

Meet the young legal tech whizz being honoured by the American Bar Association

 By Imran Salie

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Lately, South Africans seem to be making waves internationally in all facets of life. In fact, Africans, in general, are continuously innovating, breaking boundaries, and gaining recognition worldwide. What makes this fact sweeter is that many of these people are young - a testament to the truth that Africa's youth will change the continent for the better.



Leah Molatseli | image supplied

Recently, a young South African by the name of Leah Molatseli was honoured by the American Bar Association for her contribution and influence in the legal tech industry, a first for Africa. This achievement prompted me to get in touch with Molatseli to find out more about her, her successes, and her opinions on SA's youth.

But before we dive into the Q&A, here are a few facts about Molatseli: she's a lawyer and legal tech innovation specialist. One of Africa's most influential and prominent thought leaders in the legal tech sector, she is a host and guest speaker for various legal tech talks globally as well as a guest lecturer at the University of Cape Town (UCT), where she develops and teaches legal tech innovation-related courses to the broader legal industry.

Molatseli also sits as a council member at the University of the Free State (UFS), and is part of the advisory board for the

Global Legal Tech Hub and the Women in Tech South African Chapter.

🔸 ***Congratulations on being recognised by the American Bar Association for your contributions to the legal tech industry. Tell us what this means for you and the legal tech landscape in Africa.***

Leah Molatseli: It serves as validation for the very hard work being done on the continent, and that not only are we producing quality legal tech solutions but that we have professionals on the continent who contribute just as much as our foreign colleagues.

🔸 ***What sparked your interest in the legal tech space as a youth?***

Molatseli: I fell into legal tech about five years ago when I consulted with a client for a legal matter, and my nanny for my youngest did not pitch on the day. Instead of cancelling the appointment, I asked for us to rather Skype (this was pre-Covid and the world of work as we know it now). After that virtual legal consultation, it sparked an interest. Being able to do what I love, still spend time with my children and make a living... it just made sense.

Since then, I have gone down the legal tech rabbit hole.

🔸 ***How did you break into the industry?***

Molatseli: I officially launched Lenoma Legal as a legal tech startup in 2017, after my encounter with the nanny who did not show up. I also realised at that stage that the market was not aware of legal tech, so I made an effort to not only build the startup but also to continue educating the market, and the legal community through strategic partnerships such as guest lecturing at the University of Cape Town or writing a book with Juta titled *#legaltech startups and innovation*.

🔸 ***Other than the monumental recognition from the American Bar Association, what other successes have you achieved throughout your career?***

Molatseli: The most recent ones are probably being named by the International Legal Tech Association's 2022 Influential Women in Legal Tech, speaking in Nairobi at the Africa Law Tech Festival, writing one of the first African books on legal tech, and being named as one of Africa Law Tech Association's Top 50 African Individuals Leading in Legal Innovation, amongst others. But I think my biggest achievement is being able to fully live out my passions and chart a non-traditional legal route for a young female Black lawyer in this country.

🔸 ***What barriers have you faced as a woman of colour in your industry and how did you overcome them?***

Molatseli: People often underestimate you; they question your presence in certain rooms and spaces. This probably fuels some of my focus because I know people will question why I am in certain roles or in key spaces. I have to work harder, prove myself constantly to justify my presence and other times not even get paid as much as my counterparts.

🔸 ***In your opinion, what should South African youth prioritise to make a substantial difference in our country and why?***

Molatseli: I tweeted the other day about whether we study further for upward mobility or to drive impact in our society, communities, country and ultimately our continent. The responses were mixed, granted because often our country does not create an environment conducive for us to actually make a difference. It starts with being intentional about what we consume on social media, who we spend our time with, what we read, etc.

I am a loner by nature and often keep to myself, I think the biggest thing for me has been just focusing on the end goal irrespective of circumstances, the naysayers, or the people around me who did not believe in me or my dreams.

🔸 ***Tech is changing the lives of South African youth. How can this be leveraged to their advantage?***

Molatseli: Some examples include, being able to learn on YouTube. Personally, I think YouTube is the world's biggest

democratised university. If you really want to hone your skills or learn something new, that has been my go-to place. With social media sharing as you learn can make you find your tribe. Sometimes when you dream big, you can feel alone or stuck, but opening yourself up and finding your network allows you to accelerate your growth via the experience of others.

🔴 ***As we are celebrating Youth Month this June, what advice do you have for youth that would like to enter the legal tech sector?***

Molatseli: Don't overthink it, just do it. Find a problem you want to solve, become obsessed with it and just:

- Follow hashtags #legaltechwithleah and #legaltech on Twitter.
- Read, research, it's still such a niche area in South Africa you can still carve out your expert status in the country and the industry is big enough for us to all thrive.

ABOUT IMRAN SALIE

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