



THE **VOICE** OF
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DEFENCE BAR

MEMBER PROFILE QUESTIONS

INTRO :

Member Name : Theresa Donkor

Year of Call : 2019

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QUESTIONS :

1. **Why did you get into criminal law?**

One of the biggest reasons I decided to become a criminal defence lawyer was out of a love for and desire to do more for my Black community. Many people are negatively impacted by the criminal justice system, but the unfortunate reality is that Black people are disproportionately impacted – we are consistently over-policed, over-punished, and over-incarcerated. The criminal justice system perpetuates harm in our communities and I hope that my advocacy – both inside and outside the courtroom – can help reduce those harms.



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2. What type of cases do you enjoy defending the most and why?

I mostly do appellate work. I enjoy that it allows me to critically analyze how the law is applied and challenge our current legal framework. Appeals are important not only because they help protect an accused person's right to a fair trial but also because appellate decisions set precedents that affect the criminal justice system as a whole.

3. How did the practice of criminal law change you?

The practice of criminal law has made me more patient, empathetic, open-minded, and compassionate towards others and more critical of the systems and laws put in place to "protect" us. If we care about protecting the public, we need to shift our focus from policing and punishment, to investing more in meaningful social services such as safe housing, mental health and addiction services, free education, more food banks, and guaranteed livable income.

4. What advice would you give to your younger self when you first started practising criminal law?

Set appropriate boundaries. When I first started practising criminal defence, I wanted to solve every problem my clients presented me with. After all, how can someone deal with their criminal charges if they don't even have a place to live? Or a job? Or mental health supports? But I'm not a therapist or social worker and I quickly realized that I could help my clients most effectively by focusing on what I know best, which is the law, and referring them to other resources for social supports.



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5. Who is your role model/inspiration in criminal law?

There's too many to name just one but I'm particularly inspired by the racialized women in criminal defence. It's difficult to excel in a profession when you rarely see yourself reflected within that profession. It's harder still to not get the same mentorship, opportunities, or referrals as others. Yet so many of these women continue to do important work while also paving the way for other young racialized lawyers like me.

6. How do you maintain work life balance and how do you deal with the stress of the job?

I fundamentally do not believe that you need to work 24/7 to succeed in law. First, women, who frequently bear the heavier domestic burden and the sole childbearing burden, often do not have that option. Second, working all the time is not synonymous to working hard. There are undoubtedly going to be long days in this profession but the mentality that long workdays are a prerequisite for success can be problematic. In order for me to be the best lawyer for my clients and produce my best work, I have to prioritize my wellbeing and mental health. I try to maintain a life outside of the law and regularly spend time with my family and friends to keep myself grounded.

7. What do you do outside of the law?

Outside of the law, I'm learning piano and Spanish, I play soccer, I'm part of a lovely book club, I love hosting games nights, and I try to travel as much as I can.