

Q&A with Theresa Chikwendu on the ACC In-house Certification Program

Interviews and Profiles

Career Development



Why did you decide to participate in the ACC In-house Certification Program? What made it stand out?

The decision to participate in the ACC In-house Certification program stemmed from my conviction that it would be of immense value to myself, my department, and my company. I first heard about the certification program from some colleagues, and after going through the ACC website, I was amazed at the volume of materials relevant to my role as in-house counsel.

I chose to participate in the program in December 2022 because I was interested in providing best-in-class services to my internal clients and elevating my leadership skills within my department. The ACC course delivered on this because it provided me with new perspectives for servicing my stakeholders (internal and external) which I have gone on to implement. The mantra of the ACC *being by #inhouse counsel for #inhouse counsel* always stands out because the programs are focused on the unique role that we perform as in-house counsel.



Theresa Chikwendu

Head of Department, Corporate Transactions

MTN Nigeria

ACC In-house Certification Program 2022 graduate

Can you share a key takeaway(s) from the program? In other words, what was a key lesson or message that you were able to take back and

immediately apply in your legal department?

Three key takeaways stood out:

1. The importance of creating a vision and mission statement for the legal department. Every company has its mission and vision statement to its employees, customers, stakeholders, shareholders, etc. The legal department must also do the same. Creating a compelling vision statement for the legal department is a compass that will guide the department.

2. The importance of customer satisfaction surveys — I have always been aware of this and of its importance in practice. In fact, my department has deployed this in the past and we have received great feedback from business colleagues which we have implemented in our practice. However, hearing about it during the program further validated the importance of being intentional and consistent in doing it.

3. The management of stakeholders (internal and external) is critical to success as an inhouse department. The legal department cannot exist in silos hence relationships need to be managed appropriately. In addition, managing the relationship with external counsel is important and both parties must work actively on building that relationship.

Secure your seat now!

How did you find the virtual format over two weeks, and did it still provide opportunities to connect and engage with your fellow attendees?

The virtual format did allow us to connect and engage with fellow attendees particularly during the group breakout sessions. Of course, a physical event has the potential of helping attendees form deeper bonds, but I am a big believer in making the best of any situation you find yourself. I have been able to forge helpful relationships with some of the attendees.

The curriculum for the program has been developed by our Education Advisory Council (EAC). What if any, additional skills or areas of focus do you believe would have made the program even stronger? Are there other skills the program should consider addressing in the future?

Firstly, I think it was a robust curriculum and the curriculum was the greatest motivation to take the course. However, I think a deeper focus on negotiation would be great. I enjoyed the negotiation class, but we did not spend much time on such an important topic. You would agree that negotiation skill is important skill for all in-house counsel.

Also, given the evolving role of in-house counsel, there would be value in updating the curriculum to deal with topical issues like ESG, Artificial Intelligence, and data protection & privacy.

The certification program intended to explore several core competency areas, including developing stakeholder relationships, law department management, and legal services. In your opinion, why are these skills — or core competencies — essential for in-house success?

Given that the legal department does not work in isolation, the skills mentioned above are critical to ensure the success of the legal department within the business. Relationship currency is important if we are to elevate our role as in-house counsel and to achieve this, the legal department must build strong stakeholder relationships.

Law department management and the management of legal services providers is a must for every law department to thrive, hence, I really enjoyed these aspects of the program. For external legal providers, it is important that clear expectations are set, and performance evaluations done – internally at the minimum. For legal department management, "*what doesn't get measured, doesn't get done*." The law department needs to speak the language of the business, so this was a great refresher.

Looking back at the course, how will the In-house Counsel Certified (ICC) designation help advance your in-house career?

It has provided a platform for networking and engagement between the cohorts. Currently, the ACC has merged the different cohorts together to allow for even better engagement, support for each other, and networking across participants.

Join ACC

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its authors' employers, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.



Staff

ACC