



2022 ACC Top 10 30-Something: Mipe Okunseinde

Interviews and Profiles



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TOP 10
30
somethings
2022



Mipe Okunseinde

Global Head of Legal Operations

Booking.com

The Netherlands

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Consider the overflowing plate of lawyers like [Mipe Okunseinde](#) and it seems they'd be overwhelmed and strict about what they will do and what they will pass on. Not Mipe. Two qualities shine: She is

calm and open to new things.

Mipe credits her father with instilling in the family the proverb: To whom much is given, much is expected. But she also credits her grandmother, a “hugely respected matriarch” who went on trading expeditions around West Africa with her father, and was a “devout Muslim, very feminist and modern,” with imparting the same wisdom.

As a pre-med student at Harvard, Mipe studied psychology. While the medical field ultimately wasn't for her, she maintains a deep interest in what motivates people from feelings to action. “My interest is getting into the root cause of what is driving actions,” she says.

Law drew her in when she worked in policy in Washington, DC. Putting her head together with professionals with law degrees who chose not to practice, she liked how they thought. “Legal minds are trained to see all these complex things in the world. You don't know where to start, but they say: How do we deconstruct these complexities? I loved this curiosity, this creativity, this analytical thinking.”

Seeing the whole picture is what drives Mipe on her journey through life, her approach to the projects she recommends, the management of her team, the well-being classes she teaches, and how she nurtures herself and maintains a work-life balance.

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Pro bono opportunities through law also drive Mipe. And when she started out, that's what she looked for, what drove her to join [Covington & Burling LLP](#). “Things went very well, and I had a robust pro bono practice. They gave me the space to be all of me.”

Now, at [Booking.com](#), as head of strategy and operations for their legal and public affairs department, based in Amsterdam, Mipe also feels she's able to enjoy the many aspects of what makes her an individual and whole person. “My lived experience is the mission of this company,” which is to make it easier for everyone to experience the world and bring people together worldwide through travel.

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- Mipe Okunseinde

A first-generation US citizen with Nigerian and Belizean parents who has lived in five countries (the United States, United Kingdom, Nigeria, South Africa, and The Netherlands), Mipe says, “When you make it easier for people to experience the world, you're able to make connections, you're able to unlock mindsets. In a world where some are building walls to keep people out, what does it mean when you break down those walls and explore?”

A tremendous part of what Mipe handles and chooses to pursue at work is more than law. “I was meant to be a lawyer, and I ended up in operations,” she says. It's about integrating all her experience.

A great deal of Mipe's successes at work involve using technology to simplify and enable how the legal department does its work, such as developing a spend management dashboard, leading trainings on using productivity software, teaching SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, time-related) goal-setting, inclusive decision-making, and launching an intranet site for the department. Next goals include further tech modernization and integrating the new technologies into business as usual.

Mipe cultivated her tech background working at companies like [Uber](#), where she was the link between drivers and the product and operations teams to figure out what worked, what caused issues for drivers, and what customers wanted beyond the obvious.

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So, how does she deal with resistance to change when she comes into a department and suggests new systems? “When people resist, there's a why behind it.” Going back to psychology, she says, “Have people see themselves in the journey.” Ask: “What does success in my role look like for you? What are you doing more of? What are you doing less of?”

“If you aren't continuously learning new things, you're letting the business go on without you,” says Mipe. “People may say they are hired only to do a certain role, but then, how do you all come together? Our mindset is: Succeed together. And a lot of times the role of in-house counsel is to be that glue.”

Mipe is also committed to her diversity work, including serving as co-chair of the Employee Resource Group (ERG) for Black employees and allies, helping bring a diversity lens to company initiatives, working with her mentor, [Eric D. Greenberg](#), executive vice president and GC, [Cox Media Group](#), on a first-of-its-kind discussion of inclusive language in legal documents, and mentoring others, people who, like her, are Black, female, and/or from other underrepresented communities.

Among the ways Mipe keeps up with her career through ACC. The [ACC Operations Maturity Model](#) helped her and her team to build the strategy and roadmap for the operations function within their department. “We fully-customized it but it's been the starting point, the backbone for some of our operations journey,” she says.

“Also, the people I've met through ACC, the more you talk, the more you learn; the ideas, the knowledge exchange, seeing the different ways people fill their roles as in-house counsel.”

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- Mipe Okunseinde

Not just at the end of the day — within the day — Mipe practices yoga (and founded her own company, [We the Yoga](#)) and the principles behind it, mindful breathing and holistic physical and mental health.

“Our body talks to us so much, if we really take the time to be connected,” she says. Constantly

working excess hours, forgetting to balance your life, not eating or sleeping enough, are among the many ways people think they need to perform that “shock” Mipe. “If you are fighting your body, you are not at peace within yourself.”

Yoga has helped her feel — and be — more open. “It’s made me more open to crafting things around me rather than imitating something else,” she says. “When you start centering yourself, you really see your unique value. My identity is seen in everything I do. People say, ‘You seem so calm.’ That’s because I’m at home in myself.”

Q&A with Mipe Okunseinde

As you mentor other lawyers, what have you been learning that is helping you with your career and/or life in general?

I am inspired by the curiosity and courage of the lawyers coming up behind me. They have a firm sense of who they are, their values and worth — then they hold fast to that. There is a timeless learning in that mindset of forging one's own path, leading instead of being led.

Who inspires you, and what is it they’ve said or done that influences you?

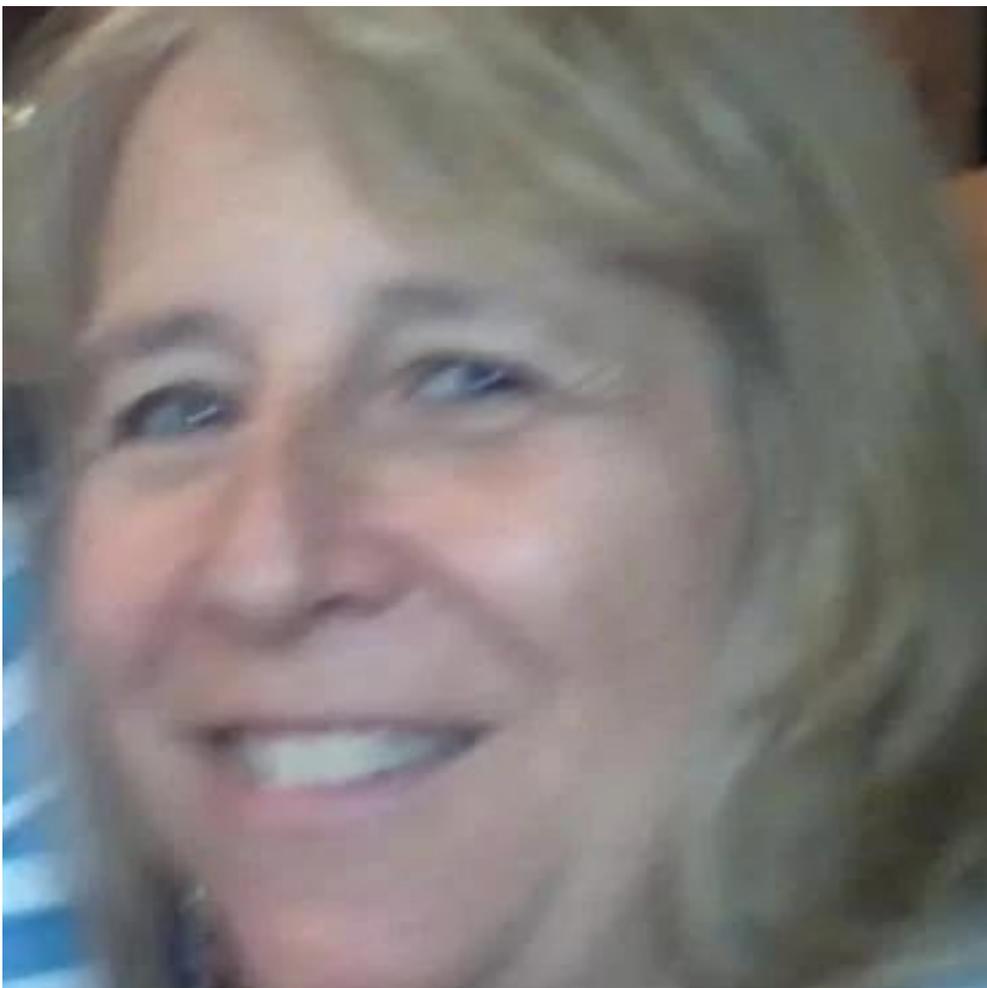
Early in my legal career, I had the great fortune to work on a high profile, high stakes matter with former US Attorney General Eric Holder. I was the most junior team member by a couple of decades. He sat me down and told me that I brought a unique experience, skillset, and perspective that no one else could, affirmed that I had every right to be at the table, and ultimately said he wanted to see "Big Mipe." That experience — and those words in particular — have stuck with me through the years. I use them as a ruler to ensure that I am always being my fullest self rather than shrinking myself to fit a mold.

And, the other day, I met a colleague in person for the first time. He remarked with surprise that he thought I would be much taller. And I thought to myself, yeah, that's that big Mipe energy!

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Debra Z. Roth, an ACC content contractor, has been a journalist, including freelance, and a communications marketing practitioner. Her news stories, features, and editorials have been

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