**MEDIATION TRAINING CAN ENHANCE LAW PRACTICE**

**BY**

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I***NTRODUCTION***

The President of the Institute, the Executives, the Faculty, Ladies and Gentlemen! It is with great pleasure that I give this Keynote Address on this remarkable occasion of the induction of Law School Students into this prestigious institute as associate members of the institute.

This institute has over the years, trained successful mediators who are contributing their quota to seeing that disputes of all kinds are resolved amicably within Nigeria and abroad. The induction of these newly trained mediators is also another feet in opening wider the door for disputants to access and explore mediation, as an effective dispute resolution mechanism to achieve the win/win result.

The enactment of the AMA has opened up mediation practice in Nigeria to a wider sphere of disputants, more particularly, international commercial companies whose confidence in our ability to resolve disputes have received a boost by the legal regime introduced by the AMA.

Today’s induction is particularly remarkable because it confirms the position that the legal education that is effective in the current Nigerian legal regime, is one that not only equips our young lawyers to be actively involved in litigating disputes but also equips them with the necessary skills to facilitate the resolution of disputes outside the court room.

This Keynote Address therefore focuses at highlighting the current demands on the legal profession in Nigeria and how this training in mediation places the inductee at an advantaged position in being able to meet those demands.

***THE CURRENT REALITIES OF LEGAL PRACTICE IN NIGERIA***

“An ounce of mediation is worth a pound of arbitration and a ton of litigation!”. - Joseph Grynbaum

This accurately captures the current realities of the dispute resolution space in Nigeria. The dockets of our Courts remain overflowing despite tremendous efforts on the part of the judiciary to dispense with cases speedily. There is also the increasing challenges of litigation which has with the economic downturn, increased even further.

***What is Commercial Mediation?***

It’s a voluntary, confidential process where a neutral third party (the

mediator) helps businesses resolve disputes without going to court. It’s faster, cheaper, and often leads to win-win outcomes, preserving business relationships.

***Why You Should Care***

* Courts are crowded. Litigation takes years — businesses want solutions in weeks.
* Commercial clients are shifting. They now prefer efficiency over endless legal battles.
* Mediators are leaders. You’re not just solving problems; you’re shaping deals, preserving relationships, and driving economic stability.

Given the existence of the above highlighted challenges within the dispute resolution space in Nigeria, it becomes imperative that, as gatekeepers of the temple of justice, the legal profession should offer more than litigation and arbitration as complimentary mechanisms for resolving disputes. This demand on the legal profession has increased and would continue to increase with the globalization of commercial activities through the means of technology.

Legal education and indeed legal practice must become more tailored to proffering dispute resolution mechanisms that would meet the demands of justice reposed on our profession.

Your ability to advice your client to explore other mechanisms of dispute resolution that would allow for timeous dispensation of justice, places you at an advantage position to meet the demands of the Client.

***MEDIATION AS AN ANSWER***

Mediation is a dispute resolution mechanism that is structured to help disputants resolve their disputes by themselves, through repeated open communication and negotiation sessions, facilitated by a neutral third party. It is party oriented, and party driven

Given this background, it goes without saying that a lawyer who has been trained to mediate disputes, is equipped with a complete toolbox. A lawyer with a mediation training in Nigeria today has what it takes to make a success of his legal practice.

***TO THE INDUCTEES***: “Guardians of Dialogue, Architects of Peace”

It is a true privilege and a thing of honour to speak with you today as we celebrate a defining milestone, the induction of a new generation of legally trained professionals who have chosen the path not of judgment, but of justice through dialogue; not of confrontation, but of resolution.

Your work will not always be easy. There will be moments of frustration, complexity, and emotional weight. But within these moments lies your greatest strength, the capacity to hold space for healing and clarity. To remind parties that beyond the noise, there is always a shared humanity.

As you begin this journey, I urge you to carry with you three principles:

1. Integrity — Let fairness and transparency be your compass. Trust is the currency of mediation, and it begins with you.
2. Empathy — Listen deeply. See beyond the positions and discover the people — their fears, hopes, and needs.
3. Courage — Not all conflicts will resolve easily. But your presence, your patience, and your perseverance can turn silence into dialogue and division into understanding.

As I stand before you, I am reminded of two towering figures who were both shaped by the law, and who, in turn, reshaped the world.

Mahatma Gandhi, a lawyer by training, believed that “The true function of a lawyer is to unite parties driven asunder.” He saw law not as a weapon for division, but as a bridge toward understanding. His approach to conflict resolution was rooted in truth, non-violence, and conciliation, ideals that lie at the heart of mediation itself.

Nelson Mandela, also a lawyer, spent decades not in a courtroom, but in a prison, and yet emerged not with vengeance, but with vision. He once said, “If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner.” What greater definition of a mediator can there be?

These men understood what you now carry forward: that the law is a powerful tool, but its highest purpose is not merely to argue or adjudicate, it is to heal. It is to bring people back from the brink of breakdown to the possibility of common ground.

Today, you our new mediators embody that possibility.

You have mastered legal theory. You understand rights, responsibilities, and the structure of justice. But now you take on a role that demands something more: the ability to listen without judgment, to guide without imposing, and to help people speak not to win, but to be heard.

In a world that too often rushes to litigation and thrives on division, your work is quietly revolutionary. You are called to do what courts cannot always do: to preserve relationships, to honor emotions, and to co-create solutions that endure beyond legal texts.

Let me leave you with three guiding principles drawn from the examples of Gandhi and Mandela:

1. Stand firm in values, but gentle in approach. As Gandhi taught, strength lies not in force, but in character.
2. Embrace empathy as a legal skill. Mandela never forgot that his enemies were also human beings. You must see the person behind the position.
3. Believe in transformation. Mediation is not about compromise alone; it is about creating space where transformation, even reconciliation can occur.

You have taken a bold step, one that many of your colleagues overlooked, by equipping yourselves with the skills to resolve disputes, not just argue them. You have embraced a role that requires empathy, neutrality, commercial understanding, and emotional intelligence. That is commendable.

But let me say this to you: your mediation journey is just beginning.

In Nigeria today, commercial disputes are growing in number and complexity. From banking to oil and gas, telecoms to tech startups. Businesses are crying out for alternatives to long, expensive litigation. They are looking for mediators who understand the law, speak the language of commerce, and can build bridges where contracts have collapsed.

That is your opportunity. Take it. That is your responsibility.

Commercial mediation is not just a skill. It is a platform for nation-building. Each dispute you settle saves time, money, and relationships. Each agreement you facilitate contributes to economic stability. Each session you mediate is a quiet act of justice.

You must now rise beyond your training and become practitioners of impact:

* Start mediating. Volunteer at court-connected ADR centers.
* Join panels. Apply to join neutral lists at NCCDRC, MDCs, NCC, or other institutional bodies.
* Brand your value. Let the business community know that you are not just a lawyer — you are a commercial problem-solver.

As lawyer-mediators, you are uniquely positioned. You understand the black letter of the law and the human dynamics behind every conflict. Use that blend. Leverage your dual identity to become the future of legal practice in Nigeria.

To each of you: Congratulations. You are not turning away from the law. You are expanding it. Deepening it. Humanizing it. And in doing so, you are carrying forward the spirit of two of history’s greatest lawyer-peacemakers.

May you walk this path with clarity, courage, and compassion.

Accept my hearty congratulations and I wish you all the best in your future endeavours.

* 1. CONCLUSION

I congratulate the Institute on this auspicious occasion. The number of inductees I see sitting before me, give me satisfaction and a sense of pride, because they signify the fulfillment of the vision of this prestigious Institute. This induction ceremony of Law School Students also signifies that the Institute is contributing its quota to raising up lawyers who are well equipped to meet the current demands on the legal profession in Nigeria.

I say well-done to the Mr. President, Godwin Omoaka, SAN the Registrar and Exco of the Institute, the Faculty, and all who put in the work to make this day a reality. I pay special tribute to our Past Presidents and Chairmen of Governing Council.

In closing, remember this:

Litigators win cases. Mediators preserve futures.

The world of business needs you — steady, skilled, and ready to make a difference.

Congratulations to all of us and may this Institute continue to wax stronger as we continue to take steps to fulfill our vision.

Thank you.

Chief Emeka Obegolu, SAN