

'The Lawyers who Win the Most, Prepare the Most'

I am Ngozi Efobi. I graduated from Nnamdi Azikiwe University in 2007 with a Second Class Upper, and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2008. I am currently a Senior Associate with AELEX's Dispute Resolution and Corporate Commercial Practice Groups. I regularly give advice on Business, Legal and Regulatory Compliance; Project Financing; and Mergers and Acquisitions. My practice also includes, acting as counsel in Arbitration, Mediation and Litigation, at all levels of courts in Nigeria.

I am a member of the International Project Finance Association, Loan Market Association, the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators UK (Nigerian Branch), the Association of Professional Negotiators and Mediators, and the International Bar Association. I was recently rated as a rising star in Project Finance and Capital Markets, by the International Financial Law Review (IFLR1000) for 2018.

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

My main challenges as a Lawyer, have mostly been about optimising time to accommodate work targets and personal goals. Meeting various client deadlines and doing so effectively, sometimes places a huge demand on your time, and I went through a phase where all I did was work. No social life, nothing. With time, I have learned that, with proper scheduling and effective team management, work can be done efficiently without burning myself out.

What was your worst day as a Lawyer?

Although representing a wide variety of clients comes with a few challenges, I honestly cannot recall any day in my professional life, that I would classify as my worst day.

What was your most memorable experience



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as a Lawyer?

It was my first appearance alone in court. I was fresh out of Law School, and had just started working at a law firm, when I was unexpectedly told in court by my Principal to argue a very contentious application against a senior colleague, who subtly reminded me that he was at least 20 years older than me at the Bar! A lifetime of student debates, moot competitions and being a student judge, did not stop the butterflies in my belly when I stood up to address the court. I was however, very elated when the Judge and other colleagues, subsequently, commended my eloquence and was even happier one month later, when we won the application.

Who has been most influential in your life?

My parents - Mr Chuka & Mrs Patricia Udokwu,

have been very influential in my life. Although, they had briefly wanted a different path for me (Medicine), they supported me wholeheartedly, when they recognised that I was interested in Law, and that I had a natural acumen for it. They taught me to always remember that, God is my hope and strength. My Husband Mr. Christian Efobi, has also significantly influenced me to aspire higher, and to work harder. He constantly pushes me, to always better myself and to never rest on my oars.

Professionally, Late Chief Amaechi Nwaiwu, SAN was very influential in my formative years as a litigation Lawyer. From High Court to Supreme Court, Election Tribunals to IST, complex negotiations to client meetings, he would send me everywhere and say "Whatever I can do, you can do too. The only difference between us is when I was called to the Bar, and the texture of my robe". As a young lawyer of 1-2 years, these words built my confidence and I never wanted to disappoint.

At AELEX, I have also been fortunate to be mentored and to learn from our Partners. There is Mr. L. Fubara Anga and Mr. Sina Sipasi, whose Project Finance guiding influence led to my being rated as a rising star in Project Finance by IFLR1000. There are also our dispute resolution Partners-Mrs. Funke Adekoya, SAN, Mr. Adedapo Tunde-Olowu and Mr. Olanipekun Orewale, all of whom I look up to, and from whom I constantly learn the wider depths of arbitration and litigation.

Why did you become a Lawyer?

I had the natural proclivities of a Lawyer, and so my becoming one was pretty much a fait accompli. I am the eldest child in my family, and growing up I was constantly advocating the case of my siblings. I always had a very keen sense of fairness and justice, and was constantly

trying to get people to change something because I thought "it was not fair". By the time I was ten years old and in secondary school, people who knew me were already calling me "Lawyer". At that time, in addition to wanting to become a Lawyer because I really wanted to defend people, I was also influenced by Legal TV shows like Perry Mason, which made the profession look so attractive!

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

Always aim to provide every client with the best possible results. Careful preparation, attention to detail, a habit of studiousness and good draftsmanship are key. Understand that real legal practice is nothing like the TV shows/ movies, where Lawyers dramatically swoop into court at the last minute and save the day with some hastily obtained document, or win negotiations by bluffing. The Lawyers who win the most, are the lawyers who prepare the most.

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

Although, I have never seriously considered being anything but a Lawyer, if I had to choose, I would have been a Journalist and a Writer. Telling people's stories, shedding light on the state of affairs in the world, and lending my voice to the collective story of humanity, is something that I can see myself doing happily. I currently, write fictional stories as a hobby, and I also have a collection of more than fifty abstract poems.

Where do you see yourself in ten years?

In the next ten years, I see myself doing even better professionally, not just in terms of providing effective solutions to clients' issues, but also being at the frontline of breaking boundaries in emerging areas of legal practice.