

Seun Timi-Koleolu on finding success while challenging the *status quo*

 By [Shan Raddiffe](#)

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The African Legal Awards' Partner of the Year, Seun Timi-Koleolu, co-founder of Pavestones, has proven what can be achieved by believing in yourself and your convictions, despite not fitting the mould and by taking the path less travelled.



Seun Timi-Koleolu, Pavestones co-founder and African Legal Awards Partner of the Year 2021

Timi-Koleolu started her legal career as an associate at one of the big law practices in Lagos, Nigeria, in 2007. Following that, she became an in-house lawyer for a telecommunications company.

"After six years at the telco, I took the bold step of leaving to build a law practice of my own - Pavestones - in 2018," says Timi-Koleolu. "The decision to leave a comfortable job to start a practice from scratch was not a popular decision to take. Particularly as I knew I didn't fit the traditional perception of a law firm founder. I am female, younger than most managing partners of law firms, and my approach to legal service delivery deviates from the traditional approach. It took audacity and a strong belief in the vision to get started."

Shortly after, Timi-Koleolu met the equally ambitious Aderonke Alex-Adedipe, who shared a similar vision, and together they set out to build Pavestones.

"It was important for us to plug various gaps we noticed in the market," Timi-Koleolu explains. "Firstly, the need for more accessible, simplified, quality legal services for the modern business. Secondly, the need for lawyers who were properly skilled to support startups and businesses utilising technology to provide their services. Finally, the need for freely disseminated legal and regulatory information to guide local and foreign companies wishing to operate in Nigeria."

After just over a year of delivering legal services in their modern way, the duo were recognised for their efforts by being shortlisted by the African Legal Awards as Law Firm of the Year (Small Practice) in 2020. In 2021, Pavestones was once again shortlisted in the same category, while Timi-Koleolu was named Partner of the Year.

Here, Timi-Koleolu talks to us about the value such accolades bring and the strides being made in the Nigerian legal system.

■ *What does it mean to you to be named Partner of the Year by the African Legal Awards?*

Seun Timi-Koleolu: Being named Partner of the Year in Africa means so many things to me. It loudly says to me that the girl child who dreams big; recognises a problem that she can solve in the market place; takes diligent steps to achieve the vision; and is resilient, can make it and be recognised far and wide for her impact. It says to me that it is okay to not follow the crowd, it is okay to take the risk of following through on a desire to improve a system or a process rather than accept it as the norm. It speaks volumes to me and I hope to many young ladies and men out there that your own unique way of doing things coupled with an attitude of excellence, will pay off in good time.

I set out to make a difference, to solve a problem in the legal space and I am amazed and grateful that my efforts were recognised in such a short period. I hope this inspires more women and upcoming lawyers to follow through on their dreams.

■ *What value do you believe such awards bring to the African legal sector as a whole?*

Timi-Koleolu: Awards such as the African Legal Awards brings a lot of value to the African legal sector. There are lawyers and law firms across Africa providing excellent legal services without being sufficiently visible to potential clients across the globe.

An award such as the African Legal Awards brings the necessary visibility and recognition to these law firms and lawyers. With such recognition, it provides opportunities to attract more business on a wider market scale and collaborate with other African/global firms to handle cross-jurisdictional transactions. I also believe that these sort of awards encourage and inspire other lawyers across Africa to strive for excellence in service delivery.

■ *As a firm that works with a network of lawyers both within Africa and beyond, what would you say is one of the biggest differences you've found between your local legal system and other countries?*

Yes, Pavestones works with a network of lawyers in other African countries and beyond Africa to deliver services to our multinational clients; and clients looking to expand their operations to other countries. In addition, as a Data Protection Compliance Organisation, we work with Data Protection Compliance Organisations in other countries to meet our clients' cross-border data compliance needs.

In terms of differences, we note that each country has its own peculiar legal/ regulatory system. We therefore work closely with qualified lawyers per country to meet our clients' needs. There can also be language barriers but that still has not prevented us from successfully collaborating on transactions with these lawyers.

■ *What do you feel is the greatest accomplishment the Nigerian or African legal system has achieved in the past 20 years?*

Technology has revolutionised the way business is conducted in the world. The Nigerian regulators have over time recognised the need for a new crop of regulations that adequately guide the tech world/startups and protect users of such

services. Although more of the tech regulations in Nigeria are fintech regulations, the effort to develop these regulations is commendable and an achievement for the African legal system.

With respect to legal service delivery, the growth of capable tech lawyers in Nigeria and the rest of Africa is a major achievement for the African legal system. Startups in Nigeria have attracted millions of dollars in foreign direct investments and with good legal support, they are well placed to attract and sustain more of such investments.

▣ ***Where is there room for further improvement?***

There will always be room for improvement. In Nigeria, the justice system/court systems are still pretty slow. Proper enforcement of consumer protection laws is still a work in progress.

From a startup regulation angle, our regulators still need to work together to develop streamlined regulations for the tech space, and avoid stifling business with over-regulation. We hope to see more improvement over time.

ABOUT SHAN RADCLIFFE

Shan Radcliffe is the editor of Bizcommunity HR, Education and Legal.

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