

CAREER INTEGRATION OF INTERNATIONALLY TRAINED LAWYERS

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Introduction

- I am an internationally trained lawyer called to the Nigerian Bar in 2012
- I relocated to Canada in 2014 and obtained my Master of Laws degree from the University of Saskatchewan in 2016
- One of the most important things on a professional immigrants mind is integration into his/her profession in the new home country. For internationally trained lawyers, the path to career integration is the National Committee on Accreditation (NCA)
- After crossing the rigorous hurdles of the NCA exams, I obtained my Certificate of Qualification in 2016

Internationally Trained Lawyers

In context, Internationally Trained Lawyers (ITLs) are migrant foreign legal professionals who received their legal education outside Canada and obtained or are in the process of obtaining their Certificate of Qualification from the NCA

This is not an attempt to understate the plight of Canadian lawyers who received their legal education outside Canada or immigrants who received their legal education from a Canadian University; however I intend to bring to light the peculiar challenges of migrant-ITLs passing through the NCA stream

Factors Working against ITLs

1. Recruitment Calendar

Most law firms and government organizations recruit articling students who are in the second year of law school a year before the students intend to commence articling. The process is totally different for ITLs

I was unable to secure an articling position while writing my NCA exams because the lawyers I met were not sure of my success in the NCA process and were unwilling to commit to a yet-to-be-certified ITL. When I completed my NCA exams and received my Certificate of Qualification, I was ready to start articling, immediately. Of course most law firms do not recruit articling students spontaneously, hence the benefit for a second year law student.

Continuation

2. Systemic Discrimination

Underlying discriminatory factors sometimes influence hiring practices or create roadblocks for ITLs

- Racial discrimination
- Cultural misinterpretation
- Unconscious bias
- Past experience with another ITLs

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3. Lack of Mentorship

- Most law schools have career officers that assist students with securing articling positions. ITLs do not have access to the services of career officers. More so, law schools often organize career workshops that give law students the opportunity to meet lawyers while in law school. Law students can cultivate mentorship relationships with lawyers in this process and receive valuable guidance in their career path.
- ITLs do not have the same access to career officers and mentors. It is a daunting task to navigate through and sometimes against the conventions and practices of the legal society you are about to join.

Conclusion

- With the increasing number of ITLs routing through the NCA stream, the legal profession need to affirm its commitment to embrace diversity and inclusiveness and develop effective plans to do so
- Educating lawyers and hiring practitioners about the stream of NCA applicants is a pragmatic step
- In furtherance of a fair recruiting system, lawyers and hiring personnel should bear in mind that academic grading systems differ when analyzing foreign law school transcripts
- Having a self-assessment and consciously dispelling the myths or notions about ITLs will help lawyers evaluate all applicants with open mind