Q&A

Marian Ohui Apronti
Senior Associate
ENS

Tactical blueprint for the next generation

What is your message for a young woman at university, looking at the long hours and intense pressures of M&A and thinking, "I don't know if I belong there"?

Don't let M&A's reputation make the decision for you before you've had the chance to experience it. Yes, it is demanding. The hours can be long and the pressure real, but it is also one of the most intellectually stimulating and rewarding areas of legal practice. Every transaction presents a different commercial puzzle, bringing together law, business strategy, finance and negotiation in a way that keeps you learning throughout your career. I still remember the first time I was handed a share purchase agreement and thought, "I have no idea what I'm doing." That feeling passes and, when it does, you realise you were more capable than you gave yourself credit for.

It is easy to look at accomplished lawyers and assume they have always been confident or naturally suited to this work. The reality is that most of us started with far more questions than answers (and a healthy dose of impostor syndrome). I certainly did. Confidence is not a prerequisite; it is something you build through preparation, experience and the willingness to ask questions, even the ones you think might sound silly.

Rather than worrying about whether you fit the mould, focus on building habits that will serve you in any area of law: think critically, communicate clearly, follow developments in the economy, and be genuinely curious about how your clients' businesses work. These skills will give you a strong foundation long before you work on your first transaction.

Most importantly, don't mistake self-doubt for a lack of ability. Growth often begins with discomfort. If M&A genuinely interests you, don't count yourself out before you've given yourself a chance. As M&A and capital markets continue to evolve in Ghana and across the African continent, we need more women helping to shape the transactions, governance and investment decisions that drive economic growth. The seat at the table is there – you just have to take it.

Beyond mathematical brilliance and financial modelling, what is the single most underappreciated 'soft skill' required to survive and excel in capital markets?

Commercial curiosity.

In a developing market like Ghana, transactions rarely fit neatly into a textbook. Regulatory frameworks continue to evolve, market practice is still developing in certain areas, and there is often no perfect precedent to follow. Technical legal knowledge is only part of the equation.

Commercial curiosity means taking the time to understand the business behind the transaction, not just the documents in front of you. It means asking why a deal is being structured in a particular way, understanding what success looks like for the client, and appreciating the commercial realities that influence their decisions. I've learnt to read annual reports, follow industry news, and ask clients about their operations. Not because it's required, but because it makes me a better adviser.

I have found that clients value advisers who understand their objectives, not simply the legal issues they face. When you appreciate the wider commercial context, your advice becomes practical, your risk assessment more balanced, and your recommendations genuinely useful to decision-makers. You become more than a technical adviser. You become a trusted partner.

When your strategic advice or valuation is met with heavy scepticism by a traditional, old-school corporate board, what is your personal strategy for reclaiming the floor and defending your thesis?

I remind myself that scepticism is not disagreement. It is often part of good governance. Directors carry significant responsibilities and should ask difficult questions before making important decisions. Rather than becoming defensive, I try to understand what is driving the concern. Is it the legal analysis, the commercial implications, or simply a preference for doing things the way they've always been done?

Once I understand the concern, I bring the discussion back to first principles. I explain the reasoning clearly, relate it to the client's commercial objectives, and support it with law, market practice and practical examples, where appropriate. I've found that people are much more receptive when they can see not only what I'm recommending, but why the recommendation makes commercial sense for them.

I've also learnt that credibility is built less by speaking the loudest and more by being well-prepared, staying composed under pressure, and engaging respectfully with difficult questions. People may not always agree immediately, but they are far more likely to trust advice that is thoughtful, measured, and grounded in both the law and commercial reality. And sometimes, the most powerful move is simply to listen before you respond.