

## **LAW AS A PROFESSION**

I must say that all of you seated here today are very fortunate to have this wonderful opportunity to receive some form of guidance and counseling before you make your choice of career. You must count yourselves most fortunate today, because there are many adults who have discovered very late in their lives that they made a wrong choice of career. This is probably because they did not have the benefit of receiving any form of guidance and counseling in their youth. It is for this reason that I must commend the authorities of this institution for having a day set apart as their 'Career Day.' I implore all of you to make good use of this golden opportunity.

My talk is on **Law as a Profession**. In the course of my lecture, I will try to enlighten you on what the legal profession is all about. Also, I will guide you on the essential subject requirements for prospective law students. I will also identify some important characteristics which you must have if you are aspiring to become a lawyer. Other areas to be discussed include, the duration of the course, the Universities offering the course and finally the various employment opportunities open to you after a successful completion of the course.

All over the world, the legal profession ranks among the most noble, the most attractive and the most interesting of all professions. It is also one of the most competitive professions in the world. There is a perpetual increase in the number of people trying to come into the legal profession. The reason for this mass attraction is not far fetched. Law is an essential element in any society. A knowledge of law increases one's understanding of public affairs. The study of law will promote your power of speech and make you more skillful in argument and in interpreting the written word.

There are some wrong notions which many people have about the legal profession which must be corrected. Many people think that lawyers are liars. They believe that the work of a lawyer is to turn white into black and to turn black into white. But they are very wrong. The legal profession is a very noble profession. It is a profession which is established on honour and integrity. It is not a profession for people with dubious intentions. Lawyers are engaged in a very noble pursuit, which is the pursuit of justice. If you are harbouring the intention of reading law in order to go into some shady or dubious activities, then I must tell you that law is not the profession for you.

Before I enumerate the subject requirements for law, I want to briefly identify some character traits which a prospective law student must have:

- (i) You must cultivate a good reading habit, we read all our lives;
- (ii) You must be honest;
- (iii) You must be neat and tidy;
- (iv) You must be orderly in speech;
- (v) You must be diligent, not lazy;
- (vi) You must be a keen observer and listener; and
- (vii) Cultivate interest in current affairs.

Coming to the important aspect of the subject requirement of the course, I will refer you to the JAMB brochure for a comprehensive detail of the admission requirements. But in summary, the law programme is offered by over twenty Universities in the country. They are all listed in the JAMB brochure. Generally however, to qualify for admission a candidate must obtain a minimum of five 'O' Level passes at credit level to include English

Language and Literature in English. It is advisable to obtain credits in other subjects like Government and History.

The subjects to take during the JAMB Examinations should generally be any three Arts or Social Science subjects. But you must note that in some cases, particular Universities specify some particular subjects that must be taken in the JAMB Examinations. Such subjects may include Literature in English, Government etc. Also some particular Universities require credits in some specific subjects like Literature, Mathematics, etc. See the current brochure for such special requirements.

The duration of the law programme depends on the mode of entry. For direct entry candidates, the duration of the course is four years while for University Matriculation Examination (UME) candidates, the period is five years. Upon the successful completion of the programme, a candidate will be awarded a Degree of Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.). But that Degree does not qualify you yet as a lawyer. To qualify as a lawyer you must proceed further to the Nigerian Law School for a one year programme to enable you qualify to be called to the Bar. At this stage, you become a Barrister and Solicitor.

After qualifying as a lawyer there are several employment opportunities open to you. In the first place you are free to set up private legal practice. This is the most common form of employment. As a beginner you may however work under a senior lawyer to get some experience. There are also employment opportunities in the civil service. They include employment as a State Counsel in the Ministry of Justice, Legal Officer in other Government Ministries and parastatals. There are

also employment opportunities in the Judiciary. They include employment as a Magistrate, Customary Court President and Judge of the High Court, or Customary Court of Appeal. However such judicial appointments are only open to lawyers with some years of experience.

Lawyers can also work in private companies as secretaries and legal advisers. Such private companies include Banks, manufacturing companies, oil companies, etc. These kinds of employment are less hectic than those engaged in actual practice of the law in court. There are several opportunities for lawyers in the academic institutions. They can lecture in the Universities, Polytechnics and other advanced colleges.

However to qualify for such appointment, a post-graduate Degree may be required.

In a nutshell, I wish to observe that in view of the vast knowledge and experience of a lawyer, he is usually suitably qualified to occupy several positions in establishments which require people who are versatile in learning. This is the advantage which a lawyer has over other professionals. Most of the time the lawyer can do the work of many other professionals but no non-lawyer can ever do the work of a lawyer.

On the whole, I hope I have been able to throw some light on the choice of law as a profession. I wish you all the best of luck as you make your choice of career for the future.

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