

21 April 2025

**THE SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF
SINGAPORE, LISA SAM, AT THE MASS ADMISSION CEREMONY
2025**

1. May it please Your Honour, on behalf of the Law Society, I seek Your Honour's leave to address the inaugural batch of lawyers (non-practitioners) admitted to the Singapore Bar on this auspicious occasion.
2. My warmest congratulations on your admission to the Singapore Bar.
3. You are now part of a noble profession. For those of you who intend to embark on a legal career as a practising lawyer, the practice of law is a lifelong journey- One of purpose, passion, and self-improvement. It is not about reaching a destination but learning about opportunities that may come your way. This is a journey of self-discovery, where you will shape your legal identity, sharpen your skills and define what it means to be a legal professional. Often, you may find yourselves committed to a lifetime of service and learning when upholding the pillars of justice. For people who choose to join the legal profession and become a practising lawyer, the practice of law becomes a calling – a means to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. Interestingly, amidst the ever-evolving legal landscape, escalating disputes, and formidable

challenges, lawyers emerge as champions of change, advocates for the voiceless, and stewards of justice.

Why is lawyering called "*practice*"

4. You may have heard of the phrase "the practice of law". However, why is it called a practice?
5. This is because mastery is never indeed achieved—we are always learning, adapting, and evolving. In law, the word "practice" refers to the constant attention, reflection and evolution required of legal professionals. Every client, every case, and every challenge is an opportunity to refine your craft. The best lawyers are not those who believe that they know everything but those who remain curious, humble, and open to learning.
6. **Law practice is multifaceted.** The practice of law often opens up surprisingly diverse paths of career shifts and offers multiple possibilities that can fulfil your potential. Feeling apprehensive and uncertain is natural when you first enter practice, step into the courtroom or engage in intense negotiations. This is perfectly normal. These feelings of doubt do not define your potential.
7. **Legal practice is an art.** You need practice to perfect the practice of law. Staying in practice is part of the journey to becoming a good advocate. You may not yet have a strong desire or calling now. Over time, your views on justice and fairness will be shaped by your legal persona and the way you practice law. The allure of the law remains timeless, with its promise of justice, intellectual rigour, and societal impact.

Three typical roles emerge in the noble pursuit of law.

8. As you begin your legal career, I want to highlight three key roles¹ you may take on:

- The first is as an advocate for the client
- The second as an officer of the legal system
- The third is as a public citizen with a special responsibility for the quality of justice in society.

First, An Advocate For The Client – I Call This The Representation Role

9. In this representation role, you wear many hats - advisor, negotiator, evaluator, and advocate. You are your client's voice, and you provide an informed understanding of their legal rights and obligations, along with the practical implications. You present their position zealously, playing by the rules of our adversarial system. You aim to secure the best outcome for your client, whether in Court or at the negotiation table, but always with honesty and fairness. When evaluating and examining your client's legal affairs, your advice, whether to the client or others, is governed by the rules of Professional Conduct.

10. This role calls for certain core qualities: confidentiality, competence, promptness, diligence, regular communication with relevant parties,

¹ Adapted in part from the Preamble to the American Bar Association's *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*:

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/professional_responsibility/publications/model_rules_of_professional_conduct/model_rules_of_professional_conduct_preamble_scope/

courtesy, professionalism, independent thinking, sound judgment, practical management skills, and more. The Legal Profession Act, the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules, practice directions, and guidance notes govern not only your professional conduct but also the personal conduct expected of you.

Second, As An Officer Of The Legal System – I call this the Non-Representation Role

11. In this capacity, you may be appointed as an arbitrator, mediator, adjudicator, or a third-party neutral. These are roles where you are not advocating for a client but instead helping to resolve disputes fairly and impartially. Many of these appointments come through institutions, and they often call for individuals with a good amount of professional training, practical legal experience, and subject matter expertise. Lawyers are highly sought after for these responsibilities due to their skills, knowledge, experience and stature. It also helps to have strong institutional awareness and administration skills.
12. What does this non-representation role demand of you? You will need to demonstrate fairness, equality, transparency, integrity, and a strong professional reputation, over and above the qualities required of you in your representation role. These are critical in earning the trust of others when you are called to play an impartial role.
13. Your peers and the market will evaluate your past conduct as a lawyer. Are you a lawyer who is competent, prompt, and diligent when dealing with matters? Are you a lawyer who uses legal procedures only for legitimate purposes, without harassing and

intimidating others? Do you demonstrate respect for the legal system and for those who serve it, including judges, other lawyers, and public officers, by upholding legal processes and the rule of law?

14. The justice system and legal institutions depend on public participation, confidence and support to maintain their authority. A progressive society upholds the rule of law. Conversely, a stagnating society is one where residents disobey or do not support the rule of law. Lawyers are the lifeblood of the legal infrastructure, connecting the public, entities, and non-lawyers to the justice system and legal institutions. Lawyers, therefore, play an essential role in upholding these institutions. This explains why the ultimate authority over the legal profession is vested primarily in the courts.

Third, As A Public Citizen - The Role Model In The Eyes Of The Public

15. A lawyer's role as a public citizen comes with special responsibilities for the quality of justice.
16. Lawyers should cultivate knowledge of the law beyond its use for their clients and should be guided by personal conscience. It is not enough to do things right by ourselves and others, but we must also be effective when discharging this role. Lawyers who take on this role may embody the following attributes or missions, though this list is not exhaustive:
 - First, seeking improvement in the law and access to the legal systems and justice.

- Second, it is essential to give accurate public feedback and stay connected to the ground.
 - Third, enhancing the administration of justice and the quality of service rendered by the legal profession.
 - Fourth, cultivating knowledge of the law beyond its use for clients and applying that knowledge to law reform and legal education.
 - Fifth, enhancing the public understanding of and confidence in, the rule of law and the justice system.
 - Sixth, exemplifying the legal profession's highest ideals, centred on public service.
 - Seventh, devoting professional time and resources or using civic influence to facilitate access to the justice system for those hindered by social and economic barriers.
17. These three roles are usually harmonious. Each part contributes to an overarching whole that forms a healthy, open, and publicly accountable judicial and legal system.
18. However, conflicting duties or responsibilities may sometimes pull you in different directions, resulting in ethical conundrums. Sensitive professional and sound moral judgment, guided by the basic principles underlying the Legal Profession (Professional Conduct) Rules and by your mentors, will serve you well.
19. It is not uncommon to find that an accomplished lawyer is imbued with many abilities. Common traits include acute commercial acumen, a keen ability to negotiate in every situation, and a wide spectrum of practical skills, ranging from critical thinking, problem-

solving, and effective communication to strong management skills, leadership, versatility, and empathy.

The Next Question: How Do You Get There?

20. You need to adopt a growth mindset. Consider taking the view that your abilities are capable of infinite development. You want to see how good you can become. To do that, you will need to challenge your limits and learn how to step outside of your comfort zone.
21. Growth usually comes from doing something difficult. And when things are difficult, they are often unpleasant and uncomfortable. Growth is uncomfortable.
22. What is a comfort zone? It is pleasing people, avoiding disapproval, receiving frequent and immediate positive validation for what you do, and avoiding the risk of failure and criticism. You may be trying not to expose your flaws.
23. When you adopt a growth mindset, you will need strategies to deal with slow progress, setbacks, conflicts (based on differing views on what the problem is), criticism, and even failure and possibly more effort is required of you. Ask yourself:
 - Can I reframe this negativity and remind myself that these setbacks and difficulties do not define my entire future and abilities?
 - How can I do this better?
 - Should I collaborate with others or form a mutual support group to work through the issues?

- How can I better prepare myself for the next task?
 - Where can I seek guidance from mentors to help me improve?
24. Develop a positive attitude and keep an open mind. How you handle failures or feedback will shape your legal persona and determine your success or failure. Learn to enjoy the process and not just focus on achieving an outcome.

Focusing On The Process As A New Strategy:

25. If you tell yourself that you have tried hard and will do better next time, you will learn to mine your mistakes for valuable information on how to move forward more successfully.
26. If you do not focus on the process, you are telling yourself that you must get it right and that you lack talent or affinity. You become terrified of making the next mistake because you do not believe your potential, qualities, or capabilities can be significantly improved.
27. Talent often plays a more minor role in success than we think. Success, more often than not, comes from effort and persistence than from early brilliance or natural ability. I urge you to be strong, courageous and persistent in what you do so you may be successful wherever you go. Ask yourself how you can do better and do things differently when faced with setbacks. Do not be afraid and discouraged. Give yourself the chance to discover what you are capable of.
28. If you can unlock a skill or talent you never knew you had through this process, you have achieved personal growth and pushed your boundaries. You can do anything.

29. Personal growth is a cornerstone of a flourishing legal career. This is why I commend to you a career in the legal profession. It opens many doors and opportunities for you to develop your abilities and brings out the best in you and others. It is well suited for those with a deep-seated desire to make a tangible difference – in their own lives and the lives of others.
30. As you embark on this journey, know that you are not alone. There is a wealth of support and inspiration within the legal profession. You can find information on the Law Society's website. Consider signing up for the Law Society Mentorship Scheme and find a mentor to guide you. One day, I hope you will become a mentor yourself or undertake the role of reverse mentoring your seniors. Some examples of the current topics for reverse mentoring are technology, social media and the latest developments in law.
31. In conclusion, congratulations once again. We look forward to witnessing your achievements and contributions to the legal profession and the community.
32. May it please the Court.

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