



AMANDLA!

AFRICAN WOMEN IN LAW SPEAKER SERIES

WOMEN TO WATCH EDITION

(Vol. 2)



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WHY AMANDLA?

Amandla is a word that means "power" among the Nguni languages of South Africa. Amandla became a rallying cry against apartheid in South Africa and continues to be a rallying call for social justice.

The Amandla! African Women in Law Speaker Series is a **global diversity awareness program** that aims to amplify the achievements and stories of African women in law. The Series is a collection of short stories on women's achievements, challenges, resistance, resilience, and solidarity. Through this project, we hope to inspire, encourage, and provide hope for future generations of young women across the globe.

Women across Africa have made remarkable strides in the legal profession, yet these achievements are often hidden in global discourses on the legal profession. As a scholar-activist, I constantly encounter discourses and spaces that attempt to erase or marginalize the voice and agency of the African woman. Whether it is in the telling of our history, in decision-making processes, or in mainstream discussions, this erasure occurs in multiple spaces across the profession. From Algeria to Zimbabwe, women continue to play important roles in the fight for social justice.

However, women's sacrifices, bravery, and contributions to nation-building are frequently relegated to the annals of history, rendering their achievements invisible. The silencing of women's experiences finds expression in the "African" proverb "until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter." The Amandla Series aims to disrupt the "hunter's story" by creating a platform for the "lioness" to be her own historian and tell her own story.

The roadmap to achieving the United Nations and African Union gender equality targets must begin with acknowledging the strength, resilience, and contributions of women. To loosely interpret the Akan Adinkra symbol, Sankofa— we should not forget our past, for it guides our future. Through legal narratives grounded in African storytelling, the series makes visible the professional trajectory of African women in law.

Through legal narratives and storytelling, African women in law **speak truth to power!**

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Ph.D.
Founder and Executive Director

Legal Narratives

"If the African woman's life experiences and story could only be told in the context of other people's lives and experiences, and not exclusively through her own voice, then how can she be independent of those external filters? Although her existence itself wouldn't be doubted, the objective reality of her identity would be obscured."

J. Jarpa Dawuni, Esq. Ph.D.

Founder and Executive Director-- Institute for African Women in Law
Quoted in Introduction to International Courts and the African Woman
Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018).

"Legal narratives are an important tool in telling stories—especially those that would otherwise not get told. Storytelling is a salient part of the African and African-American experience."

Judge Gabrielle Kirk McDonald

Former Judge/President, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY)

Quoted in Foreword to International Courts and the African Woman
Judge: Unveiled Narratives (Routledge, 2018).



Elizabeth Bakibinga-Gaswaga (Uganda)

Legal Adviser-Rule of Law, Commonwealth Secretariat, UK.

WHY LAW?

I am an avid reader and as a child, I was concerned about and disturbed by injustice, unfairness and deception depicted in books and later films and TV shows. Things came to a climax when aged 9, I read the abridged version of William Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. Portia's impersonation of Bellario, the Doctor of Laws to save Antonio left an indelible mark on me and I resolved to become a Doctor of Laws. I describe myself as a rule of law systems architect who seeks to design interventions against the injustice and unfairness in society.

PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was being in a position to shape national, regional or global rule of law policy and at times avert crises. I have been honoured to positively and directly influence the lives of people as a UN peacekeeper, something that few public international lawyers have experienced.

HINDSIGHT

Looking back, there is no significant professional decision/action I would have taken/done differently, because I endeavour to understand the environment within which I am operating, including the mandate and the resources that I have available. Anything I would have done differently would be captured during project monitoring and evaluation.



Elizabeth Bakibinga-Gaswaga (Uganda)

Legal Adviser-Rule of Law, Commonwealth Secretariat, UK.

CHALLENGES

The major professional challenges I have faced have resulted from environmental factors that affect people generally and women in society. I have practiced law in political settings, in a national legislature, United Nations peacekeeping missions and now at the Commonwealth Secretariat. This implies that I work on a range of subjects and amongst a diversity of people. Unconscious bias is a challenge I have faced, which always requires me to keep an eye on the socio-cultural dynamics of situations, especially when I have been the only woman in the room. Additional preparations that I have had to make for professional engagements, as a woman in law, have included appropriateness of dress code, establishing cultural protocols and ensuring that I have a personal safety and security plan. Knowing the territory and drawing lessons from experiences helps me to navigate the challenges. Institutional policy measures on respect for diversity help too.

STRATEGIES

Vulnerability factors that affect other women will not spare a professional woman and it is therefore important to seek out interventions that are available in a given society. This entails opportunities for child care, mental wellness and redress in the justice system. Self-management including, achieving work-life balance, the maintenance of a dependable support system and knowing oneself helps. Also, one has to appreciate and manage the encumbrances placed by society (cultural norms) in order to thrive. Commitment to lifelong learning, continuous improvement (Kaizen) and development of an additional skillset outside the traditional array of soft and hard skills makes one a more well-rounded asset. Developing and maintaining networks, including mentors and role models as well as membership of professional associations is beneficial. So is helping empower others to lead as I do in Project Girls for Girls.



Engobo Emeseh, Ph.D. (Nigeria)

Professor, and Head of Law School, University of Bradford,
UK.

WHY LAW?

I decided to study law initially to practice law and be involved in advocacy for social justice issues that I cared about. However, following a postgraduate degree, I developed a keen interest in an academic career. I really enjoy the dynamism in the environment, the freedom of thought and debate. It is a melting pot of ideas, generations and cultures. A legal academic has the unique opportunity to help shape minds, and hopefully impact not just the law today, but the future through the next generation.

PROUD MOMENT

Obtaining a first class from the Nigerian Law School, as the first time ever that women achieved that feat in the then 30 year history of the Nigerian Law School.

HINDSIGHT

I think every decision/action has taken me to the place I am now, so I am not sure I would have done anything differently.



Engobo Emeseh, Ph.D. (Nigeria)

Professor, and Head of Law School, University of Bradford,
UK.

CHALLENGES

As an African woman now living in the West, the line from 'Americanah', ... 'I did not know I was black until I came to America' resonates with me. However, what I was profoundly aware of from an early age was my gender and its restrictions! 'Don't you know you are a girl' was a constant refrain when girls were rebuked. The intersectionality of race and gender has therefore been a very real factor in my career: from my first job interview where the interviewer extolled my performance but feared that as a young woman I may be distracted from my duties, to navigating my path to professorship in the UK. However, I was fortunate that in my family, the expectation for girls to excel was not any different from that for males. Herein lies the paradox of patriarchy, and the environment that forged the values, character and resilience that have proved invaluable.

STRATEGIES

I have never accepted the limitations that society places on me. Life has had its challenges, but I have taken full advantage of every opportunity, and have been prepared to change course where required. My dream when I studied Law was to practice law. However, obtaining first class in the Law School bought the opportunity for me to be awarded a scholarship to the UK, an experience that made me change career paths from legal practice to academia. Several years later, and impossible as it may have seemed, I am fortunate to be only one of very few female black professors in the UK. So as I say on the wall celebrating female professors at my University- do not ever limit yourself. ... 'find your passion, burn the script, dream the impossible, ride the waves, grab the opportunities life brings"



Francisca Serwaa Boateng (Ghana)

Founder & Managing Counsel, FSB Law Consult, Ghana.

WHY LAW?

As a child, I did not have any dream of becoming a lawyer. In fact, before my 6th birthday, - and I remember vividly - my dream was to be an 'adowa' dancer! Fortunately or unfortunately, I passed my A' Levels well enough to qualify me to read law at the University of Ghana, Legon.

That said, my real interest in the subject of law was borne out of my innate believe in fair and equal treatment of all persons in spite of their circumstances. I saw law as an avenue to achieve balance in society between the haves and have-not-so-much.

PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was the day I handed over a cheque to a client as his compensation given by court for his wrongful dismissal. The client, barely literate, had been dismissed without a pesewa/penny by his employer, a foreign multi-national company. I will never forget his relief and excitement.

HINDSIGHT

The one thing I would have done differently would have been to develop a 'sixth sense' to know that "one may smile, and smile, and be a villain", as Shakespeare wrote in HAMLET. Such characters can sell one's soul to the devil for a pittance. Watchfulness is a virtue.



Francisca Serwaa Boateng (Ghana)

Founder & Managing Counsel, FSB Law Consult, Ghana.

CHALLENGES

I launched into private law practice right after I was called to the Bar over twenty years ago. In the early years, the challenge was mainly the daily drudgery of a typical young and single practitioner's life. That is, spending long hours in court for hearings. And boy, were those hearings memorable - sometimes, just listening to legal gobbledygook coined from ossified phrases and antiquated terminology.

I set up my law firm when my first child was barely two years old. And then another came along. There were days I would hold my baby with my left hand while taking down a client's instructions with my right. Schools on vacation? I carried kids along to court. Till date, some lawyers and judges still remember them and send their regards every so often. Running two businesses - law firm and 'mommyhood' - full time was, and still is, no easy task.

STRATEGIES

As a legal practitioner, one of my best strategies has been to get help from family, friends and colleagues both in and outside the law profession. It's always crucial. Also, I focus on my niche area of practice. As a litigation lawyer, I handle only civil cases and so I have honed my skills excellently in my area of practice. Moreover, I make time to prepare for each appointment, court session, presentation, etc. It helps one gain the respect of both judge and opposing lawyer alike. I manage my time efficiently. I ensure that I make maximum use of my court and office hours by planning my days well. That way, my weekends and evenings are spared for family and friends. Lastly, bullies exist in every realm, and the legal profession is no exception. My strategy has been this: stand up to bullies no matter who they think they are.



Isabel Boaten (Ghana)

Managing Partner, AB & David, Ghana.

WHY LAW?

To be honest, I was not one of those young people who knew what they wanted to become early in their lives. But just before I entered University, I had this strong sense that I wanted to help people. I was not quite sure of how I was going to do this. By the time I had to make a choice of my area of study, my consciousness of what was fair and unjust had been awakened by the painful experiences of disadvantaged women and children around the world. And I thought to myself - I know what I want to be - a lawyer.

PROUD MOMENT

Becoming Managing Partner. It was not the position, but the absolute show of trust in me. The following year, I successfully led AB & David's campaign to become the first law firm in Africa to secure Lexcel – the Law Society of England & Wales' accreditation for the highest practice standards.

HINDSIGHT

In the earlier part of my career, I equated my success with making every team member better. It took me a while to realise that not everybody was interested in my plan for them. I know now that sometimes it is necessary for people to exit to make the team better.



Isabel Boaten (Ghana)

Managing Partner, AB & David, Ghana.

CHALLENGES

As a woman, one recurring challenge has to do with both men and women equating an empathetic leadership style with weakness. The narrative is that to lead you must be logical and totally goal driven. The temptation to prove a point can sometimes creep up on till you realise that you are not the person leading, but someone else who is definitely not you. The challenges of balancing family and work life continue to be a real issue. In my view, work life balance does not really exist. Work or family will hold sway at one time or the other. Additionally, in a subtle way, as a woman you are either held to a higher standard or a lower standard depending on who you are dealing with. There is rarely an intermediate standard by which you are judged, so often, you are either very good or not good enough.

STRATEGIES

As a lawyer in leadership, I realise that there is so much that your "womaness" can bring to the table. I have learnt the importance of leading in line with my femininity and my personality. I realise this makes me authentic and builds trust with my team at work and the people that I interact with. I have realised that to lead people you must influence, and to have the "audacity" to do so, you must be on top of what you do, because then, even people with prejudices begin to care very little about whether you are a man or a woman. They just focus on whether you can get the job done well.



Jane Frances Abodo (Uganda)

Director of Public Prosecutions, Uganda.

WHY LAW?

I attended most of my education in the country side only coming to the capital city for my advanced level education. At the time there was no career guidance of any kind, and coupled with my humble background and upbringing in one of the poorest regions in the country, I never really dreamt big. So I never even thought of being a lawyer. I applied for a course in librarianship, when results came I had performed very well and I was immediately offered law. I have never looked back, I have just kept on walking!

PROUD MOMENT

In April 2020 I was appointed the first female Director of Public Prosecutions in Uganda. My journey has been a dream come true, and it took sweat, determination and hard work and I am a strong believer that you succeed when you strive to give that extra effort!

HINDSIGHT

When I was head of the Anti-Corruption department at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, I took a very complex case to court. For a full year we could not proceed with the case. The court dismissed it and we went back to the drawing board and made out four cases out of it. We prosecuted three successfully and one is still pending in court.



Jane Frances Abodo (Uganda)

Director of Public Prosecutions, Uganda.

CHALLENGES

* I was appointed a Judge in March 2018 and in April 2020 I was appointed the Director of Public Prosecutions. When I started work at the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions in 1999, I had a very young family and I had to juggle family and professional commitments, which was very tough, because then you have the same work schedules and time allotted to particular tasks with male counterparts. So the work life balance took a toll on me, however, I became more determined and resilient to succeed and worked even harder. When I joined the bench as a high court in 2018, I noted the glaring gender inequality, the female judges do not have equal access to senior positions, and they are severely under represented at higher levels. I made a resolution that I was going to work together with my colleagues to create an unbiased work culture.

STRATEGIES

Women are capable of anything in a given environment, it only takes hard work and focus. The world is now coming to the realization that women are better at what they do. To be a lawyer calls for hard work, integrity, compassion, treating your clients with a human face and this just seems to fit women! Women make equally excellent lawyers. I encourage all the young women lawyers out there that all it takes is hard work, focus and determination and they can realize their dreams and together we can change the world to be a better place where the rule of law is respected.



Lerato Mathopo (South Africa)

Director at DM5 Incorporated Attorneys, South Africa.

WHY LAW?

Growing up in rural areas the societal hierarchy was clear. Even as a young girl I knew that I did not like my place in that hierarchy. No one said anything about the position of woman but I could see it in my home, in my community, in family gatherings or school meetings. I did not like my place in that hierarchy. It was important for me to find a way to challenge that hierarchy. I always thought of education as an instrument for empowerment. I did not know any lawyer growing up nor did I know what work lawyers do. However, people spoke highly of lawyers. I thought that if I was to be respected like that I would not be subjected to the treatment endured by woman in my village. I would be allowed to have an opinion and a voice in my community. If I had a voice I could use it not just for me but for all woman to challenge our place in society.

PROUD MOMENT

When I got an opportunity to spend one year in working in New York through a lawyers exchange program run by the Cyrus R Vance Center for International Justice, it was a huge stepping stone in my career. There were 142 applicants and only 7 chosen. I was also the only one from a small firm. Being a founder of a 100% Black female owned commercial law firm was by far the proudest professional moment of my profession. We wanted young Black female lawyers to be exposed to commercial law and be trained by people who looked like them.

HINDSIGHT

I don't regret any of the choices I have made in my professional life both good and bad as they have made me who I am today.



Lerato Mathopo (South Africa)

Director at DM5 Incorporated Attorneys, South Africa.

CHALLENGES

Professional challenges for woman happen both in the office and at home. For those of us who chose to have families, the constant collusion between work and home is a challenge. When I started a family I was an associate in a law firm. Prior to having children I worked on projects that required me to travel to other countries. When I returned to work after my maternity leave I could no longer travel. I felt like I did not belong anymore and even considered leaving practice. My boss did not know no was he prepared to make any changes to my work in order to allow me to be able to practice law and be a new mother. The long working hours that lawyers often have to spend in offices also did not help.

When my partners and I founded our firm which was a commercial firm and 100% Black female owned, we knew that commercial law is a domain for male lawyers. Finding the space in the market and convincing clients who are also predominantly male, was a big challenge. We all came from reputable law firms and corporates however it was like we were stripped off all that experience and knowledge. Suddenly we were just Black females and not the lawyers who worked on major transactions in their previous firms. There was more focus on the fact that we were Black and female than that we were lawyers who were good at what they do. There were comments such as so what do you do at DM5 do you allow woman to breast feed in the office or how do you handle cat fights as if males in business don't have disagreements. There were also comments such as "you girls need a grey hair or a big brother", The market had doubts that we had what it takes to run a commercial firm.



Lerato Mathopo (South Africa)

Director at DM5 Incorporated Attorneys, South Africa.

STRATEGIES

People often speak about finding a balance between family and your work. I have not been able to achieve that balance. What I have learnt is that you give attention to what requires your attention the most at a time. You also need to "train" your family and clients to understand that your time is limited and you try to spread it as best as you can. Do not feel guilty because you are with a client instead of attending a school play or because you are at a school play instead of being with a client. Not all plays require you to be there and not all meetings need you to be there. You must learn to identify the occasion that requires your presence and prioritize it accordingly.

It is important to build a strong support structure around yourself. This could be a grandma, aunt, friend, personal assistant etc. these are the people who will help you to become your best either in the boardroom or at home. You can't run an important meeting while looking at your watch because you are late to pick up a child from school. You can't be on a conference call outside the school hall and not see anything because you were trying to be there for your child.

Finding your voice and being comfortable with it is important. It will allow you to reach greater heights because you set the standard and the pace for yourself. Understanding your strengths and weaknesses will allow you to approach your tasks with confidence. There is power in being able to embrace all that a woman is, use it. It is an asset not a liability.

Lastly remember there has been woman who have gone before us. Get a mentor, someone who will advise you when you get stuck. There is great benefit in having someone to bounce off ideas with. Someone who might help you see things in a different light.



Linda Kasonde (Zambia)

Owner, LCK Chambers, Zambia
Founder & Executive Director, Chapter One Foundation.

WHY LAW?

My mother had always advised my sister and I that, as a women, it is important to have a profession because whatever happens to you, you will always have that thing to fall back on.

PROUD MOMENT

Being elected the first female President of the Law Association of Zambia (Bar Association)

HINDSIGHT

I always say there's no such thing as a wasted experience. As Nelson Mandela once said, you either win or you learn.

CHALLENGES

As a practicing lawyers I was very fortunate to have supportive male bosses and partners. However when I entered "legal politics" in the Bar Association I quickly learned that women were expected to be less competent and were subjected to more abuse and at times physical threats.

STRATEGIES

As Oprah Winfrey likes to say, being excellent is the best answer to all your detractors. Also, as Maya Angelou said, having courage is the most important of all virtues as as you can't practice any other virtue consistently without it.



Marjorie Bwalya Musonda Mpundu (Zambia)

Senior Strategy and Operations Officer, World Bank Group

WHY LAW?

I originally planned on following my parents' footsteps and becoming a teacher. While at university I was inspired by a female law professor who stood out in a profession that was predominantly male. I realized that I could use the law to fight for the rights of girls and to fight poverty.

PROUD MOMENT

In 2018 I co-organized a conference that brought together heads of judiciaries in Africa to discuss gender-based violence, women's access to justice, and the role of the courts in addressing gender within the judiciary. The conference facilitated discussions about bringing justice to the most vulnerable in a culture that shies away from such conversations.

HINDSIGHT

I do not regret the path that I have taken. I still hope to go back to Cornell to do my SJD and get back into academia someday.

CHALLENGES

Self-doubt and the "impostor syndrome" creep in here and there, especially when the reality of pay and promotion gaps are so glaring, but having had so many successes in my academic and professional aspirations gives me the confidence that there is no ceiling to the achievements that one can attain. We are not defined by our gender. We are professionals in our own right!

STRATEGIES

Seek mentors, be intentional, and be prepared to use your profession to fight for human rights, especially for the less fortunate and the vulnerable.



Melene Rossouw (South Africa)

Executive Director at Women Lead Movement
Obama Foundation Scholar

WHY LAW?

Law was not my first career option. I wanted to study political science with the aim of becoming a diplomat. Fortunately things did not work out the way I envisaged and I soon found myself enrolled as an LL.B student. It was only in my second year when I was introduced to Public and Constitutional law and learned about Human Rights when I began to immerse myself in it. I chose that area of the law as my area of specialization. Today I am an internationally recognized human rights activist with a strong focus on socio-economic rights, democracy and governance.

PROUD MOMENT

My proudest moment was being admitted as an attorney in the High Court of South Africa. Whilst serving my articles at the firm I enrolled for my Masters degree in Constitutional law. Those two years were challenging as I had to manage work, part-time classes and preparation for board examinations.

HINDSIGHT

My philosophy on life and career is that everything that happened to me, happened for me. Although there have been difficult seasons in my career, it all molded me into the professional that I am today and for that reason I do not have a desire to do anything differently.



Melene Rossouw (South Africa)

Executive Director at Women Lead Movement
Obama Foundation Scholar

CHALLENGES

Most, if not all women in the legal profession deal with similar challenges. The biggest overarching challenge is gender inequality rooted in the system of patriarchy. The profession is still dominated by men who continue to earn more than women with the same experience and qualifications. Over the years I have always worked in spaces dominated by men and found that my experience, voice and knowledge were often undermined and disrespected by male colleagues even if they had to report to me. Disturbing trends amongst my male counterparts were their ability to outright reject my inputs and ideas but later present it as their own. For many years I have not been acknowledged or recognized for my contributions in the same way they would for doing far less. These toxic work spaces can become emotionally, spiritually and mentally abusive and without proper support can lead to depression.

STRATEGIES

I have never subscribed to the notion of “Survival” as it denotes a sense of disadvantage. Women in law are fierce, courageous and absolutely brilliant. Over the years I have consistently invested in and honed six things: courage, empathy, authenticity, discipline, integrity and knowledge. These are my strategies to thrive in my career and it is all you need to overcome any situation you are faced with.



Michaela Eddinia Swallow (Sierra Leone)

President, Sierra Leone Bar Association and Senior Legal Counsel, Petroleum Directorate, Office of the President, Sierra Leone.

WHY LAW?

As a mixed-raced child, I grew up wanting to break free from a certain stereotype associated with mixed-race children. I never wanted to be part of that labeling: beauty without brains. At a tender age, I fantasized of being a children's doctor, caring for babies. However, an encounter with injustice taught me how seriously the law and access to justice can change lives. Consequently, studying law became that golden key to open the door of the legal profession for me, break the labeling, fight injustice and serve as an inspiration to many young mixed-raced women and children trapped in poverty.

PROUD MOMENT

The Monrovia, Liberia, 2019 AFBA Conference, my first international appearance acting as President of the Sierra Leone Bar Association. I delivered a speech on our responsibilities as lawyers in nation building. The speech enthralled the audience and triggered a moment of introspection for legal practitioners and judges from around the world.

HINDSIGHT

So far, I have no regrets. Every professional decision/action I have taken has been intentional and purposeful. My sincerity and abiding faith in God will continue to guide every professional decision/action I take.



Michaela Eddinia Swallow (Sierra Leone)

President, Sierra Leone Bar Association and Senior Legal Counsel, Petroleum Directorate, Office of the President, Sierra Leone.

CHALLENGES

Being the only woman in the room in a male dominated profession has never been an issue for me because I learnt early on that my voice is as strong as I want it to be. However, raising children and building my career have been really challenging.

The legal profession demands both hard work and time; hence the art of balancing this with raising kids is no mean feat. How do you stay focused when your child is ill or needs homework done, but you need to review a contract or write an opinion? As women, our role as primary caregivers is a disincentive to our career growth.

For me, it has been a daily struggle. But, I have made a conscious decision to stay focused and endeavor to make pertinent choices that will complement what is important to me at every given stage in my life.

STRATEGIES

I live in a society where family is as important as a successful career in law. Therefore, there is a risk of losing yourself whilst trying to strike the right balance. As a woman, I have had to work twice as hard to achieve anything but in doing so, I always try to remember what is most important to me.

Another strategy for survival is not to compete with others, just try to be the best version of yourself. Also, engage in lots of research, there is no harm in being overprepared but being superficial is news that travels faster than light in this profession.

Similarly, don't be shy to ask for help when you need it and always maintain good relationships. Always separate the issues from colleagues representing the issues. My personal mantra in litigation is to always fight the case and not the lawyer on the other side.



Naana Frimpong (Ghana/USA)

Counsel at King & Spalding, USA.

WHY LAW?

I do not recall there being a particular moment when I decided that I wanted to be a lawyer. For as long as I can remember, I was drawn to the idea of being an advocate, promoting justice and being able to use my oral and written words to persuade. In addition, growing up a mere twenty minutes from the South African border, during that country's transition from Apartheid to a multi-racial democracy, had a deep impact on my worldview and I was intrigued by the role that lawyers could play to right those wrongs.

PROUD MOMENT

My proudest professional moment was when I introduced myself for the first time in court as a federal prosecutor and said "I represent the United States". Representing your community and playing an active role in pursuing justice for all is an awesome responsibility and honor and it was an equally proud and humbling moment.

HINDSIGHT

Investing more time in getting to know my colleagues in college, in law school and during my various work experiences. I made life-long friends at each stage but I wish I had appreciated the value of developing meaningful relationships with a broad array of my colleagues at school and at work.



Naana Frimpong (Ghana/USA)

Counsel at King & Spalding, USA.

CHALLENGES

The professional challenges that I have faced as a woman have become more acute the more I have risen in seniority. The single greatest challenge has been motherhood and the daily juggling act that is the reality of working mothers. You simply cannot devote the same amount of time to your work as those who do not have significant caretaking responsibilities and that often works to limit your opportunities.

The second most significant challenge has been the need to re-establish myself in multiple different fora because I have built a multi-faceted career (e.g., white collar criminal defense lawyer, prosecutor, international disputes lawyer). Establishing yourself and demonstrating your value in a new legal space is always challenging but even more so for women and people of color. You cannot rely on assumptions being drawn in your favor and have to be proactive in ensuring you have a seat at the table.

STRATEGIES

First, it's important to have an objective sense of what you bring to the table – a clear understanding of your strengths and capabilities. Although you should be receptive to constructive criticism it is important to cultivate a clear sense of your value proposition.

Second, be deliberate about finding people who believe in you and are going to be invested in your development and take the time to build deep and lasting relationships with them.

Third, be dogged about seeking out practical legal experience. The best legal education will be meaningless without practical application. It is only through experience that you can grow and once you have it, no one can take it from you.

Last, in everything you do, no matter how small or ministerial, try to do it to the best of your ability. This commitment to excellence will set the right tone for you personally and professionally.



Nana Serwah Godson-Amamoo (Ghana)

Partner, AB & David, Ghana.

WHY LAW?

Equal doses of nurture and nature, I believe. I was raised to be confident in who I am, to love hard work and be helpful to others. I was also the child with a relentless curiosity, a love for debate, a rebellious streak and a deep sense of fairness. I would stand up to bullies and bring home “a stray cat” now and again. Everyone who knew me well said I would be a lawyer and I agreed. However, the actual decision was made in 1995 as I watched Hilary Clinton in her pink power suit on TV delivering her thundering defense of women’s rights as pivotal to human rights in Beijing.

PROUD MOMENT

I have had many proud moments, but my heart swells the most every time we close on a transaction or project that has a direct impact on the growth of my country. It gives me immense joy to be part of something that improves lives and livelihoods; be it a new legislations, a commercial arrangements or an infrastructure projects.

HINDSIGHT

I live without regrets. I believe time and energy can never be lost – they only change their form. All our experiences ultimately become part of who we are. So, I embrace every shortcoming, challenge or set back, as a learning curve and opportunity for growth.



Nana Serwah Godson- Amamoo (Ghana)

Partner, AB & David, Ghana.

CHALLENGES

The culture of my firm is fairly gender neutral and it is currently run by a female managing partner. However, this is quite unusual in law and even rarer in the markets I serve. Earlier in my career, I struggled with the subtle effects of gender stereotyping and the perception that women in law and leadership are the 'exceptions to the rule'. Gender frequently dominated the assessment of a woman's performance and achievements, thereby taking the shine away from the actual effort she invested. So, I tried to avoid being the only woman, or one of the only women, in the room. With experience, I have learnt not to focus on this challenge, but to point to the solutions and act on them. Women have the skills to do what is regarded as extraordinary. The more we do it, the more common it will become, and perceptions will gradually change. What happened to "practice makes perfect"?

STRATEGIES

Every challenge is a learning opportunity – learn the lesson well and apply it quickly so that it becomes part of you. Identify your niche; the practice area that you love and speaks to your purpose. Become a subject matter expert in that area and work to be acknowledged as a thought leader and Go-To expert. It takes hard work to be the real deal but the payoff can be huge so invest the time. Acknowledge the skills you don't have and build them – the soft and the hard. Develop a growth mindset that allows you to properly channel feedback and to look at failure as a means to identify your strengths and weaknesses for the next task. Grow a strong work ethic with a positive attitude – quit bellyaching and put in the time, effort, and elbow grease to hit your goals.



Nania Owusu-Ankomah Sackey

Partner, Bentsi-Enchil, Letsa & Ankomah, Ghana
(Ghana)

WHY LAW?

Actually, I never made a decision to study law. I simply grew up knowing that I wanted to be a lawyer, because that's what my mother imbibed in me while growing up. Although my father is a lawyer, it was the tremendous influence of my mother that made me join the legal profession. That says a lot about the significant influence women can yield over their children and has taught me to be more intentional with the way I raise mine. My mother has raised three lawyers and is married to one, and that is no mean feat.

PROUD MOMENT

When I found the courage, at a very critical stage in my career, to pursue an international secondment with the international arbitration practice group of a top London firm. This decision came at a great personal and professional cost. However, the experience and contribution to my professional development was priceless.

HINDSIGHT

Waiting too long to shine. Occupy and shine in your space without fear. You do the world a disservice if you hide your lustre.



Nania Owusu-Ankomah Sackey

Partner, Bentsi-Enchil, Jusu & Ankomah, Ghana
(Ghana)

CHALLENGES

My greatest professional challenge is TIME. The law is a jealous lover, requiring you to invest a lot of time into your work. This can be very difficult if you have a family, and particularly acute if you are also married to another lawyer. It is impossible to become good at what you do without the time investment, but I've also grown to learn that finding ways to achieve a balance with family commitments ultimately makes you a better and more well-rounded professional. You have to be self-disciplined, resilient and also maximise your time during your peak working hours and be truly present during those times you spend with the family.

STRATEGIES

I'll recommend three strategies:

1. Find an area of law that you love and focus on it. It will make working easier and more enjoyable, while at the same time allow you to build in-depth knowledge and specialization in that field. You can then become the focal point in your organization in matters relating to that area and also build a brand within the profession around that knowledge.
2. Be visible. People will only give you work if they know you, trust you and like you. You can only be known, trusted and liked when you are visible. It is simply not enough to be talented or to do great work; others must know about it.
3. Play up to your strengths. It is important to identify what your strengths are, hone them, capitalize on them, and then find ways to monetize those strengths/ specific talents to advance your career.



Nchimunya D. Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Senior International Attorney, Millennium Challenge
Corporation, USA.

WHY LAW?

I had exposure to the law growing up with family members in the profession. During my undergraduate studies, I found myself interested in the legal issues in my social sciences coursework. I recall in my law school application, I mentioned that I wanted to be able to help others build capacity and advise them on how to better negotiate and advocate for their positions, especially in the international development space. I came pretty close to that in practice. Now, as a lawyer, I like the intellectual challenge posed by the law, the range of issues and the different sides and arguments to different issues. But overall, I like the tool that the law presents for people, by knowing its limitations and the possibilities it presents, to help put themselves in a better position, whether through negotiating a fairer contract, litigating a claim, or advocating for change.

PROUD MOMENT

There have been a few: being admitted to the bar, successful motions for summary judgment, successful negotiations, receiving a Special Act/Service Award in my first year of joining an institution, but the proudest moments come from client satisfaction—when a client tells you that you helped put them in a better position. I recall when I was leaving my last role, receiving an e-mail from a Minister of a country where I had advised on a large strategic project. In his e-mail, he thanked me for my work and contributions and stated that I had left “an indelible mark” on the country. I did not expect this compliment at all but felt proud that I had made a positive contribution.



Nchimunya D. Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Senior International Attorney, Millennium Challenge
Corporation, USA.

HINDSIGHT

I would have become more comfortable at an earlier stage about charting a different path. Coming out of law school, there is a lot of pressure to follow a certain path and to get certain jobs. Get the training that you need of course but follow your interests. Don't be afraid if your interests and opportunities drive you in a different direction. Define success relative to where you are coming from and where you want to go, on your own terms. So far, I have followed a different path filled with a lot of amazing opportunities.

CHALLENGES

I recall one particular challenge. While working on a project a few years ago, it became clear from encounters that the client was uncomfortable with me advising on the project, and it became evident that the concerns stemmed from me being a woman. In meetings where I was joined by a male colleague, the client would turn to him for answers, and in conversations and meetings, I was referred to as "the lady," while my male colleagues were referred to by their first names. I knew that I had to win the confidence of the client in order to be successful in my role. I decided that their confidence would be won by balancing my recognition of the cultural sensitivities with showing my competence and leveraging my authenticity and intuition. In conversations and meetings that followed, I remained cognizant of cultural sensitivities in my speech and actions and remained patient as the client warmed up to me. I made sure I studied and understood the project and its issues. I researched and proposed solutions to the issues presented. Shortly thereafter, the relationship changed, the client reached out to me directly, had confidence in my advice, and entrusted our team with more projects. The next time I attended a high-level meeting concerning the project, the client referred to me as "my sister," at that point, I knew we had made some progress. We have become good friends since.



Nchimunya D. Ndulo (Zambia/USA)

Senior International Attorney, Millennium Challenge
Corporation, USA.

STRATEGIES

I have five main points of advice. First, take up opportunities and responsibilities as they are presented to you at work, opportunities that allow you to continue to grow and develop new skillsets. Be intellectually curious. Second, get to know your colleagues. You may make some good and long-term friendships and connections, but also try to understand the relationships and social dynamics of your workplace. The last thing you want is to get on the wrong side of someone you later find out is your boss' greatest confidant. Third, get to know where you stand professionally at work. Request frequent feedback, it allows you to grow and improve but also lets you know where you stand at work. Ask what you need to do to be considered for a promotion. These aren't always easy conversations to have but they will help you understand if your employer is interested in your growth and development and if there are opportunities for you where you are. Fourth, develop your network—networks are a key source of support and opportunities as you advance professionally. Finally, seek mentors, mentorship can make a difference between a person who can and who does succeed.



Ntombizozuko Dyani- Mhango, Ph.D. (South Africa)

Professor of Law, Department of Jurisprudence, University
of Pretoria.

WHY LAW?

I remember my grade 6 teacher asked us what we wanted to be when we grow up and I said I wanted to be an advocate so that I can help my people. My teacher was not very encouraging as he reminded us that we might not become what we wanted to be. He was cautious because this was during the height of apartheid in South Africa. Indeed, I was admitted as an Advocate of the High Court of South Africa years later, though I have never practised law because I chose the route of legal academia.

PROUD MOMENT

This year in July, I became a full professor after 16 years of being in the legal academy. This proved to myself that all the hard work and sacrifices I have made have finally resulted in this achievement. A dream I have held since I started this journey.

HINDSIGHT

I could have started with a humanities degree before embarking on a pure law degree (LL.B). I believe that courses such as philosophy, political science, sociology and history would have been instrumental to enhance my critical thinking skills to be able to contextualize the law better.



Ntombizozuko Dyani-Mhango, Ph.D. (South Africa)

Professor of Law, Department of Jurisprudence, University of Pretoria.

CHALLENGES

As a Black South African woman in the academy, I found that I had to constantly prove myself three times more than others. There were many hurdles that I had to jump through to be where I am today. These include not being taken seriously in my craft and felt like a perpetual minor especially since I started at the lowest rank in my previous academic home. One must read the anthology, *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersection of Race and Class for Women in Academia* edited by Carmen Gonzalez et al (2012), where women of color and Black women in academia in the United States relay their 'stories of resilience and survival' in academia. The stories speak about the violence of being in the academy. My story can be found there even though I have never contributed a chapter. Changing academic homes has been the best decision I have ever made.

STRATEGIES

Understand yourself – your strengths and your weaknesses. To do so you must cancel out all other noises out there and work on improving yourself. This is an ongoing process, so give yourself time. Have a personal plan or vision in mind. I had a three-year plan to move up the ladder from associate lecturer to associate professor. Because I knew that moving from the associate professor position was going to take me longer than three years, I gave myself some leeway to just enjoy the academy with no pressure and to craft my teaching and academic citizenship besides the research. Then once I was ready to apply for full professorship, I went back to my three-year plan. And I reached my goal.



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