

**PAPER PRESENTED BY JOYCE ODUAH FICMC AT THE NIGERIAN LAW
SCHOOL KANO CAMPUS ON THE 11TH OF OCTOBER, 2023**

Good morning
The DDG, Nigerian Law School, Kano Campus,
Esteemed lecturers,
Colleagues-in-waiting,

I am truly honoured and excited to stand before you today. It gives me great pleasure to know that in a few months, all of you here in this hall will become my colleagues. I am excited because the digital and global world that we live in today is anchored on young people's creativity and innovation.

Please permit me to introduce myself. I am Joyce Oduah, a legal practitioner with over 32 years of post-call. My journey in the legal practice world began immediately after my Call to the Bar during my NYSC. I have been fortunate to serve at the branch and national levels of the NBA. At the national level, In 2014, I was the Treasurer and the immediate past General Secretary of the NBA. Beyond our national borders, I have represented our great nation as a Council Member of the International Bar Association. I am the current Vice President representing West Africa in the Pan African Lawyers Union. I am also the principal partner of the solution-centered law firm Joyce and Okey Oduah LP. By the way, I have a family of lawyers; my husband and two of my daughters are lawyers.

What is uppermost in your minds at this moment is having an excellent Bar final result, and I have an intervention I would like to introduce for your benefit before the end of this short presentation.

I want to speak briefly on "Emotional and Social Intelligence in Legal Practice."

Emotional intelligence is simply the skill of intentionally considering others, showing empathy, self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation. Social intelligence is the skill of managing and understanding interpersonal relationships. These two skills will enable you to succeed tremendously sooner rather than later. The world has moved from individualism to collectivism, working in teams, partnerships, and knowledge-sharing circles. These skills are also critical as you prepare to write your Bar Finals.

As I reflect on our educational system and even the corporate world, I have realised that there's an overemphasis on cognitive skills. While cognitive skills are undoubtedly necessary, mastering Emotional and Social Intelligence is the key to

thriving in the legal profession and society. Emotional Intelligence gives you the presence of mind to recognise and empathise with human emotions, whether yours or someone else. These skills are essential for establishing meaningful relationships in the school, the workplace, and beyond. It also plays a pivotal role in accomplishing tasks and achieving goals and aids in building strong relationships within academic and professional circles.

These two skills are critically important in this age of information, automation and agility. This is what distinguishes you from others. This keeps you relevant and ensures that AI does not 'steal' your jobs. No matter how cognitively intelligent you are, an Artificial Intelligence system will most likely outsmart you in terms of reliability, consistency and speed. It is unsurprising that an unintelligent individual can seem intelligent with access to the Google search engine.

As you progress in your career, the skills that once helped you to succeed may not be enough to ensure the continued sustainability of your success. While cognitive and technical abilities are essential for passing exams, landing your first job, or earning a promotion, they may not be sufficient in the 21st-century legal profession. Today, emotional and social intelligence are highly valued interpersonal skills in the legal industry and society. While IQ and technical skills remain relevant, they are no longer the sole determinants of professional success in our profession.

Permit me to expound on the core components of Emotional and Social Intelligence:

Self-awareness: Understanding yourself is a fundamental aspect of personal growth. As Socrates pointed out, "Man Know Thyself". This involves recognising your strengths, weaknesses, and triggers. It involves refining your strengths while working on areas that require improvement. Furthermore, it entails assessing your performance and comparing it to the opinions of others to gain a more accurate understanding of yourself. These skills can also be applied to academic pursuits, such as identifying courses you are strong in and those you are weak in. You need to categorise them accordingly and use this knowledge to plan your reading.

Self-management: This is the ability to manage your emotions effectively, particularly in stressful situations. It entails maintaining a positive outlook and responding to situations rather than reacting impulsively. When you feel emotions of fear, anger, frustration or even happiness, take a moment to pause, breathe, and collect yourself before taking appropriate actions. If you ever feel overwhelmed by the thought of the courses you need to cover, take a deep breath and relax. Instead of trying to read everything at once, choose a topic you have not covered yet and focus on that. Before you know it, you'll be done with that topic and ready to move on to the next one. If you find yourself struggling to understand your course material, take a break for 5

minutes and do something you enjoy. This might seem counter-intuitive or a waste of time, but it's not. It can help you calm down and return to your studies with a fresh perspective.

Social awareness: This is the ability to recognise and understand the emotions of others. This is crucial for navigating social situations effectively. In a courtroom, for example, you must be aware of the judge's indirect or non-verbal cues to know when to stop or change direction. This is 'taking the hint of the court'. Similarly, know your lecturers; which topics have they stressed? This may be the key to preparing effectively for your exams. Build relationships with your fellow students. Empathising with colleagues can foster meaningful relationships that are beneficial in the future. This skill also involves being attentive to non-verbal cues.

Relationship management: This is another critical skill involving effective communication, conflict resolution, and time management. To effectively manage relationships, it's crucial to learn about conflict management. Having a background in alternative dispute resolution, such as mediation, conciliation, and negotiation, is highly recommended. Also, you need to learn how to communicate openly and effectively. Pay attention to others, and put your phone aside when you're having a conversation with someone. There's a paper by the International Bar Association that says, "Formerly, we used to say it's not what you know, it's who you know'. These days, we might say: "It's not what you know or who you know; it's how you make people feel." Build relationships, and treat your colleagues with kindness. "Love others." This can be the key to success in your professional journey. It would not hurt to take a few minutes out of your busy schedule to check on someone. Additionally, it's important to learn time management skills, check up on people, and be empathetic. People matter, so treat them right.

These are crucial skills in every aspect of our profession. And it all begins with your approach to your upcoming examinations, which are just around the corner.

I understand the anxiety and pressure accompanying such exams, but I implore you to face them fearlessly and calmly. You are not alone in this journey; your colleagues are beside you. Collaboration is key. Help each other in studying and practising. A shared journey is often less daunting.

I understand your challenges so well, and my intervention to address this challenge is to organise a free virtual preparatory training for all of you across the campuses. This training is a last-minute preparatory for the knowledge and skills you need to excel in your exams. But that's not all – there's more. After the tutorial, you'll have the opportunity to participate in an MCQ test, which is structured and timed like your examination. The six best performers across all campuses will be chosen for special

rewards. Some will win personalised mentorship sessions with me, some will receive wigs and gowns for their call to the bar, and two lucky individuals will secure paid internship slots in my law firm, Joyce & Okey Oduah LP, which has branches in Lagos and Abuja. Finally, everyone across all campuses will benefit from mentorship with me and other distinguished colleagues through a project called “The Agile Legal Professional.”

I firmly believe in every one of you. You have the opportunity to succeed, and you will. But it all begins with the right mindset, surrounded by the right people. I cannot wait to welcome you into the Bar, and I already see future Senior Advocates of Nigeria, distinguished judges, corporate legal experts, and human rights defenders among you.

In closing, I want to wish you the best of luck. Believe in yourselves as I believe in you, and remember, The future of our legal landscape is bright, and you are the torchbearers. I cannot wait to see you all at the bar, shining brightly and making your mark in the legal profession.

Thank you.