

'A Lawyer Should Never Stop Reading'

I am Olufunmbi Olutoyosi Kehinde. I obtained my Bachelor of Laws from the University of Abuja in 2008, and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2009. Afterwards, I earned an LLM (Hons) from the University of Lagos.

I joined AELEX as a Junior Associate in September, 2011 and rose to become a Senior Associate in the firm. At present, my expertise cuts across the Corporate/Commercial, Tax, Regulatory Compliance, Labour and Employment Practice Groups of the firm. I am also an active member of the firm's editorial team.

I am an Associate member of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators UK (ACIS) and a member of the International Bar Association (IBA). I am also in the process of becoming an International Tax Affiliate of the Chartered Institute of Taxation, UK (CIOT).

My other interests include fitness, health and wellness, reading and travelling.

Have you had any challenges in your career as a Lawyer, and if so, what were your main challenges?

Yes, I have had quite a few. My first challenge was getting a job in a top tier law firm. As a young Lawyer, my goal was to become the best lawyer I could be. I therefore, aspired to join a law firm with a global outlook and cross-border expertise. However, I undertook my National Youth Service in Yobe State, and by the time I returned to Lagos at the end of my service year, most law firms had finished recruiting fresh Lawyers.

Lawyers. However, I applied to a few firms without success, and had to work in a small firm for about a year before I secured employment with AELEX as a Junior Associate in 2011.

Another major difficulty I encountered, was in trying to decide which area of law to specialise in. The law is incredibly vast, and there is a tendency to engage in general legal practice without attaining mastery in any field. However, after thorough consideration, I chose the practice areas that best suited my interests and strengths.

What was your worst day as a Lawyer?
I have had numerous bad days, which is not



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uncommon in the profession. One such incident occurred while I was in the process of figuring out my practice areas, and was still active in the dispute resolution unit of my firm. The custom in AELEX, is to have practice meetings where we discuss upcoming litigation matters and decide on a line of action. At the practice meeting, we had agreed that I was to move the application to regularise our Notice of Appeal at the Court of Appeal, in an upcoming matter.

Unfortunately, when the matter came up, the Justices of the Court of Appeal insisted that since the matter was an interlocutory appeal premised on service, and our client had become aware of the matter, the appeal was no longer necessary. The Court, therefore, insisted that I withdraw the application to regularise our Notice of Appeal, which would mean withdrawing the appeal. I respectfully insisted that I could not withdraw the application, as that was not the instruction I had received.

By this time, the Justices were livid, and all the Lawyers in court were advising me to withdraw the matter. Lawyers are aware of how strict the Justices of the Court of Appeal can be with junior lawyers, and though I was terrified of the Justices'

reaction, I insisted that I would not withdraw the application. In the end, the court struck out the appeal suo motu.

What was your most memorable experience as a Lawyer?

One of my most memorable experiences was when upon completion of my LLM, I reapplied to join AELEX and I was re-engaged by the firm. Another memorable experience was when we received an urgent instruction from a new client on a Friday evening, and the client expected a response by Monday. I had to reschedule the activities I had planned for the weekend, and worked all weekend to meet the deadline. Needless to say, the client was pleased, sent the firm accolades and of course, promptly settled our invoice.

Who has been most influential person in your life?

I have a long list of influential persons in my life. First, I am grateful to my parents Mr and Mrs M.A.O. Kehinde who taught me that hard work pays, and that the reward for hard work is more work. Growing up, they would say work hard now, so you can play later. I owe them and God for the drive that I have.

Secondly, the partners at AELEX, have sculpted me into the Lawyer that I am today. They work so hard and through them I have learnt diligence, the need for thorough research, and the importance of client satisfaction. In particular, Mr. Davidson Oturu, my supervising Partner, and our current Managing Partner, Mr. Theophilus Emurwa have influenced me greatly. They are valuable mentors, who constructively highlight your errors to ensure that you do not repeat them.

I am equally grateful to Ms. Alayo Ogunbiyi, a Partner Abdulai, Taiwo & Co., who has been a formidable force in my career. She took me under her wing many years ago, and has continued to push and encourage me to be the best I can. Mrs. Esther Nnamdi Ogbue has also influenced me, through her dexterity, diligence and positive attitude to work.

Why did you become a Lawyer?

The circumstances in which I chose to become a Lawyer, are quite interesting. I initially wanted to study Medicine. However, I was never good at the Sciences, so during my time at Queen's College Lagos, the guidance and counselling tutors discouraged students who did not have at least a credit in Integrated Science, from taking science courses in senior secondary school. Luckily my father and I have a relationship where we communicate with each other, and so I called him and informed him that I would be changing to the commercial courses. However, he convinced me that the art courses were better, and that I could study law. After our conversation, I realised that apart from my opinionated nature, I always had a liking for the Lawyers at my family church, and that was how I chose to become a Lawyer.

What would be your advice to anyone wanting a career in Law?

I would say that the legal profession is very interesting. Though it may take a while to understand the profession, however, once you do, it becomes enjoyable and more than just a means of livelihood. Do not focus on money, but rather seek to acquire knowledge, make impact and create value. Also, it is better to start your career in a law firm, even if it is just for one year, where you can learn the rudiments of legal practice. Thereafter, you can decide where it is you want to go with your career. Do not let anyone intimidate you; the law is dynamic, but it would not change as such, so always know where to find it. Knowledge is power, so read, read again and never stop reading, because you can never stop acquiring knowledge.

If you had not become a Lawyer, what career would you have chosen?

Maybe I would have become a life coach, event planner or a publicist.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

By God's grace in 10 years, I should be at the peak of my career. I should have been able to carve a niche for myself in my practice areas, garnered interesting experiences and hopefully be a Partner in a law firm.