

'A Good Lawyer Must Have the Ability to Empathise'

My name is Kofoworola Bamgbose. I am a wife and a mother. I have been practising law for the past eight years. Prior to being called to the Nigerian Bar and upon completion of my undergraduate degree at Cardiff University, U.K., I worked at a major UK law firm - Eversheds LLP, Cardiff for eight months.

Shortly after my stint in the U.K., I returned to Nigeria, and enrolled in the Nigerian Law School. I was called to the Bar in 2010, and subsequently worked at a sole proprietorship for 2 years. On a quest for better exposure, I decided to join a leading law firm in Nigeria - ALEX - where I have been for the past 5 years.

I am presently a member of the firm's Energy & Natural Resources, Environment, Corporate/Commercial, and Labour & Employment practice groups.

In the course of being at ALEX, I have had the opportunity of working on several transactions, undergoing a secondment at a major IOC, actively contributing to the Firm's publications, and spearheading a "Learning Session" initiative within the firm.

I recently had the honour of being ranked as a Next Generation Lawyer (Energy & Natural Resources) by Legal 500 - an International Legal Directory. I am a member of the Association of International Petroleum Negotiators, and the International Bar Association.

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

I think the challenges I sometimes face (even though very rare), are on days where I have competing family and work demands, which force me to prioritise one over the other.

What was your worst day as a Lawyer?

I can trace my worst day as a Lawyer, to a time when I had just completed orientation camp of the NYSC Programme. I was posted to a major law firm in Nigeria, as my place of



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primary assignment. Of course, upon seeing the posting letter, I was so excited to finally get a chance to experience how law is practised in a big law firm in Nigeria.

On getting to the Firm, I was told that since I was yet to be called to the Bar, the Firm had rejected me, and I was thereafter, given a rejection letter. As you can imagine, I was completely devastated. That single act of rejection made me feel like I was being rejected from the entire practice of law! Unbeknownst to me, this disappointment would turn out to be the proverbial 'blessing in disguise'. Upon taking my rejection letter to the Headquarters of the NYSC, I was re-posted to the Legal Department of a major IOC, in a manner that could only be described as a miracle from God!

What has been your most memorable experience as a Lawyer?

This would have to be the nearly two years' experience I had, while on secondment to one

of the major IOCs from ALEX. It was an invaluable experience on all fronts. As part of the legal team of the said IOC, I had the opportunity of working with mature legal minds, both in age at the Bar and portfolio of experience.

Who has been most influential in your life?

There have been several influential people in my life. I don't think I would do this question justice by only mentioning one person!

Of course, my first answer will be God. He has truly been with me in every step of my career, and has played the biggest part in my career as a Lawyer.

Navy Commander Daniel Soetan (Rtd) and Mrs. Francisca Soetan, my Parents, have been a major source of support.

My husband, Mr. Olumide Bamgbose, has also played a major role, in where my career is today. He has always done what was required (even when inconvenient), to ensure that my career progressed, and no obstacle stood in my way. My best friends from College and University- Mrs. Nkechi Adimora and Mrs. Chinyelu Onuotu, have also played a major part in my career progression.

Undoubtedly, the Partners at ALEX, especially Mr. Soji Awogbade (Partner, Energy & Natural Resources Practice), have all influenced my career, the direction it has taken, the opportunities given to me, where I am today and where I hope to be in future.

Why did you become a Lawyer?

Honestly, at first, it was my love for reading from when I was as young as 5 years old. My parents had already tagged me then as a Lawyer. This, I think, spurred me on to become a Lawyer.

Growing up, I also fell in love with the prestige and nobility of the legal profession, which was often portrayed in many of the legal dramas I would watch. When I enrolled

to study Law at the University, I came to a realisation that, being a Lawyer it is one of the only professions in which, as a result of proffering advice or preparing briefs, you develop some knowledge (no matter how little) about everything! I think this was the final selling point for me!

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

A good Lawyer, needs to acquire the ability to empathise. Put simply, you need to be able to put yourself in the client's shoes - thinking of yourself as a client, a businessman, the MD of a company, etc. How will your legal advice, affect that business, solve a problem or impact returns?

Also, taking a practical lesson from my secondment experience, I would advice young Lawyers - don't see yourself as merely a Lawyer, who is expected to know all the laws in Nigeria, and all the decisions of the courts from decided cases. Being a Lawyer, is very different from being a law student. Be ready as a Lawyer, to actually solve problems with the advice that you give. Most clients are not looking for someone who will regurgitate the provisions of the law to them, but rather someone who will assist them in solving difficult and often complex issues.

Finally, in your practice of Law, do not compromise on your integrity and standards - this is part of what makes a good Lawyer stand out.

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

I probably would have explored a career in Human Resources.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

In ten years, I hope to be a recognised professional in oil and gas law. I also see myself, playing an important role in mentoring younger Lawyers.