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BY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The President of the Nigerian Bar Association, My Noble Lords, Distinguished members of the Inner and Outer Bar, Esteemed Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great honour and privilege to stand before you today at the 66th Annual General Conference of the Nigerian Bar Association. The theme of this year's Conference, **"Beyond Limits,"** is both timely and compelling. It challenges us, individually and collectively, to interrogate the boundaries we have accepted for ourselves and for our profession.

For me, going beyond limits does not necessarily mean working longer hours than everyone else, taking on every brief that comes our way, or

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chasing every available opportunity. Rather, it means refusing to allow our present circumstances, current position, or perceived limitations to define the extent of our future contribution. It is about recognising that where we are today is merely a starting point and not a ceiling on where we can go.

Against that background, the topic of this session, “Rookie to Rainmaker,” could hardly be more appropriate. When considered alongside the Conference theme, it raises an important and practical question for every lawyer, particularly the younger members of our profession. How does a lawyer move beyond merely practising law to creating value, and, ultimately, becoming someone to whom clients, businesses and institutions naturally turn for solutions?

I approach this subject not merely from theory, but from my own professional journey. I have been the Rookie. I have worked as a young lawyer trying to learn the craft, proved my worth and found my place within the profession. I have experienced private practice from the position of an employee and became involved in building and growing a law firm, with all the responsibilities that come with attracting clients, retaining them, managing relationships, creating opportunities and sustaining a legal practice.

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That journey has taught me one central lesson which forms the foundation of this paper: the transition from Rookie to Rainmaker is fundamentally a transition in value proposition.

My discussion today will therefore be practical. Drawing from my experiences, I will examine the habits, choices, relationships and mindset that helped shape my own journey. My hope is not to present my path as a formula that everyone must follow, because every professional journey is different. Rather, it is to identify principles that may help the next generation of lawyers deliberately build their own value proposition and move, in their own way and at their own pace, beyond limits, from Rookie to Rainmaker.

2.0 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BECOME A RAINMAKER?

Every lawyer starts somewhere.

There is the first day in chambers. The first research assignment. The first appearance in court. The first transaction. The first opinion that comes back covered in corrections. The first client meeting where you mostly listen because you are not yet sure what to say.

There is also the first mistake.

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I was called to the Nigerian Bar in 2009. Like most young lawyers, I did not begin my career as a Senior Advocate, Managing Partner, reform advocate or adviser on significant transactions and disputes. I began as a young lawyer who had to learn the profession, understand clients, earn trust and gradually discover where I could add value.

My journey has taken me through different law firms and different professional environments, including Dele Olaniyan & Co., Templars and Wole Olanipekun & Co. Eventually, I became a co-founder of Oyewole & Adesina, where I presently serve as Lead Partner.

Along the way, I have worked in dispute resolution, energy, projects, finance, real estate, regulatory matters and commercial transactions. I have appeared in significant disputes, advised businesses, participated in transactions and had the privilege of contributing to national reforms through the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council.

These experiences have changed my understanding of what it means to succeed as a lawyer.

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When we hear the word **“Rainmaker,”** we often think of the lawyer or partner who brings large clients and substantial fees into a law firm. That is certainly part of it.

But I suggest that the better definition is this:

“A rainmaker is a lawyer who has developed the competence, relationships, judgment and reputation to consistently create value.”

For the lawyer in private practice, that value may eventually translate into instructions, clients, revenue and institutional relationships. For an in-house lawyer, it may translate into risks avoided, transactions completed, disputes prevented, regulatory problems solved, costs reduced and business opportunities unlocked.

The common denominator is **value**.

My central proposition today is therefore simple:

“Your journey from rookie to rainmaker is the journey from being a person who receives instructions to becoming a person whose judgment, relationships and ability to solve problems are sought after.”

3.0 THE ROOKIE YEARS: YOUR FIRST CAPITAL IS COMPETENCE

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A young lawyer usually does not have clients. You may not have an influential network. You may not have major file. But there is one form of capital available to every young lawyer: **COMPETENCE**

My early years of practice exposed me to different lawyers, firms, clients, disputes and working cultures. Those years taught me that the seemingly small assignments given to young lawyers are actually opportunities to build professional capital.

Research is not “just research.”

Drafting is not “just drafting.”

Taking notes at a meeting is not an insignificant assignment.

Following up on court filings at the Registry is not beneath you.

Every assignment teaches you something about how legal problems are solved.

There is a sequence to becoming a Rainmaker as a young lawyer. This sequence usually take the following:

The young lawyer who consistently produces reliable work gradually becomes the lawyer to whom more important work is entrusted.

And responsibility compounds.

A research assignment becomes an opinion.

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An opinion becomes responsibility for a file.

A file becomes direct interaction with a client.

Client interaction becomes trust.

Trust eventually becomes relationships.

Relationships eventually become opportunities.

The first lesson in becoming a rainmaker is therefore: **“Before you learn how to attract work, learn how to do the work exceptionally well.”**

Marketing without competence may get you the first instruction but it will not keep it. Only competence will get you the second.

4.0 STOP THINKING LIKE A LAWYER ALONE—UNDERSTAND THE CLIENT'S PROBLEM

One of the most important transitions in my own career was understanding that clients rarely come to lawyers because they are fascinated by law.

They come because they have problems.

A client may say: ***“We need an agreement.”*** But the real issue may be how to allocate commercial risk.

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A client may say: ***"We want to sue."*** But the real objective may be to recover money quickly.

A company may ask: ***"Can we do this?"*** But what management really needs to know is: ***"How can we achieve our commercial objective without creating unacceptable legal or regulatory risk?"***

That distinction is fundamental.

A technically brilliant lawyer who does not understand the client's objective can produce a legally correct answer that is commercially useless.

Over the years, my practice expanded beyond dispute resolution into energy, projects, finance, real estate, regulatory compliance and complex commercial transactions.

Working across these areas reinforced one lesson:

The best lawyers do not merely identify legal problems. They help clients achieve legitimate objectives despite those problems.

That requires understanding the client's business.

What does the client sell?

How does the client make money?

What threatens that revenue?

Who regulates the client?

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Who are its competitors?

Where does financing come from?

What could prevent a transaction from closing?

What does a dispute actually cost the business?

Once you begin asking these questions, you stop being merely a legal service provider. You begin becoming a **business adviser who happens to possess legal expertise.**

5.0 YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION: WHY SHOULD ANYONE CHOOSE YOU?

Every lawyer should be able to answer one uncomfortable question:

Why should a client, employer or organisation choose me rather than another competent lawyer?

There are thousands of lawyers. Many attended excellent universities. Many can draft agreements. Many can conduct research. Many are good advocates.

Therefore, simply saying ***“I am a lawyer”*** is not a value proposition.

Your value proposition is the combination of capabilities that makes your contribution particularly useful.

I think of it in this way:

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**VALUE = COMPETENCE + RELIABILITY + JUDGMENT +
RELATIONSHIPS + UNDERSTANDING OF THE CLIENT**

Competence means you know what you are doing.

Reliability means people know that when you undertake to do something, it will be done.

Judgment means you know not only what can be done, but what should be done.

Relationships mean people know you, trust you and are comfortable involving you.

Understanding the client means your advice responds to the client's actual objectives rather than merely displaying your knowledge of law.

As your career progresses, your value proposition must also evolve.

At the beginning, your proposition may simply be: ***"I am dependable and I produce excellent work."***

Later it becomes: ***"I understand this area of practice extremely well."***

Eventually it should become: ***"When you have this kind of problem, I am one of the people you should call."***

That final stage is where rainmaking begins.

6.0 FROM DOING TASKS TO TAKING OWNERSHIP

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There is a point in every successful career when your mentality must change.

A rookie waits for instructions.

A rainmaker takes ownership.

The rookie asks: ***"What do you want me to do?"***

The developing lawyer asks: ***"What needs to be done?"***

The rainmaker asks: ***"What outcome are we trying to achieve, what could prevent it, and how do we get ahead of those problems?"***

Suppose you are asked to review an agreement.

The basic lawyer identifies problematic clauses.

The valuable lawyer identifies the clauses **and proposes solutions.**

The exceptional lawyer understands the transaction sufficiently to anticipate problems that nobody has yet identified.

That is ownership.

Clients and organisations remember lawyers who reduce the number of problems they have to think about.

7.0 PRIVATE PRACTICE: YOU ARE ALSO RUNNING A BUSINESS

One of the biggest lessons from establishing and growing a Firm is that excellent legal training does not automatically prepare you to run

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a law firm. A law firm is simultaneously a professional institution and a business.

You must think about: clients; people; revenue; cash flow; collections; technology; knowledge; reputation; succession; service delivery; and institutional culture.

When you are an associate, someone else may worry about salaries, rent, technology and whether clients have paid their invoices.

When you become responsible for a firm, those matters become very real.

This changes your perspective.

You begin to appreciate that revenue is not something beneath professional consideration. Without sustainable revenue, you cannot employ excellent lawyers, invest in technology, maintain offices, train people or build an enduring institution.

But there is an important sequence:

“Do not chase fees. Chase value. Value creates trust; trust creates relationships; relationships create instructions; instructions create revenue.”

That sequence matters.

8.0 RELATIONSHIPS ARE PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL

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No serious discussion about rainmaking can ignore relationships. But networking is frequently misunderstood.

Networking is not collecting telephone numbers. It is not attending every event. It is not distributing business cards. It is not constantly asking people for work.

A network is a collection of relationships of trust.

Some of the most valuable professional relationships you will build may not produce an instruction for ten years.

Some may never produce one.

Build them anyway.

Your classmates will become judges, general counsel, regulators, entrepreneurs, partners, public officers and business leaders.

The junior colleague of today may become the managing director of tomorrow.

Treat people well before you need anything from them.

Stay in touch. Congratulate people. Share useful information. Make introductions. Help where you genuinely can.

Do not make every relationship transactional.

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The strongest network is built before you need it.

9.0 VISIBILITY MATTERS—BUT SUBSTANCE MUST COME FIRST

You cannot become known for expertise that nobody knows you possess.

Young lawyers should therefore write, speak, teach and participate meaningfully in professional organisations.

But visibility without substance is dangerous.

Social media has made it possible to manufacture the appearance of expertise very quickly.

A conference photograph is not expertise. A LinkedIn post is not expertise. A title is not expertise.

Your public profile should amplify competence, not substitute for it.

My own participation in professional activities and public-sector reform initiatives exposed me to lawyers, judges, policymakers, regulators, businesses and institutions outside the traditional boundaries of private legal practice.

But those opportunities required work.

The objective should therefore be:

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Do excellent work → develop knowledge → contribute meaningfully → communicate your expertise → build credibility.

10.0 SOMETIMES VALUE IS CREATED OUTSIDE A CLIENT MANDATE

Some of the most consequential work in my professional journey did not begin as conventional fee-paying legal instructions.

My involvement with the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council provided an opportunity to contribute to reforms aimed at improving Nigeria's business environment.

I participated in work relating to the Small Claims Court framework and the Business Facilitation legislation, among other reform initiatives.

The Small Claims Court initiative was particularly meaningful because it addressed a practical problem: how can businesses, particularly SMEs, resolve relatively modest commercial disputes without spending years navigating the court system?

That experience reinforced an important lesson:

Your professional value is not limited to the invoices you generate.

Service creates expertise. Expertise creates credibility. Credibility creates relationships. Relationships create opportunities.

Contribution to the profession, government reform, pro bono work, committees, teaching and policy initiatives may therefore form part of a lawyer's long-term professional capital.

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Do not ask only:

"What am I being paid for this?"

Sometimes the better question is:

"What value can I create here, and what will I learn in the process?"

11.0 REPUTATION COMPOUNDS

In law, reputation travels faster than advertising.

Every interaction contributes to it.

The quality of your drafting. Whether you return calls. Whether you meet deadlines. Whether your word can be trusted. How you treat junior lawyers. How you behave when nobody important appears to be watching. How you respond when you make a mistake. How you conduct yourself against opposing counsel. How you treat confidential information.

One impressive transaction cannot create a career. One significant case cannot create a career.

A career is the accumulated result of thousands of professional interactions.

That is why reputation compounds.

So does a bad reputation.

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Protect yours carefully.

12.0 TECHNOLOGY AND THE NEXT GENERATION OF RAINMAKERS

The next generation of successful lawyers will practise differently from my generation.

Artificial intelligence can already assist with research, document review, drafting, due diligence, knowledge management and many routine legal tasks.

This should not frighten young lawyers. It should challenge them.

If technology can perform part of what you currently regard as your primary value, then you must move higher up the value chain.

Machines can increasingly retrieve information.

The lawyer must provide judgment.

Technology can assist with drafting.

The lawyer must understand strategy.

Technology can identify clauses.

The lawyer must understand commercial consequences.

Technology may accelerate analysis.

The lawyer must build trust.

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The rainmaker of the future will not compete against technology by pretending it does not exist. The rainmaker will use technology to become faster and more efficient while investing more deeply in the human capabilities that technology cannot easily replicate: judgment, empathy, leadership, negotiation, relationships and trust.

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE LADDER: FROM ROOKIE TO RAINMAKER

In conclusion, I would summarise the professional journey in six stages.

STAGE 1 — THE LEARNER

Question: *What do I need to know?*

Learn the law. Learn procedure. Learn drafting. Observe excellent practitioners. Ask questions. Accept corrections.

STAGE 2 — THE DOER

Question: *Can I execute this assignment excellently?*

Become dependable. Meet deadlines. Pay attention to detail. Make your supervisor's life easier.

STAGE 3 — THE PROBLEM SOLVER

Question: *What problem are we actually trying to solve?*

Stop merely executing instructions. Begin understanding objectives.

STAGE 4 — THE TRUSTED ADVISER

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Question: *What should the client do?*

Develop judgment. Understand the client's business. Become someone whose opinion is sought before decisions are made.

STAGE 5 — THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDER

Question: *How do I create value beyond this immediate assignment?*

Build relationships. Understand industries. Identify opportunities.

STAGE 6 — THE RAINMAKER

Question: *How can I create opportunities and value for others?*

At this stage, instructions increasingly come because of your reputation, judgment, relationships and demonstrated ability to deliver outcomes.

TEN PRACTICAL RULES I WOULD GIVE A YOUNG LAWYER

If I were speaking to myself as a newly called lawyer in 2009, I would give myself these ten rules:

1. **Become exceptionally good at something.** General competence gets you started. Recognised expertise differentiates you.
2. **Never submit work you have not personally reviewed.** Your name must become associated with quality.

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3. **Understand money.** Learn how businesses make money, how transactions are financed, how clients measure costs and how law firms themselves operate economically.
4. **Learn the client's industry.** Knowing law without understanding the business limits your usefulness.
5. **Return calls and emails.** Responsiveness is one of the easiest competitive advantages in professional services.
6. **Build relationships before you need them.** Do not suddenly remember people when you need an instruction, recommendation or favour.
7. **Write and speak.** Develop ideas and contribute to professional conversations. Visibility should follow substance.
8. **Find mentors, but do not outsource your career to them.** A mentor can open a door. You must still justify being in the room.
9. **Protect your integrity.** There are opportunities you should refuse. There are clients you should lose. There is money you should not earn.

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10. **Create value everywhere you go.** In your firm. In your company. In the NBA. In government committees. In your community. For younger lawyers. For clients. People remember value creators.

FOR LAW FIRMS: RAINMAKING MUST BECOME INSTITUTIONAL

The responsibility for developing rainmakers cannot rest solely on young lawyers. Senior lawyers and law firms also have an important role to play. We cannot expect associates to become effective rainmakers in the future if, throughout their formative years, we shield them from clients, exclude them from commercial conversations, and give them little opportunity to understand how legal practice operates as a business.

I believe rainmaking should be taught through exposure and experience. When senior lawyers attend important client meetings, younger lawyers should, where appropriate, be in the room. Let them listen to the conversation and understand that the client's concern is rarely about the law in isolation. Behind every instruction is usually a business objective, a commercial pressure, a regulatory concern, a transaction to be completed, a dispute to be resolved, or a risk to be managed.

We should also allow associates to participate in pitches and business-development meetings. Let them see how relationships are built before the instruction arrives. Let them understand how a potential client's needs are identified, how a proposal is developed, how fees are determined and negotiated, and how the economics of running a law firm actually works.

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These are important aspects of legal practice that cannot be learnt from textbooks or courtrooms alone.

Most importantly, give young lawyers responsibility and visibility. Allow them to interact meaningfully with clients. Let clients know their names, recognise their competence and gradually develop confidence in them. Business development must therefore not be treated as something that begins when a lawyer becomes a partner. It should form part of a lawyer's professional development from the early years of practice.

Rainmaking is pivotal to institutional sustainability. A law firm that depends entirely on one individual for the generation of business may be successful, but it is also vulnerable. The real test of an enduring institution is whether it can develop successive generations of lawyers who are capable not only of delivering excellent legal services, but also of building relationships, identifying opportunities, creating value and attracting work.

A sustainable law firm should therefore not merely have a rainmaker; it should build a rainmaking culture.

And when rainmaking becomes part of the culture of the firm rather than the personality of one individual, the institution itself begins to go **beyond limits.**

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