



A Lawyer's Now Also, Salesman, Leader, Manager, Accountant...

By Pippa Blakemore

W'hen those contemplating a career in law are asked, 'Why do you want to be a lawyer?' they most frequently answer because 'I want to practise law and I think I would make a good lawyer'. The reality for lawyers in private practice is a great deal more demanding and requires lawyers to be hugely versatile in many other areas as well as law. Many lawyers are not aware of this initially and often not prepared for it. In addition to being expert lawyers, they are required to be salesmen and client relationship managers; inspirational leaders as well as efficient managers; credit controllers and accountants. These skills are all requirements to be in one person: the lawyer.

The Lawyer as Salesman: Bring In Work, Keep Clients (Happy)

Lawyers now need to be successful salesmen, who win the work and then continue to keep clients happy. This is far removed from sitting in a room studying judgements and legal texts for the fascination of their legal intricacies.

Winning the work requires an understanding of the potential clients' sector, organisation and the individuals within it. Lawyers need to keep up with economic, political, legislative and social issues affect the particular sector in which they work and appreciate the implications of changes in any of these areas for the sector, potential and current clients. Lawyers need a commercial and sensitive understanding of the organisation they are approaching, which can be demonstrated, for example, by monitoring their share price, knowing when their accounting year-end is and the date of their annual general meeting.

Keeping clients and the work coming in, is becoming increasingly challenging. As well as continuing to keep up-to-date with the sectors and organisations, lawyers need to anticipate the needs and meeting the changing requirements of increasingly sophisticated and knowledgeable clients under huge pressures. Clients would like new, innovative, streamlined and imaginative systems to deliver legal services. They are also under huge pressures to cut costs and deliver value to their own organisations. Such requirements of clients may conflict directly with the needs of the lawyer's own firm.

The Lawyer as Motivational Leader and Efficient Manager

Until recently, a key priority of running a successful law firm was the retention of staff. Now, for many firms, the requirement has changed dramatically to the need to reduce staff, while maintaining the morale of those remaining. Retaining the right staff under these circumstances requires the ability to lead,

motivate and manage an often demoralised group of people.

Leadership requires charisma, inspiration and flexibility to adapt style and role to all the many teams of which the leader is a part. Lawyers, as managers, must delegate. However, often what they should delegate is that which they enjoy most – the law. Sensitive communication is an essential skill, giving constructive feedback on each piece of work to enable more junior lawyers to flourish, combined with regular appraisals is another challenging requirement. These skills are far removed from the application of the principles of law to a knotty legal problem.

The Lawyer as Credit Controller and Accountant

Traditionally lawyers have billed clients according to the amount of time that they have spent on a matter. Clients are increasingly challenging this and demanding value for money as a basis for payment and asking lawyers to demonstrate the value they are providing for the fees they are charging. Lawyers are having to become increasingly innovative and creative in the fee structures they offer to demonstrate this value. Fixed fees, blended rates, retainers, and even asking the client what they would like to pay, are some of the alternatives that law firms are considering.

Clients are challenging more bills and delaying payment as well as providing less work. This means that many lawyers face a reduction in their billings; must invoice regularly and chase bills for payment, which is distasteful for many. Some lawyers have not chased payment and the client has gone into liquidation with unpaid legal fees.

Many lawyers never imagined at the beginning of their career that they would have to telephone a client and ask why they have not paid their bill and when they would.

Conclusion

The skills required to be a good lawyer nowadays are wide-ranging and varied. It is almost a given, that lawyers have excellent legal knowledge, skills, expertise and track record. In addition, it is now a fundamental requirement they have, in addition to keeping up with the law, all the skills and abilities to run a successful business. This is unique because in a commercial organisation these skills may be spread among many people and a range of departments. Lawyers have to create the opportunities, win the work, provide the services and maintain client relationships.

However, if lawyers can embrace the enormous flexibility offered by their modern and demanding role, it can be one of the most fulfilling and enriching careers that exist.

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With Capitalism on Trial, SBL To Confront Global Crisis

By Kayode Keteke

The Nigerian Bar Association Section on Business Law is hosting the world next month at a special forum to brainstorm on the problem of the global economic recession with a view to proffer a way out of the crisis.

The forum, holding at the Transcorp Hilton Hotel, Abuja is one of the sessions forming part of this year's 4th Annual Business Law Conference of the Section on Business Law which is holding in Abuja between April 14 and 17.

Delegates from Nigeria and other countries in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, United Kingdom and United States are expected at the session.

The session, which will be chaired by Senator Udo Udoma, will feature the Governor of the Central Bank of Malawi and the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Mathews Chikaonda.

Chikanonda will trace the history of the global financial crisis, identify what went wrong and furnish other perspectives on the issue to enlighten the participants.

Nigeria's Minister of Finance, Mr. Mansur Muktar will also speak on Africa's response to the crisis using

Nigeria as an example.

Chairman of Stanbic IBTC Bank, Mr. Atedo Peterside and the Group Managing Director of Transcorp Plc, Mr. Tom Iseghohi will also participate. Peterside will tackle the issue from a banker's perspective whilst Iseghohi will give an insight on opportunities that abound in times of crisis.

At another special session scheduled to hold on the first day of the conference, April 14, the SBL will host judges, judicial officers, and senior members of the bar at the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory Abuja between 10.00 am and 1.00 pm.

Judges and judicial officers from other African countries, United States, United Kingdom, Canada, The Caribbean, Asia Pacific and other parts of the world are expected to come together to explore how to attain modern justice delivery techniques. The session will be chaired by former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Mohammed Uwais and co-chaired by former NBA President, Chief Wole Olanipekun, SAN.

Expected to speak at the forum are former Lagos State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, SAN, and Professor Oba Nsugbe QC, SAN. Nsugbe who is a Recorder (Deputy High Court Judge) in the UK will speak on the Business of Judging.