

DETERMINED TEAM LEADER

Melissa Anyetei views legal negotiations through the eye of an engineer.



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The problem-solving skills of engineering combined with the rigor of law have proven a winning combination for Melissa Anyetei ('02).

As an intellectual property partner at Mayer Brown LLP, she represents tech companies in negotiations and lawsuits touching on everything from computer parts to cell phones to medical devices.

“It’s a fun way to use an engineering degree,” Anyetei says. “You get to see all the technical documents, how a product was developed, and the thinking that went into it.”

As a child growing up in Skokie, Illinois, she was surrounded by the math and science textbooks that her Ghana-born father, Sowah Anyetei, used while studying for his PhD in economics at Northwestern. “He taught me that most everything can be solved with hard work, determination, and a step-by-step approach,” she says.

When the time came for college, studying industrial engineering at her father’s alma mater felt natural. At Northwestern Engineering, she gained a scientific understanding of systems and analytics while developing skills in problem-solving, decision-making, and teamwork.

During marathon sessions tackling problems with fellow students, Anyetei says, she learned that she’s a natural leader who enjoys bringing out the best in others. “I like being the one who strategizes about how we get to a result using the best talents and skill sets of the team,” she says.

While at the McCormick School of Engineering, she interned at Motorola in the accessories and aftermarket division. There, she developed a product-packaging method that decreased inventory costs by 31 percent and packaging cycle time by 20 percent.

Despite her success, she didn’t especially enjoy the work, leading her to secretly consider a move to law. In her third year at Northwestern Engineering, without telling most of her family or friends, Anyetei studied for the LSAT. With several offers from law schools in hand, she ultimately settled on Columbia University, where she was guided into patent law. During summers, she interned at both intellectual property and general practice firms and saw firsthand how the law and science can go hand-in-hand.

After graduation, she returned home to Chicago and joined the law firm of Mayer Brown as a summer associate. Now, as partner, she’s once again creating successful teams.

“Recognizing that no one person excels at everything is key,” says Anyetei, named a rising star by *Illinois Super Lawyers*. “When people can focus on what they’re good at, or what they’re most inspired to do, it inevitably leads to great results.”

Anyetei, one of only a few black partners in her firm, prioritizes mentorship. She chaired the mentorship committee of the Black Women Lawyers’ Association of Greater Chicago and sits on Mayer Brown’s Committee on Diversity and Inclusion.

In 2016 she was named one of the most influential women in the state by the Illinois Diversity Council. Anyetei is also a member of Northwestern’s Council of One Hundred, which connects highly successful alumnae.

“Far too many women and people of color leave law firms because they don’t feel they can fit in a box,” she says. “I’ve always felt that with support and intention, we can change the size of the box.”

JENNY BLAIR