

Clifford Chance

The Real Contract



Foreword

**A Training Contract is where many legal careers begin.
But the journeys that follow are rarely straightforward.**

In this booklet, you'll learn from lawyers at different stages of their careers as they write a letter to their younger selves. Through their reflections, they share the challenges they faced, the lessons they learned and the commitments that helped them grow both personally and professionally.

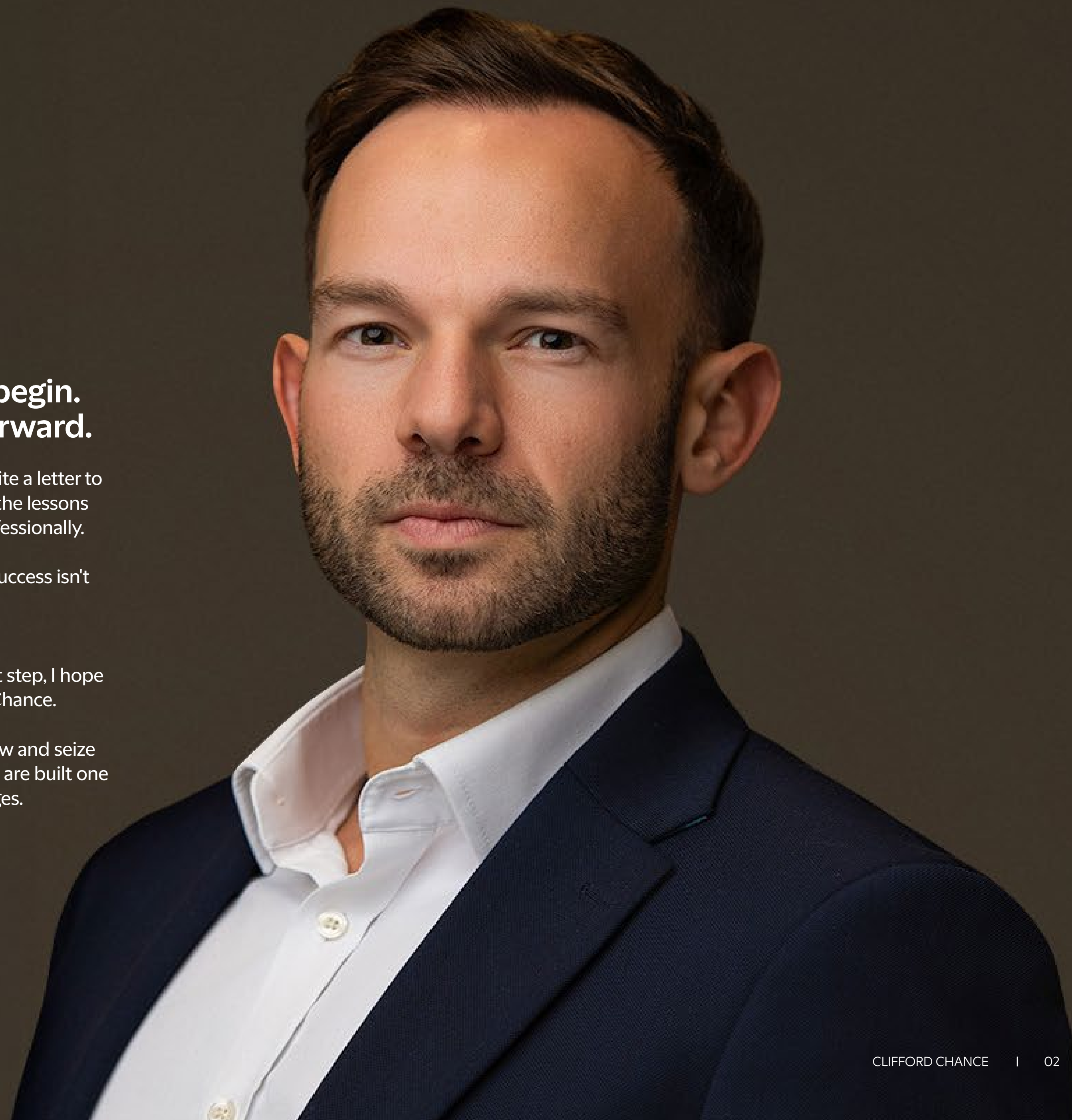
While each letter offers a unique perspective, they are united by a common theme: success isn't defined by the contract you sign, but by the promises you make to yourself and the determination to keep them.

Whether you're considering a career in commercial law or preparing to take your next step, I hope these stories offer inspiration, perspective and an honest insight into life at Clifford Chance.

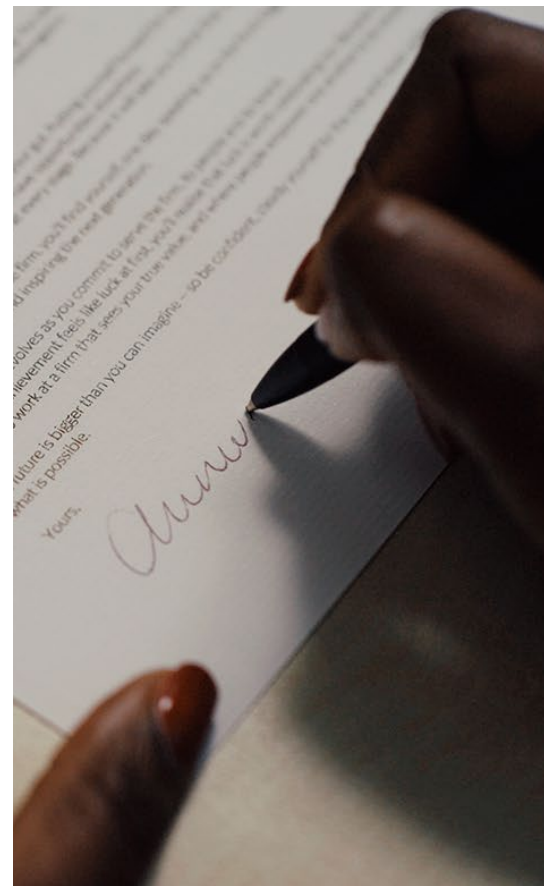
The Real Contract is not a document you sign, but the choices you make to learn, grow and seize every opportunity along the way. Together, these letters offer a reminder that careers are built one step at a time through curiosity, resilience and a willingness to embrace new challenges.

Toby Horner

Head of Early Careers (UK & Middle East Markets)



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‘The Real Contract’

“You will learn that the Training Contract isn’t about trying to fit into the firm. It is about making the decision to stay in the room when you feel uncertain. Because the real contract is the one you make with yourself.”

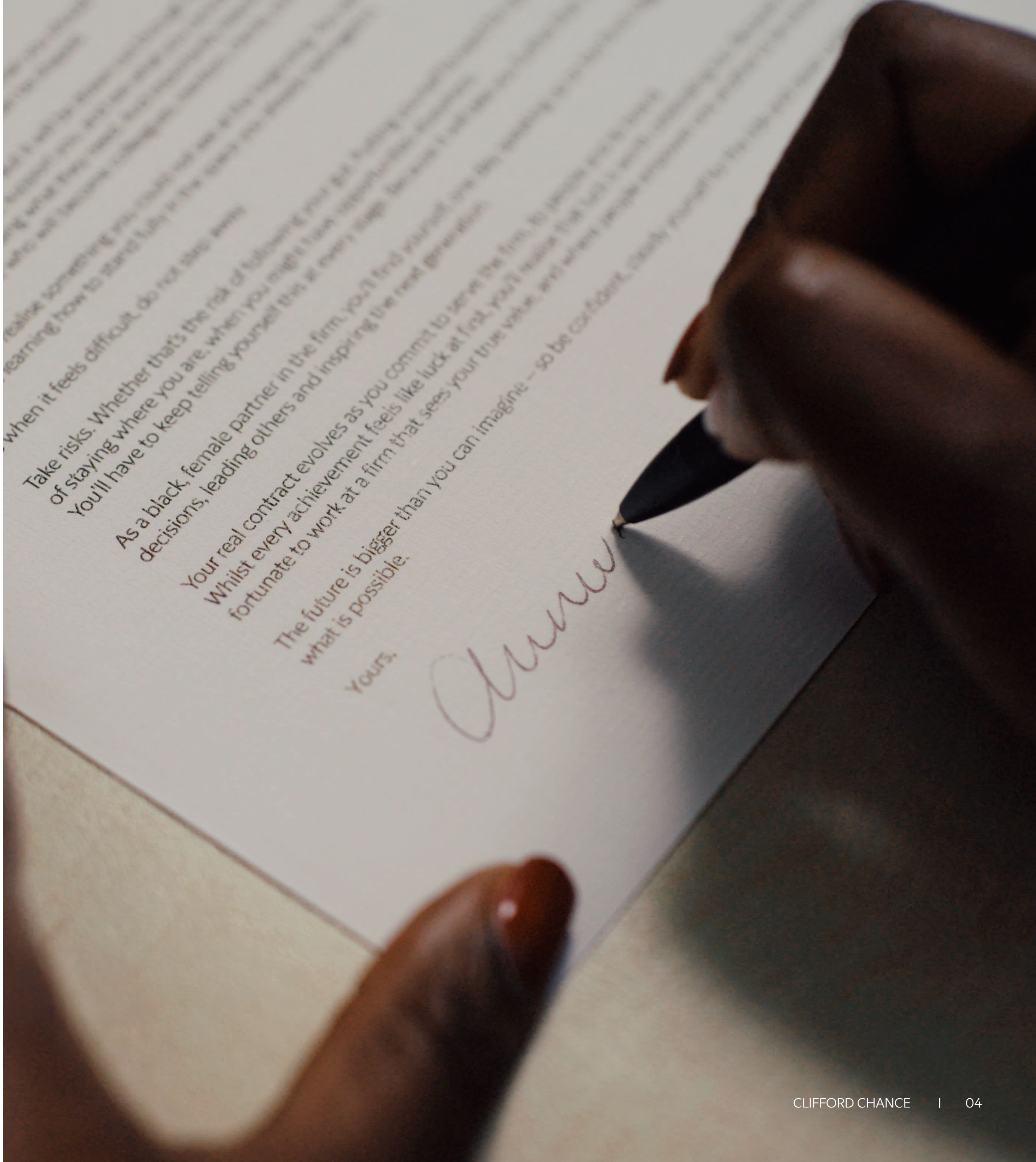
—— Chinwe Odimba-Chapman

The Clifford Chance Training Contract is a one-of-a-kind opportunity for aspiring lawyers, opening a door to countless opportunities that will allow you to flourish.

But signing your contract is only the beginning. It takes commitment, dedication, and perseverance to complete.

That’s why the ‘real contract’ is not something you sign. The ‘real contract’ is the one you enter into with yourself – the commitment you make at the start of your journey to see it through to the end, and the promises you keep to yourself along the way that drive you to your true potential.

‘The Real Contract’ celebrates what it’s really like to be a lawyer at Clifford Chance. Discover seven real stories from lawyers at different stages of their career as they write a letter to their younger selves reflecting on the start of their legal journey and what ‘The Real Contract’ means to them.





Watch ‘The Real Contract’



A portrait of Chinwe Odimba-Chapman, a Black woman with long black braids, wearing glasses and a dark top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a blurred office interior with large windows.

Chinwe Odimba-Chapman

Office Managing Partner, London

Dear Chinwe,

You're about to begin your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.

This is the start of a journey that will challenge you in ways you cannot yet fully imagine.

On your first day, you will walk into a crowded room full of eager trainees.
And you will quietly notice that you are one of very few who look like you.
You will look around and wonder whether you really belong here.

It's not that you don't feel as though you belong, it's just that every now and then someone will say something completely alien to you. And you'll realise that these people have been preparing for this job for many years. You sense everyone else already understands something you do not.

And at first, you will react by doing what's got you this far.
You'll keep your head down. Work hard. Let your work speak for you.

But over time, you will learn that the Training Contract isn't about trying to fit into the firm.
It is about making the decision to stay in the room when you feel uncertain.

Because the real contract is the one you make with yourself.
The discipline to keep going when you feel behind.

You will, at times, feel unsure of your place and uncomfortable in many rooms.
Especially when someone describes you as "too shy," and you begin to understand how perception can shape opportunity.

And you will carry that sentence longer than you should.
But how you are seen is not fixed. It can be shaped.

Your answer is already in you. But it will be drawn out through relationships. Deep, life-long relationships. Through people who challenge you, support you, and see what you cannot yet see. Such as being really good at reading people and understanding what they need. And importantly listening deeply. And you will find many of those people here, people who will become colleagues, mentors, clients, even friends for life.

And you will realise something you could not see at the beginning. You were never trying to fit in.
You were learning how to stand fully in the space you already belonged in.

So when it feels difficult, do not step away.

Take risks. Whether that's the risk of following your gut. Putting yourself forward for opportunities. Or even the risk of staying where you are, when you might have opportunities elsewhere.
You'll have to keep telling yourself this at every stage. Because it will take you further than you've ever imagined.

As a black, female partner in the firm, you'll find yourself, one day, speaking up on the firm's biggest stages, shaping decisions, leading others and inspiring the next generation.

Your real contract evolves as you commit to serve the firm, its people and its brand.
Whilst every achievement feels like luck at first, you'll realise that luck is worth celebrating too. Because you're so fortunate to work at a firm that sees your true value, and where people empower one another to be exceptional.

The future is bigger than you can imagine – so be confident, steady yourself for the ride and never underestimate what is possible.

Yours,

Aunna e



A portrait of a young man with dark hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings and a window frame on the right.

Ilijah Gibbs

Associate, London

Dear Ilijah,

You're about to begin your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.

This is a day that has been years in the making, but you're here. While the journey to starting at Clifford Chance was tough, your biggest challenge is about to begin.

Because the real contract is not the one you signed.
The real contract is the one you make with yourself.

You will feel overwhelmed, tired, and out of your depth. You will experience periods of not feeling like you are meant to be here, that this opportunity was a product of pure luck.

There will be moments where, despite being in this towering skyscraper filled with people, that you are alone.

This career will push you out of your comfort zone and test you in ways that you have never been tested before.

But remember why you started this journey and chose to make it your career. That 12-year-old who wanted to make his parents proud, his family proud, himself proud. The almost stubborn drive that has fuelled you through rejection and redirection, ultimately to not settle for anything but the best.

When the work is tough, the nights are long, and the stress is high, remember the people you've met along the way. Colleagues will become best friends, managers will become mentors, and the support system back home will continue to be there for you through it all.

Despite the regular thoughts convincing you of the opposite, you are capable, you are driven, you are resilient. Tough times never last, but tough people do.

This career will allow you to speak to colleagues in Australia, Singapore, Amsterdam and New York, all in the space of one day. The opportunities this firm has provided you with, and will continue to provide, will broaden your horizons and perspective of the world like no other. You will drive change and deliver impact on a scale that you could never have imagined.

That success is nothing but a product of your determination, resilience and joy to do the best for your family, your friends and, most importantly, you.

Keep being curious, jump into the unknown, and most importantly, believe in yourself.

All the best,

Ilijah



A portrait of Nabeela Afifi, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a white top and a pearl necklace. She is looking directly at the camera. The background is a blurred cityscape.

Nabeela Afifi

Associate, Dubai

Hi Nabeela,

You're about to start your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.

You've spent years working towards this goal, and now you're finally here. You are about to begin at the firm you always hoped you would join, and I hope you let yourself fully feel the weight and pride of that moment – because I remember how much it meant to you.

But I want you to know that the real contract is not the one you have signed. The real contract is the one you make with yourself.

It is the commitment you make to yourself every day: to keep showing up, to keep pushing yourself, and to keep holding yourself to a standard that will sometimes feel uncomfortable.

You are entering a world of fierce intellect, high expectations and uncompromising quality. At times, it will feel like everyone around you has it all figured out. Like it comes more naturally to them. Like you are the only one working twice as hard just to keep up.

You will question whether you fit. Whether you are sharp enough, and whether you can keep up with the people around you.

But one thing you will not question is your resilience and dedication. That is what will keep you going. Your commitment, your curiosity, your willingness to learn and your refusal to become complacent. Remind yourself that this is why you chose Clifford Chance.

You did not come here because you wanted it easy. You came here because you wanted to be challenged, to grow, and to become the kind of lawyer you know you are capable of becoming. And the challenges will keep changing. Just when something feels insurmountable, you will overcome it – and then a new challenge will arrive. But each time, you will carry the lessons from the last one with you.

The rewards will come quietly at first.

You will notice that a task that once felt impossible is suddenly easier to crack. You will find yourself explaining a concept to a trainee that you once struggled to understand yourself.

You will be trusted with more responsibility, placed on the best deals, and realise that the trust you have built with partners and senior lawyers came from consistent effort, care and showing up when it mattered.

And you will find your people. Colleagues will become genuine friends – people you look forward to seeing every day.

So keep going. Commit to excellence, but do not let doubt cloud your view of what is possible. Trust yourself. You know more than you think you do.

It will not be easy – but that is exactly why you will love it.

Yours,

Nabeela





Ahmed Shafiek

Senior Associate, Dubai

Dear Ahmed,

You are about to board your flight from Cairo to London to begin a new chapter. Your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.

But the real contract is not the one you signed.
The real contract is the one you make with yourself.

Right now, everything feels full of possibility.
A new city. A new job. A new environment surrounded by people you know are exceptional.

You will be excited, but you will also feel the weight of it. You will wonder whether you are ready.

You are.
But there will be moments when it does not feel that way.

At times, the pressure, the competing demands and the pace will feel overwhelming. It will feel like every task is critical and everything matters at once. There will be moments where it genuinely feels like the end of the world.

You will remember one of them clearly. Stuck in an elevator, holding a large pack of documents that need to be signed before an imminent deadline. No way out, no control, and the sense that everything that could go wrong is going wrong.

In those moments, pause. Take a breath. Remind yourself what you are capable of. Because you will get through it. And one day, it will even become a story you tell and laugh about.

What you do not see yet is everything that comes with those moments.
You will be trusted early, often before you feel ready. You will learn quickly, because you will have to.
You will work alongside people who challenge you, but also support you in ways that matter.

Over time, you will start to see the bigger picture.

You will understand how the most successful businesses operate. You will work on transactions that shape industries, build economies and make headlines. You will be promoted earlier than you expect. And you will realise that you have changed too. You will grow in confidence. You will learn how to lead. You will start to mentor others going through the same experience, remembering exactly how it felt.

There will still be pressure. There will still be difficult moments. But you will have the experience to deal with them. So when it feels overwhelming, zoom out.

Keep perspective.
Trust that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

It will not always be easy.
But it will be worth it.

Best,

Ahmed



A portrait of Catherine Freeman, a woman with long, wavy, light brown hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark blue or black top and a thin gold necklace with a small pendant. The background is a blurred view of a city skyline through a large window.

Catherine Freeman

Senior Associate, London

Dear Catherine,

You're about to start your training contract at Clifford Chance.

You've worked so hard to be here, but that is nothing compared to what's ahead of you.

Because the real contract is not the one you have signed.
The real contract is the one you make with yourself.

There will be times when you will feel so alone and entirely out of your depth. Times when you're sitting at your desk late at night, or working through another weekend, yet again missing something that matters to you. Friends will question why you do it; and there are times when you will question everything.

Right now, I know you feel nervous, and that you can't possibly fit in with these polished, confident people. That feeling won't disappear overnight, and it will resurface time and again. There will be moments when you're convinced it's all a mistake, and one day someone will realise you aren't any good at this and don't belong.

But something will shift, sooner than you think.

After a few months you will look around and realise that not only do you fit in here, but you feel more yourself than you ever have. That in fact, you're thriving, and not only are the people around you supporting you, but also becoming your friends.

You will learn to manage feeling completely overwhelmed, to acknowledge it and push through, in the knowledge that you have done it before and you can do it again. You will learn that you are more capable and resilient than you ever imagined.

Then there will be moments that make it all worth it. Usually at the end of a long, intense deal, where it all comes together and you're left with the biggest sense of accomplishment and pride watching your team pull together around you and pull off what only hours before, felt impossible.

Lean on the people around you. They want you to succeed, and one day you will be that person for someone else.

That little voice that told you this was a trick, that is telling you that you might not belong here, will slowly quieten. A quiet confidence in yourself, built on everything you will accomplish, will start to shine through.

So take a deep breath, it won't be easy. But you deserve to be here, and you may even surprise yourself by how much you enjoy it.

Love,

Catherine



A portrait of Mo Al-Shukairy, a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a teal patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background is a modern office interior with large windows showing a city skyline and some indoor plants.

Mo Al-Shukairy

Head of Middle East and Türkiye, Dubai

Dear Mo,

You are about to start your Training Contract at Clifford Chance.

You have worked incredibly hard to get here. You will feel like the luckiest person in the world. And now you want to prove that this is where you belong.

So you will do what many ambitious young lawyers do.
You will work harder than anyone expects.
You will make tough sacrifices. Without any promise that it will be worth it in the end.

But the contract you signed is not the most important one.
The real contract is the one you make with yourself.

The commitment to keep pushing even when you are far beyond your comfort zone.
And when things get difficult, to remind yourself just why you started in the first place. There will be late nights, cancelled holidays, missed football matches and so on.

And at first, you may think leaning on those around you is perhaps a sign of weakness, but the truth is it is a sign of individual and collective strength.

Many colleagues, mentors and friends standing beside you at the beginning of this journey will still be beside you decades later. You'll learn from each other, support each other, and discover that the best outcomes are always built together.

And over time, you will understand that you do not have to fit the mould, and very soon after, you will start breaking it.

Because the things that make you different, your global upbringing and Palestinian heritage, are going to build trusted relationships, work on incredible transactions and with other partners build teams that are simply second to none.

You are going to top the rankings for M&A deal count in London as a Senior Associate, make partner in record time before being seconded to the Middle East where you will act on the first ever public company merger in the UAE and first ever takeover in Saudi, amongst other firsts.

You will lead some of the most complex international private equity deals. Heights you can't yet imagine, as a fresh trainee at Clifford Chance.

But you will come to realise that what makes you most proud is the journey it took to get there, working with so many phenomenal people cross the firm.

Enjoy the ride and stay true to yourself.

P.S. Don't cancel going up to Old Trafford for the Roma match – you will regret it.

Best,

WMO.



The Clifford Chance Training Contract
is one of the greatest challenges
a young lawyer can take on.

That's why they apply.

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The Challenge

Briefing Document