

Exploring Careers Beyond the Legal Department

Law Department Management



Banner artwork by insta_photos / *Shutterstock.com*

The idea of pursuing a career outside of conventional legal practice can be daunting for many legal professionals due to the uncertainty and lack of clear guidance on how to navigate these non-traditional paths. Missteps in this process can lead to frustration, which is why ACC organized an insightful webinar to address this issue. It was co-moderated by the co-chairs of the Career Development Committee of ACC Small Law Department Network, Theresa Chikwendu, head of corporate transactions at MTN Nigeria Communications Plc and Orlesia Tucker, associate general counsel, Destination Pet. During the event, two accomplished speakers shared their journeys and insights:

- Tinuade Awe, former chief executive officer of NGX Regulation Limited, and
- Shelayne Clemmer, chief compliance officer of Vericast.



Tinuade Awe, former CEO, NGX Regulation Limited



Shelayne Clemmer, Chief Compliance Officer, Vericast

Below are some key takeaways from their presentation:

Innovative problem-solving

As a lawyer looking to move beyond legal practice, it is crucial to be innovative and approach challenges with a problem-solving mindset. This ability to think skillfully about issues and discover creative business-minded solutions can set you apart in the corporate world. It may not always be typically a lawyer's job, but it sets you apart as a strategic advisor to the business.



An innovative approach to problem solving is essential for in-house counsel and driving career advancement. Dilok Klaisataporn / *Shutterstock.com*

Preparation and continuous learning

Opportunities in non-legal careers may require specific knowledge or certifications. Whether through formal education, specialized training (like finance training for lawyers), or obtaining new certifications, continuously developing your expertise is essential for transitioning. Be ready always and stay flexible when the opportunities come up because it might lead to something better. Awe shared a beautiful example about how she gained practical experience in finance by engaging a finance coach for intensive training.

Start with what you have

You don’t need to meet every qualification when starting out in a new field. Leverage your existing/transferable legal and non-legal skills, and apply them strategically to the industry you are interested in. Clemmer and Awe gave practical examples of people like Chinua Azubuike, managing director and chief executive officer of InfraCredit, and others in various positions from CEO, CFO, CHRO, chief tax officer, etc.

Value of legal skills in corporate settings

Lawyers bring a unique perspective to the corporate world, particularly in terms of risk management and compliance. These legal frameworks are invaluable for leadership, strategy, and advisory roles, making lawyers an asset in every corporate environment.

Explore this valuable ACC career resource to take the next step in advancing forward in your legal career.

Broad opportunities for lawyers

A law degree provides a solid foundation for a wide array of careers beyond traditional legal practice. Lawyers can explore roles in business, public policy, education, technology, and more, ensuring there are many pathways to success outside the courtroom.

Managing reputation

Always remember that as a professional, you have a personal reputation, and that there are implications for certain actions particularly when you are licensed. As you move or seek to transition careers outside of the legal department, be wary about participating in unethical activities.

Leverage your transferable skills

A legal career offers a vast range of transferable skills that can be applied across multiple industries beyond the courtroom. Whether in business, public policy, technology, or international relations, lawyers are highly adaptable professionals who can excel in diverse fields. By exploring alternative career paths, legal professionals can expand their horizons and continue making significant contributions in new and exciting ways.

The versatility of a law degree remains one of its greatest strengths, opening up numerous opportunities for those willing to venture beyond the traditional legal landscape.

ACC members can access the link to the recording here.

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.

Theresa Chikwendu



Principal Consultant, Legal & M&A

MTN Nigeria Communications Plc

Theresa Chikwendu is a distinguished and award-winning legal professional whose career is marked by a proven ability to navigate complex corporate transactions and drive strategic legal initiatives within one of Africa's largest and most influential organizations.

As Principal Consultant, Legal & M&A at MTN Group (**JSE: MTN**), my role involves providing critical legal oversight for M&A, and business development initiatives, ensuring robust legal frameworks that align with MTN's strategic objectives and international best practices. She was previously the former Senior Manager and Head of Department, Corporate Transactions at MTN Nigeria Communications Plc (**NGX: MTN**), where she helped the company structure and negotiate its most complex commercial transactions ranging from financing, mergers & acquisitions, and project finance transactions. She provided strategic leadership to the business on legal and business issues ranging from corporate transactions, general commercial transactions, stakeholder management, project management, and related matters.

She holds an LL.M Degree from Harvard Law School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. Theresa's hobbies include reading, travelling, and she is a big advocate of mentorship. She runs a weekly LinkedIn column known as "***Diary of an Inhouse Legal Counsel***" where she is building a global community for in-house lawyers focused on becoming better strategic business advisors. She also has a collaboration with the African Corporate & Government Counsel Forum on a column titled – ***Legal Insights with Theresa Chikwendu, A monthly Digest for In-House Counsel***.

She is the visionary and convener of the ***#YoungerMe Nuggets Series,*** an initiative committed to empowering the next generation of young legal professionals and law students from underrepresented schools/backgrounds with the tools they need for career success globally. She served on the 2023 Annual Meeting Advisory Board of the Association of Corporate Counsel. She is also on the leadership of the International Legal Affairs, and Small Law Department Networks of the Association of Corporate Counsel.

You can learn more about her here - https://www.linkedin.com/in/nkeonyeasua-theresa-chikwend

Orlesia Tucker



Associate General Counsel

Destination Pet, LLC

Orlesia Tucker serves as associate general counsel at Destination Pet, LLC since September 2023 and has extensive experience in various legal roles. Previously, Tucker was director of legal affairs at CalTex from January to April 2023, where responsibilities included managing legal initiatives related to compliance, marketing, and intellectual property for a manufacturing company. From 2016 to 2023, Tucker held the position of general counsel at FBD Partnership, LP, overseeing corporate legal strategies and advising on business transactions for a multi-million-dollar frozen beverage company with international offices. Further experience includes serving as a contract attorney at CPS Energy and Of Counsel at Alston Hunt Floyd & Ing. Tucker has also worked as a shareholder at Graves Dougherty Hearon & Moody, and an associate at Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, focusing on litigation and intellectual property matters. Educational qualifications include a J.D. in intellectual property law from South Texas College of Law, a Mini-MBA from Boston University, and a B.S. in Bioengineering from Texas A&M University.