling on my life. Once I embraced and became proud of ME created by God, my brand evolved, blossomed and shone brightly onto others. I became more fulfilled once I started allowing God to use His abilities and giftings in me to carry on with my everyday work. I thus stopped trying to role model anyone else, but simply to learn from them.



By knowing and recognizing those values and being true to them. Understanding that the workplace is an aggregation of different personalities at each cadre of the organization leading to dynamism; and whilst one remains versatile and learns from others, my rule of thumb is to not compromise on my values of integrity and compassion. Being professional at all times, whilst recognizing that there is a human being behind every email, agreement, legal opinion, or telephone call and treating them with respect. It is important that young professionals are able to identify with the different personalities and leadership styles within their organizations as they take their career journey. Staying true to my style thus involves authenticity, integrity, and leading with empathy. Upholding personal values is very vital in leadership.



As a leader, the first and most important thing for me is to be fair. I understand that I am often considered tough, and as I continue to grow, I have learnt to be more tolerant. One of the things that has influenced my leadership style is achieving the delicate balance between guiding, correcting, and allowing the person working with me to experience and learn from the journey. I have found that it is essential to strike this balance because as a senior colleague, I can see from a mile the potential mistake that a junior colleague is about to make. Therefore, while I guide and correct them, I also allow them to learn and grow from their experiences. I don't see myself as a woman when I'm at work. I have been fortunate enough to work in an industry where what is required of me is my intellect, my ability to analyze and come up with solutions to complex business problems, and not my physical strength. As a result, I can go head-to-head with any man, and therefore do not see myself as a woman in the workplace. However, I do acknowledge the fact that I'm a female, so I try as much as possible to adapt to the culture and the environment I work in. I understand the expectations that are driven by our code, which is largely influenced by our culture. So, I dress appropriately and always strive to be seen as a professional. Being recognized as a professional is very important to me.

## 14

**What's the most important career lesson you've learned that you wish you knew at the start of your career?**



That as a lawyer, the studying and reading and digging did not end with my Masters' degree. My Masters, which was my last tertiary study platform, was just the beginning. Secondly, that being widely read was a springboard for leadership success.



Recognizing one's strength and playing to it, as well as using one's voice in the workplace. Speak up for yourself and don't downplay your achievements. In addition, always remember that failures are opportunities to learn and grow. Do not be ashamed of these but rather, learn from them and keep forging ahead. Resilience and adaptability will sustain you on your journey to success.

## 15

**Can you share any personal experiences or examples where you've witnessed the positive impact of female professionals in driving social change or promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace?**



**Olaniwun Ajayi LP is one workplace that is gender blind to capacity.**

Nonetheless, female professionals like Ibi, Georgette and many others who have passed through the firm ensure that we do not take the values for granted but that we improve on them, hence, they are deliberate in taking advantage of IWD to promote these values.



CHAPTER FIVE:  
YOU MATTER; BALANCING  
YOUR CAREER AND  
PERSONAL INTERESTS

# Meet Our Contributors

## Anu Balogun

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Anu stands as a distinguished legal practitioner renowned for her expertise advising on complex high-value corporate transactions involving corporate finance, restructuring, mergers and acquisitions, and capital markets. With a solid academic background in Law, she has imprinted her name in the legal profession as a woman to look up to and an icon of excellence. She holds an LL.M from the prestigious University College London.

Anu is a partner at Olaniwun Ajayi LP and in charge of the Mergers, Acquisitions and Private Equity practice group. She has previously worked at Clifford Chance LLP, London, where she advised a number of private equity investors on several cross-border mergers and acquisitions transactions.



## Ibi Ogunbiyi

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Ibi graduated top of her class at the University of Ibadan and is currently a Partner in the Power and Infrastructure Practice (widely regarded as Nigeria's flagship power practice) at Olaniwun Ajayi LP and the Partner-in-Charge of the Mining & Metals Practice. She has extensive experience in power acquisition and financing, corporate finance, mergers and acquisitions, corporate and commercial law. Over the past two (2) decades, Ibi has garnered masterly experience in advising on some of the landmark and complex financings within the Nigerian market and has worked with government institutions and agencies, sponsors, financiers, and technical operators on implementing their various projects and also providing expert advisory on the financing. She has consistently been ranked by international legal directories (including IFLR, Chambers and Legal 500) as a leading lawyer in Nigeria.



## Busola Bakinson

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Busola is a commercial and Intellectual Property legal advisor and has amassed over a decade of broad-based experience advising diverse industries, including technology, financial services, health care, and retail. Providing extensive legal support and advice across the entire value chain of diverse sectors within Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom. She is currently the team lead of the Intellectual Property and Entertainment, Leisure, and Media Practice of Olaniwun Ajayi LP.



## Ogechi Onuoha

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Ogechi Onuoha is a double-time IFLR and Legal 500 ranked lawyer who has over time, garnered a wealth of experience in commercial law practice particularly in the areas of corporate restructuring, business acquisitions, private equity financing, company secretarial and corporate governance principles. She has supported a good number of start-ups and established businesses in varying sectors of the economy like telecommunications, fintech, oil & gas, advertising, broadcasting and construction.



## 01

## How do you define 'balance' in your life, and what steps do you take to achieve it?



Balance for me is my ability to juggle many balls- being a wife, mother, friend and professional- and somehow make it work. I say "somehow" because one may never find balance, but by chance, you may be able to synchronize all aspects of your life in such a way that you achieve harmony (at least from your perspective). The first step for me was the realization that it was possible to coordinate all aspects of your life and achieve harmony. Secondly, I have learned over the years to prioritize and focus on what is truly important at every point in time.

This helps to keep things in perspective. I have sometimes had to explain to my family (especially when in the middle of a highly demanding and time bound transaction) that I need to extend myself beyond the usual to deliver these projects. Thanks to my very understanding family, this has gone well so far. I have also on occasion, turned down requests from clients that I know will encroach on my family time; and instead, re-arrange official obligations around family commitments.



Balance in my life means prioritizing both my legal career and my other passions. To achieve this, I allocate specific time blocks for each aspect of my life, ensuring that neither one dominates the other.



Balance for me is being able to do my legal work as well as the other things which are important to me outside of this, including showing up for my family and friends, traveling and managing my travel company. To achieve this, I strictly ensure that I do not pay attention or give time to anything that is neither important nor of interest to me. I am very conscious of my time, and so I guard it jealously.



Balance, for me, is being able to manifest my optimal self in both personal and professional spheres. It is the sense of wholesomeness and peace that comes from being my authentic self at work, at play and at rest. I have learnt to pay attention to my mind, body and spirit and what each tells me in terms of where I have over-extended or under-applied myself in relation to my personal and professional responsibilities.

Feeling guilty and ashamed for not being present enough in my husband or children’s lives was common in the earlier years of marriage. There were also years of my career where I deliberately slowed down my involvement and contributions to professional responsibilities just so I could devote more time to myself, my children and my relationship with my husband. In other phases, I have de-prioritized other spheres of my life just so I could spend more time socially with friends and attend family events, or to deepen my relationship with God. What I have learnt from all the cycles of my life thus far, is that balance is a deliberate act of juggling diverse facets of one’s life. You must be intentional and consistently mindful of the importance of developing as a four-dimensional human – body, soul, mind, and spirit. What is essential to nourish one aspect of you, may be at the detriment of another, but, still important. So, sacrifice is an inherent aspect of the balancing act. At any point in time, you will thrive in some areas, and be wanting in some others. Also, the recognition that there are different phases of life is crucial, and the trick is to do what is most critical for your overall well-being at each point.

**The steps I take to achieve balance are:**

letting my children know and understand that mama is a career girl and loves being able to work and optimise her potential, but that she loves them dearly and those two things are not mutually exclusive. Also, spending quality time with them as often as possible.

deliberately making time to do the small but impactful things that bring me joy – sleeping late at night, reading romance novels, strolling through the streets of IG, watching Netflix, shopping, traveling and being with my family, hanging out with my close friends, praying, etc;

nurturing trusting and familial relationships with my bosses and colleagues over the years – this has enabled very humane interactions that allow for transparency and candour when I have personal challenges, understanding and compassion when I cannot perform optimally, and profound support for my professional development;



Balance in my life means prioritizing both my legal career and my other passions. To achieve this, I allocate specific time blocks for each aspect of my life, ensuring that neither one dominates the other.

delegating administrative and technical tasks effectively so that I am not overwhelmed;

having a dependable structure for running my household by building long-lasting and trusting relationships with my domestic staff and outlining roles and responsibilities for them which I hold them accountable to;

having a strong support system – my husband, mom and elder sister have been critical pillars of support to me over the years, emotionally and administratively in maintaining my sanity and running the Homefront;

## 02

## Do you believe that the law is really a jealous mistress?



A very jealous mistress indeed! To consistently be a top-notch commercial lawyer and leader in a Tier 1 firm requires many long and arduous hours of: investing in your personal development to ram up your skills, keeping up with emerging trends in law and business, attending to client needs (of diverse scope and complexity) and deepening existing client relationships, managing people of varying personality types and ensuring they all work well together, chasing and originating mandates, envisioning and contributing to strategic initiatives and helping to implement same – the list is endless. Being a successful (female) legal practitioner is a demanding role and requires a significant amount of passion, dedication, hard work, diligence, and dynamism, as only the best and most resilient talents will thrive.



Yes, it is. You must really be committed to devoting a sizable portion of your waking moments to the pursuit of law if you intend to make a mark in this profession.



While the law can be demanding and time-consuming, I believe it doesn't necessarily have to be a "jealous mistress" if one can effectively manage their time and priorities.



The law will only be a jealous mistress to you if you make room for it to be. Personally, the law is not and can never be my jealous mistress. As much as I am devoted to practising law, I am equally committed to the other things in my life that give me joy.

## 03

**Asides your life as a lawyer, what other area are you excelling at? What influenced your choice of that area of pursuit?**

Aside from practicing law, I excel in mixology and entrepreneurship. My passion for crafting delicious mocktails and drinks stemmed from my love for creativity and hospitality. I was drawn to this area because it allows me to express my creativity while providing enjoyment to others.



I own and manage a travel company that has done quite well in its almost two years of existence. Experiential travel is my way of life, and my travel brand gives me the unique opportunity of curating wholesome travel experiences for people.

## 04

**How have you managed to balance building a family (if you have one) and a successful career simultaneously in the legal profession?**

My husband's support has been tremendously instrumental to my professional success. In the earlier days of my career, he abided very late nights at work, several cancelled dates, lack of my attention, and several other anomalies. He held the fort with the children where necessary and continues to do so. He took over school drop-offs a while back due to my being very nocturnal and tired in the morning from overnight work. He even bathed and dressed the children for school at various times. Coming up as a young lawyer, I was very single-minded and passionate about my job and that singularity made it difficult for me at the time to make compromises on the personal front that I felt would jeopardise my work trajectory. Despite these challenges, he has cheered me on at my lowest points in my career and celebrated every single milestone with me. He has always supported me to manifest my fullest potential - and continues to be my champion.

I would therefore say young female professionals need to be very discerning about whom they select as a life partner. This is one of the most critical decisions you will ever make – and your choice can make or mar your career. Watch out for the traits that show your partner is compassionate, driven and supportive of having a partner that will pursue an active professional life. The signs are always there even in the early stages of courtship. This is not to say that there won't be challenges – my passion for my work has strained my relationship with my husband many times. However, his innate delight in seeing me succeed in what I enjoy and the compromises I have learnt to make along the way, have made for a fairly rewarding experience for us both.

A good support system is fundamental. My mom, my older sister and numerous loyal and dedicated drivers and nannies have over the years, provided a solid foundation of care for my children and household. Having a structured routine for domestic matters also goes a long way in ensuring things move smoothly along without my personal involvement. I am a very detailed person and tend to be exacting with my requirements of roles and responsibilities on my domestic staff.



Building a family and a successful legal career has been nothing short of God's grace. First, I believe God is interested in all aspects of my life including my family and profession and wants me to succeed. Knowing this, I draw my strength from Him daily trusting that He will not fail me. I have a super supportive spouse (shout out to my hubby, Tolulope Balogun). He's my biggest cheerleader and makes family life quite easy. His understanding lightens my workload on the home front, and he is very quick to step in and assist with our kids when work exigencies demand that I be away from home. My kids are awesome and make mummy duties easy. I also have a great support system in my family and in laws – they are constantly there to pray, offer words of encouragement and let me bend their ears (when I require advice or on days when I feel the walls are closing in). I should also state that I am very fortunate to work at Olaniwun Ajayi, a firm which is truly supportive of women attaining the highest level of excellence- both professionally and in their personal lives- and have built structures that ensure this is possible.



Balancing family and career in the legal profession requires careful planning and communication. I ensure to allocate quality time for my family, friends and as best as possible, prioritize their needs, while also fulfilling my professional obligations.



I am unmarried and without kids, however, I believe that the strategies for achieving a work-life balance would be very useful in striking a balance between building a family and maintaining a successful legal career.

## 05

**In navigating the complexities of work-life balance, what sacrifices or compromises have you had to make along the way? How do you reconcile these decisions with your career aspirations and personal goals?**



I have sometimes had to sacrifice loads of sleep to get work done or morph from being a professional to being there for my family. There have been instances where work commitments clash with family commitments (e.g. attendance at school functions for my children) and I have, (with proper explanations to my kids) had to find family members who can attend school events on my behalf. I have also sometimes had to re-arrange work schedules around family commitments so one does not suffer. I still feel guilty when I have to miss family events/commitments on account of work, but I have found that explaining properly to the various stakeholders smoothens the way. Extending yourself some grace also helps especially when you find yourself falling short of achieving the work/life synchronization you set out to achieve.



Navigating work-life balance often involves making sacrifices and compromises. For example, I may need to delegate certain tasks or adjust my schedule to accommodate family commitments. I reconcile these decisions by reminding myself of my long-term career aspirations and personal goals, while also ensuring my well-being and happiness.



The only thing that comes to mind is that I used to be out every weekend. My weekends were for thorough enjoyment, and I never missed except in extenuating circumstances. I would go restaurant hopping and visit all the trendy bars, clubs, and lounges all through the weekend from close of business on Friday. However, I have had to cut down on my weekend outings because I realised that I needed some extra time during the weekend to either clear any outstanding deliverables or get ahead with tasks for the next week. This has helped to increase my productivity at work and with my business.



COVID and stay-at-home orders that came with it revealed the gaps in my daily routine. I realized my children were growing up fast and needed to bond with me more. Prior to COVID, they spent a lot of time at my mom's, and I hardly spent quality time with them as they left home before me, and I usually got home after they were in bed. So COVID was a blessing in disguise indeed and I learnt to disengage from work and be fully present to listen to them and develop a camaraderie outside of the quintessential parent-child dynamic. Post-COVID, I made a conscious decision to continue to build upon the connections we had developed, and this means at times, not focusing on my work deliverables while at home. Doing movie nights, scheduling dates where we just hang out as a family, listening to music together, watching skits and memes on IG together, and things like that.

Making time for my family life and social engagements means that I sometimes have to refuse to attend client or business development meetings on weekends and public holidays, and I plan my business travel very carefully to ensure I am not away for long periods at a time. Making compromises to achieve balance also means female professionals may need to deliberately slow down their growth trajectory – for instance, climb the proverbial ladder more slowly and compete less aggressively for available leadership promotions – as the demands of leadership may be unsuitable or detrimental to your current personal situation. For a few years after I had my son, I had to do this as my marriage was undergoing considerable stress. You have to bear in mind that even though you have the same capabilities as your male peers (sometimes, even far more!), the multiplicity and complexity of your roles as wife, mother, caregiver, daughter, sister, etc, may mean you have to reach the leadership destination through a more measured, and maybe even longer route. Slow and steady may be the best way to win the race, sometimes.

Professionally, I have seen that traits such as outspokenness, confidence and a penchant for candour - which are lauded in men, are viewed more negatively in women. You may be cast as disrespectful, rude, aggressive, and confrontational for exhibiting the same traits a man is being promoted or held as a role model for. This can be extremely frustrating and demoralising for an ambitious female professional, especially within the Nigerian cultural context which is extremely paternalistic and demands subservience of women. Even in the most liberalised professional organisations, it is not unusual to experience chauvinism and double standards from time to time, with women being expected to show deference to male counterparts or to be more subtle or accommodating in expressing dissenting views. As much as is within my influence, I do my reasonable best to shatter these cultural and social norms and to forge a path that allows all women to manifest their fullest authentic potential within my organisation. Nonetheless, I have learnt to also make compromises where necessary – choosing my battles such that I can still challenge prejudices and unconscious bias against women in the workplace, without undermining due authority and being viewed as “the angry black woman”. This has helped me a lot mentally and psychologically, so that I don't carry over the misplaced resentment from situations I feel are unfair at work, to my interactions with my husband or other people in my personal life.

# 06

## What are some practical tips or strategies you would offer to younger professionals aspiring to achieve work-life balance while pursuing career advancement in the legal field?

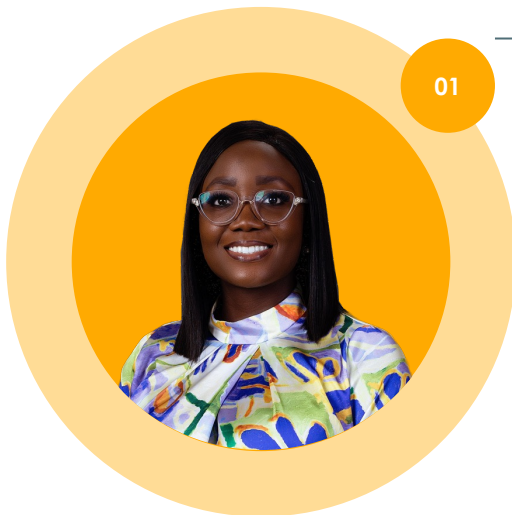
Ask for help-some people have walked the path you are on, and you can borrow a thing or two from their books

Remember to breathe and cut yourself some slack when you fall short of your expectations. Rome wasn't built in a day.



02 Prioritize, Prioritize, Prioritize

03 Marry the right partner: if you intend to get married whilst on this journey, please marry the right partner. The right partner will handhold you when the going gets tough.



01 For younger professionals seeking work-life balance in the legal field, I recommend setting clear boundaries, prioritizing self-care, and learning to delegate tasks effectively. It's also crucial to communicate openly with colleagues and supervisors about workload and personal commitments.

**Define Priorities-** As a starting point, you have to reflect on and define what truly matters to you in your work and personal life. This sets the tone for the decisions you would make going forward, in relation to both aspects of your life.



**Effective Time Management-** This is very crucial for achieving a work-life balance. Plan your days, weeks, and months in advance to ensure a balance between work and personal commitments. You can employ the use of to-do lists, calendars, practice time blocking, and such other time management techniques as are available to you.

**Invest in Self-Care-** Self-care is extremely important to me. It is something that professionals easily miss out on perhaps due to the pressures from work. However, prioritizing your self-care will do you good in the short and long run. You must be intentional in creating time for activities that promote your physical and mental wellbeing such as exercising, going on spa dates, meditating or such other hobbies that you truly enjoy. This helps to improve the quality of your life which has a direct impact on your performance at work.



### **Acquire Knowledge & Master Your Skill:**

There is no short cut to learning the law. You have to get your hands dirty, do those transactions/briefs, work those long hours, do that research, attend those long meetings, read those books, master those legal principles and how to apply them, understudy that mentor, and so on. Law is best perfected by dedicated apprenticeship. Your skills and capabilities increase in scope and depth, in direct correlation to the frequency, diversity and complexity of the tasks you undertake. There is a time for reaping, and that for sowing. You can only command the respect from your colleagues and supervisors, and therefore demand the personal time you require, when they know you are the best at what you do! So you have to invest in yourself, constantly. This is the currency you will use to advance quickly through the ranks, and then be able to draw boundaries for your personal time.

### **Work Effectively & Efficiently:**

This is a skill acquired over time. You need to be able to manage yourself effectively. Self-discipline and awareness are key to this. Under what conditions do you perform more optimally – daytime or nighttime? Does it take you time to read through and understand lengthy documents? How often do you meet deliverable targets set by your supervisor? What volume of work are you able to churn out each week/month at a consistent level of quality? What's the level of markup your supervisor sends back your work with? Which tasks do you struggle with more, which do you find easier? What area of law are you able to perform more effortlessly, which, otherwise? Routinely asking yourself these questions and paying attention to the patterns in your work style and output will help you develop strategies to overcome your shortcomings and actively seek opportunities to showcase your strengths. This cycle will in the long run help you be a very efficient professional with more time for personal pursuits.

### **Develop & Nurture Hobbies:**

There will always be work to do. However, you must bear in mind that life must be more memorable and enjoyable than the job presents, otherwise you will end up being bitter and alone. Fill your life with the things that bring you joy and fulfilment. You like to write? Scribble notes during short breaks at work and make time for it at the weekend. To read? Have a kindle or buy books, join a book club. To cook? Invite friends over at a weekend and feed them to a stupor. Knitting? Puzzles? Restaurant hopping? Whatever it is that catches your fancy, go for it. Make time for it. These little things mean a lot. They help you to remain a balanced and healthy human, better able to present your authentic and productive self at work. They make you more interesting, with depth to survive those boring networking events. You would be surprised how much nurturing a hobby can present networking opportunities too!



**Set Boundaries:** It may sound absurd, given that the goal is to achieve professional and market recognition. However, you will need to set boundaries at work in order for your personal life to thrive. This is not about becoming that overly sensitive worker that whines at every inconvenience and shirks every responsibility on account of it posing some remote mental health challenge. This is about firmly conveying to your colleagues and supervisors, your hard limits on the incursion of work into your personal time. For instance, when you are on holiday you should only be contacted for emergencies or urgent issues. Of course, this presupposes you have managed your portfolio in a responsible manner and not flitted off leaving land mines for your delegates to deal with. This could also entail limits around when you can be reached after work hours (difficult, I know!). Again, this requires that you work efficiently and manage your tasks responsibly.

**Date/Marry Sensibly:** I cannot overemphasize the importance of having a significant other that supports and understands the demands of a professional lifestyle. Choose carefully and not just with your heart. Be pragmatic and watch out for red flags. Many super-talented women have been stopped in their tracks by partners who destroyed rather than supported their dreams and aspirations.

**Make time to Rest:** Work/life balance is often portrayed as how professionals share time between their work, and the people in their lives. The individual is a fundamental component of the balancing equation. You are at the centre of your life. **You** matter, simply as an individual. You must therefore make time to just be you, not as a role or responsibility to anyone. Dare to be selfish. Take time to rest and be reinvigorated. Sleep those long hours every now and then. Take that solo vacation if you can afford it. Do a staycation, go to a hotel or a location you can be alone without parents, significant others, children, etc. I simply lock myself in my room and my children and hubby now know to leave me alone. I stay awake when the house is quiet at night to think, pray and just revel in my quirks. I spend my Saturdays solo window-shopping or hang out with a close friend whose company I truly enjoy. These little interventions help you to de-stress significantly and avoid burn-out.

**Be Relentless in the Pursuit of Critical Changes to Institutional Culture:**

My Firm currently has a reasonably conducive environment for achieving work/life balance – but this hasn't always been the case, say in comparison to a decade ago. The current structures and policies that enable women (and men) alike thrive in both personal and professional spheres of endeavour are the outcome of several years of campaigning and lobbying by varied interested parties within the Firm, pressing on the leaders of the Firm to change the work culture. These changes have taken time to percolate and manifest. I recall as a young associate, many proposals that were advanced by me and my peers at the time, were shut down and sometimes even berated. We were disheartened, but over time, constant engagement, reiterating the overall benefits to institutional growth and stability and remaining undeterred despite negative responses helped to gradually change perspectives and align views. The current generation of lawyers in the Firm are now the beneficiaries of campaigns that preceded their time with the Firm. So, in retrospect, I say that as changemakers and purveyors of inclusion for women, we must avoid getting unduly emotional. Present your case to decision-makers and leaders with facts, logic and coherence. Leaders tend to respond to these more positively. Be relentless and no matter how daunting the task may seem, keep parroting the same issues on inclusion and work/life balance and you will be shocked that one day, you will look around, and see that you have been part of a profound institutional transformation that benefits everyone – men and women alike.

## 07

**Tell us about your view on time management and how it has influenced your life and personal pursuits.**

Time is a currency you need to spend rightly. Growing up, my mum ingrained in us all the mantra that “time waits for no one” and this showed us the importance of schedules for different activities. This has shaped my values till this day and has driven how I go about my daily pursuits.



Time management is essential in both my legal career and personal pursuits. I prioritize tasks based on urgency and importance, utilize tools, and regularly review my schedule to ensure optimal use of time.

Lack of good time management may be that one thing affecting your performance at work or holding you back from doing something that you genuinely love. As mentioned earlier, I am very big on effectively managing my time because it is one strategy that has made it possible for me to have a legal career as well as a thriving business. I have consistently applied time management skills, and this has helped me to avoid missing deadlines, procrastination, unwanted stress and has helped me maintain my reputation as someone that can be trusted to deliver results.



## 08

## How do you deal with burn out?



I have a number of things I do: (i) I pray asking God to help get out of the funk; (ii) I listen to music; (iii) I take mini vacations with family. I have been mulling about taking a year long sabbatical from work for some time. I hear this is really great for burn outs. Fingers crossed on how this will unfold.



To deal with burnout, I practice self-care by taking regular breaks. I also love to travel and engage in hobbies outside of work, seeking support from friends and family. Additionally, I'm not afraid to seek professional help if needed.



First, I talk to God and ask for the help of the Holy Spirit. Then I speak to my therapist who guides me through identifying the particular stressors for that burnout, following which I practice mindfulness and take breathers which help to reframe my mindset. I would also definitely go on a vacation if the time were ideal.



I experienced burn out for the longest time. In fact, I think I spent most of my 30s burnt out. I started out my legal career at 24years old, very passionately, intensely and fast paced, and I believe that in my first decade of work, I did enough work for the next decade! I became unmotivated and disenchanted, my relationship with my hubby got quite strained, I was trying for a second child, and I was simply exhausted from the endless cycle of high-pressured work and moving from one client deliverable to another. It all seemed so meaningless and pointless. This was also the period I was being considered for partnership, so the pressure was unbearable (especially as my bosses kept subtly quizzing me, wondering where all the fire went and why I suddenly seemed so unbothered). It was a tough period for me, and I even seriously considered resigning and exploring other avenues of employment as I began to resent my job and its ever-demanding nature.

How did I get over it? Looking back, I really can't say it was one specific thing. One thing I can say though, is that burn-out is best avoided than treated. In hindsight, I should have paid better attention to my mental and emotional health. I should have seen the signs, slowed down and maybe even taken a sabbatical. I spent so much time being perpetually "ON", that burn-out was inevitable. I even began having minor anxiety attacks, having dreams about underperforming at work and being publicly shamed – classic signs of stress, I later gathered. It also didn't help that I had accumulated a lot of guilt over not being fully present for my growing son and beloved husband. I even began to feel God was punishing me for my selfishness in the pursuit of my career, by withholding a second child.

So, my advice to women who are in the middle stage of their careers looking to leapfrog into leadership roles is this – don't burn so bright that your fire burns you. Every woman's stress tolerance threshold is unique and different, but you must be sufficiently self-aware to know when to reign in your ambition, in the interest of your overall well-being. That job, that role, that position – will always be there, but you won't be if you overextend yourself too quickly and become too mentally and emotionally drained to be useful to the organization you work with, or those who love you. Please don't get me wrong – I am an advocate of hard work, dedication and focus. But. If you are like me and being loved on by those you hold dear is equally if not more important than reaching the pinnacle of professional achievement, then those strides you make at work will gradually lose value and importance if you reach the finish line alone. As you pour yourself into your career, you must also be poured into by those you love and be nourished by them.

Without waxing poetic any further, I will say that my journey out of burn out was slow. Rejuvenation was achieved through reevaluating my personal circumstance, and making necessary adjustments and compromises to ensure future Ibi could thrive as a professional and as a person. I also learned to stop being so much of a workaholic and accepted that I was not indispensable. The work, the business, the Firm will go on – with or without me.

# 09

## How do you recharge and what activities or hobbies contribute to your well-being?

I love my me time. I love reading fictional novels and I have been known to watch a movie or two. For relaxation, you will often find me curled up on a sofa reading a novel or watching a movie.



I constantly recharge, every day! I take short breaks during each working day to listen to music, scroll through IG, chat with colleagues, or simply eat! I love food.

Generally, I love to read so if I'm not working, I'm on my Kindle reading the latest mindless romance that catches my fancy. I listen to music. I sing – singing, especially praise and worship songs, when I am all alone, gives me so much peace and joy. I pray and read a devotional. I chat with my kids. Gossip with my hubby. Catch up with a bestie. Visit my mom. Hang out with my sister. I attend *owanbe* parties every once in a while - the Lagosian in me thoroughly enjoys the over-the-top dressing, decadent food, people watching and music bands. #Opoorrrr! I SHOP! I am a shopaholic. I love to dress up, so I am always spending endless hours browsing e-sites and IG pages for my next fashion hunt. I used to watch TV and movies quite obsessively before, but I do much less of that nowadays.



Recharging for me involves spending time outdoors, experimenting with new cocktail recipes, and engaging in physical activities like dancing for fitness, games night etc. These activities contribute to my overall well-being and help me maintain balance in my life.



I intend to write a novel one day so I also play around in my mind with plots and characters. I love to dance though I'm just "mid" at it, as my teenage son would say. I do intend to attend dancing classes soon though.



I recharge by traveling to a place with mountains, waterfalls, beaches and/or trees. Other activities that I enjoy are watching Spanish shows, going on spa dates, and dancing.

## 10

## Beyond your professional achievements, how do you leverage your platform and influence as a female legal professional to advocate for gender equality, diversity, and social justice within your organization and the broader legal community?

I speak up when I find social injustice being meted out. I also mentor young and upcoming professionals within my circle of influence.



At every chance I get, I let the people around me know that with the help of God, they can do whatever they set their hearts to regardless of gender or current social status. I use my personal experiences in letting them know that having the right mindset is a giant step towards breaking whatever societal barriers to success that exist.

As a female legal professional, I actively support initiatives that promote inclusivity and mentorship opportunities for women in the legal profession. I am a member of various organizations like Women in the Profession that cater to young and older women. I also ensure that I am vocal in every room to allow other women know that we can be seen and heard.

I have consistently over the years been a strong proponent for gender diversity and inclusion within my Firm. I seek to create opportunities for young female lawyers and push them to assume leadership roles within the Firm. I am candid with my experience and always willing to provide steerage when needed. I have played an active role in carefully curating my Firm's IWD celebrations over the better part of the last decade, and in so doing, brought consciousness to the issues and challenges affecting women in the workplace as well as proposing strategies to address them.

I do think though that I need to do more, both within my Firm and in wider society. I feel strongly that our journey as women in the corporate world is a universal one and we all can benefit from each other's stories and experience. In a few years, I would like to have been instrumental to the establishment of a formal mentorship program for young girls/women who want to pursue a legal career. I also plan to play a more pivotal role in initiatives that promote the education and empowerment of the girl-child. I look at my eight-year-old daughter with so much fondness and amazement all the time. I see her intelligence, passion and spirit and I don't want anything in this world to ever dim her light. This epitomizes the way I feel about every little girl - the girl child is full of so much potential and *magic*. I want to be a part of helping to either pave the way for them so their journey to leadership and self-empowerment is easier, or to provide the steerage and sounding board they require.

## 11

## What actionable steps do you believe female professionals can take to contribute to social and transformative changes?

**Speak up** - your opinion counts.

Remember, the change you desire to see should start with you. Keep giving your best to whatever you do and effect that change you desire to see in your little corner of the world. The seemingly “small” changes you effect, when aggregated, has the ability to propel meaningful changes overall.

The first step is to speak out because our silence can be deemed as approval. If there is a change that we want to see, we must be vocal about it regardless of what position we find ourselves. The second step is to impact. We must be the change we want to see. Let our behaviors and attitude towards those around us reflect the change that we want to see in the broader society.

Female professionals can contribute to social and transformative changes by amplifying their voices, supporting each other, and advocating for policies that promote gender equality and diversity. Additionally, taking on leadership roles and actively participating in community initiatives can make a significant impact.

## 12

In the context of building a sustainable network, how do you approach building meaningful professional relationships that go beyond transactional connections? What strategies do you employ to nurture and maintain these relationships over time?



- i. I am intentional about cultivating my relationships.
- ii. Start early and grow with your contacts.
- iii. Be real and genuinely interested in the people you meet along the way. I have found that people tend to open up to you when they realize your interest spans beyond the transactions that led you to them. I have made lifelong friendships from relationships which started out as a “client” meeting.

Building meaningful professional relationships requires authenticity, empathy, and consistent communication. I approach networking with the intention of forming genuine connections rather than focusing solely on transactional benefits. I make an effort to stay in touch with contacts, offer support when needed, and foster mutual respect and trust over time.



The approach I take is integration. As much as we may want to set boundaries between our professional and personal lives, one way to ensure that we build meaningful relationships beyond transactional connections is to integrate or blend personal and professional needs. Sometimes, I show that I am a real person with both strengths and flaws behind the professional look and that helps to gain trust and nurture great relationships.

Despite my mostly (seemingly) upbeat nature, I am an innate introvert. My best times are spent alone, deep-thinking, reading a book, listening to music or chilling with my inner circle of family and friends. I find extensive social interactions quite draining and would ordinarily seek to avoid them – save for the joy of dressing up, looking good and being seen and admired for limited hours. If you are like me, then you may find having to socially engage for professional purposes a daunting and apprehensive task indeed. In addition, I keep my circle small and don't find it easy to connect with newfound acquaintances. This interesting bouquet of characteristics have made business networking extremely challenging for me. Coupled with a mindset of strong belief that work-related relationships (especially with clients) should be short-dated and restricted to a transactional nature, this made me struggle for the better part of my career with effective business development and networking. Fast forward to becoming a leader in the Firm, with responsibilities to nurture old clients and originate new ones - the art of building meaningful professional relationships assumed a new poignancy and relevance.



**Based on my experience with the pitfalls that a stultified sense of making new connections impacted on my career, my advice on strategies that can be deployed to nurture and sustain business relationships over time are as follows:**

**Be Authentic & Not Opportunistic:** Your engagements with business colleagues should be as authentic as possible, without compromising acceptable standards of decency and decorum. Be your (best)self. There is an inherent paradox in business networking – we all know we are out to make the most out of each connection, but at the same time no one wants to be propositioned in the way of the proverbial car salesman. It is generally off-putting to openly convey that the singular reason for your engagement with a business target is the potential for a profitable or beneficial opportunity. No one likes to be used. So, the right balance needs to be struck between genuinely wanting to connect and know the person as a human-being, and not being a nuisance or a hustler. This is a skill best learnt over time but there is a consciousness required to stay on the right side of being accessible and original.

01

**Start Young:** Building a network of business professionals and nurturing these connections takes time. It is best to start making those connections as early as possible from the onset of your career. This helps to build confidence and ease over time. The top executives and decision-makers of the high-value companies of the future are the rookies of today. Connections are best made when you are all rookies with high aspirations for the future and shared struggles. As a trainee associate on a brief or transaction, leverage your position as the most junior person to make connections with your peers within the client organization and transaction counterparties. Make plans to hang out with your colleagues at work; take shared rides home, have drinks, see a movie or join social clubs with them too. This helps to build trust and confidence within work teams, and helps to “ginger” your small-talk game – which you can then use more effectively with people outside your organization.

02

**Stay in Touch:** Make intermittent but reasonably frequent contact with your business connections. I must admit, this is something I find hard to do myself, but I have seen this work superbly well for other professionals. My intuitive reaction is to avoid contact that makes me come across as creepy or intrusive, and so I seriously hesitate to engage my business contacts informally. Such habits must be overcome. My dearest mom has a saying, “everything reacts to care” and I daresay that this has proven true. The occasional WhatsApp text to check up, the occasional call or hang out with business colleagues, even forwarding news items that pertain to their business or noticing and commenting on a nice display picture (depending on the level of familiarity! Remember, don’t be forward or presumptuous) - all these are good ways of keeping in contact or broaching a conversation. Good and lasting friendships can be borne out of relationships that start out as purely business, so you do yourself a great disservice if you are either too sensitive to try or too close-minded to explore these avenues to expand your networks. Also important is actively cultivating the connections you establish in your early days. Grow with your business connections and as you rise on the corporate ladder, so will they. Forming strong bonds before such people attain influential positions allows for more authentic interactions that will be the steppingstone to having a lifelong professional ally.

03

**Stay Informed:** Knowledge is truly power. You need to be on top of local and international news and current affairs. Whether in relation to politics, business, religion, music, finance, social media, etc, you cannot be a consummate networker without being knowledgeable on a diverse range of issues and topics. This is the catalyst for initiating conversations with business associates, sustaining small talk at corporate events, or passing along information that is specifically curated to a target connection’s business or personal needs. It goes without saying that you must also be on top of emerging market trends, jurisprudence and landmark case law in your chosen field and must also continually learn and develop new skills. People generally like to be associated with knowledgeable and technically proficient professionals. Leverage this to your networking advantage.

04

05

**Solve Problems:** It is a human tendency to gravitate towards those who lighten our burdens. Whether you’re advising on a transaction/brief or taking a quick phone call with a business connection over a seemingly inconsequential conundrum, be that person that is an enabler. Help people to solve problems and this psychologically endears you to them. A person is most likely to remember you in a positive light if you have helped them or their business. You easily become the first to come to mind when they have intractable legal or business problems and with this comes the opportunity to deepen the relationship further. A solutions-oriented mindset is an integral asset of the client-service professional.

**Be Visible:** Attend those conferences, speak at those workshops, write those articles, take up that professional or industry position, lead those initiatives. Market recognition is critical to developing and nurturing business connections. Someone who heard you speak at a conference or read a thought-provoking article you wrote is more likely to want to connect with you and deepen the relationship. You don't want to be the best kept secret that no one ever heard about. You must therefore be deliberate and intentional about your business persona/personal brand, and how you signal (in a credible way) to your target market that you are a quality professional that will be beneficial for them to be associated with.

06

07

**Be careful though -** don't get drawn into social activities that are at variance with your core personal values or beliefs. Boundaries may need to be firmly and politely set, and this requires a lot of emotional intelligence and maturity. However, if done properly, the benefits of having "street credibility" are exponential for your professional growth.

08

**Build Social Relevance:** Again, this may be challenging for natural introverts. However, borrowing from the strategies our parents and grandparents used to develop strong business networks, this is tried, tested, and trusted. Our predecessors placed a strong value on social bonds formed from childhood and sustained this by frequent social interactions at parties and all manner of communal celebrations. Powerful and influential people socialize - and regularly too. If you want to meet them, you have to be in their circle. Without being a social climber and opportunist, a good way to achieve this is to leverage the professional relationships you develop when you are opportune to advise on or be involved in transactions or briefs that involve the businesses of the powerful and influential. It may start with an invitation to a corporate dinner to mark the successful closing of a deal, or the business trips abroad that allow most to bond over late night dinners or tourist activities. Build those relationships, attend those dinners, go for drinks, relax with your business colleagues. People tend to trust professionals they can let their hair down with. Social functions thus tend to create an atmosphere for deeper and realer connections. You get to see people in their element and connect with them in a more impactful way than business dealings would allow. This helps monumentally with chemistry and flow when doing business together. Being seen in the right circles will also create good impressions and attract more of the caliber of individuals that are likely to provide beneficial business connections.



**CHAPTER SIX:**  
**DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT  
FEMALE PROFESSIONALS**

# Meet Our Contributors

## Abisola Odeinde

Abisola is a distinguished Partner in the Energy & Infrastructure Team of the esteemed Olaniwun Ajayi LP where she showcases her wealth of expertise and leadership. She holds a master's degree in law from the University of London, which shows her devoted commitment to achieving excellence. With years of experience in mergers and acquisitions, structured finance, private equity, and general corporate finance, Abisola is a driving force in navigating complex financial landscapes. Abisola was ranked as a "Recommended Lawyer" in Nigeria in the 2023 edition of Legal 500 Rankings and in Energy & Natural Resources and Real Estate & Construction. Her inclusive and collaborative approach fosters a culture of creativity and continuous improvement, making Abisola a driving force in the ever-evolving realm of leadership.



## Ganiyat Seriki

Ganiyat is an associate in the Power and Infrastructure Practice (widely regarded as Nigeria's flagship power practice) at Olaniwun Ajayi. She was recently recognised by the legal directory IFLR1000 as a rising star in project development due to the experience she has garnered from routinely advising corporate clients, local banks, development finance institutions, international commercial banks, project developers and government entities on various aspects of financings, development and acquisitions within the energy and infrastructure sector. In a relatively short period, she is rising through the ranks and is fast becoming a trusted adviser to her clients in offering legal and commercial solutions that arise in energy and infrastructure transactions.



## Hibbatun-Basser Shobambi

Hibbatun-Nasser is an assiduous and goal-oriented IP Associate in the firm's IP team where she advises indigenous and multinational clients on IP protection and enforcement mechanisms in Nigeria and Africa. She is passionate about the development of IP in Nigeria and founded a premier IP law podcast in Nigeria (Everything IP law) dedicated to providing creatives and businesses with the best available options to leverage their intangible assets in a fast-paced technology-driven world.

In 2020 and 2021, she was recognized as an "outstanding IP practitioner" by the World IP Review (WIPR) and recently ranked by ManagingIP for the EMEA region. She is currently serving as an Executive Committee member of the Intellectual Property Law Association of Nigeria (IPLAN).



## Ifeoluwa Omisope

Ifeoluwa is a part-time creative and builder. She enjoys expressing herself through various artistic mediums and finds immense satisfaction in turning ideas into tangible and meaningful ventures. She is also a professional baker, an intermediate fashion designer and an entrepreneur on sabbatical. One of her secret hacks to improving her ever-increasing skill arsenal is in-depth research, reading, binge-watching useful videos on social media and practising. She was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2022. Currently, Ifeoluwa works as a Digital Marketing Analyst at Olaniwun Ajayi LP.



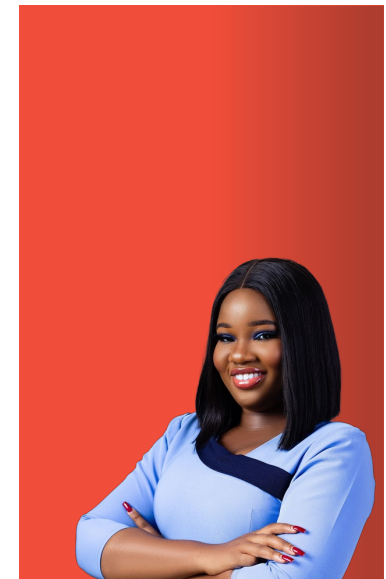
# 02

## What misconceptions about the capabilities of female lawyers have you observed in your professional journey and how have you debunked these misconceptions through your work, actions, or accomplishments?

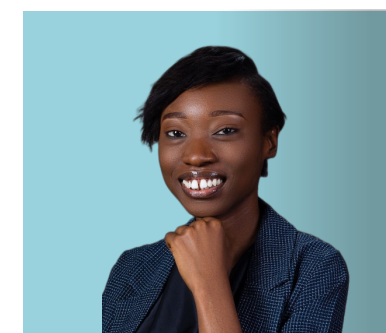
I think there can be a perception that women are reluctant to take on leadership roles or have limited career ambitions and a lack of leadership skills. Personally, I have tried to debunk these notions by taking on leadership roles, developing my leadership skills, and not shying away from the challenges of leadership. Many women re-enter the world of work after a career hiatus for family or other reasons. Such examples as well as my re-entry into a top tier firm even after many years away should hopefully help to challenge notions that women are not as ambitious or are unable to attain their career goals at the right time for them.



Fortunately for me, during my legal career, I have not faced discrimination from my male colleagues in the workplace. However, in terms of being female in the workplace, I have observed the misconception around how a woman looks and her professionalism. For instance, some still find it to be a rare sighting that a woman can be the ultimate professional and still be a “girly girl” and be interested in getting her nails done, beauty products, etc. feeding into the stereotype of the distinction between “beauty and brains”. However, for me, I do not believe physical attributes are related in whatever manner to the work done. I have been able to show that hard work and attitude to work is how a female lawyer (and all lawyers) should be adjudged in the workplace.



I have not observed any misconceptions, but I remember a comment I received at the National Rounds of the Phillip C. Jessup Moot. The judges practically implored me to become a litigator mentioning that there were few astounding women litigators in the profession. I think that itself is a misconception, that there are not many women who do exceptionally well in and out of court.



# 03

**It is often said that women have to sacrifice a part of their careers for family life or a part of family life for their careers if they have to be successful. What do you think about this? What personal sacrifices have you made for your career, and how do you feel about them now?**



It isn't always the case that a sacrifice has to be made for women to have a healthy work-family life balance. Many women have been able to achieve this with a strong support system and prioritizing different aspects of career and family at different times and as the situation requires. The key is balance. Efforts that promote workplace flexibility, ensuring parental leave policies are in place and a general supportive environment can go a long way in ensuring this balance is achieved and the need for such sacrifice is limited. To attain my career long term and short-term goals, I do often have to make sacrifices. However, I am very clear that balance is key and if that balance exists in all aspects of my life, I am willing and able to make the necessary sacrifices. I have also had to adjust my career trajectory for family requirements. Whilst that was not without its challenges, I am happy and satisfied with my decisions.

In a sensitive profession like ours, the need to balance ethical standards with integrity is critical to maintaining the trust of clients and complying with the provisions of the law. Our clients' interest is paramount, and we must seek to seek to serve them within legal and ethical boundaries. In situations where my personal values contradict with an action required in the course of my work, my approach is to apply the ethical test. If what is required of me aligns with the ethics of my profession, I am happy to set aside my personal views and serve the client. Thankfully, the ethics of the legal profession are consistent with generally acceptable moral norms.



I have not yet gotten to the stage of my life when I want to start a family, and so personally I have not made any life sacrifices so far. However, I do believe that I am only in a relationship because it started prior to entering full-time employment as a lawyer. If I had started worked as a single lady and jumped into the demands of the work almost immediately, I believe it would have been extremely difficult for me to have taken out the time to cultivate any sort of romantic relationships. Even as young adults, echoes around relationships taking a back burner to careers have started.

In addition, whilst I haven't made sacrifices as to having a family, one aspect of my life I have made sacrifices in relation to is with respect to my friendships. There are quite a few friendships that were not cultivated and nurtured as I prioritized work over those relationships, and it is still a huge regret how many years later. I wish I had taken the time to nurture those relationships along with trying to be successful at work. I do believe as a career-women, you cannot have it all and choosing one path means the other path suffers. However, I believe this is where supportive partners, family members and friends come in, backed up by a willingness to get help. By having a supporting spouse and having helping hands, life will be easier, but not outrightly easy. Some relationships will suffer, and what is important is to understand what sacrifices have to be made and mitigating the effects of making those sacrifices. This is especially true given that there are some aspects of a woman's life that she has to go through alone. This includes her pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, etc. It will be hard during this stage to juggle these responsibilities with a demanding job, no matter how much help the woman has. This is where organizations come in with respect to supporting their female employees and ensuring they have sufficient time off in this respect.



Sacrifice is relative, and I think it should be defined based on values, personal choices, and goals. Some women see raising their children as success and even choose to be stay-at-home moms. And I don't think their decisions should be maligned especially where they had a 'promising' career. Their definition of success has changed and should be respected. I am yet to make any personal sacrifice.

# 04

## Have you ever faced resistance or skepticism from clients, colleagues, or superiors based on gender related assumptions about your abilities as a female lawyer? How did you address these challenges without coming off as combative?



I recall one occasion where a counterparty in a negotiation responded to a question with 'this is why I do not like to deal with women!'. Although I was offended, I simply focused on the work, on the matters to be resolved and on ensuring that the negotiations were fruitful. I believe I was assertive but remained professional and diplomatic for the remainder of the meeting. I think when we are results oriented even when aggrieved, gender related skepticism and assumptions can be dissipated.

There are times when as a female lawyer you will face skepticism from clients, colleagues, or superiors based on gender related assumptions about your abilities as a female lawyer. However, I believe the way to address this is speaking through your work and your abilities. In such an instance, particularly where the skepticism is from a client, the best way to address the challenge is through the quality, timeliness and utility of whatever work and deliverable will be provided to the client.

In addition, I think being seen as "combative" has a negative undertone around it particularly in relation to a woman standing up for her right. I do not believe that in any circumstance when a woman stands up for herself, she should be seen as combative. This is interrelated to the popular stereotype of an "angry black woman" which is given to black women in white dominated spaces who speak up for themselves. Therefore, I am never unwilling to speak up for myself when I believe I am being stereotyped just because of the fear of being seen as combative. Sometimes, being seen as combative may just be the fastest way to get the relevant point across quickly and ensure that such a negative discussion does not repeat itself.



No, I haven't. I have been blessed to work with and for people who do not limit my capabilities based on my gender.

I have never faced any of these. I am very privileged to be working closely with female superiors and gender has never been an issue.



## 05

## Have you witnessed any instances where myths about female lawyers hindered opportunities for female colleagues? Have there been instances where you found yourself realizing some of these myths were true?



Whilst I have not personally witnessed such instances, I understand these instances occur. I have been told of cases of biased hiring and promotion where male candidates are hired or promoted based not on merit but on 'old boys' school associations, beliefs that female lawyers will soon quit their jobs to start families etc. However, I believe with organizations and individuals' promotion of stronger governance standards and policies and the recognition of the value of greater diversity and inclusion, these myths are being combatted. Increased enlightenment and sensitization of unconscious biases will also help to address these issues.



One of the myths about female lawyers (and actually females in general) is that they are less assertive, less likely to stand up for their rights, less bold, less confident and less likely to initiate discussions around pay, promotions etc. I have seen female colleagues hindered by the fact that they have been less bold and confident than their male counterparts. For instance, the bold and confident male colleagues became more visible quite quickly, and they were typically picked over their female colleagues to do certain tasks. This is unlike their female counterparts who may likely have a higher capability to do the work. This is in addition to female colleagues who have been passed on for promotions or pay rises because they were uncomfortable bringing up these discussions with the bosses. I have observed that male colleagues who may not have as much capabilities as their female counterparts are confident, bold, assertive and willing to have the uncomfortable discussions. This also impacts activities such as business development events and socializing with clients. The female lawyers tend to be quite reserved and introverted and may not be as quick to form a rapport with a client.

Therefore, as women in the workplace (including and especially myself), it is important to be loud, bold, assertive, dominant, make others uncomfortable in speaking up for yourself. This is one of the reasons I do not subscribe to the trend of "girl math", "girl work", "I am just a girl", etc. Whilst this trend recognizes how women have different characteristics or different strengths, with the way the world works, the personality that is closer to that which most men exhibit is likely to take the cake. Until society changes, that will continue to be the case.



I have not witnessed any instance personally and have never been one to back down from a goal based on apparent gender-related obstacles. Thankfully, I have also never been one to believe myths. I am a Christian and I believe anything is possible if you set your mind to it. I had also mentioned earlier that my university experience largely influenced who I am, and I just have to say that the lawyers I respect the most, who are doing amazing things in my opinion are females. Believing that being female limits your opportunities is the first roadblock you've set for yourself. This is not to belittle the experiences of people who go through this. My point is, if you have never faced it do not ever think or believe that being a female lawyer automatically hinders you from opportunities. Opportunities that deserve you and those you deserve will come to you. Chase them without thinking twice about your gender.

## 06

## Tell us two things you believed about female lawyers when you were younger but have now learned are untrue.



I believed female lawyers were a rare breed and the profession was mostly male dominated. However, from university and till now in practice, I can see that very soon the narrative will now be that the legal sector is “female dominated”. Second belief is that female lawyers are not as “aggressive” as male lawyers. This is especially with respect to advocacy and being a litigator. However, over the past couple of years I have learned and observed that female lawyers can be just as “aggressive” if not more aggressive than their male counterparts in fighting for the rights of clients.



Perhaps that female lawyers were not as ambitious and were less assertive than their male counterparts. I have since learned that nothing could be further from the truth!

I thought female lawyers had no social life, but I have come to know many “life-of-the-party”, fun and quirky female lawyers. I also thought female lawyers had to be loud and aggressive to garner respect and be heard like their male counterparts. I have however come to realize how misconceived I was as I have now met several brilliant female lawyers who are soft spoken yet assertive.



This question! I would place my spin on my answers. The first thing I believed was that female lawyers had to practice law. I bet you were not expecting my answer (wink). It applies generally though, but you do not have to practice law because you studied it. It is very okay to pivot careers if that is what you truly desire. Several female lawyers have pivoted careers and are doing excellently well. That aside, there is a certain kind of finesse you acquire by being a lawyer. It is an asset no matter your career choice.

# 07

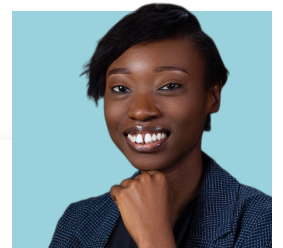
## In what ways do you think the study and practice of law shaped your behaviour as a woman?



The study and practice of law helps to develop qualities such as attention to detail, analytical reasoning, critical thinking, problem solving, multi-tasking and the need to be resilient. These are valuable skills that help me to meet the demands of everyday life.



I would say assertiveness and being unashamed about voicing an unpopular perspective.



I would say this repeatedly, if I had to go to the university all over again for my first degree I would still choose 'Law'. It might be controversial because I am not practicing the law, but I truly enjoyed studying 'Law'. I evolved from being a painfully shy teenager to being an excellent public speaker and advocate. My interactions with female colleagues and lecturers especially as a law student shaped me in ways I am only just uncovering. It made me discover my super-power (lol). Being a very unassuming lethal weapon.



I definitely think being a lawyer has shaped me to be much more confident than I would have been if I wasn't a lawyer, given my quiet personality and introverted nature. I also believe studying and practicing law has given me the ability to be quite discerning and solution minded, particularly based on my experience analyzing client issues and coming up with solutions. I also think as someone who sometimes has a lot of anxiety and overthinks a lot of situations, being a lawyer has really helped provide me with coping mechanisms on dealing with that and having a better mindset generally.

# 08 What unique challenges do you think female lawyers face in Nigeria's legal landscape compared to their male counterparts, and how have you navigated these challenges personally?



Although I have never experienced any of the following in my career so far, I am aware some female lawyers experience the following challenges:

Skepticism or lack of confidence from chauvinistic clients and senior colleagues.

Sexual Assault (blatant or subtle) from colleagues, seniors and clients.



In our society, traditional gender roles place greater demands and expectations on women to manage the household and family, with less of this expectation on their male counterparts. In essence, women must juggle more balls, none of which we are permitted to drop! A strong support system, clarity on matters of priority to you whilst not being shy to delegate non-priority matters can help to mitigate burnout and achieve balance.

Some of the challenges female lawyers face in Nigeria's legal landscape include:

#### Dealing with sexual misconduct from colleagues

– As female lawyers, there is always this nagging anxiety around your safety around male clients and colleagues which puts you in high alert mode most times. As a female lawyer, you are aware of the conviction rates for sexual-related crimes and therefore you assume that justice will either not be forthcoming or protracted. Therefore, this is a constant worry that feeds into interactions with potential male clients. For instance, a woman can request to work with a male client, and the client can see in turn wrongly see this an avenue to commence non-professional discussions. This is not a concern most men face in reversed situations.

**Not being taken seriously in the workplace** – Sometimes as female lawyers we always have to be “extra” before being taken seriously in the workplace. Whether working longer hours than the male colleague, being more aggressive, being smarter and/or going above and beyond. There is this push to be “excellent” whilst the male colleagues can just coast along being “good”. This is especially so in a workplace with tough female bosses who tend to be harsher on the female junior associates (sometimes coming from a place of good intentions but likely having a negative impact). This is most predominant for females who fit into the traditional standards of beauty and have to cross the additional hurdle of proving that she is not “just a pretty face”.

**Unequal pay** – The issue of equal pay is something that plagues female professionals all over the world and this includes female lawyers in Nigeria.

#### Gender bias and implicit stereotypes

– As Nigerian women, it is a given that some sort of gender bias and stereotypes will be faced in the workplace. This is because we live in quite a traditional society where gender roles are still upheld to a large extent. Such bias may lead to being passed up for certain opportunities because you're a woman – for example, being excluded from work trips because of perceived safety and family commitments.

**Career derailment due to family commitments** – There are certain women who have to make a decision on choosing either their career or their family. Such choice will derail the option not chosen and may come from the fact that the woman is unable to stay at work for long hours because of her husband and kids. This means her male counterpart is able to be more visible and to move along the career trajectory faster.

Personally, I am grateful to be working in an organization that does not discriminate between men and women in the workplace and I am surrounded by inspiring women as a result. However, my personal experience does not take away the fact that there may be other women in my Firm who may have faced any of the above, and who may not believe they are in an environment in which they can safely speak about such issues. In addition, I have observed that as a woman in the workplace, once you exhibit typical “male” characteristics, you are judged even in circumstances where your male colleague will not be judged. For example, if you are always willing to speak up, and are seen as “bossy” or “tough” you may become an intimidating and uncomfortable presence for others. Therefore, as women, we occupy a precarious role in the workplace and navigating the environment should be carefully done.

## 09

**Reflecting on your career journey, what do you believe are the most valuable contributions that female legal professionals bring to the table, and how can these contributions be further recognized and appreciated within the industry?**



Given their unique experiences and backgrounds, women help to bring diverse viewpoints which enrich legal discourse and decision making. Professional development opportunities and recognition of the achievements of women through awards and accolades will serve to inspire others, address unconscious biases and foster a culture of appreciation of women in the profession.



I believe one of the most valuable contributions that female legal professionals bring to the table is their intellect and their unique perspectives to resolving legal issues. This could be attributed to some of the supposed female characteristics such as being a bit more careful and being reflective in certain situations rather than just deploying the “cowboy-ish” approach. In terms of recognizing and appreciating these contributions, I believe it starts with us women ourselves. Women need to be seen as pulling each other up and actively trying to promote and support other women. There are a lot of opportunities for more women at the leadership table.



I believe female lawyers are able to offer unique perspectives and contributions to legal discussions, enriching decision-making processes and promoting diversity of thought. Further, female lawyers are able to serve as mentors and counselors for aspiring young female professionals, providing guidance, support, and opportunities for career advancement.



**REPRESENTATION!** Knowing that someone like you has gone ahead and done that is a confidence booster. You begin to see yourself in their accomplishments and that is a blessing. I think this Guide in itself is contributing to the discourse already because amplifying the voices of female legal professionals is a great step in the right direction.

# 10

**What advice would you give to women entering or advancing in the legal field to confront and surpass prevalent myths and stereotypes about female lawyers? Additionally, can you share a personal experience where you felt such a myth affect your personal journey and how you debunked it?**



I would say that stereotypes can be challenged by being committed to excellence and being results oriented. Learn to recognise and appreciate your unique strengths and skill set, develop them, and never give up.

The majority of my experience in the legal field draws largely from my time as a student, and I would advise those entering the legal field, to explore extracurricular activities as much as possible. Most students ignore this, believing the untruth that you do not have so much time as a law student. It is a big limitation. You can excellently balance both because the reality is that we will always make time for what truly matters to us. Participate in moot competitions, explore joining a chamber in your school, participate in Model United Nations conferences, and public speaking competitions to have a well-rounded experience as a law student- especially if you know that public speaking is not your forte.





My advice to young women entering or advancing in the legal field is to try to step outside your comfort zone. As a woman, the first port of call is to observe the environment around you, observe the people who are thriving and successful and model yourself against the characteristics you have observed from such persons. My advice is not to completely change your personality but to be conscious of what constitutes success around you and emulate the relevant characteristics.

Another advice will be to find mentors – whether male or female. It is very important to find mentors very early in your legal career, who are admirable and who you can emulate. I am grateful to have worked with very amazing women who have shaped the legal profession in Nigeria.

I think as women, we need to smash those glass ceilings. Be bold, be confident, be assertive and speak up when necessary. Do not shy away from anything or fear being known as “domineering”, “combative”, “bossy” and all the other negative buzz words.

In addition, any workplace in which any incident of sexual misconduct is reported and not properly investigated or taken seriously is not a workplace which is safe or for any young professional women should remain. I also believe it is very important to have a safe place/hobby outside of work that can be used to destress. This can either be with friends, family, or within the covers of books.

“The only thing standing between you and your goal is you”. Do not focus on other people’s misconceptions about you. They are exactly that- misconceptions. Strive to show up daily and give your best.



## 11

## In envisioning a more equitable and inclusive future for the legal profession, what actionable steps do you believe individuals, organizations, and governing bodies should take to dismantle systemic barriers and create opportunities for underrepresented groups, particularly women and minorities?



A more equitable and inclusive future for the legal profession requires intentionality and more concerted efforts from individuals, organisations, and governing bodies. There must be the will to achieve this, and it can be done as more women rise to influential positions in the profession. Additionally, measures such as the development and implementation of effective diversity and inclusion frameworks which set out clear and comprehensive policies on merit-based hiring and promotion practices, mentorship programs where experienced mentors can provide guidance and support to young female lawyers, healthy work-life balance initiatives, flexible work arrangements, and a generally supportive environment for women to thrive in will go a long way in achieving this objective.

As individuals, I believe what can be done is to provide encouragement and support to the females around you. Men need to be willing to support their female counterparts and speak up for them where required or when the female colleague has invited the male colleague to do so. This is particularly crucial when incidents occur that need corroboration, or a wrongdoing needs to be corrected.

As organizations, I believe representation is the first but certainly not the final step. For instance, if an organization has 20 female partners to 12 male partners, how many of those female partners are in executive positions and able to make key decisions? Furthermore, organizations cannot see men and women as equal and treat them the same. Men and women are different and such differences should be taken into consideration in structuring policies. For instance, an 8am – 6pm workday will negatively impact a woman (or man) who needs to pick up kids from school in the evening and drop them in the morning. Organizations need to promote flexible work arrangements which will permit taking this into consideration.

Transparency and equality in pay is important and individuals should be rewarded based on a meritocratic system, rather than gender.

Organizations also need to be clear and communicative on how it will deal with sexual misconduct and assault in the workplace, given that such actions will communicate a safe workplace for female employees. Organizations also have to get involved in activities which communicate to both internal and external stakeholders that women's issues are important.

Governing bodies need to implement policies which take into account the challenges that women face in the workplace. This may be as simple as effecting into law the maximum period for maternity leave that women are entitled to. Where the law takes sex crimes against women seriously and convictions rise, this will also serve as a deterrent.



As earlier hinted, I believe legal service employers play a pivotal role in bridging the gender gap, dismantling systemic barriers and creating opportunities for women at senior level leadership. Essentially, a long-term inclusion strategy aimed at promoting gender equality, addressing gender-based discrimination, and ensuring fair treatment for females should be adopted. Furthermore, I advise gender-sensitive education and training in the workplace to tackle bias and gender discrimination.



I also advise implementing policies and practices that promote work-life balance, such as flexible working hours, remote work options, and reasonably generous parental leave policies.



The first step is to acknowledge the uniqueness of women in the workplace. This will significantly contribute to the types of systems set up to cater to these unique needs. Flexibility with work hours, fair maternal leave policies and even childcare policies at the workplace will go a long way to up the productivity of nursing mothers. Lastly, mentorship plays a significant role in ensuring continuity. Platforms should be created and sustained for excellent female leaders to contribute to the development of budding professionals.





# 2024 International Women's Day!

## Inspire Inclusion

#InvestinWomen  
#WomenOfOA

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