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Produced, written and published by Those Who Inspire Ltd

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Printed in the UAE by Emirates Printing Press, Dubai

Date: September 2015
ISBN: 978-9948-18-666-3

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NIGERIA

ThoseWhoInspire™

*We hope you enjoy reading *Those Who Inspire: Nigeria* as much as we have enjoyed writing it, and we offer our sincere thanks to everyone in Nigeria for their kindness, helpfulness and gracious hospitality.*

We extend our special thanks to The Federal Ministry of Education, Growing Business Foundation (GBF) and all the members of “The Circle of Influence”; without their commitment, this book would have never been possible.

We thank for their camaraderie and support during both good and tough times: Awesome, Laura, Ali, Kevin, Kurt, Dennis, Iffat, Domitila, John, Tope, Schola, Pablo, Natalia, Hassan, Godknows and so many more.

Finally, we wish to express our admiration and appreciation to all the extraordinary people portrayed in our book.

Why This Book Collection?

We believe in touching lives of the youth by sharing local inspiring stories.

We had been trotting the globe for almost two decades, and by 2010, our life and work as an international communication agency had taken us to more than eighty countries.

After spending a month or two on projects with government leaders, local entrepreneurs and business executives, it was time to move to the next country. Our job was exciting and full of opportunities to see so many new places and cultures, and business was great.

However, we were both itching for a deeper experience. We wanted a different kind of adventure, one that would allow us to learn more about the people from the various countries we had come to love; we wanted to contribute more, somehow, to the people of those countries.

But how?

This is our story...

While visiting Oman in 2010, we came across a suggestion given to us by our dear friend, the ex-Minister of Manpower and the Architect for Omanisation, Dr. Juma Ali Juma: “Why not write a book?”

You should have seen our faces. A book? What would we write a book about?

As time passed we didn't really talk about the suggestion anymore until one day we discovered we'd both been thinking about it. The idea had inspired us more than we'd realized. Sure, we loved what we had been doing, but here was a chance to cultivate our desire for a fascinating new adventure, one that would speak to our passions.

With a book in mind, we started reflecting on our experiences in Oman and around the world. After months of brainstorming we were finally able to define what would be our purpose, our cause and belief so that we could contribute beyond ourselves, so that we could inspire.

We were cognizant of inspiration being a constant spark throughout our own careers. But what, we asked ourselves, does it mean to actually inspire? There are few words that evoke such a strong emotional response. Every idea, project, or venture starts with inspiration, and it is what sees us through challenges, connects people, and enables us to progress.

All of us can call to mind people who have inspired us throughout our lives, as many of us have no doubt inspired others. We are convinced that when somebody shares with you the right thing at the right time, it can impact the decisions you make and change the course of your life.

Young or old, there is no age limit to be inspired. And we knew deep down that although this book would inspire people at any age, we especially wanted it to reach the youth, those young minds that comprise the future of every single country.

Over the years we had heard from so many different leaders from around the world that the youth were not motivated enough, that they had no idea what their elders had to go through to be where they are today. For some, these lost stories were about building a country from scratch in less than 50 years; for others, it was about being brought up in very poor families with little access to education, or boldly elevating family tradition toward new paths, and for some it was about having survived wars or famines.

From that pivotal moment, as the concept of the book came to light, we knew that our challenge was to write something that would inspire the youth by sharing stories of people from all walks of life. Not everybody can or wants to be a doctor or an entrepreneur; we had to give the youth different types of role models. And who's to say that through the beauty of cross-pollination an aspiring banker, for instance, can't find inspiration from a scientist or an artist? So we decided to portray people, mentors from very different backgrounds.

In fact, people portrayed in our books would have three things in common: those who follow their passion, contribute to society, and who are mentors or ready to become mentors.

We believe that success, passion and happiness are not about how much money you make or the chair you sit in, but about the art of fulfilment and social engagement.

From our experience around the world we know that every country is different. Even neighbouring countries are different, if we classify the world by regions like Europe, the Middle East, Africa, or the Americas. We all agree that France is different from

Germany as much as Oman is different from the UAE, Nigeria from South Africa or the U.S. from Canada.

So we decided it would be one book per country where we would portray only local citizens. In other words, before we even had our first book, we knew we had the makings of a collection!

We were and are convinced that story is more powerful if you can identify yourself to someone from your country instead of looking up to some foreign icon that comes from a completely different culture. This conviction gave the drive behind our mission even more clarity.

We would go to a country, meet with the most amazing people we could find, and share their stories with as many local youth as possible. Our book would be authentic, genuine and cross-generational. And to make sure we would reach the maximum amount of people in the country it would be in English and the local language when possible.

Almost nine months after laying out our plans, it was time to jump into this new journey. We started our first book *Those Who Inspire: Oman*. It was a book that finally gave an opportunity to young Omani to read about someone from their own region or village, a book that allowed this young generation to see that anything is possible.

It took us eighteen months to produce our first book. We launched *Those Who Inspire: Oman* in December 2012 in English and Arabic. Two years later, in October 2014, we published our second book *Those Who Inspire: UAE* also in English and Arabic, and 2015 is the year of *Those Who Inspire: Nigeria*.

This journey has been fuelled by passion every step of the way. It is intense, complicated, fascinating, emotional and a never-

ending process. We were afraid and stressed at times as we were leaving behind a lucrative business we knew from inside-out in order to embark fully and passionately into *Those Who Inspire*. And here we are, five years later; we are truly fulfilled to be sharing with you the third book of our collection, this one celebrating Nigeria, and soon, hopefully more of the collection to come. Which countries? Follow us on www.thosewhoinspire.co to find out more.

Delphine Baretts
Founding Partner
& Publisher

Marlène Plomik
Founding Partner
& Publisher



The Circle of Influence

We shaped *The Circle of Influence* during our quest to answer two crucial questions:

-How can we finance this crazy social entrepreneurship adventure in a world where so many people say books are a thing of the past?

-How can we ensure the books reach the youth, our main focus being the students and the young workforce?

To start off, we knew what we didn't want. Unlike other publications, we didn't want advertising, and we didn't want anybody paying to be featured in *Those Who Inspire*.

Just as important – and one of our main values, in fact – is that no young person would have to pay to receive a copy of a *Those Who Inspire* book from their own country.

After some time carefully reflecting on both of these crucial questions, we orchestrated a solution to meet the book's financing needs and at the same time reach the youth.

We would pre-sell the books to entities and companies. And they, in turn, would contribute to inspiring the youth by donating those purchased books to their young employees and training centres, allowing us to reach the young workforce.

In order to reach students, and as part of our social entrepreneurship vision, Those Who Inspire Ltd in turn donates an equivalent amount of those books purchased to universities and colleges around the country, with the endorsement and collaboration of the Ministry of Education.

This is how *The Circle of Influence* was created.

In working with us to inspire, *The Circle of Influence* impacts the lives of countless young adults. First in Oman, then in the UAE, and now Nigeria.

A special thanks to the Nigerian members of *The Circle of Influence*, without them Those Who Inspire: Nigeria would not have been possible.

Why Those Who Inspire Nigeria?

We believe in touching lives of the youth by sharing local inspiring stories.

Dear reader,

Each of the books in the *Those Who Inspire* collection is a celebration of a country's people who contribute to make that country a better place. They share their life stories, beliefs, emotions, vulnerabilities, ambitions and vision in order to connect and inspire the youth.

Until a few decades ago, this mode of sharing and storytelling was the primary pastime among most societies; friends and families used to sit together, intently listening as their elders shared and passed down their stories...and the youngsters would look up to them and would want to emulate them, building on lessons learned as they carved out a blueprint for their own future.

In today's fast-moving world of rapidly changing technology, where do we find this intergenerational dynamic? How do mentors connect and inspire the younger generation?

Those Who Inspire: Nigeria is a radical new book where young Nigerians can find inspiring life stories from Nigerian mentors. You can read about someone from your own region or village, stories that show you how anything is possible.

At TWI, as storytellers, we create connections between those who inspire, those who lead, angel advisers, mentors and the youth.

Throughout the following pages you will connect with 90 Nigerians, discovering what gets them out of bed every morning, their purpose, their beliefs, and their motivation. Through example, you will find inspiration, feel this sense of worthiness and compassion – how they forged the courage to become who they are today.

This book is like a portable mentor. Many of the people profiled in these pages consider mentorship an utmost virtue of society and desire to give back by acting as mentors themselves, passing on the torch of inspiration.

Our experiences in Nigeria have also been an inspiration. We've had the chance to meet so many inspiring Nigerians from different backgrounds. Nigeria's heterogeneity can be one of the country's greatest challenges at times. But once people accept and even celebrate their differences – as many who are profiled in this book will attest to – a new world opens up: one of solidarity, ideation, and problem solving.

Like most countries, Nigeria has its share of problems. However, one of the most common philosophies we encountered while exchanging with hundreds of extraordinary people for this book was that there are no problems – only challenges to be overcome. And it is through embracing these challenges that a citizen can be a part of realizing the country's potential.

Those Who Inspire: Nigeria is a cross-section of the country's leading people: artists, teachers, scientists, entrepreneurs, humanitarians, and other exemplary citizens – ordinary individuals who are passionate and driven about the contributions they make to their country and people.

We want to stress that the following showcase of Nigeria's inspiring citizens is by no means exhaustive. This is a humble beginning to a living document; one which we hope will grow alongside this great nation, catalysing change and innovation for generations to come.

And so we dedicate this third volume of the *Those Who Inspire* collection to you, the Nigerian youth – the true treasure of Nigeria. We believe this book will inspire you to pursue that one thing that gives you life – your desired vocation. Learn from the successes and failures of those who have chased their own dreams, and tomorrow it may be you who will inspire others to greatness.

As Nelson Mandela once noted, "Sometimes it falls upon a generation to be great; you can be that generation."

Contribute to the *Those Who Inspire* movement; become a TWI Ambassador and share those stories around you.

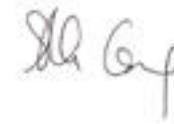
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Luisa Carrasco
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We Like & We Don't Like

We ask all the mentors portrayed in our books to share three things they like and three things they don't like;

it's a difficult exercise to select only three for each;

so Those Who Inspire shall do the same.

We Like

- Challenges & Adventure
- Contributing Beyond Ourselves
 - Nigeria

We Don't Like

- Injustice
- Extremism
 - Wahala

Nigeria: the Giant of Africa

Nigeria – the vibrant, colourful Giant of Africa – a country ripe with potential and brimming with contrasts. These differences provide Nigerians with opportunities to learn, discover, and collaborate, but they can also cause the friction slowing the country’s path to progress.

Just as Nigeria has many good things going for it, it also has its share of difficulties that often thrust the country onto the international stage for the wrong reasons. While the violence and good governance issues that have plagued Nigeria for so long pose very real challenges, it is difficult to garner two important factors from the frequent media reports: the historical context that illuminates Nigeria’s current situation and the positive forces – many of whom are profiled in this book – working to usher in a better future for Nigeria.

This group, these catalysts of posterity, are the type of people who see the certainty of solutions and opportunities in problems. They prefer action over circular discussion or complaining. Most of all, these are the Nigerians who – no matter how difficult a situation may become – remain utterly optimistic and determined. As Nigeria continues to define its relationship with the twenty-first century, these agents of progress are increasing in number – which is good news for a country with one of the largest and most promising youth populations in the world.

Although Nigerians still have a lot of work to do to actualize the country’s potential, the progress Nigeria has made since its independence in 1960 is nothing short of remarkable. For this population of over 170 million people from hundreds of ethnic groups, forcibly merged together at the hand of British colonization, many challenges remain on the horizon – and yet the only direction is upward.

The Path to Political Sustainability

Just as in many countries, politics has been a sensitive topic for Nigerians. Ever since the postcolonial outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, the country had regularly shifted between civilian and military rule. Political power in Nigeria has often been the subject of misuse with destructive results.

The country’s return to democracy in 1999 marked the beginning of a new era still unfolding today. Several people in Nigeria’s political scene have begun to catch the country’s attention with their fervent stance against bad governance and their commitment to integrity, justice, and a passionate desire to keep the country on the track of progress.

The message coming from both within and outside of the political scene – and expounded on by many people throughout these pages – is that the absence of the rule of law, be it in business or politics, is not sustainable.

An Upswing of Economic Optimism

Nigeria became the largest economy in Africa in 2014 following the rebasing of its economy to a GDP of \$510 billion. For many, especially those who worked to bolster the country’s economic standing, it was a victorious milestone for the country. More importantly, this moment of triumph was a strong step forward, proving to the world that Nigerians have what it takes to enter the top 20 global economies by 2020 – as many experts predict.

Emergences in banking, telecommunications, and the entertainment industry are just a few major areas where Nigeria is gaining momentum. This upswing is veritable proof that Nigeria is not content with depending on its oil reserves alone. What's more, there is still plenty of room for growth in other sectors, such as agriculture and services, but for the optimistic at heart, this only means more opportunities; at this moment, there are a variety of initiatives underway aimed at improving the industries that have fallen behind. For example, power services were a great concern in Nigeria, but with the ongoing reforms and privatization of the sector, there is hope that things will change for the better.

With continued adjustments in economic policy designed to help Nigeria better manage all of its key sectors, the country's capacity to harness its wealth of native talent and resources is more enhanced.

An Entrepreneurial Mindset

Another encouraging trend for the Nigerian economy is the unparalleled growth of entrepreneurial thinking. Instead of waiting for an opportunity to be handed to them, young Nigerians are realizing the value of going out and making their own opportunities. In addition, the rise of micro-finance banks has further catalysed the situation to where people are actualizing their dreams, making a living for themselves in unprecedented numbers.

Entrepreneurship has long been a typical component of the Nigerian mindset, but now it is taking off so much that elders, people with a lifetime of experience in both public and private sector work, are encouraging young Nigerians to break the trend of expecting a cushy government job. Instead, they're telling the next generation to combine education, work ethic, and a

willingness to build experience over time in order to add value to society.

A Culture of Plenty

With more than two hundred ethnic groups, Nigeria's diverse culture might be one of its greatest sources of wealth. Citizens can take pride in both a rich traditional heritage as well as more recent contributions to world literature and music. Nigerian culture has been preserved and developed by not only a myriad of artists and entrepreneurs, but also through a distinct passion Nigerians have for their homeland.

Every person portrayed in this book spoke of Nigeria with a strong sense of pride, revealing an immeasurable passion for their country and their fellow Nigerians. One cannot help but feel that this passion is particular to citizens who have gone through difficult times together, and who now are harnessing the opportunities of the present for the sake of posterity. As the country continues its ascent to global influence, the rest of the world will benefit from exposure to its diverse culture.

The Development of Education

Nigeria is home to a number of excellent schools, colleges and universities, some of which are distinguished with international prestige. At the same time, the overall state of Nigeria's educational system is no stranger to criticism, particularly in rural areas, where schools often lack the facilities and resources to give children a decent education. But yet even in this sector, monumental efforts are underway to revolutionize and unify a disparate school system in all thirty-six states into an institutional pillar for the country, one that stands strong next to the country's growing economy.

Equally important is the growing number of organizations and foundations designed to educate young Nigerians and to empower them in their areas of interest. Similarly, some of Nigeria's more successful individuals are starting to roll up their sleeves and open their bank accounts alongside established foundations to support schools in need of financial assistance. Nigerians are realizing now more than ever that if the country is going to be a major player on the global stage in the coming years, education must be a top priority.

The Battle for Healthcare

Improvement in healthcare is another area where Nigeria is starting to experience momentum. Just as with the reform of other sectors, Nigeria is seeing cases where average citizens dissatisfied with the status quo – usually after experiencing the inadequacy of the healthcare system first-hand – are doing whatever it takes to catalyse change: a mother creating a foundation designed to increase the sanitation of birthing environments so that others do not have to experience the same pain of losing an infant; a college student along with her family and friends establishing an organization to lobby for better logistics and response times among hospitals after she nearly lost her life in a recent bomb blast. These and other examples demonstrate the grassroots reform efforts beginning to stir in Nigeria.

However, not all of Nigeria's healthcare improvements have been happening from the bottom-up. We can also find inspiration from the top-down – for instance, in Nigeria's globally influential battle against counterfeit pharmaceuticals. The broad range of reform efforts proves that with the right amount of preparation, determination and communication, Nigeria is a fertile ground for anybody who wants to step up and make a difference.

Building Global Relationships

Ever since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has been a significant player in foreign relations, particularly concerning African unity and especially in its efforts to liberate South Africa from apartheid. In addition to participating in the African Union, Nigeria is also a member of the Economic Community of West African States, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

Nigeria's involvement on the international stage over the past five and a half decades reveals a pattern, a consistent effort to add value at the global level. This sincere desire to be a global force for good is apparent in the individuals profiled in this book, many of whom have long records of international experience. Their sense of cooperation and world citizenship stand in clear contrast to the negative headlines so prevalent today.

In spite of its struggles, Nigeria maintains favourable relations with numerous countries, some of which are committed to helping actualize the country's potential, just as Nigeria has assisted other countries over the years.

Achieving the Impossible

With its great diversity and enormous population, Nigeria is a country that is practically bursting at the seams. During both good and bad times, the country and its people have managed to hold everything together, and the situation is no different with the country's present-day challenges. Nigeria has achieved the impossible before, and if the inspiring personalities portrayed here – as well as so many more throughout the world – have anything to say about it, the country will certainly do so again.

90 Nigerians
216 pages
Infinite Inspiration

The following profiles are in alphabetical order.



Mohammed Kaoje Abubakar, OON, FAS

My Words of
Wisdom:
“If you don’t
contribute
your quota
to the
development
of society,
then why
take the
trouble to
do so many
other things
in life?”

When people ask Professor Mohammed Kaoje Abubakar how he initially came to study biochemistry, his answer usually surprises them. “I had a flair for sciences, the study of nature and how things work – but it was my curiosity as a student in secondary school that led me to biochemistry,” he explains. “One day I was browsing in the library when a book on comparative biochemistry caught my attention. I don’t know how much of it I really understood, but it sparked the beginning of a lifelong interest.”

Although Abubakar had considered studying medicine in university, his concern for his family led him down a path that suited his youthful curiosity for biochemistry. “My parents had gone through enough trouble – I didn’t want them to wait another seven years while I studied medicine,” Abubakar explains. “I wanted to finish university quickly, so I could come back and be of assistance to my parents and siblings.”

Abubakar had a first-hand understanding of what it meant to live in destitution from his childhood in Kebbi State. Born in a home with no electricity or running water, he knew poverty well enough to believe that returning to help out his family was

the only option. “My parents were not well off, and we went through untold hardships,” Abubakar recalls, adding that his father, who never had the opportunity to go to school, was happy beyond measure to see his son succeed in academia.

“My father told me that I had to use what I had seen and experienced in life along with the power of my education to become a champion of the poor, to assist people as much as I can,” Abubakar notes. “Today this is now part of my personal motivation, a lifelong societal project. If you don’t contribute your quota to the development of society, then why take the trouble to do so many other things in life?”

Abubakar’s passion for serving others would eventually take him beyond the average teaching career. He ultimately went on to earn a number of key public servant roles, including his appointment as Director General in Kebbi State, followed by appointments as Permanent Secretary and presently Commissioner Inspectorate for the National Pension Commission. He also served for a short period on President Goodluck Jonathan’s cabinet as Minister of Science and Technology.

Yet it all stemmed from a simple teaching career, which began

Commissioner Inspectorate National Pension Commission (PENCOM)

at Usman dan Fodio University. “The whole reason why I got into academics in the first place was because I had a very good memory and knew I had potential. It was easy for me to read and grasp things, and I thought that I could teach effortlessly,” he explains.

A few years later, Abubakar pursued his master’s at Ahmadu Bello University on scholarship before ultimately earning his Ph.D. in 1994 at the University of Essex on a State Government scholarship. “I consider myself one of the lucky Nigerians to have gotten funding for my education from the Nigerian people,” Abubakar notes. “This country, along with my Creator, has provided me with an environment that enabled me to fully manifest my potential. I have had the opportunity to attain my current position despite the odds.”

While Abubakar may consider himself lucky, his rise from a humble background to reach his full potential also involved a lot of hard work and keeping a cool head in the face of adversity. “Problems and challenges are a daily fact of life. When they arise, I sit down and crack my head over the best way to solve them,” Abubakar says. “I have never been overwhelmed by a problem. If and when an issue arises, I try my best, but there are no guarantees. At the very least you want to know that – whatever the problem – you did your best to solve it within the limits of your abilities or the circumstances of your environment.”

And even when problems can’t be solved, Abubakar maintains,

experiencing one’s share of life’s challenges is vital to gaining experience. “You have to go through the ups and downs to be able to appreciate what life is,” he advises. “You have to have experienced poverty, for example, in order to appreciate it, to know it.”

Although Abubakar has excelled and added value to his community through administrative roles, his true legacy lies in the students who have passed through his classroom. “Looking back, I think I have done very well,” he reflects. “I have produced professors, doctors – some of my students have even gone on to be Vice Chancellors, and they all went through me.”

In Short: *Professor Mohammed Kaoje Abubakar rose from an impoverished background to pursue a career in academics. Many of his students have gone on to become influential figures in their communities, and Abubakar’s success in the academic world has also earned him prominent government positions, such as Minister of Science and Technology and Commissioner Inspectorate in Kebbi State. “Opportunities are things you stumble into while working hard – what you call serendipity in science,” he suggests. “In other words, there is no shortcut. The rule of thumb is to work hard and be honest.”*



Date of Birth
19/10/1959

Education
Ph.D. in Biochemistry
University of Essex
UK, 1994

M.Sc. in Biochemistry
Ahmadu Bello
University
Zaria
Nigeria, 1989

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like
• Reading
• Hunting
• Meeting intelligent people

I Don’t Like
• Dishonesty
• People who patronize others
• Losing sleep

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Ahmed Adamu

Chairperson Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC)



My Top Tip:
“Always
try – any
dream you
have in your
mind – just
give it a shot
and imbue
whatever
you’re
doing with
passion.”

Ahmed Adamu is living proof that a young person can go from student union leadership at university to leading over 1.2 billion youth from around the world as Chairperson of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) – with a stop as an NGO founder along the way. “After graduating, I went back home and set up an NGO called League for Democratic Youth,” he notes. “Democracy in Nigeria had been revived just seven years before, and many Nigerians were still uncomfortable with the system. During the era of military rule, people had become indifferent to politics; they hardly voted, and many were unaware of their democratic rights.”

Ahmed saw a need to sensitize young people and encourage them to be active in their communities. “With the NGO, we showed people how they could influence change through dialogue with government representatives,” he explains. “We’ve organized so many events and meetings with policymakers. People immediately saw the significance of what we were doing, and similar initiatives began to form.”

The success of Ahmed’s NGO earned him a spot on the Nigerian Youth Parliament, which

led to his nomination for the 2011 Commonwealth Youth Forum in Australia. “That was my first engagement with the Commonwealth, and I loved the exchange of ideas and making new contacts – the experience inspired me to expand my network of young, motivated individuals.”

But Ahmed didn’t only meet with peers while he was in Australia. He was also selected to meet with Her Majesty the Queen of England to present the Youth Resolution, which summarized what the young people at the forum had decided they wanted from their leaders. “Meeting with Her Majesty was another experience that instilled a lot of confidence in me,” Ahmed recalls, adding that the proposal to establish the CYC was accepted and endorsed by the Queen and heads of governments during the Australia meeting. It would be the perfect platform to represent young people at high-level decision-making processes, but Ahmed didn’t see his official involvement going further.

Upon returning from Australia, Ahmed continued with his NGO and started teaching at a secondary school, later becoming a lecturer at the state university, but still keeping in touch with forum contacts via Facebook. “I’d been following the conversation, but I never

thought I could become the first Chairperson!” he mentions. “In fact, at the beginning of the application process, I told myself I was too busy studying for my Ph.D. But in the end, I couldn’t resist, and after a period of vigorous campaigning, I was elected.”

Suddenly, as the first Chairperson of CYC, Ahmed was faced with the daunting task of laying the groundwork for an organization that would represent 1.2 billion young people from fifty-three countries across six continents. “With such great diversity, you have different needs. We had to decide how we would address these needs, what resources we could call upon, and whom we could employ,” Ahmed explains. “If you don’t have somebody who came before you, there’s nobody to ask, and it can be difficult. We’ve had a lot of challenges, made some mistakes, but we are constantly learning and improving.”

Things got easier after navigating first-year challenges, and the CYC is off to a rolling success. “We now have an international staff working in two offices, in London and Sri Lanka. We are building, networking, and connecting,” he notes, adding that the CYC has initiated within Nigeria a campaign against election violence. “Nigerians are proud to have one of their own as the first-ever Chairperson of the CYC, and if I am successful, people will remember that the first was from Nigeria.” He adds, “Being in this position has exposed me and other young Nigerians to so many opportunities, and it has enhanced my diplomatic

experience and networks of friends across the world.”

Ahmed, whose position has allowed him to travel widely, meeting with presidents and heads of states of the Commonwealth countries, as well as with Her Majesty the Queen, believes that his position with the CYC is a source of encouragement to other young Nigerians. “They see me in this position and realize they, too, can do something similar. It only takes confidence and courage, and to have those, you have to believe in yourself,” Ahmed advises. “If you believe in yourself, then you can be whatever you want to be. Always try – any dream you have in your mind – give it a shot and imbue whatever you’re doing with passion.”

In Short: *Ahmed Adamu never imagined he would become the first Chairperson of the Commonwealth Youth Council, an organization representing 1.2 billion people in fifty-three countries across the world. However, this position is a natural progression of his passion to engage with the community around him, starting with student leadership at the university level, then progressing to establishing his own NGO, League for Democratic Youth, designed to encourage democratic thinking among young people. “Be absolutely engaged in whatever you believe in; don’t just do it halfway. Do it with full strength and commitment.”*

Date of Birth
03/03/1985

Education
Ph.D. in Petroleum
Economics
Newcastle University
UK, 2015

Master’s in
Oil & Gas Economics
University of Dundee
UK, 2011

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like
• Simplicity
• Humility
• Jokes

I Don’t Like
• Arrogance
• Complex people
• People that don’t smile

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Olajumoke Adenowo

My Goal: “We are working toward a national renaissance by teaching young people to share their respective abilities for the greater good.”

Olajumoke Adenowo is a believer in intrinsic motivation, finding that spark inside oneself and using it to be an agent of change. “If you wait for people to encourage you, you’ll never do anything. You have to be self-motivated. You have to find that something inside yourself that will push you to do amazing things,” she says. “We each have a gift to share with the world, and it’s a matter of discovering that gift, developing it and deploying it to make a social impact.”

Several years ago, Adenowo began to realize this need to deploy her own gift after she’d built a successful career as an architect. She was a founding partner of the firm AD Consulting Ltd, and was also happily married to a supportive husband with whom she had two beautiful sons. “I had accomplished so much in my life, yet I was still incomplete. And that’s when my vision to do more began to take shape,” she explains. “I began to use my consulting firm to fund what would become the Awesome Treasures Foundation.”

Making an impact and cultivating a sense of purpose – which has been a driving force in Adenowo’s life since the start of her career – is at the core of the

vision for Awesome Treasures. The Foundation has made a difference in thousands of lives through regular focus groups, seminars, and summits. “Whether it’s through our business seminars for women entrepreneurs or through groups centred around issues like health, legal or education resources, the underlying message remains the same,” Adenowo explains. “We are working toward a national renaissance by teaching people to share their abilities for the greater good.”

Too many people, in Adenowo’s opinion, have yet to realize or cultivate their unique gift, or maybe they are using it for selfish reasons instead of making a difference in the world. “You were not born in this country by accident – there is a specific gift that you possess that this generation of Nigerians needs, and until you deploy it, you have not succeeded, no matter how rich or famous you are,” Adenowo states. “True leadership is the ability to have a positive influence on people. It has nothing to do with an elected position, as many might think.”

Adenowo suggests that the best way to reach people is by using your gift to build a platform on which to stand, much like she used her own firm as a launching point for Awesome Treasures. “Elected

Founding Partner AD Consulting Ltd Founder & Coordinator Awesome Treasures

ministers are easy to tune out, but a popular song, for example, can catch the attention of the entire country with its message,” she remarks. “I’ve had quite a few youths who have passed through the Foundation and have moved on to become an assistant to a governor, or an activist, or a social media enthusiast – whatever your gift is, we all have our platforms for making a difference.”

In addition to Awesome Treasures, Adenowo has several other platforms from which to spread her positive influence. She’s been interviewed on CNN, she ran a blog for many years, and now she produces her own podcast. “If you’re not part of the solution, then you’re part of the problem. And at the end of the day life is about the impact you make,” Adenowo believes. “What inspires me are people who leave a legacy, people who haven’t just found something to live for, they’ve found something to die for.”

Naturally, Adenowo’s schedule keeps her quite busy, but the balance she maintains all comes down to a sense of purpose. “The earlier in life you realize your purpose, the sooner you learn how to say no! I set a goal for where I’m going, and everything else is a distraction. Other opportunities may come along, and they might be good opportunities, but only a few of those things may be right for me,” she notes. “And I know that no matter what I do, my family is key. I brought two children

into this world, so it doesn’t matter if I’ve reached thousands or millions on the radio – I’m accountable for those two. So I put my family first.”

The catalysing factor behind all of these priorities, Adenowo adds, is the support she receives from her husband. “African women have to marry right. Because it is possible for a man to frustrate all your dreams, derail you, and force you to choose between your family and your vision,” Adenowo advises. “So if you want to be married, find the right man! Marry for the right reasons! It has nothing to do with how rich or handsome he is, it’s about finding a partner who will be supportive.”

In Short: *Olajumoke Adenowo distinguished herself early on as an architect, but for her the perfect career and a happy family were only part of the equation. Determined to be part of the solution to Nigeria’s numerous challenges, she founded the Awesome Treasures Foundation, which has gone on to empower thousands of young people to discover, develop and deploy their gifts in life. “Only a life lived for others is a life worth living. We are only going to be remembered for the impact we have on those around us. That’s what I teach all the time – live your life every day like you’re leaving a legacy.”*



Date of Birth
16/10/1968

Special Appointment
M.Sc. Dist. in
Architecture
Obafemi Awolowo
University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 1991

B.Sc. Hons. in
Architecture
Obafemi Awolowo
University
Ile-Ife, Nigeria, 1988

Languages
Yoruba, English

I Like
• People
• My family
• Faith

I Don’t Like
• Lies
• Inequity
• Nigeria not
optimizing its
potential

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Ambassador Obinna Adim

Ambassador at Large of the Republic of Burundi



My Belief:
“Young Nigerians have the power to do whatever they want to make positive change.”

As a Pan-Africanist, Obinna Adim has travelled to forty of the continent’s countries – comparing cultures, gathering ideas and reaping inspiration along the way. From his role as Ambassador at Large for Burundi to his position as Special Adviser to former President Goodluck Jonathan on Youth Empowerment, Adim has continuously grown in his passion as an advocate for positive change.

He has also been encouraged by many other voices for change along his own career path. Of the various African leaders Adim has met outside Nigeria, Pierre Nkurunziza, President of Burundi, whom he began working with in 2006, inspires him most. “Nkurunziza’s ability to bring the communities together in the country – to mend the strife between the Hutu and the Tutsis in such a short amount of time – is something you don’t see very often,” Adim notes.

Adim also points to President Paul Kagame in neighbouring Rwanda as an inspirational African leader. “He has not only encouraged the people of his country to find value in unity as a way of moving the nation forward, but he has also spurred economic development in Rwanda, a country that has gone through hell,” Adim says. “It was

only in 1994 that the genocide happened. Looking at the rate of Rwanda’s growth since then – I call it a miracle.”

Adim suggests that such inspiring leaders among African countries are unfortunately a rarity. “The problem we have in Africa today is that some people want leadership positions because they feel it is their right,” he says. “However, they usually don’t have proper vision, and I believe that a person without a vision for his people shouldn’t aim for an elected position. We have so many cases like this in Africa, and that is why we don’t see the desired change.”

This desire for change is a lifelong passion for Adim, a passion that he brings to the table in his capacity as Special Adviser to the President on Youth Empowerment. “The passion inside of me to enact change is what brought me to this position,” Adim discloses. “People could clearly see the burning desire in my heart.”

In his campaign for youth empowerment, one of the primary problems Adim found is a lack of proper foundations for the upcoming generations. “It is something the past governments and regimes failed to include in their master plans,” he mentions, adding that one of his

biggest efforts to date for youth empowerment attempts to address the root of this issue.

For the past two years, Adim has been working with a group of consultants to put together an indexing system to assess youth development initiatives throughout the country. “Nobody has done this before in Nigeria. So when I came in the first thing I did was to bring in these consultants and organize a think tank. We would sit three times a week to look at the problem, to analyse what had gone wrong,” Adim explains. “There are plenty of youth development programmes up and running, yet we still have youth issues. Things are not moving, the youth are not empowered, are not employed – so we began developing indexes that would show the way forward.”

The indexes, still in the development phase, assess everything from leadership, to entrepreneurship, to skills acquisition, and more. “We can score states and programmes. It will enable these programmes to have a sincere impact,” Adim mentions.

Adim has also played a part in developing the Integrated Youth Economic Empowerment Programme, which utilizes the “PP concept,” establishing partnerships between the private and public sectors to develop solutions for specific youth issues. “The first thing we wanted to focus on is mentorship, a key element in life that Nigerian youth don’t really have the resources or tools to access,” Adim notes. “So we partnered with the Mara Foundation, which has one

of the best mentorship platforms in Africa today, to create a programme that provides a channel between youth and mentors.”

While Adim continues to devote his life to empowering youth, he maintains that the next generation must also find it in themselves to bring about change. “The youth make up more than sixty percent of this country, which is a lot. Young Nigerians have the power to do whatever they want to make positive change, to bring in the right people to rule them, and to hold political leaders accountable to their promises.”

In Short: Obinna Adim’s travels and experiences have led him to a highly informed perspective on Africa. As Ambassador at Large of Burundi and through youth empowerment, he strives to actualize his sense of awareness mixed with passion, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and positive outlook for Nigeria and the rest of Africa. “It’s time for the youth to awaken from their slumber and begin to think positively – to think beyond themselves, for the younger generation, their children,” Adim encourages. “Nigeria has very intelligent people. If you move them in the right direction, our country will absolutely shine.”

Date of Birth
16/03/1970

Special Appointment
Ambassador at Large
of the Republic
of Burundi

Languages
English, Igbo

I Like
• Travelling
• Family values
• Abstract things

I Don’t Like
• Corruption and dishonesty
• Untidiness
• Tacky things

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Olisa Agbakoba

OON, SAN, LLD FCI Arb

Senior Partner

Olisa Agbakoba & Associates



My Vision:
“Why should we settle for mediocrity when we can strive for excellence?”

Olisa Agbakoba, known around the world for his human rights advocacy, has been fighting for a better Nigeria for forty years – fifty – if you count all the way back to when he was a thirteen-year-old soldier during the Biafran War. “For so many years I have been continuously shouting and talking, trying to forge a system that will allow things to work,” he says. “I agree that Nigeria’s biggest problem is not corruption, but mediocrity.”

Indeed, throughout all the years and decades of fighting for a country he loves so much, one question has persisted in Agbakoba’s heart: “Why should we settle for mediocrity when we can strive for excellence?”

In 1968, after fighting in the Civil War for two years, a fifteen-year-old Agbakoba was imprisoned along with many others from Onitsha. He was not released until January 1970, at which point he was faced with the challenge of rebuilding his life, a struggle many Nigerians encountered after the war. At the time, Agbakoba’s father, who would later become a Chief Justice, continued to be the beacon in young Agbakoba’s life that he had been throughout his childhood. “My father was there to encourage me, telling me to achieve all that I

could and that anything was possible provided that I stay the course.”

Agbakoba’s vision of what he thought Nigeria should be began to take shape during his formative years spent attending various schools throughout the country. Pointedly, all those years of moving around gave Agbakoba what he refers to as a Pan-Nigerian view. “I understand the various concerns of people in the different regions, and I can empathize with them,” he notes. “What’s more, I believe in a very strong, united Nigeria, a Nigeria that accommodates various ethnicities and religions. If you can’t accommodate, it’s going to be a constant put off for everybody and there will always be trouble.”

After being called to the Nigerian bar in 1978, Agbakoba would go on to specialize in Maritime Law at the prestigious London School of Economics & Political Science. His legal knowledge of the seas would pave the way for Agbakoba to boldly carve out a niche in the Nigerian Maritime industry where he would become the founder and first president of the Nigerian Chamber of Shipping (NSC).

Over the last four decades Agbakoba has grown from strength to strength in his chosen vocation. From founding his own law firm

to reaching the pinnacle of his profession by becoming a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), Agbakoba also became the President of the Nigerian Bar Association, a position he held for two years.

However, his impressive legal career somewhat pales in comparison to his work with human rights, which includes his founding of the Civil Liberties Organization. In 1998, his human rights activism landed him in prison after protesting the Sani Abacha regime. “We had organized a demonstration called the Five Million Man March,” Agbakoba recalls, “and we were massively beaten, tear-gassed and arrested. We spent the next six months in prison until Abacha died. I wasn’t eating much, and I think at one point I didn’t eat for a whole month – only water.”

In hindsight, Agbakoba attributes his ability to cope with such difficult times to spirituality. “It’s like what Bruce Lee called emotional contact, or when you have those priests and monks who can live on the ground or in the street for two years – a sort of spiritual aloofness,” he discloses. “It’s all in the mind, you see. I was convinced that I was doing the right thing, and I had nothing to worry about because of my strong Catholic faith and very strong family support, especially my wife.”

Looking back on the ups and downs of his life, Agbakoba advises young Nigerians, above all, to be careful of envy: “Don’t be envious of anybody; you are your own star, and each star shines differently,” he says. “If you focus on your own

ability to shine, you will illuminate brilliantly, but if you spend all your time looking at another star, you will do nothing.”

In regards to success, Agbakoba sees building a successful career as an incremental ladder. “I have climbed four steps in my life: you start as a professional, which is your base. Then you become an expert, then an authority, and then finally you become a master,” he explains. “Becoming a master can take twenty years, thirty years, and in some cases forty. Be sure of what you want to do, and slowly but surely you will get there.”

In Short: *Known throughout Africa as “The Father of Human Rights,” Olisa Agbakoba will be remembered as one of Nigeria’s foremost human rights activists. In his quest to free Nigerians from greed and hypocrisy, he has persevered through bloodshed and prison time to become the founder of the Civil Liberties Organization and the NGO Human Rights Law Services. Alongside his human rights campaign, Agbakoba has also cultivated a monumental career in Maritime Law. He founded the Nigerian Shipping Chamber of Commerce and is the founding partner of Olisa Agbakoba & Associates. “What drives me is excellence – for Nigeria to be excellent,” he says. “I cannot stand incompetence and disloyalty, especially in a country of such great opportunity.”*

Date of Birth
29/04/1953

Education
LL.D.
University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 2012

LL.M. London School
of Economics &
Political Science
UK, 1980

Languages
Igbo, Hausa, English

I Like
• Loyalty
• Competence
• Honesty

I Don’t Like
• Disloyalty
• Incompetence
• Laziness

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Ferdinand Agu

Chairman of the Governing Council and Pro-Chancellor of the Federal University of Health Sciences



My Top Tip: “If you can search for meaning in your actions, the likelihood of being drawn along by bad influences will be reduced.”

Until recently Ferdinand Agu worked inside what he called the engine room of the government – the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation. It was a quiet but significant position Agu enjoyed because it allowed him to be part of the decision-making process in Nigeria. He has since moved on to the Federal University of Health Sciences, but his path remains that of someone who has spent a lifetime attuned to the call to do good in society.

Ever since his youth, Agu has had a keen interest in public affairs and the desire to be involved and to serve. “Public service is often mistaken for public leadership. The truth is that you have a lot of people who are privileged enough to be in a leadership position, yet they don’t embody the essence of service,” Agu explains. “I’m more concerned with serving than merely being in a leadership position. In fact, everything I’ve done from my childhood until now is part of my desire to serve, to give back, to seek opportunities for my country, and to build a better community.”

Agu began to realize this passion not long after the Nigerian Civil War, when he received a government scholarship in 1972 to study in Kenya. “Spending my

formative years outside of Nigeria not only gave me a perspective on another part of Africa, but it also made me appreciate my Nigerian essence,” he recalls. “Growing up in a distant place like that, I learned to see every Nigerian as a brother. It also compelled me to develop a very strong Nigerian identity because in the eyes of my classmates, I was a representative of Nigeria.”

Growing up in Kenya also introduced Agu to an entirely different political system. “Kenya at the time was democratic. So while my peers back home were under a military regime, I was already experiencing democracy in action,” he recalls. “And because of the active politicking I observed at such a young age, I had an urge to be part of public service.”

The all-boys school Agu attended in Nairobi further fostered his early professional desires with its emphasis on discipline and service. “We were instilled with the adage that to whom much is given, much is expected,” Agu notes. “We were also ingrained with the knowledge that society faced specific challenges, and as we became adults, we would join the effort to grapple with those challenges.”

Agu returned to Nigeria in 1977 with the call for service already kindled inside of him. He carried

the momentum forward, involving himself in student unions and political activities during university. Upon graduating, he worked his way up in the public sector, eventually helping to develop the country’s maritime industry before moving on to his current position. “I’ve been involved in both simple and complex organizations, and I’ve come to understand that the critical thing is to do your bit, and to do it the best you can – and then after you have done it, go the extra mile,” he advises. “It doesn’t matter whether there are any immediate rewards, or praise, or people taking notice. In the end, it’s all about the satisfaction at having done something good.”

If everybody did their own part, Agu continues, society would be on a much straighter path to progress. “But if you don’t do your part because you think that nobody will notice or praise you, then you have not only failed yourself, but you have failed the collective effort,” Agu suggests. “And in any case, if you don’t do the best you can, you can never realize your potential in life.”

Of the many places Agu has found inspiration to reach his own potential, including books, teachers, colleagues and mentors – the generation of his parents stands out. “This is an incredible generation as most of them were born in what you might call ‘rural societies’ but they learned to embrace new influences and come to terms with the modern world,” Agu observes. “They set our country on the path to synthesizing

modernity with our indigenous heritage.”

When it comes to learning from previous generations, Agu advises young people to keep an open ear and strive to understand both their potential and their parameters. “You have to constantly search for meaning and know that the world isn’t all about you and your opinions,” he says. “If you can find the real meaning in your actions, the likelihood of being drawn along by bad influences will be reduced. With parameters like that, you can live a beautiful life as a young person, and in the fullness of time contribute even more to the development of our society.”

In Short: Ferdinand Agu has lived a life of service and contribution to the common good. After working as Special Assistant to the President in the Office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, he has taken on a new leadership role with the Federal University of Health Sciences. He encourages Nigerian youth to learn what they can from their elders and to discover their own unique joy in serving. “There are times when young people must break from the crowd and find themselves, and if they do it in an earnest spirit of seeking meaning, then they will become those leaders that we are looking for tomorrow.”

Date of Birth
26/07/1960

Education
B.Arch. Hons.
University of Nigeria
Enugu
Nigeria, 1983

Languages
Igbo, English, Swahili

I Like
• Reading
• Adventure
• Challenges

I Don't Like
• The “A beg” generation
• Injustice
• Prejudice

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Sandra Aguebor- Ekperuoh, MFR, NPOM

Founder Lady Mechanic Initiative



My Advice:

“Ultimately

the most

important

thing is

you – the

confidence

you have, the

interest you

have, and the

passion.”

When Sandra Aguebor decided to become a professional mechanic, nobody took her seriously, and many openly laughed at her. “It was a big taboo then for a woman to say she wanted to work in a garage – it still is,” she mentions. “People tried to intimidate me, humiliate me; nobody wanted to be close to me. But that gave me enough room to focus on my chosen vocation.”

After finishing school, she worked a few jobs, gaining experience, but before long decided to open her own shop. “My mother was so scared that an engine would fall on me! She couldn’t understand why I would want to be fixing cars, but I honestly believed it was what God wanted me to do,” Aguebor remembers. “She tried to discourage me while I was in school by giving me extra chores to do after my long shift at the garage, thinking I would be too tired to go back to work the next day.”

But Aguebor, the first female mechanic in Nigeria, stuck with it. And in the process, she has enabled more than seven hundred Nigerian girls and women to become mechanics as well through the Lady Mechanic Initiative (LMI). “The idea for this came from helping so many women with their cars broken down

on the side of the road – sometimes in dangerous places,” Aguebor explains. “I realized I could do much more for women by teaching them to become mechanics.”

LMI has flourished since its inception more than ten years ago. What started as a simple initiative to teach women how to fix their cars has turned into something much bigger than Aguebor could have imagined. “Lady Mechanic trainees are now the preferred choice among car companies and services because they come to the job with both practical and theoretical knowledge,” Aguebor notes. “As soon as you employ one of them, they start fixing cars for you immediately, increasing the bottom line.”

The success of the programme has begun to garner international attention, accompanied by support from several foundations abroad and even a letter of commendation from German Chancellor Angela Merkel. But the true measure of LMI’s success can be found in the lives of the Lady Mechanics themselves. “We equip these women to become independent, to become not just entrepreneurs, but successful leaders in their trade,” Aguebor says. “We’ve taken girls off the streets, and we’ve also enabled women to

bring a second income into their households – we are creating jobs and reducing poverty.”

For those who might think that auto mechanics is more of a man’s world due to the need for physical strength, Aguebor points out that technology makes it easy today for women to work unhindered by heavy lifting. “There are definitely tools to make the job easier, but ultimately the most important thing is you – the confidence you have, the interest you have, and the passion,” she says. “Even when you are carrying the heavy stuff, you don’t find it heavy because you have that passion, that drive.”

The drive in Aguebor’s own life is crystal clear. “A lot of people may identify success with monetary wealth or material things, how many cars or houses you have – but I see success quite differently,” she remarks. “For me success is about having inner peace, waking up every morning with a sense of joy about what you are contributing to the world and the people around you. Success is the happiness of being able to lift somebody from the ground and give them hope.”

LMI continues to grow in all sorts of ways. Aguebor plans on building a full training facility equipped with hostels for the girls who have nowhere else to stay. And she has also started to expand the project into after-school clubs for high school students. “We are giving these girls early exposure to working in a garage, changing mindsets from early on. They can go home, for example, and spread

that new outlook to their fathers by simply changing a flat tire.”

Aguebor is also expanding the programme into other countries, as there is plenty of demand for good mechanics anywhere cars are being manufactured. But no matter the desired vocation, Aguebor encourages all young girls to focus on cultivating a profession. “Don’t fall into the trap of depending solely on boyfriends to give you money – do it yourself. In households where both the husband and wife are making money, there’s harmony, happiness and respect. So choose the one thing you’d like to do for the rest of your life, concentrate, and make it happen.”

In Short: When Sandra Aguebor decided to devote her professional life to being a mechanic – the first female mechanic in Nigeria – she ignored those who ridiculed her ambition. In fact, she would go on to establish the Lady Mechanic Initiative, training more than seven hundred women to be the best mechanics in Nigeria. Ten years in, the initiative continues to grow along with the women it has empowered. “When you empower somebody, you are building the nation economically, socially, and technologically – you contribute to creating an environment where crime and social vices are reduced.”

Date of Birth
16/07/-

Education
CEM: Certificate of Entrepreneurship
Pan-African University
Lagos, Nigeria, 2012

HND: Higher National Diploma Mechanical Engineering
Auchi Polytechnic
Nigeria, 1998

Mechanical Engineering
Auchi Polytechnic
Nigeria, 1994

Languages
English, Bini, German

I Like
• Fast-moving vehicles
• Fashion
• Makeup

I Don't Like
• People that don't keep their word
• Men deceiving women
• Women who are depending on men

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General Martin Luther Agwai, CFR

My Mantra:
“There are calls to leadership all around us, whether it’s in your locality or simply your family.”

In 1969, an unexpected encounter confirmed General Martin Luther Agwai’s intuition that military life was the path for him. He was working with a land survey team in the wild countryside, when he and his team were waylaid by a troop of baboons while returning from an assignment. The frightened team made the wise choice to continue on – while the baboons followed them for three kilometres. Realizing he was lucky to have escaped without harm, Agwai’s thoughts quickly went to an idea he had considered before: if he had military training and was properly armed, he would have been in a position to defend himself if necessary. “That was what really fuelled my desire to go into the military, a direction I had already been thinking about since my boy scouting experience in secondary school,” Agwai explains. “As a boy scout, I got the taste of adventure, and I believed that joining the military would offer plenty of it.”

Throughout the years of service that followed, Agwai would certainly find the adventure he had set out for. By 1972, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant into the Nigerian Army Armoured Corps. By the end of his military career in 2009, he had risen to the rank of a four-star General. A few of the many

positions he held include the Deputy Force Commander for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, Chief of Army Staff of the Nigerian Army, Chief of Defence Staff of the Nigerian Armed Forces and Force Commander of the African Union/United Nations Hybrid Operations in Darfur.

This extraordinary military career was built one day at a time, developed through Agwai’s value system of hard work, diligence, discipline, honesty and integrity. “My military career shows how one can rise from humble beginnings to achieve legitimate dreams,” he points out. “I learned how important it is to follow those dreams without being distracted, to follow my instincts and to think big – there is a kind of magic in doing that.”

At the end of Agwai’s military career in 2009, he soon realized there was still much more to achieve. He has since been involved in various projects such as his work in Geneva with the Committee on Security Sector Reform (SSR). “Because people know I am retired they in turn think I have a lot of extra time on my hands, so every day I have someone knocking on my door asking me to participate in this or that. Never a dull moment!”

One of Agwai’s most significant

contributions in his post-military life was his role as the Chairman for the Presidential Committee on Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme, better known as SURE-P. The government-sponsored programme is mandated with overseeing Infrastructural Development – projects include revitalizing Nigeria’s railway system and modernizing its road networks. SURE-P also oversees Social Safety Nets, consisting of many welfare programmes. One of such is the Maternal Child Healthcare (MCH) programme, which recruits midwives and trains Community Health Extension Workers (CHEW), as well as village health workers who are deployed throughout communities and villages. It has also helped provide clean, potable water to over five hundred primary health centres through provision of motorized boreholes.

In addition to contributing to the development of these communities, what Agwai loved most about his position with SURE-P is that it offered him the opportunity to work alongside the younger generations. “I try to build up young people, help them to discover their talents and use those talents for general betterment of the society,” Agwai notes. “I also like to mentor some of them, especially in leadership development.”

When it comes to leadership in particular, Agwai believes that people are not always aware of the sheer number of leadership roles around them that need to be filled.

Former Chairman SURE-P

“A lot of people get the wrong idea about leadership; when they think of a leader, they think of a president, for example,” Agwai notes. “The truth is that there are calls to leadership all around us, whether it’s in your locality or simply your family.”

If local or family leaders knew just how significant their roles were, Agwai continues, it would make a huge difference. “When we look at leadership from the top, then we tend to blame the top, not knowing that the foundation is not solid. But if all the leaders from the lowest level knew what they were doing and were accountable for their actions or inactions, then you would find that society would be far better.”

In Short: *General Martin Luther Agwai’s love for adventure has turned into a distinguished military career that has allowed him to serve the country he loves on an international level. Even after retirement, the adventure continues through his involvement in numerous projects, as he calls on Nigerians to find leadership opportunities from the bottom level up. “Nigeria – the most populous country in Africa, with its vast human and mineral resources – presents her citizens with boundless possibilities and opportunities; thus instilling pride in those of us privileged to be born Nigerians.”*



Date of Birth
08/11/1948

Education
M.Sc. in National Resource Strategy
National Defense University
Washington DC
U.S., 2000

Post Graduate Diploma in Public Administration
Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), Badagry
Nigeria, 1985

Languages
Jaba, Hausa, English

I Like

- Music
- Wildlife
- Hardworking people

I Don’t Like

- Dishonesty
- Laziness
- Uncooked food

Contacts
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Kadaria Ahmed

Journalist & Consultant Reinvent Media Ltd



My Mantra:

“Put people first in everything you do, and you’ll never go wrong. This goes for professional and personal relationships.”

Kadaria Ahmed grew up in a household that encouraged education and independent thought. Her father taught her and her sisters to speak their minds in a community where girls were supposed to be seen, not heard. “My father taught us to be the best that we could be, and both of my parents were very big on education,” Ahmed notes. “Education has meant everything for me and has made me who I am – it has led me to my passions in life.”

Ahmed’s education would eventually take her to the UK, where she earned her Master’s in Television Documentary and began working with the BBC for the next eight years. “I grew up listening to the BBC World Service; it was basically what would wake me up every morning,” she reflects. “I thought it would be an interesting job, and that’s how I settled on journalism – and to be honest, I haven’t regretted it.”

After starting her career with the BBC, journalism quickly became a full-fledged passion for Ahmed. She worked as a journalist and senior producer for the newsroom as well as the programmes Focus on Africa and Network Africa. As a young professional, Ahmed admits to having been temperamental at times.

“Some of the fights I used to get into within the BBC are famous because of how upset I would become,” she laughs. “I was young, and I had a bit of a chip on my shoulder because I knew I was slightly different, and I always took criticism a little too personally instead of using it constructively.”

Indeed, it took the young Ahmed some time to get used to working in journalism, where she always seemed to be different in more ways than one. “I would go into the BBC newsroom, for example, and more often than not be the only black woman there with fifteen white men,” she explains. “Or when I came back to Nigeria in 2008, running a newsroom for NEXT and 234NEXT, I was the only female editor and many times the only Northerner in the newsroom.”

According to Ahmed, being able to take criticism, no matter the reason, is an incredibly valuable skill that involves a bit of growing up intertwined with grace. “Over time you develop a thick skin and learn to allow criticism to wash over you,” she suggests. “Eventually, if you stick to what you are doing long enough, your work begins to speak for you, and those early critics start to show respect.”

Today, Ahmed sees her

memorable time at the BBC as a blessing; it was a chance to make a living doing what she loved while working with other professionals and picking up experience that she would be able to use once she returned to Nigeria. And while journalism remains a passion, Ahmed has had to find other means of work to supplement her income back in Nigeria. “In Nigeria it is much harder for a journalist to make a living, especially when they refuse to accept bribes,” Ahmed notes. “But Nigeria is still my home. This is where I feel most comfortable; it is part of my identity.”

Ahmed has broadened her career in Nigeria to include plenty of other things – all utilizing the skills that she had picked up as a journalist and producer – such as book editing and publishing. From her own experience in the workplace, she extends a word of caution to young Nigerians just starting out in their careers: “If I were addressing a UK audience, I would say go for something you love, but the problem in Nigeria is that there are so few jobs here. Young people get out of university and they, unfortunately, have a difficult time finding work,” she says. “So my advice when it comes to a career is to grab whatever is available, but always do the things you love on the side.”

Ahmed emphasizes the need to always make room for one’s passion in life, adding that it doesn’t always have to amount to a pay check. “If you love writing

poetry but work at a bank, you can go to poetry clubs or open-mic nights,” she suggests. “This is the sort of balanced pragmatism required when it comes to working in Nigeria.”

Whatever somebody chooses to do in life, Ahmed believes that there is one value above all that everybody must remember: “Put people first in everything you do, and you’ll never go wrong. This goes for professional and personal relationships,” she advises. “Human beings innately have a certain goodness, and when we become corrupted this creates pain. But I believe people can be better – I honestly, sincerely do.”

In Short: *Kadaria Ahmed’s career as a journalist has been matched by few Nigerian women. While she considers herself fortunate to have made a living from journalism while gaining tremendous experience with the BBC on shows like Focus on Africa and Network Africa, she advises young Nigerians these days to be practical in their job searches, but to consistently cultivate their true passion on the side. “Your passion in life isn’t necessarily going to pay the bills. But even if you have to get a job just to make ends meet, you can still make time for what you love – which leads to a healthy balance.”*

Date of Birth
13/12/-

Education
M.A. in Television Documentary
Goldsmiths’ College
University of London
UK

B.A. in Mass Communications
Bayero University
Kano, Nigeria

Languages
English, Hausa

I Like

- Music
- People that make me laugh
- Reading

I Don’t Like

- Not being disciplined with food
- Marmite
- Religious extremists

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Mary Akpobome

Executive Director Heritage Banking Company Limited



My Advice:
“When you’re seeking out those mentorship opportunities, make sure the other person knows that your aspirations are honourable.”

After earning a degree in theatre arts, Mary Akpobome took an unexpected turn in her career path. She was entertaining options for her obligatory year of Youth Service and one day found herself sitting in the lobby of a bank, waiting for an interview. “I was waiting there for hours, and the whole time I was observing the people in customer service. I was fascinated by how they were attending to the customers’ needs,” Akpobome remembers. “I was impressed by how these customers would come in with their burdens, and walk away smiling.”

Akpobome decided then and there that she wanted to be in a position where she could have the same impact on people. She got the job with the bank and has been acting on her desire to help customers with their problems ever since. “From that early age I made it a point to do my best so that anybody who came to me would walk away with a good feeling,” she explains. “Even if I wasn’t able to solve their problem on the spot, they would at least know that I tried, and they would leave with a sense that they had gained something from meeting with me.”

Over the years Akpobome has continuously cultivated this service-

oriented philosophy while climbing her way to the top to become Executive Director of Heritage Banking Company Limited. “Nobody visits a bank simply because they have nothing better to do,” she suggests. “They are here because they have a need and want something done, and if you have a positive outlook when it comes to providing a service – in this case the service is banking – it can be quite fulfilling to help people solve their problems.”

Akpobome likes to inspire similar thinking among her colleagues, especially the younger ones. “People don’t quite understand what it means when you say the ‘customer is king.’ So I put it in a way that makes it easier to relate to,” she explains. “If royalty came to visit you, how would you treat them? Do you roll out the red carpet? Do you wear something nice? Do you cook the best meal? That mentality of respect and attention is extremely important to this organization.”

Inspiring younger professionals in the workplace or within mentoring groups is a particular joy for Akpobome. She works closely with one of Nigeria’s largest mentoring groups – Women in Management, Business and Public Service (WIMBIZ). “WIMBIZ is an

excellent group for mentorship because it is well structured. It includes a large membership network for women and places young ladies into valuable mentor relationships,” Akpobome notes. “Apart from that I do a little extra mentoring on the side, but not as much as I would like. I wish I could get more than twenty-four hours in a day to give more attention to a number of the young ladies around me!”

Finding a good mentor and role model, Akpobome advises, is crucial for any young person. “And when you’re seeking out those mentorship opportunities, make sure the other person knows that your aspirations are honourable,” she notes. “Finding a mentor is not about idolizing the size of a person’s house or how many cars they have – because really you don’t know the stories behind those things and how they were acquired. Good mentorship is about connecting with someone of personal substance, and it’s about the principles that lie within the other person.”

And of course Akpobome doesn’t only offer her advice to young ladies. In fact, a lot of young men ask for her insight on how she is able to manage the home and build a career at the same time. “The truth is that I have an absolutely fantastic husband. So when young men ask me about how I as a woman keep that balance, I use the opportunity to appeal to them to allow their own wives to blossom,” she shares. “For example, if I got a call now and had

to fly out of the country tonight, my husband would bring my suitcase and passport from home. I wouldn’t be here without him. It’s as simple as that. You don’t get to where I am without having that level of support.”

Because of this support from her husband, Akpobome has been able to grow as a professional over the years. In every task or space she has found herself in, she has been able to apply herself to become the very best. “Whatever job you’re doing, be the best at it,” she advises. “Don’t get caught up in who you’re working for, just be the best, and you will be rewarded. Even the stars will rise up and bless you for it.”

In Short: *Mary Akpobome took a left turn when she began to work for a bank instead of pursuing a career in theatre arts. By doing so, she seized the opportunity to make others happy through the art of customer service. Her sincere and steady efforts to please clients have fuelled her rise to the top of her sector as Executive Director of Heritage Banking Company Limited. “You can’t fake it. On the inside you have to be a person who wants to give without expecting anything in return. Sure rewards may come your way, but you can’t do it for that purpose, no matter what kind of business you’re in.”*

Date of Birth
11/07/1968

Education
MBA
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 2000

B.A. Hons.
in Theatre Arts
University of Benin
Nigeria, 1991

Languages
Ibibo, English

I Like
• My family
• Prayer
• Laughter

I Don’t Like
• Being taken for granted
• Dishonesty
• Sloppiness

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Bolanle Olubunmi Austen-Peters

Founder & Managing Director Terra Kulture Ltd



My Vision for the Future: “Whatever it is that you are doing at the moment, it’s important to know that you can always be so much better.”

Happiness has always been a top priority in Bolanle Austen-Peters’s life, but before entering university she had no idea what kind of career path would make her happy. Unsure of what to study, she chose law simply because her father was a lawyer. By the time she graduated and started practicing law, however, she realized it wasn’t something she was particularly passionate about. A change was in order.

It would not be the last time that Austen-Peters would find herself in need of a career change. And whenever the time for change did come, she was always unapologetic about these necessary shifts. “Happiness and joy must be there in everything I do,” she explains. “A lot of people believe that they have to stay in a situation, whether it’s a marriage or a job. But I’m not like that. If it’s not giving me joy – I leave.”

So instead of continuing as a lawyer, Austen-Peters decided to go for her master’s at the London School of Economics and Political Science, utilizing the educational boost to become more people-oriented in her professional focus. She then started working for the United Nations High

Commission for Human Rights in Geneva, and after a few years found herself working in Ethiopia for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “I noticed that I was a lot happier out in the field, dealing with real issues,” Austen-Peters recalls. “I realized that my path was not office work, but direct work with human beings.”

After Austen-Peters got married, she decided to switch to a “saner” job and took a position with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), opting for a post in Namibia over New York. “I knew I wanted to stay in Africa, and Namibia is such a beautiful, developed country – but I disliked the job. The position involved a lot more paperwork than I expected, too much for my taste. I knew I wanted out, so I came back to Nigeria and got a job as a consultant to UNDP. But the hours for that job were so demanding that I was sleeping every day at work!”

Once again miserable with her job situation, Austen-Peters communicated this to her husband, who asked her what she would prefer most. She knew that she liked people, loved her culture, and loved being Nigerian. “Nigeria is my

home, and it’s the place I’d rather be more than anywhere else in the world. I thought it would be nice to share that passion and have a place where Nigerians and foreigners could learn a bit about the country,” she explains. “So the challenge became how to put all that together in a business plan – how to translate my enthusiasm for Nigerian culture into an actual, sustainable business.”

What Austen-Peters ultimately came up with were the blueprints for Terra Kulture, a premier location for Nigerian cuisine, art, history, and cultural events. Ten years in, the business is a multi-million-naira operation. Of course, Austen-Peters couldn’t have done all that by herself. “There were some great people I was fortunate to come across in the process of building this business, people who were there to mentor me and offer me encouragement,” she recollects. “I had a mentor who pushed me to make this whole project sustainable. He taught me the importance of generating enough funds internally instead of depending on grants or institutions for support. My husband was also always there to back me up and push me when I needed it most.”

Austen-Peters also believes that a good support network can go a long way in overcoming fear of failure – a necessary step towards achievement. “Once you are fearful of failure, you are fearful of success, fearful of falling, fearful of what people will say – and then you are

in trouble,” she cautions. “You’re not going to make it like that; fear is the most crippling thing that can happen to a person.”

While the fear of failure can indeed be a common source of inaction for many, Austen-Peters adds that the best thing is to remember that each person has their own intrinsic worth that stems from maintaining their values. “Holding your values close is what makes a difference. It’s not always about how much money you make,” she advises. “Whatever it is that you are doing at the moment, it’s important to know that you can always be so much better. We can all add so much worth, we can rise above our station and rise above ourselves to realize our true potential.”

In Short: *It may have taken Bolanle Austen-Peters a few career changes to find her place, but she never gave up, never settled in her search for happiness. Now she’s her own boss, following her passion for people, culture, and Nigeria. Her business Terra Kulture is ten years old and going strong. “I’ve reached a place in my life where I don’t let problems bother me anymore. Once I can safely rule out that something is not going to kill me – generally a worst-case scenario – then I can handle anything with a much more positive attitude, knowing that with time everything moves.”*

Date of Birth
04/02/1969

Education
LL.M. Merit, London School of Economics & Political Science UK, 1995

LL.B. Hons., University of Lagos Nigeria, 1990

Languages
English

I Like
• Food
• Swimming
• Sleep

I Don’t Like
• Wall geckos
• Laziness
• Obsession with money

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Dr. Olu Ehiz Ayewoh

Education Consultant



Date of Birth
20/09/1955

Education
Ed.D. in Educational Administration & Supervision
Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, Georgia
U.S., 1992

M.Sc. in Education
Curriculum & Instruction
Mansfield University
Pennsylvania
U.S., 1986

Languages
Esan, English

I Like

- People
- Building human capacity
- Music

I Don't Like

- Drugs
- Smoking
- Alcohol

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My Belief:
“Set up right, education has immeasurable multiplier effects on generations unborn. It is a gift that keeps giving and a power that keeps empowering. Education is life.”

As a child, Dr. Olu Ehiz Ayewoh spent a lot of time with his grandparents, working with his grandfather on the farm and helping his grandmother sell akara in the marketplace. His biggest influence, however, was his father, who stirred Ayewoh’s passion for education, paving the way for the impact he would one day have on Nigeria’s education system.

“The influence of my father was a natural progression for me, because as a teacher and lecturer, he would bring schoolwork home and have me correct advanced essays and engage me in lesson preparation,” Ayewoh explains. “A lot of people have inspired me throughout my life, but my father was number one. He had a great mind, and I saw how people were consistently attentive to what he had to say. Every time he spoke, you could hear a pin drop. The respect people showed my father made a lasting impression on me.”

After earning his bachelor’s degree, Ayewoh worked a government job for a few years before going to the U.S. to further his education. He ended up in Mansfield, Pennsylvania, to pursue a Master’s Degree in Education, Curriculum and Instruction with the help of U.S. government funding. “Because I was the only black student in the graduate school, I

was able to obtain some financial support,” he explains.

After graduating, Dr. Ayewoh spent the next twenty years climbing his way up the school system in the U.S., earning his Ed.D in 1992 and ultimately being appointed the first African school principal in the state of Georgia. “I considered it a great recognition with awesome responsibilities. Failure was not an option,” Ayewoh said. By 2007, however, he knew it was time to return to Nigeria, a decision partially influenced by visits from two prominent Nigerians. “One was the first lady at the time, the late Stella Obasanjo. She came to my school, saw what I was doing, and wondered why I had not considered returning home to help improve the Nigerian education sector,” Ayewoh recalls. “Later, Architect Mike Onolememen, who is currently the Minister of Works, also visited me and intimated that my school restructuring efforts would be valuable in Nigeria.”

Dr. Ayewoh admits that it wasn’t until a few years after those visits that he finally decided to return, after being convinced by his daughter. “She pointed out that I had helped fix schools in the States and asked why I couldn’t do the same in Nigeria,” he says. “So I abandoned a rather cushy position in the U.S. and ended up working in Edo State,

helping out with education research and development.”

The position in Edo State didn’t last long, as the government soon changed, but Ayewoh had caught the attention of the Nigerian Governor’s Forum. “They invited me to join them as their consultant and policy adviser on education, and we spent the next two and a half years touring all thirty-six states of the country, engaging with governments and stakeholders about the status of the education system and how to improve it,” Ayewoh says. “That first-hand experience led me to develop a reform package for the entire Nigerian education system. And when the new Minister came in, he brought me on as an Education Consultant to help with his quest to improve the sector, keying into the Transformation Agenda of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.”

Ayewoh had a hand in developing the four-year strategic plan currently in place within Nigerian education, which includes initiatives such as creating more access to quality education, expanding the attendance formula to include kindergarten, placing more emphasis on reading as a subject, and more prominent use of the mother tongue in classrooms.

Having been a part of the Nigerian diaspora, Ayewoh naturally had returned to Nigeria with many new ideas. Yet he found that after so many years abroad, it was vital to rediscover his home country. “You will not find the same country that you left. If you come here and try to impose ideas that you picked up in America, you’re going to run into problems,” he advises. “You can’t simply transplant ideas from one country to another – you

must tailor the ideas to the needs, peculiarities and circumstances of today’s Nigerian.”

But Dr. Ayewoh is undaunted by nuanced problems. “When facing any challenge, it’s important to realize that however complex the problem is, the answer lies in its simplicity,” he says. “If you can break the problem down into smaller parts, address the individual issues, you will have addressed the problem in its entirety.”

For instance, when considering the situation surrounding Nigerian youth, Ayewoh believes that the root of the problem is that the youth are not engaged and are therefore underutilized. “Most of them have become redundant because they are not properly empowered in meaningful and sustainable ways,” he suggests. “Our youth make up the most energetic sector of society; we need to functionally engage this critical mass, invest more in them, challenge them and expand the scope of their aspirations.”

In Short: *After living in the U.S. for more than twenty-seven years, Dr. Olu Ehiz Ayewoh abandoned his comfortable career to focus on improving the education system in Nigeria. “If you are looking to have a lot of money, then education is not the right place to be,” he notes. “Education is truly about contributing to people’s lives. It is about creating opportunities for socio-economic liberation. It is about providing skill sets for sustainable poverty alleviation. Put simply, it is about developing human capacity with a view to improving the human condition in a predictable way.”*



Senator Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed

Ph.D. FSN

My View:
 “I always see a need to fill a gap. There’s so much out there that remains to be done, remains to be done.”

Some of the biggest achievements in Senator Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed’s life, particularly during his career in politics and his work with Baze University, have come about through dissatisfaction with the status quo and a desire for change. “If we want change, we have to bring it about ourselves,” he states. “I certainly don’t expect people from outside of Nigeria to come in and bring it for us.”

It was with this attitude that Baba-Ahmed entered into politics in 2002, joining the opposition party to counter what he saw as a government that was not accomplishing its goals. “I was fully convinced that the government at the time was not on course to develop Nigeria. I saw abuses of power and mismanagement of the economy – but I happened to be in just the right age bracket with the right amount of qualifications to get involved and make change.”

Upon entering the House of Representatives in 2003, Baba-Ahmed started to make several contributions to the system, ranging from enhancements in medical care to boosting Nigeria’s relationships with international financial organizations. But even before

politics, Baba-Ahmed was well known throughout the community due to his efforts in development and construction. “As soon as I got the chance to invest, I set my sights on real estate,” he explains. “Most of the designs were mine through the architects and engineers, and they were very well received by tenants and other investors buying properties from me.”

The sojourn into real estate proved to be a smart way for Baba-Ahmed to build on his education in economics and business. But more importantly, it set the framework for what would be his greatest accomplishment to date: Baze University. “I started to form the idea of creating a private university back in 1996, and over the years I conducted a significant amount of research,” he notes. “In 2008 I got to the point where I needed to take stock of all my assets to truly decide if I was capable of launching this project.”

Baba-Ahmed cites several other considerations that led him to move beyond the feasibility study phase when it came to establishing the university. “A combination of three factors motivated me to begin the paperwork: firstly, I knew I had it in me in terms of strength

Founder & Pro-Chancellor Baze University

of character; secondly, I noticed an opportunity within the education sector,” he says. “The third factor was that I saw all of this as a way to further the legacy of my family, particularly my late father.”

Once Baba-Ahmed began the process of filing the paperwork, applying for the university commission and for the plot of land, there was no stopping him. “I was able to accelerate a lot of different bureaucratic aspects, but that’s not to say I wasn’t financially challenged many times along the way,” he recalls. “In order to make ends meet, I sold most of my assets and mortgaged the rest, including my house. I borrowed what I needed to, and I made a success of the project.”

By 2011, Baze University began to accept its first students – seventy in all during that opening year. Today the institution has grown to thirteen hundred students and counting. “The most important thing is not simply numbers; it is about quality. We maintain international standards, and our faculty is comprised of leading academics from around the world,” Baba-Ahmed emphasizes. “Our system is free of harassment and corrupt practices. Integrity and high expectations are paramount.”

Baba-Ahmed himself continues to oversee the university in terms of financing, construction, key appointments, policy, and so forth, keeping the legacy of his father burning bright. “My father was one of those who struggled

to encourage Western education,” Baba-Ahmed mentions. “He was originally from Mauritania and he came to Nigeria in 1921, settling here for the rest of his life. He was part of the zero generation, coming here alone, making friends, raising his family, and creating an impact on the country. He was a true inspiration to me.”

This long-lasting paternal inspiration continues to fuel Baba-Ahmed’s day-to-day drive. “I always see a need to fill a gap. There’s so much out there that remains to be done, that needs to be done. That’s what drives me: if we don’t do it, nobody else will do it,” he says. “My overall aspiration is, simply put, to succeed to the fullest in everything I touch.”

In Short: Senator Yusuf Datti Baba-Ahmed’s goal in life is to achieve absolute success in every challenge he embraces. So far he is accomplishing just that. His ventures in real estate, his progress in politics, and his impact on education through the founding of Baze University all illustrate the capability of a man determined to make his country a better place. He believes young Nigerians are equally capable so long as they remain focused. “Keep it real, and take life seriously. Stay away from drugs and antisocial behaviour. My advice is to use your knowledge and strength to follow your dreams.”



Date of Birth
07/07/1969

Education
Ph.D. in Economics
University of Westminster
London
UK, 2006

MBA
University of Wales
Cardiff
UK, 1996

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like

- Precision
- Order
- Inspiration

I Don’t Like

- Dishonesty
- Disorder
- Deception

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Senator Prof. Robert Ajayi Boroffice, OON & Asiwaju of Akoko Land

My Vision for the Future: “We must make Nigeria a place where young Nigerians would want to live.”

Few have contributed as much to Nigeria’s advancement in science and technology as Senator and Professor Robert Ajayi Boroffice. He has what he calls a “youthful exuberance,” which has fuelled his love for challenges. It is a love that has defined his life and career, a career that saw the launch of Nigeria’s first satellites.

Boroffice’s positive outlook was evident even as a child growing up in Oka-Akoko, Ondo State. “My childhood was exciting! I was part of the culture, community, and the tradition of my people, and I took all of that in,” Boroffice remembers. “I had mentors and role models, and I knew I wanted to be a university lecturer, which inspired me to study hard.”

The excellence that Boroffice had achieved in the classroom, in fact, earned him a university scholarship from the German government. Boroffice’s academic diligence also earned him yet another scholarship, this one awarded by the Bulgarian government, while studying for his Ph.D. at the University of Ibadan in 1975.

When it came time to decide on the focus of his Ph.D., Boroffice opted for the most challenging subject he could find – Human Genetics. “Nobody in Nigeria

had ever done a Ph.D. in this area, making my thesis the first of its kind in this country,” he notes. “I focused my research on chromosome abnormalities in children and worked at the University College Hospital in Ibadan.”

After several years as a senior lecturer at the University of Ibadan, Boroffice went on to become a professor at Lagos State University in the mid-80s. In 1992, the federal government invited Boroffice to become Coordinating Director of the National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure (NASeni) to assist in developing the country’s science infrastructure. In his newly appointed capacity, Boroffice zeroed in on specific areas, ultimately acting as a “midwife” for three new agencies: the space agency (NASRDA), the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), and the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA).

Of course, Boroffice couldn’t work as the head of all three, so he chose to work primarily with the space agency – demonstrating yet again his inability to resist a challenge. “To me it was more challenging because I am not an engineer,” Boroffice explains. “That’s not to say I had no

Chairman Senate Committee on Science & Technology National Assembly

background in the area of space. The formation of the space agency was a project very close to my heart because of my involvement in discussions about space on an international level through the UN.”

Before Boroffice established NASRDA, he had played an active part in the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space. “Nigeria had previously been a member of the committee but participation was weak with no real commitment,” Boroffice says. “I made it a point to attend conferences and seminars where I educated myself and met big names in the field, people who were ready to assist us.”

Eventually, Boroffice convinced the government to form a space agency, but first he had to persuade the Nigerian people. “It was so difficult to convince the public that we had the capability. The idea of an African country launching satellites was preposterous to them,” Boroffice explains. “But we finally got the approval, so we put together a programme and a policy and eventually established the agency. It was a huge challenge because I am a biologist; yet staying with biotechnology would have been too easy.”

With Boroffice at the helm, NASRDA launched two satellites, and before he stepped down in 2008 he signed an agreement for two more, both of which were launched in 2011. “I am extremely happy and proud that the legacy is enduring,” he says, adding that he is still involved with the programme. “I

am too passionate about our space agency to stay away!”

The impressive scope of Boroffice’s accomplishments, however, comes from a deep passion for his country. In 2011, he took to the political stage, elected Senator for Ondo North, in Ondo State. “I have a dream for a Nigeria that is peaceful, where there is equal opportunity for everybody for self-improvement. I want to see a country that is economically viable, a country that is socially secured and politically stable and with the resources available to the people,” he says. “We don’t want to see our young Nigerians going abroad. Instead, we must make Nigeria a place where young Nigerians would want to live.”

In Short: Senator and Professor Robert Ajayi Boroffice has accomplished an incredible amount in his life. He has been a key figure in developing Nigeria’s science infrastructure, particularly as the first Director General of the National Space Research and Development Agency, launching the first ever Nigerian satellites. Having now taken his ambitions to the political sector, Boroffice is striving to realize his dream of a peaceful Nigeria where opportunity for young people abounds. “You must work hard, stay focused, set goals and, above all, you must believe in yourself.”



Date of Birth
23/04/1949

Education
Ph.D. in Genetics
University of Ibadan
Nigeria, 1975

B.Sc. Hons. Second
Class Upper Division
University of Ibadan
Nigeria, 1971

Languages
Yoruba, English

I Like
• Music
• Nollywood
• Religion

I Don’t Like
• Liars
• Arrogance
• Injustice

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Annkio Briggs

Founder & President AGAPE Birth Rights Organization Spokesperson, Ijaw Republican Assembly



My Mantra:
“You must
always
be able
to follow
through
with what
is right, no
matter how
difficult
it might
seem.”

“The moment that I knew I was going to be part of the process of definitively changing the injustice that my people suffer was the day that Ken Saro-Wiwa was killed,” Annkio Briggs recalls. It was a pivotal moment in the minds and hearts of many Nigerians, and for Briggs in particular, a breaking point in a long line of injustices witnessed as early as her childhood during the Nigerian Civil War.

“I hated to see so many people suffer on both sides during the war, especially the many children who died,” she remembers. Briggs herself was no stranger to suffering at the time, having experienced the trauma of being separated from the rest of her family and needing to have her appendix removed. “I was so lost during the war. I walked hundreds of kilometres looking for members of my family. I know what it is to be excruciatingly thirsty, to be so hungry that you feel both sides of your stomach stuck together.”

The wartime experience was a sharp contrast to Briggs’s early childhood in the Niger Delta where her father, a native Ijaw, brought her to live four years after she was born in England. “I was surrounded by water growing up. I played

a lot around the creeks and the mangroves and by the riverside,” she fondly reflects. “I played a lot with fish and crabs and periwinkles and oysters – it was a very peaceful, environmental childhood.”

After the war, she finished secondary school and went back to the UK to further her education. **By the time she returned to Nigeria, the same place that had provided so many colourful memories for her in her youth had been ravaged with pollution – another monumental injustice to Briggs’s mind.** “When I close my eyes, I can see what this place once was. I can hear the trill of laughter and playful splashing in the water,” she notes. “But when I open my eyes, it’s all gone. It is very painful and frustrating to have these childhood memories violently stolen from me. This is why I became an environmental activist.”

Environmental justice is a primary focus of Briggs’s role as a spokesperson for the Ijaw Republican Assembly as well as a pillar of her AGAPE Birth Rights Organization, which also focuses on human and development rights. These are all causes that Briggs has devoted her life to during the past few decades, sometimes even at the expense of family – though

they have come to understand her passion. “When it comes to promoting a cause I believe in and fighting issues of injustice, I don’t let go until something gives. I did what I believed I had to do for my people, for my region, and the constant travel involved definitely affected my children,” she reveals. “But now that they’re grown up and in university, I don’t hear any bitterness or anger. They are amazed at what I do, and they are proud.”

One of Briggs’s hopes is that the work she has done and the example she has set will encourage her children and other young Nigerians to take up the mantle of being better people for the future. “A lot of the youth have grown up in a Nigeria where all their experiences are of the badness of the world: poverty and neglect, people doing the wrong things, politicians that cannot be trusted,” she notes. “My message to youth anywhere is to first know right from wrong. You must know the depth and the consequences of both sides of an issue, and you must always be able to follow through with what is right, no matter how difficult it might seem.”

There comes a time, Briggs continues, when we are all confronted with a decision between right and wrong. “Even when the wrong choice may seem like a better or easier option, it is not,” she advises. “In the beginning it can be difficult to resist corruption, to turn your back on handsome bribes. It

helps to think about what kind of tomorrow you want for yourself. If you truly want a better tomorrow you have to do what’s right.”

Briggs reminds that people succumb to corruption all the time, but even with the immediate financial payoff, it is never worth it. “If you plan evil things, then that is exactly what you are going to get,” she suggests. “The people who are doing bad today know within themselves something is wrong, and they cannot sleep peacefully. They live their lives in a state of constant fear. But once you do the right thing, this fear goes away. In fact, the fear runs away when justice prevails.”

In Short: Like a lot of Nigerians, Annkio Briggs has witnessed first-hand enough injustice in her beloved country to feel that she had no other choice but to rise up and do her part to contribute to a better Nigeria. She has acted on this motivation and done much more through her work in founding and managing the AGAPE Birth Rights Organization while also positioning herself as a spokesperson for the Ijaw people. “Everybody has the capacity to be good, even the best, so long as you aspire and keep working in that direction. It is all a matter of choice, and the choices we make in life are extremely powerful.”

Date of Birth
29/07/1952

Languages
English, Kalabari, Igbo

I Like
• Bright colours
• Travel
• Time with my children

I Don't Like
• Injustice
• Lies
• People who do not play by the rules

Contacts
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Professor Odinkalu Anselm Chidi

My Vision for the Future: “We have to be able to rethink and reimagine, which isn’t easy. And therein lies the value of rigour.”

The driving force of Professor Odinkalu Anselm Chidi’s life in two words? Young people. Between his own children and the youths he has adopted, he has plenty of experience with the up-and-coming generations. “We’ve got a very young, mobile population, but a population that the country cannot provide for,” Chidi states. “They are asking questions that Nigeria has never heard before, has not anticipated, and cannot answer.”

Finding the answers to these questions, Chidi believes, is the path to progress. “Look, this country is not lacking in excellence; what is lacking is the capacity to nurture that excellence, sustain it, and encourage people to know that it pays to do the right thing,” he notes. “That sense of the right thing is really what it’s about. You can’t teach a sixty-year-old to do the right thing, but you can teach a four-year-old, a seventeen-year-old, even a twenty-year-old to do the right thing. So that sense of the future is encapsulated in our country’s youth.”

This notion of doing the right thing was planted in Chidi’s heart at a young age. Born during the second half of the Nigerian Civil War, his earliest memories are of the humanitarian queues, waiting to get

a meagre portion of cornmeal mixed with a few dried prawns and cod liver oil – if he was lucky. “It was a time of displacement, destitution, desperation, and it was perverse. There were so many children around us dropping dead like flies,” he grimly recalls. “Those kids who didn’t make it have become my mission – they deserve a voice.”

This terrible era, Chidi explains, propelled much of his generation into protest mode by the time he had finished university. They were tired of both the civilian and military governments, and by 1993 – when the military nullified the elections – they realized the situation wasn’t getting any better. “We were incredulous. Who did these people think they were?! In July of that year we took to the streets in demonstration and the country actually listened to us – but the problem was we did not have any affirmative programme; we did not have a proposal for where our country could go,” Chidi remembers. After this, he ended up living in the UK for ten years only to realize that Nigeria was the only country that gave him a sense of mission. He had to come back and serve.

Now, as a lawyer and a human rights practitioner, Chidi prefers

to look toward Nigeria’s future, not its past. As the Chairman for the National Human Rights Commission, he is pushing hard for change, both outside of the commission and within. “All of my predecessors were retired Supreme Court Justices, so coming in at the age of forty, I bring a different temperament to the commission. This commission is supposed to have authority as the conscience of Nigeria and be able to push back on some of the things that debilitate the country – hopefully making it possible for people to realize the best of what they can,” Chidi notes.

With a limited budget, Chidi admits the job is not easy. One of the primary focuses has revolved around the insurgency in the Northeast along with the conduct of uniformed services. “We try to ensure that there are levels of accountability. All sides have to respect important obligations to international law,” says Chidi, whose familiarity with international law is evident in his extensive publications on human rights and the accompanying legal implications. He has also been involved in a variety of human rights organizations throughout his career, including the Centre for the Legal Protection of Human Rights in London and as Human Rights Adviser to the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone. “During times of national difficulty, such as the current insurgency, people have a natural tendency to offer uncritical support to the armed

services, which has been a big challenge for us.”

The key to handling any challenge, Chidi advises, is to remain impartial and try to manage the situation thoughtfully. “If there is one thing we don’t do well in Nigeria, it is management, going from stage one, to stage two, to stage three. We like big things; we like to dream big and talk big,” Chidi notes. “But really, life is lived in details and in slices. We don’t do this well enough. We have to be able to rethink and reimagine, which isn’t easy. And therein lies the value of rigour. In a country like ours, where things need to be turned around properly and sometimes hastily – we cannot sacrifice rigour.”

In Short: Social justice lies at the heart of Professor Odinkalu Anselm Chidi’s mission in life. As Chairman for the National Human Rights Commission, his devotion to Nigeria is revealed not only in his human rights efforts, but also in his focus on the young people around him, providing mentorship, a means of education, and a solid work ethic. “Nothing can stop us if we are willing to put in the work that is required, but you’ve got to have faith in yourself. You have the right to make mistakes and learn from them. You have the right to hope, and you have the right to dream and to build your imagination.”

Chairman National Human Rights Commission



Date of Birth
12/06/1968

Education
Ph.D. in Law
London School of
Economics & Political
Science
UK, 2007

LL.M.
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1990

Languages
Igbo, English, French

I Like
• Character
• Motor racing
• Fitness

I Don’t Like
• Sliminess
• Lack of
character
• Dirt

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Chief Ositadinma Benjamin Chidoka, OFR

Former Honorable Minister of Aviation



My Words of Wisdom: “Being able to concentrate is so important, but a lot of people do just the opposite.”

When Chief Osita Chidoka joined the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC), he remembers Nigeria ranking around ninety-fourth in road safety. His goal: to make Nigeria’s roads among the best in the world by 2020. Not a trivial endeavour in a country notorious for poor road conditions and careless drivers.

However, the common sense initiatives that Chidoka and his team devised and implemented proved quite successful. “The first initiative was to transform our driver licencing system. Before, anyone could get a licence. There wasn’t even a database,” he recalls. “So we introduced a single-point biometric driver’s licence that was top-of-the-line. It had a huge database behind it, including facial recognition and fingerprints.”

Another aspect of this monumental task involved putting all of Nigeria’s registered vehicles in the database. “Now if somebody runs a red light and the camera captures their plates, we are able to pinpoint exactly who the car belongs to. That wasn’t available when I initially took over,” Chidoka notes. “Because of all the work we were doing, we eventually invited the World Bank to come in and do a country capacity review on road safety, hoping to see

a little progress – and they actually rated us as average.”

Getting involved with the World Bank turned out to be a smart alliance because they began to help finance road projects, Chidoka points out. “We bought ambulance systems and positioned them on the highways to make rescues possible. We brought in a call centre and a toll-free number for people to dial and report crashes on the highway,” he enumerates. “Four years into this, the World Bank rated the FRSC as the best example of a lead agency in Africa.”

After seven years with FRSC – and still at a relatively young age – Chidoka was named Honourable Minister of Aviation with the expectation that he would modernize this sector just as he had done with road safety. “Any project I tackle starts with acquiring the data, so that everything can be evidence-based and transparent,” he explains. “So we began conducting studies of airlines and found that customers were not happy with the frequent flight delays, airport security corruption, and lack of cleanliness – we noted anything that was bad.”

From there, Chidoka had his team develop a web portal that allows people to track flight departures, landings, and delays in real time.

“You can compare the records yourself and then choose the best airline, clicking straight on through to their site to book your tickets,” he says, adding that his team also launched an anticorruption campaign to stop extortion, beefed up their social media presence to respond to complaints, and drastically enhanced procedures such as reporting aircraft or acquiring landing rights.

A lot of Chidoka’s competence comes from the gradual building of experience, but he also attributes a good portion of it to the influence of his father. As early as secondary school, Chidoka had been priming himself for a bold career in public service based on his father’s guidance. “My father was constantly furnishing me with reading material, newspapers and magazines – he wanted me to have a global mind, and he was investing in me that I might one day make a difference in Nigeria,” Chidoka reflects. “He instilled within me to always think about posterity. He impressed upon me that it wasn’t money or power that defined a person, but what you do with these things that people remember.”

Looking at all that Chidoka has accomplished, it’s no wonder that people ask him how he’s done so much in such a short amount of time. His answer is simple. “Teamwork is the key. Once your team is up and running, you have less work to do,” he reveals. “When I see somebody running about their work helter-skelter, I know he

hasn’t built a framework to handle the capacity from below. Once you focus on building that, the workload reduces.”

Another important factor when it comes to accomplishing things is focus. “Being able to concentrate is so important, but a lot of people do just the opposite. Many young people are in a hurry. They get a wonderful education, then they want to do this and that – but there is value to focusing on one task,” he advises. “There is value to setting a goal and staying the course. And if you stick to it, you are likely to learn how to sustain your efforts even in the face of failure.”

In Short: Chief Osita Chidoka knew from a young age that he wanted to commit himself to a dynamic career in public service. He started out by modernizing Nigeria’s approach to traffic safety and is now doing the same thing in the aviation sector. He has shifted bureaucratic mountains with his ability to concentrate, build strong teams, and create evidence-based initiatives through methodical data gathering. The projects he’s taken on have come with a lot of work and no shortage of challenge. “When challenges do arise, just remain calm. If you panic, you tend to make mistakes. So stay calm and take your time.”

Date of Birth
18/07/1971

Education
Master’s in Transport Policy & Logistics School of Public Policy, George Mason University Fairfax, Virginia U.S., 2005

B.Sc. in Management University of Nigeria Nsukka Nigeria, 1995

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like
• Results
• Listening
• Traveling

I Don’t Like
• Lack of beauty
• Lack of consideration
• People that do not stand up for their ideas

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Mustafa Chike-Obi

My Goal:
“I feel that I need to add value to Nigeria, to ensure that things here are developing for the better.”

Mustafa Chike-Obi spent more than fifteen years living in the U.S., working as a successful investment banker for big-time firms such as Goldman Sachs, Bear Stearns, and Guggenheim Partners. In fact, things were going so well that there was a stretch where he didn't think he would ever return to Nigeria.

But in 2010, he found himself back in his home country to attend the burial of his mother. It was a sad occasion, as was the fact that Nigeria was still reeling from the financial crisis. It occurred then to Chike-Obi that instead of toiling away in the U.S., he ought to be contributing back in Nigeria, helping the country recover. After a few meetings, some of which involved the Central Bank of Nigeria Governor at the time, Chike-Obi was given the opportunity to help form and oversee a new organization that the government would later announce as the Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON).

The role was pivotal and challenging enough to satisfy Chike-Obi's need to give back. “One of the things that motivates me is guilt at having lived abroad for so many years, leading a comfortable life while the situation in my country

unfolded as it did,” Chike-Obi explains. “So I feel every day that I need to make a statement, that I need to add value to Nigeria, to ensure that things here are developing for the better.”

Chike-Obi's desire to give rather than take from Nigeria is inherent in how he manages AMCON. “The organization is quite liquid – we have funds, but have chosen, materialistically, to maintain very simple lifestyles at the top,” he says. “You will not see an AMCON executive, for example, with a ten-car convoy. This is something you notice a lot of executives doing even when they can't afford it. Although we can afford it, there is such an unnecessary amount of wastage involved.”

Chike-Obi maintains that such ostentatious and lavish lifestyles achieve little in the grand scheme of things. “You don't have to show people that you are ‘the big man’ with such pomp and circumstance, but you can be a big man in the functional sense,” he wisely suggests. “You can be extremely functional and do important things without playing it up.”

Chike-Obi has been running AMCON with a pennywise mentality since day one, when the first order of

CEO & Managing Director Asset Management Corporation of Nigeria (AMCON)

business was to help the stumbling bank industry back to its feet. And while the banks are in good shape for now, there is still plenty of work to be done. “Collecting on debts is a consistent problem, getting Nigerians to understand that when you borrow money from the bank you have to pay it back,” Chike-Obi notes. “It is important, and we will keep doing that. I am very proud of this organization because we created it from nothing – from an idea on a piece of paper – and it has gone on to do exactly what it was meant to do.”

When addressing the regular problems and challenges that come with his position, Chike-Obi favours an approach of realistic tenacity. “Sometimes you can't solve certain problems, and you have to accept that. But if you think you can solve the problem, then you give it your best effort – you put work, creativity and ingenuity into solving it,” he advises. “And if you have done your best, but you still can't solve it, it's okay. Some math problems took thousands of years to solve, but people kept trying until they got it.”

The historical reference is quite natural for Chike-Obi, since some of his biggest influences come from history. “As a historical figure, Jesus Christ has had a huge influence on my life. He had such an unbelievable amount of courage. Alexander the Great is another one; he achieved what people considered to be impossible,” Chike-Obi says.

“Or, from modern times, I am incredibly inspired by Einstein. The thought process he utilized to convert matter into energy is mind-boggling!”

When it comes to heroes in Nigeria, Chike-Obi sees an interesting – albeit dubious – pattern. “As Nigerians, we do not like heroes in this country. We try to chain them down, so there is rarely anybody who has been held up as a hero in Nigeria,” he suggests. “We have had plenty of heroes but we don't keep them up there long enough, which is a huge loss to all of us. I think, for the sake of posterity, we ought to start enshrining our heroes.”

In Short: After several years living abroad among the Nigerian diaspora, Mustafa Chike-Obi returned to the country in 2010, sensing that he could make a positive impact. He immediately began to do just that, taking on a position as CEO and Managing Director of AMCON, where to this day he continues his mission to set the national tone for fiscal responsibility, accountability and efficiency. “Avoid the ostentatious lifestyle; it is not sustainable,” he advises the youth. “Dependence on foreign goods is not sustainable either. Let's do things our own way, and let's hold our leaders accountable.”



Date of Birth
05/12/1955

Education
MBA, Stanford University, Stanford California U.S., 1984

B.Sc. in Maths
First Class Honours
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1978

Languages
English, Igbo

I Like
• Sleep
• Watching sports
• Music

I Don't Like
• Being bothered
• Unfair people
• Laziness

Contacts
amcon.com.ng



Tonye Patrick Cole

My Goal:
“I would like to be remembered as a person who made a positive impact on the people I have met.”

For Tonye Cole, ‘potential’ is not a very useful notion. Instead of speculating on potential and what might happen in the future, Cole prefers to think about the possibilities of the present – the power of now. “Every single thing that we need to create a great nation already exists. In other words, we must move from potential to actualization,” he suggests. “We need people who will stand up and make things happen. No complaining, no arguing, just getting up and doing what is required.” Looking back on Cole’s impressive career, he is clearly a credible source on what it means to make things happen. After completing his formal education in architecture at the University of Lagos and then studying Portuguese at the Universidade de Brasília, Cole joined the top-tier Brazilian architectural firm Grupo Quatro in 1990. With the firm, Cole gained priceless experience, helping to plan and develop from scratch the capital city of Palmas in the state of Tocantins, Brazil.

Thinking back on his decision to become an architect, Cole reflects that it was not so much a conscious choice, but a natural culmination

of his interests. “When it was time to go to university, architecture was the only course that combined the subjects that I liked: a mixture of science and art,” he reflects. “Once I started learning more about architecture, I found that it was something that I would have devoted myself to much earlier had I thought about it.”

In 1993, after returning to Nigeria, Cole proved that his skill set ranged far beyond architecture. He was recruited as Director of Operations for a Brazilian civil engineering company and tasked with setting up the Nigerian office. During this time, Cole worked with the team to execute multi-million-dollar contracts for the Lagos State and Anambra State Water Corporations – more valuable experience that would serve him well in his next endeavour.

Three years later, in 1996, Cole went on to co-found Sahara Energy Resource Limited, which started out as an oil and gas company trading excess fuel oil from Nigeria’s refineries. However, the company quickly grew beyond these transactions, diversifying into storage depots, vessels, and upstream assets. Today Sahara has

offices in Africa and other parts of the world, a level of success that can be attributed to the creative brilliance and insightful business acumen of Cole and his partners.

A lot of Cole’s success and creative prowess can be traced back to the autonomy developed during his childhood. Growing up in a large house full of relatives and cousins, Cole was mostly left to his own devices. “In a way, I had to fend for myself at a young age. We learned very early on to deal with our own issues. And that is what I did,” Cole remembers. “So basically, I trained myself to internalize my own problems, which doesn’t work so well in life as you have to be able to communicate to other people what you’re thinking.”

Never really having had a mentor or role model, Cole gained bits and pieces of inspiration from numerous people throughout his life. Today, on the other hand, he finds greater value in mentorship than ever before. He views mentorship as a way of truly making an impact on lives. “Sure you can give money to people, but it won’t make a true difference in who they are. They forget you in seconds and will just look for the next person to pay for their next meal,” Cole notes. “What really counts is when you find time to sit down and talk with people, help them discover who they are and set them on the path that will turn out to change their lives. That is how I would like to be remembered – as a person who made a positive

Executive Director Sahara Group

impact on the people I have met.”

In fact, the time Cole spends with the younger generation has proven to be one of his biggest motivations in life. “Each time I have a discussion with children or teenagers, I see a lot of intelligence, a lot of belief, a lot of hope for tomorrow, and I get a lot of inspiration from that,” Cole explains. “Growing up, I had to discover so many things on my own about the kind of future that was possible for me. So now it is important to me to provide the younger generation with the guidance I lacked – to help shape them, turn them into something great and make them actually see for themselves what they can achieve.”

In Short: After earning his degree in architecture, Tonye Cole worked hard to catapult his career from architect to Executive Director of Sahara Group, but his true passion lies in encouraging young Africans. “Life is like a jigsaw puzzle. You see the picture, you know what it is meant to look like, and from there you start putting the pieces together. If you are patient and diligent, you will actualize that picture. The good thing about Nigeria is that every piece of the puzzle is there – maybe in the wrong place, but there. You just have to understand what you want and put the pieces together!”



Date of Birth
11/01/1967

Education
Foundation & Advanced Course for Portuguese Language Universidade de Brasilia Brazil, 1991

B.E. & B.Arch. Merit Hons. in Architecture University of Lagos Nigeria, 1990

Languages
English, Portuguese

I Like
• Travel
• Inspiring and influencing people
• Reading

I Don't Like
• Dishonesty
• Apathy
• Extravagance

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Senator Daisy Ehanire Danjuma

My Philosophy: “We need to engage our youth now if we want them to grow into a system of sustainable development.”

It was all but inevitable that Senator Daisy Ehanire Danjuma would one day become a lawyer, a popular profession in a family that also has its share of doctors and engineers. It is a family that sets high standards for education and values, creating a background for Daisy that has left a mark not only on her choice of career but, more importantly, on her actions.

Looking back on those formative years, Daisy traces the family’s roots in education to her grandfather. “My grandfather was one of the first Christians in Edo, so my family was one of the first to enjoy Western education,” she explains. “My father would always say that the best insurance one could give to a child was education.”

After finishing her education, Daisy began work as a lawyer, fulfilling her Youth Service requirements as a public prosecutor in Lagos State, and later as a pioneer counsel for the Legal Aid Council. Thereafter she worked with the investment bank, Nigerian Acceptances Ltd (NAL), before spending ten years with Nigeria Television Authority as company secretary and legal adviser. Daisy also served as Chairman of SAPETRO from 1999 to 2003. With the accumulated years of experience, Daisy steadily

developed the professional acumen and wisdom with which to give back to the workplace in any challenge or project.

But Daisy needed a nudge to transition from law to politics. “When the late Chief Bola Ige, who was Federal Minister of Justice at the time, suggested that I should get into politics, I wasn’t too keen on the idea. But then he encouraged me, saying that we needed more educated women on the forefront of politics in Nigeria,” Daisy recalls.

When Daisy heard soon after that there would be a vacancy for a Senate seat in her constituency from Dr. Nwodo and Dr. Chris Ngige, officers of her party, she decided to seize the opportunity. “I went to Benin City, registered in the ward, attended political meetings and declared my intentions,” she explains. Daisy would go on to win a seat in the Senate from 2003 to 2007, a win that she attributes to her multilingual ability, which allowed her to truly connect with people in various communities. “My biggest personal gain as a politician was the opportunity to get to know, understand, and interact with people.

Once elected, Daisy served on numerous committees, most notably as Chairman of the ECOWAS Parliament’s Women

Former Senator & Executive Vice Chairman SAPETRO

and Children’s Rights Committee as well as the Senate Committee Chairman on Women Affairs and Youth Development and as a member of the Commonwealth Parliament.

One of Daisy’s biggest achievements as a politician was to raise awareness regarding the perils of female genital mutilation (FGM), which led to the ban of FGM in her constituency. “I held a big campaign, inviting friends who were parliamentarians from other countries, the traditional ruler of Benin, representatives of the church, doctors, nurses, women from the market, mothers and youth throughout the community,” Daisy remembers. “We showed graphic illustrations of FGM, explained its hazards and how it affected the future of these women. We even had male youth leaders, boys, come out to explain that they didn’t want to marry women who were circumcised.”

Daisy took her efforts even further beyond the intensive awareness raising campaign, reaching out to the women who perform the FGM procedure. “I knew that even with a ban, these women would continue to do it because it was their source of income,” Daisy explains. “So I decided we should find them alternative means of income. We gave them money to go start new businesses, so that they wouldn’t encourage women to do this procedure anymore.”

Though now out of the National Assembly, Daisy remains

politically active as a member of the Board of Trustees for the People’s Democratic Party. Political activism remains close to her heart as she sees so much opportunity for change in Nigeria, particularly when it comes to calling on the youth and women. “You have to involve them. The youth must work with us now to have a better future. If we don’t integrate them in this way, they’re not going to learn,” Daisy suggests. “You don’t have to be forty to be something. There are motivational speakers who are in their twenties now. We need to engage our youth now if we want them to grow into a system of sustainable development.”

In Short: Senator Daisy Ehanire Danjuma has worked very hard in her career to make things happen, to effect positive change and foster meaningful connections with people in her community. “When I went to business school in Barcelona, you had a professor who taught us that there are three phrases that make relationships in business successful: thank you, please and I’m sorry. If you go with that attitude to your workplace, you are bound to succeed. It’s not about how much money you have, but that you have integrity, good relations and teamwork. Without a good name and respect for others, nobody will appreciate you.”



Date of Birth
06/08/1952

Education
CEP, Lagos Business School, Nigeria, 2008

B.L., Nigeria Law School, Lagos Nigeria, 1977

LL.B., Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Nigeria, 1976

Languages
English, Edo, Igbo Hausa, Yoruba, Hsekiri

I Like
• Integrity
• Hospitality
• Humility

I Don’t Like
• Dishonesty
• Disrespect
• Arrogance

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Sola David-Borha

Chief Executive Stanbic IBTC Holdings Plc



My Belief:
“Don’t be in a hurry to rush toward the top; you have to be able to last the distance, work hard, and keep on learning as you go.”

For Sola David-Borha, the best starting point is a good education. “Going to university or any higher form of education will help train your mind to learn. It won’t teach you everything, but you’ll know how to develop yourself and develop your way of thinking,” she notes. “At the end of the day, what you need are skills that will carry you forward in life – success isn’t just about having a certain title or position, but skills that will help you create a living, a career, or a business.”

After getting an education, David-Borha maintains that one must follow his or her passion. “Think about what you’re good at and what you enjoy doing – hopefully something that can also be monetized,” she says. David-Borha discovered her own passion after being introduced to economics in high school. At university she earned her Economics Degree and went on to earn an MBA at the University of Manchester during which time she decided she wanted to be a banker. Immediately after finishing her postgraduate work, she returned to Nigeria in 1984 to secure an entry-level position with NAL Merchant Bank.

During the next four years, David-Borha would accumulate

precious experience through her work in various departments. The incredible diligence and tenacity that she brought to the workplace did not go unnoticed. When the Nigerian government began to issue new banking licences for the first time in decades, David-Borha was approached by one of her unit bosses, Atedo N.A. Peterside. He invited her to join him as one of the pioneering staff of Investment Banking & Trust Company – the legacy institution of Stanbic IBTC – where she’s been working since 1989.

During these past twenty-five years, David-Borha has been a vital asset to the bank. “The industry has changed significantly and our bank along with it. We have expanded into retail banking and commercial banking, and have become the country’s largest pension fund administrators and asset managers,” she notes. “What started out as a boutique investment banking institution has grown to become a universal banking business, and it’s been very interesting to watch the transformation.”

Naturally, the success that Sola David-Borha enjoys today as Chief Executive of Stanbic IBTC did not come without years of hard work. “There is no such thing as overnight success, whether you are

a banker, a movie star, an athlete, or a politician,” David-Borha believes. “Look at star athletes for example. Even when they appear young, chances are they started practicing as young as three or four years old. So by the time they are twenty-five, they’ve had at least twenty years of experience.”

According to David-Borha, the twenty-year mark of experience in a field or skill is the right amount of time to be really successful at something. “You cannot run away from the years you need to put in – and as long as you are applying the same skills it doesn’t all have to be in the same industry,” she suggests. “So don’t be in a hurry to rush toward the top; you have to be able to last the distance, work hard, and keep on learning as you go.”

David-Borha points out that successful entrepreneurs are often a perfect example of this. “You see that a lot of times they started out with a small business before expanding. Along the way they would make many mistakes – in fact, you learn more from your mistakes – before finally finding success and continued growth,” she says. “The knowledge that you gain during these years of experience and learning from your failures will act as your base. It will inform you in making important decisions, such as expanding or hiring staff.”

When it comes to hiring staff, David-Borha, with her years of experience, has developed three criteria. “The first thing is the character of the person – determining if they have a sense of integrity. You don’t want to hire somebody who has the wrong values,” she

explains. “Secondly is competence. Obviously the person must be skilled or have some value to add. And finally I look at the person’s ability to collaborate – if they can work with others and if they have the right attitude. Because you can have somebody who has character and competence, yet from a team perspective they can be a complete disaster, which could destabilize the whole team.”

David-Borha admits that the one thing that experience can’t improve is the daily struggle of balancing work and family. “You never get better at it, but you make sure you are available for the important moments, and that you take time out for holidays,” she advises, adding that having a spouse who supports you is just as vital.

In Short: *Sola David-Borha started at the bottom of Nigeria’s banking industry and climbed her way up to become the Chief Executive of Stanbic IBTC Holdings Plc. She has been a constant source of inspiration to her colleagues and to young Nigerians through her strength, integrity and determination in the face of challenge. “There is no problem or challenge that there is not a solution for, but you need to know how to go about solving the problem, which involves gaining as much information about it as possible. Most importantly, you have to want to do the right thing no matter how difficult the outcome is.”*

Date of Birth
07/12/1960

Education
MBA, Manchester Business School UK, 1984

B.Sc. Hons. in Economics
The University of Ibadan Nigeria, 1981

Languages
English, Yoruba

- I Like**
- Reading the Bible
 - Spending time with family
 - Travelling and discovering new places

- I Don’t Like**
- Dishonesty
 - No governance or organization
 - Oily food

Contacts
stanbicibtc.com



Dr. Pascal Gabriel Dozie, OON, CON

Chairman New Nigeria Foundation



My Belief:
“You must add value and contribute to your society. It all starts from the self, but it doesn’t stop there.”

As Chairman of the New Nigeria Foundation, Dr. Pascal Gabriel Dozie oversees an organization with core values similar to his own: integrity, transparency, accountability, professionalism, teamwork, and respect for diversity. **The central focus of the Foundation is to strengthen communities throughout Nigeria to achieve sustainable economic development.**

Community has a special place in Dozie’s heart, taking him back to his childhood. He remembers it as a time when society was more community-oriented. “We had several mothers and several fathers, so to speak. You never lacked company,” he remembers.

Growing up, Dozie attended Catholic school, a place he enjoyed simply for the sheer amount of learning. “Even though the teachers didn’t have very high qualifications, their impact was felt,” Dozie recalls. “For us, they were larger-than-life. If we saw one coming along the road we would hide to avoid being reprimanded for not studying or helping our parents!”

During Dozie’s time in secondary school, he had yet to fully discover his ambitions. “We didn’t have a lot of vocational guidance,” Dozie says of his upbringing in

Nigeria. “I would see other people who were successful, people from the Shell compound, for example, wearing nice clothes and driving nice cars – and I wanted to know what they had to do to reach that level.”

Although his family was poor, they cherished education and made sure that Dozie got the best, sending him off to the London School of Economics for university. He graduated with a degree in econometrics before moving on to City University in London to study business administration. “I was extremely motivated throughout all of my studies, because where I come from, education was highly valued,” Dozie explains. “There was a societal respect for anybody who exhibited a prowess for learning and discipline.”

Dozie upheld this prowess even after school. After earning his master’s, Dozie entered the consulting business where he worked for the National Economic Development Office in London. The experience was an invaluable arena where the young Dozie could sharpen his skills before returning to Nigeria in the early 70s.

In 1972, Dozie established the African Development Consulting Group, a venture that would net

him tremendous success when he began attracting substantial clients such as Nestlé and Pfizer. In the 1980s, he noticed that a lot of the traders were struggling to handle significant amounts of cash when travelling back and forth to Lagos. Often times they were ambushed and robbed of their hard-earned money. He proposed the simple idea of establishing electronic transfers in Nigeria, so the traders wouldn’t have to carry their money.

For Dozie, the simplicity of the idea is essential. “Life is so simple, but we make it complicated. The most common things in life are the most wonderful,” he suggests. “Even my motivation in life is simple: to attempt at making life better for everybody.”

Dozie’s experience with electronic cash transfers indeed made life better for many Nigerians, and it ultimately led him to found Diamond Bank Plc with a group of professionals in 1991. During that same decade, Dozie set out to find investors for MTN Nigeria. Unfortunately, most of the people Dozie approached had no faith in the venture, but he was not deterred. Today, MTN is Nigeria’s leading cellular telecommunications company – Dozie is the Chairman.

Over the years, Dozie has been involved in countless commissions, initiatives, projects and ventures, all geared toward developing Nigeria. He has consistently played a front-line role in facilitating the betterment of the country. “The greatest asset a country has is its people, and it is vital that we help them realize

their God-given potential,” he says. “And you have to do that in a way that doesn’t impose on the person, but allows them to realize their potential themselves. There are so many people who can do amazing things, but they have no access to opportunity, so we create those opportunities. We try to help them appreciate their own inner qualities.”

This process of self-realization, Dozie adds, is essential for the youth. “When we are young, it is very important that we begin to try and understand ourselves, which is the first step in learning the best way for you to add value to society,” he suggests. “You must add value and contribute to your society. It all starts from the self, but it doesn’t stop there.”

In Short: Dr. Pascal Gabriel Dozie has spent a lifetime personally investing himself in the advancement of Nigeria and the empowerment of its people. He has toiled on the front lines of every sector, from banking to telecommunications, with fruitful results. More importantly, his work across Nigeria’s various industries has made a positive difference in the lives of countless people. “You can only harness opportunity when people work together,” he advises. “No one person’s success is his or her own doing. You don’t achieve success on your own, but only with the help of others.”

Date of Birth
09/04/1939

Education
M.Sc. in Business Administration
City University
London
UK, 1968

B.Sc. in Economics
London School of Economics
UK, 1966

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like

- Music
- Quality conversation
- Simplicity and discipline

I Don’t Like

- Injustice
- Irresponsibility
- Lies

Contacts
nnfng.org



Donald Duke

Former Governor of Cross River State



My Advice:

“Regardless

of how

successful

you are, there

ought to be

some role

model you

look up to.”

“It wasn’t until my father’s demise that I came to appreciate how much he moulded me,” says Donald Duke, former Governor of Cross River State, Nigeria. “There were five of us growing up and we were constantly reminded not only to look out for each other but also to have a goal in life.”

While still shaping what would become his own, inspiring goals in life, the young Duke was adamant about going to one of the more elite institutions in Lagos as he prepared to enter secondary school. “Indeed, my father thought the choice would be academically sound, but he also felt that I did not know the country well enough. So he sent me and my brother to school in Sokoto, way up in northern Nigeria.”

Duke can still remember standing at the rail terminal on a Saturday morning, his father having further decided that it would be a much more formative and enriching experience to cross the country by train as opposed to flying. “We were boarding this train along with cattle, chicken... I was convinced then that the man did not like me!” Duke laughs, adding that by the end of the three-day journey they reached Sokoto exhausted and filthy. “In hindsight, it made me a better

person. If I hadn’t gone through that, maybe my views of Nigeria would have turned out differently. Today, however, I see myself as a balanced Nigerian.”

Duke ended up staying in the North all the way through university level. During these pivotal years he found himself submerged in a predominantly Muslim culture, as opposed to his upbringing in the Christian-oriented South. “When you live with people who were brought up with different beliefs than you, you end up finding out that human beings are the same wherever you go,” Duke explains as he reflects on the valuable lessons learned during his school years and beyond. “We don’t choose where we come from, so we find ourselves under different circumstances. Regardless, we are all the same.”

Duke’s perspective of equality among all people, no matter their religious beliefs or ethnic background, was reaffirmed when he moved to the United States to study law. Living, studying, and working abroad would prove to be another worthwhile experience, bolstering Duke for greater things to come. However, as much as he liked the U.S., he decided that it was time to return to Nigeria in the

late 1980s. “I realized that I would never achieve my full potential in the United States,” Duke notes. “The system there can absorb you. You get married, buy a house, pay your mortgage. This is how a lot of people define success there, which I found really inhibitive in a lot of ways.”

When Duke did return to Nigeria, it was a difficult era for the country, but nevertheless he saw immense opportunity everywhere just as he sees it today. “If you’re from a virgin continent like Africa, there are a whole lot of opportunities. And with Nigeria even more opportunity,” he suggests of the country’s as well as the greater continent’s potential. “There is so much that has not been done, that needs to be done. So for me, Nigeria and indeed Africa represent the future.”

Upon returning to Nigeria, Duke became relatively successful in the business sector. He actually had little inclination to involve himself with politics, but the future had other things in store. By the age of thirty he had been appointed as Commissioner of Finance in his home state, Cross River State. The new governor had been urging him for a while to sign on, and Duke finally committed at the insistence of a valued mentor. Seven years later, Duke would become one of the youngest elected governors in Nigeria’s history.

Looking back, Duke points out that had it not been for his mentor, his life would have perhaps taken a completely different path.

“Regardless of how successful you are, there ought to be some role model you look up to,” Duke says. “Yes, at first I did not want to be a commissioner, but once I got there I saw things differently. I came to appreciate the value of public service.”

Today, Duke sees a good mentor-protégé dynamic as an invaluable extension of one’s formal education. And a great education, he believes, is the best thing a person can do for oneself. “There is no alternative to a great education,” he advises. “Get as much exposure as you can, and better still get it while you are young! This exposure will become a part of you – your background, your foundation.”

In Short: *After receiving most of his education in northern Nigeria, Donald Duke moved to the U.S. for his postgraduate in law. He opted to return to Nigeria in order to fulfil his potential, where he would later become one of the youngest elected governors in the country. Now that he is out of politics, he has taken his passion back to the private sector. “Make things happen. Although money helps, it’s not always about that. It’s more about your will, determination and focus,” he says. “Believe in yourself and have a clear vision of what you want to do – no matter how outlandish it may seem.”*

Date of Birth
30/09/1961

Education
LL.M. in Business Law & Admiralty University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia U.S., 1984

B.L., Nigeria Law School Lagos Nigeria, 1983

Languages
English

I Like
• Beauty
• Foresightedness
• Music

I Don’t Like
• Vulgarity
• Disorder
• Slyness

Contacts
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Mitchell Elegbe

Founder & Group Managing Director Interswitch Limited



My Words of Wisdom: “When you fully embrace challenge you begin to see other opportunities, doors that have been open all along.”

I think that every situation, no matter how bad it is, has a solution – you just have to keep your eyes open and look for it,” says Mitchell Elegbe. “If you allow the challenge or problem to disturb you, you won’t see as clearly.” As Group Managing Director of Interswitch Limited, an integrated payment and transaction company, Elegbe encounters problems to be solved on a daily basis. Yet he doesn’t consider them problems at all but challenges. “When you fully embrace challenges you begin to see other opportunities, doors that have been open all along,” he notes. “So when you go through one door, you keep an eye on all the other doors that are open – with such a range of possibility you’ll see that every problem already has a solution!” This philosophy of solutions and open doors is part of Elegbe’s trademark optimism. And while he is not a person to dwell on the negative, he cautions young people against what he refers to as unbridled optimism. “It is indeed good to be optimistic. However, through the mentoring I have done, I’ve seen a lot of youths come up with ideas without having completely thought them through,” he says. “So you

need to check your optimism with a sense of steadfast preparation, otherwise you’ll face a lot of disappointments, and suffering one disappointment after another is the easiest way to kill your dreams.”

Growing up, Elegbe was a big dreamer himself. “I wasn’t just living day to day, but was always thinking of the future. I had a view of what I wanted to do, which of course changed over time, but I was always very particular about what my future was going to look like,” he explains. “I would occupy myself with dreams of the kind of life I was going to live, what kind of family I was going to have, even the opportunities I would like to see my children have!”

Elegbe’s propensity for dreaming was the result of an independent childhood. His father passed away before he was born, so he grew up living with his uncle, a move that would ensure a good education for the young Elegbe. “My uncle was a huge inspiration in my life, a father figure who had a big influence on me,” he notes. “I was put into situations where I had to be independent. I had responsibilities, and studying was one of those things you did in order to get on. It came

quite naturally to me.”

Elegbe continued to cultivate his capacity for dreaming while he attended university, studying to be an electrical engineer. His first position after graduating was with Computer Systems Associates, but after just six months he would quickly progress to a more substantial position with TELNET. Naturally, the ideas didn’t stop as he continued to apply them in both his professional life and with personal projects.

Though Elegbe acknowledges that many of the ideas he came up with were failures, he has also had his fair share of successes, especially the idea for Interswitch. “I was just four years out of school and was able to raise over one million dollars to start up this business. That was a huge responsibility that could have easily gone bad like a lot of other startups did at the time,” Elegbe recalls. “Looking back, it’s amazing to see how the business has grown to almost three hundred employees. We were recently nominated as one of the fastest-growing companies in Africa!”

However, when it comes to dreaming, developing, and pursuing ideas, Elegbe refers back to his wariness of naive optimism which can bring with it a rigid mentality: “Don’t be a slave to your ideas and decisions. Always keep your end goal in view, but at the same time keep an open mind, especially if logic starts pointing you in a different direction,” he advises. “If you strive to continuously improve,

you’ll find that there are always better and more efficient ways to achieve your end goal, ways to push the envelope and stay focused at the same time.”

As a positive thinker, Elegbe firmly believes that, with the right amount of focus, Nigeria has the basic ingredients to potentially become a world power. “We have got people with the right focus, the right drive and the right entrepreneurial spirit,” he suggests. “The day when we can realize a situation in which everybody in the value chain, including the government, is well-connected and moving in the same direction, will be the day when you will find that a lot will happen with ease in this country.”

In Short: Mitchell Elegbe is a modern-day innovator with an entrepreneurial edge. As Founder and Group Managing Director for Interswitch Limited, he has streamlined the financial transactions of Nigerians, but more importantly he has reached a position where he will continue to inspire with his message of humility and positivity. “I put a lot of effort into getting the results I want, which is what I call winning,” he says. “Don’t sit and criticize Nigeria when your energy could be better spent in a more productive way. Keep looking for those open doors if you really want to make a change.”

Date of Birth
14/11/1972

Education
B.Eng. Hons.
Electronic Engineering
University of Benin
Nigeria, 1996

Languages
English, French

I Like
• Dancing
• Music
• Mentoring

I Don’t Like
• Disloyalty
• Critics who only complain
• Insincerity

Contacts
interswitchng.com



Ndidi Emefiele

Professional Artist



My Mantra:
“Only pursue something that you really love – because then you are prepared to give it everything you have.”

For Ndidi Emefiele there was never any other choice but to pursue her passion for fine arts. Even when others tried to dissuade her from becoming an artist, she knew herself well enough to understand what they didn't: that she loved art to the point where she was willing to put in the work it demands. “Let's just say nobody was excited in the beginning about my choice to be an artist,” she recalls. “A lot of people had a preconceived notion of how things typically turn out for artists, and it wasn't a pretty picture.”

In spite of this bleak career outlook painted for her by so many, Ndidi was never discouraged. “I knew deep down I was going to be an artist, and I was ready for anything that came with it,” she reflects. “If it wasn't so glamorous or pleasant, I didn't care. I just knew for me there was nothing else. I couldn't imagine myself in any other line of work.”

Even throughout her primary and secondary education in Abuja, Ndidi felt the continual pull of her artistic inclinations. “Instead of taking notes in class I would end up sketching the teachers as they taught,” she laughs. “Outside of fine

arts, nothing else really appealed to me. My parents thought it was a phase that I would probably grow out of, but instead I grew deeper into it.”

Outside of school, Ndidi's upbringing in Abuja has left her with memories of the state during its initial years of existence. “Unlike the hustle and bustle you see there today, Abuja was very quiet and rather undeveloped,” she remembers. “People were moving in from different parts of the country and settling here, but the University of Abuja did not offer a fine arts programme, so I had to go to Delta State University for my bachelor's.”

Along the way, Ndidi began to find a source of much-needed encouragement in people who shared her love of the arts. “People began to tell me that if this is what I loved, I ought to stick with it no matter what,” she mentions. “And there were others who actually became mentors, giving me support when I needed it.”

Ndidi's career as an artist has also been bolstered by the milestones she has realized over the years. The first major achievement was during her last year of secondary school,

when she won first place at a national art competition. “It was the first time that the competition was televised nationally, so when my parents' friends saw it, they all started calling to offer words of congratulations and encouragement,” Ndidi recalls. “That was a turning point – I suddenly had people telling me to move forward with this.”

The second big milestone came when Al Jazeera interviewed Ndidi for a feature on her work. “It was a significant moment, one that exposed me to the outside world,” she says. “As an artist you want to be received not only at home, but abroad as well.”

Today Ndidi's career continues to gain momentum; her works of mixed-media are curated in solo and group exhibitions throughout Nigeria and elsewhere in the world. Through her hard work she strives to break the stereotype of the “female artist.” “Society has a tendency to impose its ideas on artists; it can put you in a box and categorize you,” Ndidi explains. “I try to use my works to transcend that. I've experimented with exhibitions where I remain absent from the space so that people can absorb the art without equating it to the fact that it was produced by a female.”

As her work is starting to receive more attention, Ndidi has been taking advantage of opportunities to mentor other aspiring artists. “I've had parents come up to me to tell me how confused they were by their children's tendency toward art, that

their kids wouldn't stop drawing and they didn't know what to do,” Ndidi shares. “So I asked these kids how much they love art. Because when you're passionate about something, you're going to be told to work hard at it. So you should only pursue something that you really love – because then you are prepared to give it everything you have.”

Indeed, hard work is a core principle in Ndidi's career. Not only as an effort to ward off becoming the prototypical starving artist, but as a matter of philosophy. “Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well or not at all. If you're going to do it, you've got to give it one hundred percent.”

In Short: *Ndidi Emefiele knew from the beginning that arts was the only path for her. This strong degree of self-awareness has come with a sense of purpose, enabling her to work hard and persevere even when others doubted her vision for herself. Today her unwavering pursuit of her dream has yielded an audience for her work throughout Nigeria and abroad. “I always knew that this was what I wanted to do, and while others may have perceived it as risky, I would have done it even if it wouldn't have worked out, rather than knowing that I didn't do it at all. So I was ready for whatever was going to come.”*

Date of Birth
12/06/1987

Education
Master's in Fine Art
University College
London
UK, 2014

Bachelor of Fine Arts
Delta State University
Abraka
Nigeria, 2007

Languages
English

I Like
• Happiness
• Individualism
• Success

I Don't Like
• Stereotypes
• Disappointment
• Anything monotonous

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Florence Etta-AkinAina

My Recipe for Success: “Do not be afraid of failure; embrace it as a meaningful learning opportunity.”

“My driving force is to make life better for those who have no voice, no power or position,” says Florence Etta-AkinAina, who has spent the last twenty-five years adhering to this mission of selfless dynamism. “I have a voice; I’ve been trained; I can reach people and call on resources – I’ll do whatever I can with what I have for those who can’t do so for themselves.”

As Executive Director of the TY Danjuma Foundation, Etta-AkinAina uses her resourcefulness and energy to orchestrate initiatives for bolstering access to health and education services. “When people are in a difficult situation, it’s not because they are powerless, but because they don’t have the necessary opportunities, which makes them feel powerless to act,” Etta-AkinAina suggests. “The truth is we all depend on each other.”

Throughout her career, Etta-AkinAina has committed herself to a number of causes. “I have fought for gender equality, environmental issues, access to technology – all nationally and internationally,” Etta-AkinAina notes. “I am humbled by the vastness of the world’s needs, but I think that if I do my little bit, wherever I find myself, then maybe

I can leave the world a better place.”

When Etta-AkinAina thinks about all of the world’s problems, she admits that her never-ending work is not easy. “On the one hand it is very depressing, but on the other hand I am an incurable optimist!” she explains. “In this world you have to be an optimist, otherwise you won’t want to wake up in the morning. You have to be an optimist to see the degrees of deprivation I’ve seen and still go to work.”

Etta-AkinAina has spent a lot of time working outside of Nigeria. Throughout her career she has taken on assignments with a variety of organizations abroad, both governmental and non-governmental. This includes her work from 1999 to 2006 with the Canadian International Development Research Centre for Eastern and Southern Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, and her stint as President of the African Evaluation Association.

At each of her many posts, Etta-AkinAina has endeavoured to make a difference through her trademark diligence and discipline. “Hard work doesn’t hurt anybody – it can only make you stronger. If you’re passionate about something or if you have a good idea, I suggest you pursue it,” Etta-AkinAina advises.

Executive Director TY Danjuma Foundation



“Try and try again, and if you fail – be sure to learn from the failure.”

When it comes to failure, Etta-AkinAina is a firm believer that successful people generally fail more often because they try more. “Oh boy, have I failed in so many things! But do not be afraid of failure; embrace it as a meaningful learning opportunity,” she says. “When we succeed, we don’t learn as much. It’s a lesson that many young people don’t understand, so they respond to failure with discouragement. Success makes us happy, but failure can bring you to a state of introspection.”

Like many people, Etta-AkinAina’s first taste of failure came during her school years when she was shocked at having underperformed on her “A” levels. However, her exam results were enough to motivate this small-town girl to work harder at her studies. In university, she initially cultivated an interest in science, graduating with a Bachelor’s Degree in Zoology Education.

But when it came time to earn her master’s, Etta-AkinAina pursued a different kind of degree at the encouragement of her future husband, who was a graduate assistant in the Sociology Department at the time. “At least one of my science professors was a bit shocked and disappointed that I’d converted to sociology of education, but I’d grown bored with science,” she explains. “I was intrigued when I heard my husband

talking about the philosophy of science – which was never taught to us, yet he learned it in sociology!”

Etta-AkinAina would go on to earn her Master’s in Psychology of Education, specializing in guidance and counselling. She later moved to London for her Ph.D., beginning her twenty-five year career abroad before returning to Nigeria to begin work with the TY Danjuma Foundation.

“The Foundation and what it stands for is the kind of commitment I’m cut out for,” Etta-AkinAina says of her current position. “It is as if I have been preparing all my life for this position, and I don’t think I could be doing any other job at this point that is as good as this one.”

In Short: *Florence Etta-AkinAina’s position as the Executive Director of the TY Danjuma Foundation is yet another stage of her epic career in working to do her part in the world. As a self-proclaimed incurable optimist, she has built a career and a life out of helping people, and it has taken her to various countries in Africa and other points around the globe. Now back in Nigeria, she continues to strive each day to do her part in any way she can. To young Nigerians, she advises: “When it comes to pursuing your own career, do not hesitate to follow your passion.”*

Date of Birth
11/09/1956

Education
Ph.D. in Cognitive Psychology
University of London
Institute of Education
UK, 1988

M.Ed. in Psychology of Education
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1982

Languages
Ikom, English, Yoruba
French

I Like
• Nature
• A good laugh
• Good food

I Don’t Like
• Snakes
• Mediocrity
• Dishonesty

Contacts
tydanjumafoundation.org



Member H. Feese

Senior Supervisor Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)



My Recipe for
Success:
“If you have
a vision or
dream, don’t
ever give up
– fight for it.”

On August 26, 2011, Member Feese walked into the UN Building in Abuja to conduct research for her Master’s Degree in Poverty and Development. She was still in the reception area when the bomb exploded. The blast ripped through the building, taking the lives of at least twenty people that day. Dozens more were severely injured, including Member, whose life would be forever changed.

Instead of working on the research that she hoped would one day make a difference in Nigeria, this young, enthusiastic, and cheerful student was suddenly facing life-threatening injuries. The doctors told Member’s family that she had only a slim chance of surviving. Of course, had they known she was a fighter, they would’ve given her better odds.

When Member awoke from her coma three weeks later, her family was concerned about how she would react to the news of what had happened: her left leg had been amputated and her brain had suffered traumatic injuries, which meant that she would have to learn to do most things all over again.

Nobody could fathom the resilience and optimism Member would display in her comeback.

“I survived that day; I survived a horrible accident, and if God did not want me to survive, he would’ve taken my life then,” she explains of her positive energy. “So there’s no point sitting around and wallowing in self-pity.”

One of Member’s biggest assets during her recovery has been her family and friends, who have been by her side every step of the way. “I never knew I had such a fantastic support system until after the incident. They say when something bad happens, that’s when you discover your true friends,” she mentions. “For me, I knew I had good friends, but I didn’t know what they were capable of and how far they would go to support me.”

Even Member’s university got behind her. They offered her the option of either dropping out and still taking a diploma or resuming when she was ready. Ever the warrior, Member chose the latter option, taking some time off to recover before returning to school to finish her dissertation. When she did graduate, the school applauded her inspiring tenacity, but for Member it was just the beginning of her mission.

Today, with bombings still plaguing Nigeria, Member goes out

of her way to visit survivors and their families in the hospital. “My goal is to give them hope, to show them that life still goes on in spite of their situations,” she notes. “Most of the people injured are quite poor and often have lost their sense of livelihood, but I remind them that the most important thing is life and the ability to go on, that God will provide another way for them.”

Aside from Member’s inspiring recovery, something else was born from the rubble of that bomb blast in August 2011. After witnessing firsthand the inadequacy of the Nigerian healthcare system, Member and her friends started an NGO called Team Member, a name her friends coined before she regained consciousness. “Team Member was initially formed by my friends to campaign for blood donations and provide information to other friends on my situation,” Member explains. “But then it evolved into a way to navigate the confusion, lack of information, and lapses that we continually discovered within the system.”

Team Member continues to advocate for quality healthcare services for Nigerians and intends to expand its scope to other social services. “As citizens we have a right to the provision of good quality services, yet we tend to not demand our rights; we just step back and accept lower standards,” Member observes.

Member counts herself fortunate to have had the support to be flown abroad to receive the best possible treatment for her injuries,

but she knows that many Nigerians are left without such an option when it is most needed. Through Team Member, one of the first questions she asked when meeting with relevant government agencies was if they had learned any lessons from the bomb incident. If a better system were in place, she told them, people would not have to suffer so much.

As Member continues to fight for a better Nigeria, she refuses to be discouraged. “If you have a vision or dream, don’t ever give up – fight for it. It may take a year; it may take five or six years. But my message to young people is to never let anybody demoralize you or discourage you – fight for your dream and try your best to achieve it.”

In Short: *Through what many would view as a cruel twist of fate, Member Feese has thrived since the bomb attack that nearly took her life in 2011. Today, she continues to work toward a career in tackling poverty and also to make a difference through her NGO, Team Member, advocating for better services and social amenities throughout Nigeria. “Nigerians must be aware of their rights and make demands for them – from the right to efficient emergency response services all the way to education. This also includes the right to fight for your dreams without letting anybody or anything discourage you.”*

Date of Birth
03/10/1987

Education
M.A. in Poverty & Development
University of Sussex
Brighton
UK, 2013

B.Sc. Hons.
in Economics
& International
Development
University of Bath
UK, 2009

Languages
English

I Like
• Working to alleviate poverty
• Giving a voice to the voiceless
• Giving hope

I Don’t Like
• Sense of helplessness
• Doing nothing to change situations
• Self-pity

Contacts
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Facebook: Team Member



Rear Admiral Itunu Hotonu

FSS, MSS, psc fwc FNIA

My Vision for
the Future:
“Because of
the path that
I’ve paved, it
will be easier
for the next
generation.”

When Itunu Hotonu first started studying architecture, she never imagined that she would one day become the first female Rear Admiral in the Nigerian Navy – and the first female Rear Admiral (senior grade, two-star) in all of Africa. In fact, she comes from a family historically devoted to academics. Both of her parents worked in education, and all four of her grandparents were teachers as well as members of the Anglican clergy. “I basically grew up at the university where my parents worked,” Hotonu recalls.

By the age of thirteen, the young Hotonu had set her mind on a career in architecture thanks to the encouragement of her father. “At the time I knew that my two best subjects in school were fine arts and mathematics, and I remember wondering how was I going to keep drawing and keep doing math!” she explains. “It was my father who pointed out that architecture would provide a perfect combination of the two.”

The notion was interesting enough to pique Hotonu’s interest, and so her father arranged a brief internship at a nearby architecture firm. “That was a valuable experience

through which I discovered a love of architecture, and from then on that was all I wanted to do,” she notes. “Even in my capacity as an officer with the Navy, I am still an architect.”

Hotonu believes that her natural tendency to be a “tomboy” was one of her first nudges towards the Navy. “I’ve always liked taking on challenges and experiencing new things, so after I became professionally qualified as an architect, I got the idea to do something different,” she explains. “The Navy was taking architects for the first time, so I applied and got in. My mother didn’t quite understand at first. She wanted me to follow the family tradition of getting my master’s and Ph.D. But for me, a career in the Navy was something different, something nobody I knew had done before – so I wanted to try it.”

Hotonu was trained as an officer and appointed to the logistics branch. She approached her duties with the same tenacity and attention to detail she had applied to her studies, but quickly found that Navy life would be much more demanding than she had expected. “I found that my British upper-middle-class

Managing Director & CEO Navy Building & Construction Company Limited

upbringing was quite different than the background of most people I met,” she notes. “Because I carry a different set of ideals, it created some friction. For example, if I tried to do volunteer work, people would simply think I was attempting to show them up, or when I wanted things to be almost perfect, people might think I was showing off – which wasn’t true.”

This contrast also hindered Hotonu’s efforts to succeed as a woman in a man’s world. “I was brought up in an environment where it was not unusual to see a woman succeed, but in this other world, people often see a woman striving for success and think ‘how dare she?’ – there is a sense of incredulity,” Hotonu observes. “This is not something you can fight because there are too many people. What I tried to do was work harder than everybody else – but that often fuelled the problem.”

Compared to the uphill battle at work, balancing her career with family obligations was the easy part. “Early on, my husband and I decided that the children would always attend school in Lagos where the family is based. They would spend the holidays with me wherever I was posted, and I would come see them every two weeks, so it was kind of like boarding school,” Hotonu explains. “It turned out that I didn’t get posted outside of Lagos until my youngest was eight, so it worked out rather well.”

What made this balance between work and family so

attainable, Hotonu continues, was the unwavering support of her husband, also an architect. “If it wasn’t for him I wouldn’t have made it this far. He said to me, look, if you are not happy you can’t make me happy,” she notes. “He is an unusual person, because most people are not like that, but then again we are both artists, and artists are very unusual people. We’ve been married thirty-two years now.”

While she acknowledges that it has been a difficult career, Hotonu adds that it has been well worth it. “Because of the path that I’ve paved, it will be easier for the next generation. Sure, I’ve made a lot of sacrifices, but I would do it again in a heartbeat for that reason alone.”

In Short: *Rear Admiral Itunu Hotonu is the first woman in both Nigeria and all of Africa to reach such a distinguished rank in the Navy. Her career was a complete divergence from her family’s expectations, but she persevered nonetheless, satiating her desire for challenge. Her path to success has not been easy, but she has remained determined to work hard and demonstrate her worth. “You’ve got to believe in yourself. Don’t ever let anybody put you down. Even when it gets really rough – don’t give up, because somewhere along the line you’re going to get where you need to be.”*



Date of Birth
18/01/1959

Education
MSS: Master’s in Strategic Studies
University of Ibadan
Nigeria, 2005

B.Arch.
University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 1982

Languages
English, Yoruba, Igbo
French

I Like
• Chocolates
• Being an architect
• Travel

I Don’t Like
• Dishonesty
• Untidiness
• Lazy people

Contacts
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Innocent Ujah Idibia

“2face Idibia”

My Words of Wisdom: “Whatever you want to do in this world, you have to start gradually and build yourself as you go.”

Innocent Ujah Idibia – famously known by his stage name 2face Idibia – has had a musical mind from an extremely young age. “Music came to me quite naturally; I’ve always had a flair for it,” he notes. “I never dreamed of doing anything other than music – so it isn’t surprising for people who know me to see what I’ve been doing with my life.”

Born in Jos, Innocent was the second child in a family of four boys. He remembers that his parents weren’t the wealthiest people in town, but they always managed to keep food on the table and the children in school. “My parents have always been the driving force in my life. I was brought up in a house where we were taught to live and let live,” Innocent explains of his childhood environment. “As children we were always taught to do our own thing, and that has been a key mentality throughout my whole life. I have always wanted to just do my own thing and do it to the best of my ability.”

Putting so much focus on his music has brought Innocent steadily increasing success in Nigeria, Africa, and even in Europe. “The moment that changed everything for me was when I became the first

African residing in Africa to win at the MTV Europe Music Awards – that was a game changer,” he remarks. “Music has since opened up a lot of doors for me. My success in the industry has allowed me to invest in a couple of businesses, and I’ve gotten to meet people that I wouldn’t have normally been able to meet and go places that I had only dreamt of going to before.”

Innocent has actually earned numerous awards, many of them on an international scale, as well as nationally and within Africa. Yet even in the face of such distinguished accolades, he has never been one to rest on his laurels. “Each award gives me a huge sense of responsibility. I think to myself: ‘Well, okay, I’m carrying my people out there with me and this is great,’” he reveals. “But at the same time it really is more responsibility, and it pushes me to work harder to get to the next level in order to not disappoint the people who’ve started to believe in me.”

Representing Nigeria as an artist, Innocent can’t help but feel honoured at the opportunity to be an ambassador for his country in the entertainment world. “Nigeria is everything for me. These are my roots, my DNA,” he states. “And

Singer & Songwriter

Record Producer



with Nigeria specifically, I really want to be a force that unites. I want to be an agent of change that ignites and reorients the Nigerian mindset.”

As much as Innocent loves Nigeria, and perhaps because of this love, he is not afraid to point out the country’s faults. “So many years of corruption, people not following due process to make things happen, everybody wanting to take shortcuts,” he enumerates. “Sadly, most young people today are not really trying to build themselves; they just want to be something instantly.”

Innocent cautions the Nigerian youth to eliminate any shortcut mentalities that they might be holding. “Whatever you want to do in this world, you have to start gradually and build yourself as you go, and that comes with having the right role models in your life as well,” he advises. “A lot of young people here are starting to look up to criminals as role models, which has had a devastating effect on the psyche of many Nigerians. Remember that your dignity will always be more important than monetary wealth.”

The role models in Innocent’s own life have come from within the music industry as well as from outside. “Like a lot of performers, I was influenced by figures like Michael Jackson or Bob Marley,” he mentions. “There have also been a couple of people who weren’t really involved in music but have inspired me to keep moving and keep doing my thing. They encouraged me to

stay dedicated and inspired me to grow.”

Finding the right role models and reaching the proper levels of focus and determination, Innocent continues, are all instrumental in achieving your dreams. “Life is what you choose to make of it. But at the same time, you always have to be considerate and respectful toward other people,” he notes. “You can either be a criminal or a legitimate person. You can be heartless or you can be conscientious. This fork in the road can be a dicey area for some people, which is why you’ve got to clear your mind and really focus on life as a human being. Learn the culture of building yourself up from an early age.”

In Short: *Innocent Ujah Idibia devoted himself to music at quite a young age. Harnessing the live and let live mentality instilled in him by his parents, he challenged himself to pursue a music career to the best of his abilities. In doing so, he has made a name for himself in Nigeria, Africa and other parts of the world, and he is proud to represent Nigeria on a global level. His biggest hope, however, is to have a life-changing impact on the young people in his country. “I want to be the future; I want to be that spark, that revolution within the mindsets of young Nigerians.”*

Date of Birth
18/09/1975

Awards
2011, Best Int’l Artiste-Africa, BET Award

2010, Best Male Artiste & Artiste of the year
MTV MAMA

2008, World Music Award

2007, Best African Act
MOBO

2005, Best African Act
MTV Europe Awards

Languages
Idoma, English

I Like
• Music
• Peaceful people
• Beautiful people inside and out

I Don’t Like
• Fake people
• Violence
• Over-controlling and over-possessive people

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Ambassador Godknows Boladei Igali, Ph.D.

Permanent Secretary Federal Ministry of Power



My View:
“No matter
how hard
you work,
one thing
everybody
needs in life
is people.
Don’t ever
take other
people for
granted.”

After the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that the Bakassi Peninsula belonged to Cameroon, thousands of Nigerians who had been displaced into Cameroon for several years as a result of civil crisis suddenly found themselves facing a new period of uncertainty. The man who would successfully negotiate and initiate their return to Nigeria was Ambassador Godknows Boladei Igali. Over the course of 2003 to 2005, Igali worked with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, supervising the return of over 200,000 people. It was a mission he took personally, going above and beyond the call of duty.

“The ICJ judgment brought about a lot of clashes, so we had to manage the repatriation carefully,” says Igali, who worked in Cameroon as the Nigerian Consul General. “I rode along with every single convoy to ensure the refugees’ safe return to Nigeria. We only had to cross eight kilometres of territory, but each trip took an entire day because of the mountainous terrain.”

For Igali, the experience was difficult, yet one of the highlights of his years of civil service. “Initially, I wanted to be a diplomat because it would allow me to travel, to see

different countries and represent my own,” he explains. “I quickly learned that each country is unique in its own set of difficulties and challenges. For example, I started my diplomatic career in Czechoslovakia. I was very young at the time and it was a communist government – a completely different environment for me. After that it was Pakistan, and then Venezuela, which allowed me to travel to even more countries. I was in charge of Colombia and Ecuador, and I would also go to Argentina and Brazil.”

Thereafter Igali found himself in Cameroon as Nigeria’s Consul General based in Buea for six tough years. After his Cameroon assignment, Igali served as Special Assistant in the Nigerian Presidential Villa as well as Secretary to the Presidential Committee on Money Laundering and Financial Crimes. He was later appointed Secretary to the Bayelsa State Government and, simultaneously, Honorary Adviser and Peace Envoy to the President on the Niger Delta. It was an intense period, a time during which Igali helped negotiate the release of kidnapped victims and advocated for amnesty as a means of ending conflict.

In 2008, Igali returned to

Foreign Service as Nigeria’s ambassador to the Scandinavian countries: Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway. Compared to what he’d been doing in Bayelsa, Igali saw his time in Scandinavia as a chance to relax, joking that he could finally catch up on sleep. But really, he was as productive as ever, embarking on a number of initiatives and economic missions to encourage trade between Scandinavia and Nigeria.

The excellence Igali had achieved in public service landed him his appointment as Permanent Secretary for the Federal Ministry of Water, and he has since transitioned to Permanent Secretary with the Federal Ministry of Power. In both positions he has continued his career-long pattern of getting things done and building the greater good of Nigeria. “I’ve contributed so much to building the public sector, and it may not have resulted in personal monetary wealth, but I have a lot of impact on critical sectors,” he reveals. “I get a lot of chances to bring about results for Nigeria and its people.”

Reflecting on the number of assignments he has held throughout his career, Igali believes that there are several key factors that have made him such a sought-after civil servant. “The first thing is deep devotion to God and then secondary, hard work. I have learned that when you work hard at whatever you do, it might not be appreciated immediately, but after some time people begin to notice,” he advises. “When I was a young diplomat, my

reputation started to take hold and every boss wanted me. I had taught myself everything I needed, and all the hard work I had put in further strengthened my foundation.”

This work ethic and constant hunger to learn is what has allowed Igali to continue to expand in his life and career. “I am also an academic. I have a Ph.D., and I write books – you can be a civil servant and also be accomplished in other ways. People will notice these unique qualities in you, and they will want to work with you,” he notes, before adding a final piece of advice: “But no matter how hard you work, one thing everybody needs in life is people. Don’t ever take other people for granted.”

In Short: *Ambassador Godknows Boladei Igali became a diplomat for the sake of adventure, but it quickly turned into something bigger. Over the years Nigeria has continuously called upon him for civil service abroad and at home, and he has always been there to make a difference. Whether it was through helping bring Nigerian refugees back into the country, working for peace in the Niger Delta, or enhancing Nigeria’s water and power resources, he has readily put the country before himself. “When you work hard, and when you work selflessly, people respect you and see that you have qualities to contribute.”*

Date of Birth
04/04/1960

Education
Ph.D. in Politics & International Studies
University of Venezuela
Caracas
Venezuela, 1998

M.A. in International Law & Diplomacy
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1989

Languages
English, Ijaw, Spanish
French, German

I Like
• Philanthropy
• Hard work
• People

I Don’t Like
• Unkind people
• Ungenerous people
• Unforgiving people

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Ene Ijegwa-Adaji

MD & CEO - IA&G Partners Ltd Design and Construction



My Recipe for Success: “You just have to go out there and do it - take control of your life and circumstances.”

Ene Ijegwa-Adaji was a good student, but while studying architecture at university, her studies were compromised by an unexpected situation, one that was dramatic enough to hurt her academic performance. As a result, she graduated third-class, a ranking that would make it next to impossible for the average Nigerian to find a job. Yet Ene has never been one to settle for average, even in the face of obstacles outside of her control.

Upon graduating, Ene consciously decided not to let the academic setback affect her career. If anything, she was more motivated by what had happened. “I decided to create my own job opportunities and lifestyle,” she explains. “I ended up landing my first job because my employers could see that I wasn’t third-class material.”

Naturally, Ene counted herself blessed to have found work, but after a couple of years, her integrity demanded she quit this first job: “I had done a set of drawings for construction and had made a mistake, which nobody corrected. Knowing I had made a mistake, I took it to my boss, but he shrugged it off,” recalls Ene. Sensing a disingenuous work

environment, she knew she needed to leave.

Her work ethic, however, had caught the attention of a previous client. He had remembered a job where she worked all night to prepare a brief for him, so after he found out Ene had quit the firm, he approached her directly for a new assignment. “When I work on something, it’s always 120 percent. Anything I do, I give it my best shot,” she notes.

Ene leveraged the momentum from that first independent contract to create more opportunities for herself. She continued to land one contract after another, all of them high-paying. Today, she is Managing Director and CEO of her own design and construction firm, IA&G Partners Ltd – a position that allows her to ensure that her standards for excellence are constantly upheld.

“The construction aspect of the company came about because I wanted to protect the integrity of my designs,” Ene explains. “Previously, I had a problem with designing something only to find that whoever was building it didn’t really care about the original plans. The end result would be something different than what I had envisioned.”

With a core staff of twelve, not

including contract workers, Ene maintains that she has no problems working in a field that is very much a man’s world. “When people believe in you, they will follow you. It doesn’t matter that I am female, because the men that I employ can see my vision, and what I want to do is so clear that there are not a lot of challenges.”

With this strong sense of vision bringing successful results, Ene still stands by the values with which she started. “My father taught me that honesty always pays off. He taught me to never compromise, to always keep true to what I am about,” she notes. “Through his own hardworking example he showed me that integrity is sustainable.”

Ene keeps these engrained lessons from childhood close to her heart, but at the same time finds new inspiration from the people she works with today. “The work I do exposes me to very successful men, and from them I’ve learned that everything is possible,” she shares. “Most of them are self-made, and I’ve learned from them that this all starts in the mind – if you believe, you can achieve. Yet they’ve also taught me the importance of being humble about what you have, which in turn helps you grow more.”

Humility, Ene continues, can go a long way in helping a young person psychologically relax when they are first starting out. “The world can be difficult and unfair,

but you just have to go out there and do it – take control of your life and circumstances,” she advises. “With the right amount of ambition and focus, you can move in any direction. And once you take the first step it will be fine, but you’ve got to give yourself a chance. Don’t be too hard on yourself; making mistakes is how you learn.”

One thing that helps Ene as she continues to persevere in her own work is something she believes everyone should have: a personal word. Her word? Freedom. “Whatever I am doing, I have to be free. I will not compromise my standards, because that would lead to cover-ups. I always do my best because I like to be free and happy.”

In Short: *Integrity, humility, freedom, hard work – values on which Ene Ijegwa-Adaji has built the foundation of her success as an architect and entrepreneur. Looking back on the experiences and attitudes that have served her so well, she encourages young Nigerians to go for what they want in life as well. “It is possible to succeed on your own terms, just as I have done. Regardless of being a woman or a man, it is possible so long as you believe in yourself, have ambition and are focused.”*

Date of Birth
02/09/1981

Education
B.Sc. in Architecture
Obafemi Awolowo
University
Ile-Ife
Nigeria, 2006

Languages
English, Idoma

I Like
• Reading
• Bob Marley
• Saturday mornings

I Don’t Like
• Traffic
• Delayed flights
• Stereotyping

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Monsignor Professor Obiora Ike

My Words of Wisdom:
“You have to be able to laugh at yourself, to be able to pick yourself up whenever you fall.”

Monsignor Professor Obiora Ike does not consider himself an achiever but merely a servant. Yet he has done so much for the good of Nigeria and its people, spreading a message of love, faith, hope and optimism. “My personal goal is to leave an impact everywhere I go and on everyone whom I meet,” he says. “Whether it’s cleaning up a dirty place, educating the illiterate, or turning cries into laughter. These are the things that make life real for people, showing them what it means to be a human being.”

In confronting the many struggles that life presents, Monsignor maintains that a sense of optimism is a key factor. “Everything is a gift. Every gift is a call. Every call is an opportunity. Every opportunity is a challenge. Every challenge is a cross and the cross is victory. We are constantly being given the chance to refine ourselves through pain or through vocation,” he notes. “This is what we mean by the optimism of life, and it is the only way to reach victory.” He adds that even when we fail to achieve the aims we are reaching for, there is still reason to

be happy at having been given the chance to try.

Monsignor also finds value in not taking oneself too seriously. “This is where the laughter of life comes from, and you have to be able to laugh at yourself, to be able to pick yourself up whenever you fall,” he suggests. “It is certainly a better alternative to crying and feeling bad all the time.”

In fact, Monsignor considers his ability to make people laugh in even the most difficult of circumstances as one of his greatest joys. A perfect example of this lies in his work as a prison chaplain with more than seventeen hundred inmates, many of whom have been locked up and forgotten about for a very long time. “Whenever I walk into the prisons, I make sure I don’t leave without having heard that laughter,” he explains. “The language is hope.”

This desire to spread the message of hope is part of what led Monsignor to organize the Africa Association for Prison Chaplains, bringing chaplains from over 150 prisons in Nigeria under one roof. “It was a way to encourage the chaplains, because they were living

Director Catholic Institute for Development Justice & Peace

in a world of no hope,” Monsignor says. “The law here is difficult, the justice system isn’t moving, and there’s a lot of corruption – all of which make it very easy for the chaplains to give up. It is vitally important to sustain those who give hope.”

Aside from optimism, hope, faith and laughter there is the key matter of education. “Education gives us access to knowledge, which gives us access to mastering the environment, and because you know you can lead others to know,” Monsignor notes. “These are the things that make us human, a person with dignity and value.” Monsignor goes on to emphasize that he would sell the tires off his car if it meant paying somebody’s way through school. “The other day I realized that every year I pay the school fees for more than fifteen hundred people, and I have no idea where the money comes from. This has been going on for the last twenty-five years, whether it is elementary school or secondary school or university, the line is long,” Monsignor says, mentioning the scholarship programme he started to ensure as many educations as possible.

It is education that can lead people to asking themselves what Monsignor considers the one true question, a question that summarizes his entire life and work: “How can we use the power of the mind and spirit? How can we use it in a positive way to confront society, and to confront evil, to change the

world for better – because the world is beautiful.”

In Monsignor’s office, there is a sign that reads “I want results. No ifs, no buts – Perform.” It is a deterrent to ward off his few dislikes in life: mediocrity, excuses and time wasting. When he gives advice to young people, he likes to keep it simple, quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Sow a thought and reap an act; sow an act and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny.”

The primary thing is the thought, Monsignor says, good thoughts will lead you toward good action – and excellence is the key thing for which we must strive in everything we do. “Don’t ever say that excellence is not possible. It is always possible with faith and hard work. And love, by the way, makes it easier.”

In Short: Monsignor Professor Obiora Ike, in all his humility, is a paragon of excellence and servitude. His message of love, optimism and faith accentuate all that is beautiful in Nigeria as well as the rest of the world. His laughter and his words illuminate the pathways to embracing life’s challenges. “My driving force has always been to reach out and transform, help, assist, change and motivate,” he says. “This is possible because the faith of God is not founded on sentiment but on solid rock.”



Date of Birth
07/04/1956

Education
Doctor of Theology
Social Ethics (DD)
Rheinische Friedrich
Wilhelms Universitaet
Bonn
Germany, 1986

Doctor of Philosophy
Dissertation
Jurisprudence
Rheinische Friedrich
Wilhelms Universitaet
Bonn
Germany, 1985

Languages
Igbo, Hausa, English
French, German
Hebrew, Latin, Greek

I Like
• Hard work
• Education
• People

I Don’t Like
• Laziness
• Mediocrity
• Dishonesty

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Constance C. Ikokwu

Journalist & Media Strategist



My Belief:
“When you have a desire to give back, you discover opportunities in the midst of challenges.”

“When I started out as a cub journalist, it never occurred to me that I would come this far. It was and still is a male-dominated profession in Nigeria, especially as you rise up the ranks,” says Constance Ikokwu, former Deputy Editor at THISDAY “newspapers”, a national daily in Nigeria. Looking at what she has accomplished, it is no coincidence that Constance is a woman of many firsts. She was the first female Foreign Editor at THISDAY, the first female Deputy Editor for the daily paper, the first female Washington Bureau Chief and first female Online Editor. She was also at various times the Enugu Bureau Chief and a member of the Editorial Board.

The early days of her career were not easy, Constance notes, adding that she was the only woman writing about politics for the Sunday paper at the time. “It was tough: sleepless nights, time-consuming research, lots of reading, extensive field work and focused writing in order to meet deadlines,” she recalls. “The odd hours made it even more intense – we had to spend the night in the office on Fridays in order to get parts of the paper ready by Saturday morning. We would leave as late as six o’clock in the morning and return to the office by ten. I

worked very hard. Nothing was handed to me.”

After her first couple of years at the newspaper, Constance took a break to pursue a Master’s Degree in International Law & International Relations in the UK. Although she didn’t have enough funds for school, she remained undaunted by the challenge. “It was one of the most difficult experiences of my life. I arrived in England during winter. It was freezing and studies were extremely demanding – countless assignments and a long list of recommended reading, but I was determined not to fail,” she reflects. “In addition, I had to work to make extra income – imagine toiling on winter nights when all your body wants is a warm blanket and a cup of hot chocolate.”

After finishing her master’s, Constance returned to THISDAY in Lagos, where she was promoted to the post of Foreign Editor. She was soon thereafter moved to Washington DC as Bureau Chief. “At first I wasn’t keen on going,” she remembers. “But then my father told me that when you get an opportunity, you take it. If I got there and didn’t like it, I could always come back.”

Constance ended up staying for over two years, covering stories on the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund (IMF), the White House, the UN, the State Department and several think tanks. “The DC assignment was a wonderful opportunity in my career to grow at the international level and to broaden my horizons,” she notes.

Not long after covering the 2008 presidential elections in the U.S., Constance got the call from Nigeria. She’d been promoted to Deputy Editor and it was time to come back. Just a few months later, she was moved again to Abuja where she held the double title of Deputy Editor and Abuja Bureau Chief.

While being moved around so much was not easy for Constance, she embraced the challenge as a way to give back to Nigeria. “Giving back is how society regenerates itself. If you only take and don’t give, society gradually dies,” she believes. “When you have a desire to give back, you discover opportunities in the midst of challenges.”

This desire to give back has kept Constance hard at work throughout her career, leading up to her previous position as Media Adviser to Minister of Finance Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala. The position brought with it a responsibility that speaks to Constance’s core values. “I’ve always thought that I must have an impact on my generation, reminding myself that whatever I do, I have to do it well,” she explains. “What keeps me focused is my belief that I must live to positively affect other people.”

Constance advises the younger

generation to also contemplate their guiding purpose in life. “The first thing any young person needs to do is to sit down and ask themselves: ‘Why am I here on earth? What am I doing here?’ If you don’t know who you are or where you should be heading, it’s entirely possible that you will lose a lot of years moving in the wrong direction.”

She goes on to explain the benefits of having some direction in life: “It’s easier for you to move fast when you are doing the right thing. You find yourself in the right place, asking the right questions,” she suggests. “And because you’re doing what you are meant to, you are more likely to find happiness.” Constance extends this message to budding journalists in particular, emphasizing her own fulfilment in the field and her belief in the critical role of journalists in society.

In Short: *Constance Ikokwu’s groundbreaking career in journalism has emboldened countless female Nigerians to follow in her wake. But she is also an inspiration to all young Nigerians pursuing their dream careers: “Nigeria is not an easy country, because we are still struggling as a nation to build, but don’t give up. Keep working at it. I have travelled to countries that are highly developed, yet if you look at their history, you will find that their forefathers also fought hard to develop their land. Together, we need to build this country for now and the future. No one else will do it for us.”*

Date of Birth
22/05/1976

Education
LL.M. International Law & International Relations
Lancaster University
UK, 2004

B.Sc. in Political Science
Lagos State University
Nigeria, 1998

Languages
Igbo, English, French

I Like
• Travelling
• Reading
• Aerobics

I Don’t Like
• Dishonesty
• Unreliability
• Pessimism

Contacts
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Chiogor Constance
Ikokwu



Florence Ilaka

Deputy General Manager Deepwater Geosciences & Assets Management Development & Planning Total E&P Nigeria Limited



My View:

“A lot of times what we think are challenges are not always as serious as we initially believe.”

In her professional and personal life, Florence Ilaka has achieved a balance that many would envy. By the time she graduated with a Bachelor’s Degree in Chemical Engineering, she was already married and a mother of two. “My friends were amazed at how I could juggle so many responsibilities,” she recalls. “But because I had such a supportive husband, my grades actually improved!”

During Ilaka’s National Youth Service, she interned with Total in Port Harcourt where she was subsequently hired on as the first female in the production engineering department. “It was exciting because I was hired to fill a new position, which allowed me to both learn about other parts of the company and develop new procedures myself,” she says of the experience. “At the same time, there were a lot of other females blazing the trail in other departments, so it was easy to look up to them for inspiration.”

Ilaka has always been one to draw inspiration from those around her, whether it’s a female colleague or anyone else achieving success in her field. But with women in particular, she sees great things happening in many different sectors. “A lot of people still see so many fields as male-dominated environments, but

things are changing now because we’re seeing more women succeed in various occupations,” Ilaka observes. “So with engineering for example, we are no longer trapped in the mentality that it is a field for men. It is actually open to everyone – but you have to prove yourself.”

After working in Nigeria for a couple of years, Ilaka moved to France for her master’s degree, which her company helped fund. “I had to do a crash course in the French language because the master’s programme was in French,” she recalls. The French lessons came to good use when she returned to Paris a few years later, family in tow, having climbed her way up to the position of Petroleum Architect in the company’s head office.

With her husband spending approximately half of his time with the family in Paris because of his job, Ilaka continued to skilfully balance motherhood and work. In fact, her career was flourishing more than ever. “From the head office in Paris, I had the opportunity to work on projects in the Netherlands and Russia,” she notes. “It was a very exciting opportunity and I had a wonderful team.”

Even while Ilaka was accomplishing so much in Europe, there was never any doubt in her

mind that she would ultimately return to Nigeria. “I always keep my mind open for possible opportunities abroad, but I also know that I am still going to be relevant whenever I come back to Nigeria because of the field that I’m in,” she says. “This is important to me because Nigeria is a country where the opportunity is enormous and we are still developing in so many ways. If too many of us leave, there will be a gap between the generation that has the experience and the new generation.”

Today, now a mother of four and working as Deputy General Manager for Deepwater Geosciences & Assets Management, Ilaka continues to thrive. “I come to work every morning and am really happy that I’m part of a team that contributes to the success and continuity of the company,” she mentions. “I want to one day leave the company in great shape for the future generation.”

For Ilaka, this kind of success includes a mentality of teamwork and a willingness to involve others when it comes to problem solving. “When problems come along, you have to be able to look at them in a different light. My golden rule is to first stand back and reassess the situation, because a lot of times what we think are challenges are not always as serious as we initially believe,” she explains. “I then talk to people who have been in the same situation, and I find out how they worked on the problem.

Before long, you come to a logical solution.”

This is the same mode of operation that enables the tremendous balance that Ilaka has achieved between work and family. “It’s a lot of planning and prioritizing. You have to establish the basis for the family from the beginning and know the direction you want your family to go. And when you are spending time with your children, you have to be there one hundred percent, knowing that whatever needs to be done at the office will be carried out in its own time. As I tell my children, life requires striving and effort – on all fronts.”

In Short: *Florence Ilaka’s life is an inspiring model for Nigerian women and men who desire to grow a career and simultaneously raise a family. Through methodical planning, prioritizing, and choosing work that she is passionate about, Ilaka has achieved her dreams both in her personal life and career. “I always tell my own children to go for their dreams, and that they will succeed if they work at it. If you work hard you will see the results and you will be happier in the end, especially if you keep an open mind toward other people, and toward opportunities and possibilities.”*

Date of Birth
13/09/1972

Education
M.Sc. in Petroleum Engineering & Project Development
Institut Francais du Petrole
Paris
France, 2004

B.Sc. in Chemical Engineering
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1997

Languages
Igbo, English, French

I Like
• My family
• My job
• My country

I Don’t Like
• Laziness
• Insincerity
• Corruption

Contacts
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Comrade Jude Gabriel Imagwe, MON

My Philosophy: “To serve humanity is the essence of our existence.”

Comrade Jude Gabriel Imagwe once imagined that meeting with the president of a country would be an intimidating experience – one that would make him melt before he could even speak. But his regular meetings with former President Goodluck Jonathan as Senior Special Assistant to the President on Youth and Student Matters proved to be quite the contrary.

“Former President Jonathan taught me the meaning of humility and patience, of being prayerful and full of expectations, and above all what it means to be sincere and transparent,” Comrade says. “I am continually impressed by how calm and humble he is, and I feel there are traits I must emulate in this man. I must also learn to tolerate, to be patient, and most importantly, to always lead a humble life and never forget where I came from.”

Indeed, Comrade came from a very humble background. As his father was a military man, Comrade spent much of his early childhood moving around the country with his family of seven, living in one military installation after another. Life amongst the other military families submerged Comrade in a milieu of mixed backgrounds and religious beliefs. “It was a community where

nobody distinguished between Igbo or Hausa or Yoruba backgrounds,” Comrade explains. “We loved each other and we shared together. There were no fences that separated us.”

However, perpetually moving from one state to another became too impractical for the family, so they settled in Rivers State while his father continued to relocate, visiting home periodically. “This shifted the burden of raising all of us children to my mother. It was really intense for her with five of us to look after,” Comrade recalls. “This was coupled with the fact that in order to make ends meet financially she had to start trading, which kept her constantly moving between the North and the South selling and buying goods.”

When it came time to enter university, Comrade was obligated to push his dreams of becoming a Catholic priest aside due to his father’s insistence that he study medicine. “That was a very difficult impasse in my life and not an easy moment between me and my father,” recalls Comrade, who would go on to study microbiology. “Part of my father’s insistence had to do with the fact that we could barely afford school. My mother, though, was absolutely determined to see me get a higher education, and even sold off all of her jewellery to help pay for school.”

Former SSA to the President on Youth & Student Matters

Once he got to university, Comrade discovered a new side of himself, a passion for independence and involvement that drove him to join the Student Union Government of the university. It was a role he took seriously, becoming the youngest ever electoral chairman for the organization. “Generally I developed a good followership, simultaneously surprising everybody with my ability to change the status quo despite my small stature at the time,” Comrade notes, adding that he was elected National President of the National Association of Science Students of Nigeria before graduating.

Comrade’s participation in student leadership continued while he was studying for his Master’s in Environmental and Public Health. In fact, he was the first postgraduate student to become President of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). “I had seen a lot of room for improvement in the organization, mistakes that I hadn’t had the opportunity to correct as an undergraduate student,” Comrade explains.

One of the more remarkable achievements Comrade attained during his tenure as President of NANS involved a proposal to the government to establish more federal universities. The proposal was enough to put him on the ruling administration’s radar, and it led to the establishment of nine new federal universities. “In the country today, virtually all of the states have a federal university,” Comrade notes.

By August of 2011, Comrade had completed his term as President of NANS, and by October he was made a member of the Order of the Niger.

In July 2012, Comrade was appointed as Senior Special Assistant to the President on Youth and Student Matters. He also served as Deputy Secretary General of the Pan African Youth Union (PYU) until December 2014.

While Comrade continues to play an active role in the community, challenging the status quo, he himself is constantly inspired by the people around him who have the power to implement change for the better. It is something that he too hopes to be remembered for one day. “It’s like when President Mandela died. Nobody discussed the amount he had in his bank account or that he died in one of the best hospitals,” Comrade says. “People were discussing the legacy he left behind, the number of lives he had affected while he was living. To serve humanity is the essence of our existence.”

In Short: Comrade Jude Gabriel Imagwe continues to advocate for the youth of his nation by continually working to bring about his vision of a better Nigeria. “Great and brave men defend our country, while others try to destroy it,” he says. “It is our responsibility to always strive to leave the country better than how we found it.”



Date of Birth
12/07/1978

Education
Master’s in Environmental & Public Health
University of Benin
Nigeria, 2011

B.Sc. Hons. in Microbiology
University of Benin
Nigeria, 2001

Languages
Edo, Hausa, English

I Like

- Driving
- Cooking
- Playing soccer

I Don’t Like

- Failure
- Women crying
- Disunity

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Colins Edozie Imoh

My Philosophy: “If the younger generations imbibe the culture of living peacefully, then there is a chance that they can be transformed from within.”

Colins Imoh’s life revolves around a simple passion: transforming young people into advocates for peace. “Helping young people was always something I wanted to do, but I never dreamed I’d take it this far,” he says of his life’s work. “I am humbled when I look back now on how much has been accomplished.”

Imoh’s journey to inspire started while he was involved with Young Christian Students (YCS). He was invited to participate with forty other young people from various parts of Africa at the 2001 ‘African Youths for a Culture of Peace’ conference in Cape Town, organized by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders (UNOY). At the end of the conference, Imoh was among those selected to begin work the following year in the UNOY office in the Netherlands, specifically as African Desk Coordinator. His job was to organize the African Network of Young Peacebuilders (ANYP). “My duty was to translate an idea from paper to reality,” Imoh notes. “It was a tremendous challenge on many levels. I was living outside the country for the first time, yet travelling almost every other week to different countries, helping to set up projects and bring in benefactors.”

By the time Imoh left Holland, ANYP was working with approximately two hundred youth-

based organizations throughout Africa. Aside from the experience he gained, Imoh also saw how the African Network helped others who were involved. “People who were working in the network at the time have moved on to make an impact in so many different places throughout the world,” Imoh notes. “This tells me that the African Network actually empowers a lot of young people to be agents of improvement not only in Africa but globally.”

After Holland, Imoh returned to Cape Town to work on a Master’s Degree in Environmental Management in 2004. Living there, Imoh found that post-apartheid South Africa was still very much trying to figure itself out, ten years after gaining independence. “I noticed there was no sense of African spirit on campus; there seemed to be a reluctance for people to identify themselves as Africans, so I formed the Awake the African Spirit Society, which was sponsored by the African Studies Department, the International Academic Programme Office (IAPO) and the Deputy Vice Chancellor’s office,” Imoh recalls. “We got people thinking about Africa, what the African identity was, and really how to aid the transformation of the South African society. It was a serious movement toward promoting discourse about what the African spirit means.”

P4P Project Manager Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND)

This notion of seeing a need in society and working to fill it would continue to pattern itself throughout Imoh’s life. During the 2011 elections in Nigeria, for instance, Imoh helped organize a democracy fair, which included the participation of different political parties, the police, and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). “We got everybody together so that the public could come and ask any questions – to the political parties, to the police about security, or to the INEC on how to vote,” Imoh explains. “The whole idea was to mobilize people for change.”

Another project close to Imoh’s heart has been organizing the annual Peace Camp, designed to educate secondary school students on how to live peacefully with others and even start peace projects in their own schools. “If the younger generations imbibe the culture of living peacefully, then there is a chance that they can be transformed from within. When you get old you are fixed with your ideas, but the young people – they can make a difference.”

Currently, Imoh works as Partners for Peace (P4P) Project Manager under the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND). “It’s a big project in which we involve many different stakeholders – the government, businesses, and people at the grassroots level – to consider and act on bringing about peaceful livelihoods,” Imoh explains. “War and violence start in the heart and mind – it isn’t something that you just wake up in the morning and decide to act on – it involves a lot

of thought and planning. If we can shift our mentality, then there is a chance that peace can take root in the community. In an atmosphere of violence, economic development cannot thrive, and you will have increased poverty. To have development, we need to imbibe the culture of peace.”

Indeed, some of history’s biggest peacemakers serve as an inspiration to Imoh. “When I think about Gandhi, I admire his persistence – his nonviolent, peaceful stands that created entire social movements,” Imoh says. “And when I look at Mandela, I see patience and tolerance. If we can start thinking about these things, we can transform an entire country.”

In Short: *Colins Imoh, in his quest to inspire peace among young people throughout Nigeria and Africa, has continuously displayed innovative, selfless thinking with remarkable results. His devotion to solidarity is evident in his work and the numerous projects designed to engage young people throughout the continent. His advice to young Nigerians is simple: “Believe in yourself and your abilities. But also roll up your sleeves and work hard if you want to be successful. And don’t be intimidated by any problems you encounter; remember that they happen for a reason – nothing is by chance, especially if you remember that there is always something to be learned.”*



Date of Birth
22/10/1970

Education
M.A. in Conflict Transformation & Organizational Leadership, Eastern Mennonite University Center for Justice & Peacebuilding Harrisonburg Virginia U.S., 2012

M.Phil. in Environmental Management University of Cape Town South Africa, 2005

Languages
Igbo, English, Edo

I Like
• Classic music
• Nature
• Travelling

I Don’t Like
• Extravagance
• Seeing people suffer
• Poverty

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Stanley Jegede

Co-Founder & CEO
Phase3 Telecom Limited



My Dream:
“I see the challenges that Nigeria faces as diamonds and gold, so to speak – rare opportunities that this country offers.”

When Stanley Jegede left Nigeria, he was eager to gain new experiences, hungry for a strong education, and in search of opportunities. Yet throughout his time studying in the UK and during the valuable years of work experience in the U.S., Jegede always knew that he would return to Nigeria when he was ready, planning to one day give back to his home in a big way. For more than ten years now he’s been doing just that through his company Phase3 Telecom.

Through Phase3, Jegede has equipped Nigeria and a few other countries in West Africa with the telecommunications infrastructure they’d never had. Today, Nigeria’s biggest networks and internet service providers depend on this infrastructure to keep people connected. But for Jegede, the vision for this crucial component of Nigeria’s ascension into the modern era started while he was still living and working in the States.

“I was in America, working in the Washington DC area, reading about the Nigerian government deregulating the telecom industry to various telecom operators who were promising to come in and build their networks,” Jegede explains. “I knew that these operators did not have the

physical infrastructure with which to connect cities, towns and villages throughout Nigeria. Were they going to wait for the government to build this infrastructure?”

Having identified this rather large gap, Jegede knew it was time to head home. “I was going to find a way to be that national backbone, that physical infrastructure that everybody would ride on,” he explains. “I knew that I had the experience to make it happen in Nigeria. I saw the opportunity and I came forward. I’ve since connected countless people through telecommunications. But it all started with a dream, a vision, and just as important: focus.”

Jegede has been inspired to give back to Nigeria because the country itself continues to inspire him in so many ways. “I see the challenges that Nigeria faces as diamonds and gold, so to speak – rare opportunities that this country offers,” he says. “Indeed, there is room for us to do better than we are currently doing, but there’s no such thing as a perfect society. Even roses, as they say, have thorns.”

The determination behind Jegede’s efforts also comes from the same inspiration he feels when he looks at figures like Richard Branson, Bill Gates or Aliko

Dangote. “These are just a few of the names I came across when I was living abroad, and I wanted to be like them. I wanted to give back,” he remarks. “I’m inspired by success, education, and intellect. But I’m also inspired by humility and culture. The more cultured you are, the more doors will open for you – while always being humble and respectful.”

Jegede’s appreciation for humility has also shaped his definition of success: “Success for me is not necessarily monetary, but achievement within a chosen career,” he explains. “You could be making toothpicks, but if you are able to successfully make toothpicks, market them, and distribute them – then to me you’re successful. This mentality is part of what has fuelled me in my own path.”

The other considerable factor in Jegede’s drive is his passion; the fiery determination that launched him into the beginning of his career is very much alive today. “I still haven’t gotten to where I want to be; I still have a long way to go, and that mentality is what drives me today,” he reveals. “I am also still propelled by the fear of failure, the fear of not achieving my goals. This fear is what keeps me focused. That focus is important because Phase3 was a long-term vision and a long-term goal from the beginning.”

Although Jegede’s focus on his career keeps him quite busy, he is also a father of three and is careful to maintain the balance between work and family. “Family

is my backbone in life. Time with my wife and children is what keeps me going more than anything, and what inspires me most to want to do more,” he shares. “That balance though, is crucial. Otherwise, someday when my life’s work is finished – then what?”

Whether engaging with work or family, Jegede maintains that patience is the number one virtue. “You need to be patient in life if you want to keep away anxiety. Anxiety is eighty percent of every human being’s struggles,” he advises. “If you’re able to be patient, you can believe that all is going to be well, that all is going to fall in line – and only then can you keep moving forward.”

In Short: *Through his company Phase3 Telecom, Stanley Jegede has built a regional infrastructural backbone in telecommunications, connecting the whole of Nigeria and a few other countries in West Africa. This infrastructure has played a pivotal role in Nigeria’s modernization. “I want to connect people; I want to put smiles on the faces of Nigerians and West Africans. I want us to be comparable to other developed countries, those that have been able to achieve an infrastructure that works for them, that has improved their GDP – this is the vision that makes me want to work so hard.”*

Date of Birth
25/12/-

Education
M.Sc. in Business
Information Technology
Middlesex University
UK, 1996

B.Sc. Hons. in
Business Information
Systems
University of North
London
UK, 1995

Languages
Hausa, Yoruba, English

I Like
• Fruit n’ Fibre
cereals
• Nature
• Positive people

I Don’t Like
• Negativity
• Arrogance
• Rudeness

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Asma'u Joda

Executive Chair Centre for Women & Adolescent Empowerment



My Mantra:

“People assume change won’t happen, that change is not possible, so they just don’t bother to push for it.”

With much of Adamawa State and the surrounding areas gripped by shock and fear in the midst of a violent insurgency, Asma'u Joda continues to face the situation with clear-minded courage. She has made it her mission to support those who have suffered most during a time of strife and uncertainty.

Asma'u has received funds both locally and internationally through her Yola-based NGO, the Centre for Women & Adolescent Empowerment, to work with civil society members from Borno, Yobe and Adamawa – states most affected by the insurgency. Part of this funding will go to a course called ‘Trainers of Trainers in Trauma Counselling’ to reach people who have been affected by the violence and need counselling to try to emotionally rebalance. *This mission that Asma'u and her team have taken upon themselves leads them literally into the heart of darkness, but they are not alone.*

The community has accepted these internally displaced persons into their homes, and the Centre for Women & Adolescent Empowerment, the Adamawa Peacemakers Initiative, the Red Cross, and other organizations and individuals have made sure that they receive the necessary support.

“After we train the trainers, we hope to reach out to people traumatized by abductions, sexual abuse, or the death of a loved one,” she says. “The first part of our objective is to counsel them. We then make sure they’re able to seek necessary medical and emotional support.”

Asma'u maintains that getting to people as soon as possible is a vital first step in the healing process. “If you don’t counsel the community, they are likely to believe that these tragic circumstances are what God meant for them, which prolongs their devastation,” Asma'u explains. “Once you get stuck in that kind of mentality, you can be paralyzed unless something is done.”

While Asma'u didn't always plan on working to counter the fallout of an insurgency, she is no stranger to social justice. *“This has always been a passion of mine. Even as a child, I joined the Brownies and the Red Cross,” she recalls.* “I think a lot of it was initially inspired by my grandparents’ attitude toward social justice, especially for women.”

Over the years, Asma'u has worked with a number of other socially-oriented initiatives throughout Nigeria and abroad, with her prominent focus revolving around the treatment of women and children in Muslim communities. “One of my special areas is trying

to stop child marriages; we work with respected members of the community to get them to intercede for the girls,” Asma'u explains. “It’s a problem that everybody knows exists, but intervention needs to come from the right person.”

Although Asma'u admits that stopping a child marriage can be a difficult process, she senses an altered perception throughout the Muslim community in which she lives. “Parents now think twice before they marry their girls off, and at the same time they know the justice system is prepared to support these girls when necessary, but that’s because we’ve worked for it,” Asma'u emphasizes. *“People assume change won’t happen, that change is not possible, so they just don’t bother to push for it.”*

Considering her lifelong passion for human rights, Asma'u can’t help but laugh when she thinks about how she came from a background in business administration. “I am indeed business-minded, but I never think in terms of my own profit,” Asma'u reveals. “For example, I am currently part of an organization that concentrates on estate management, and I have convinced them to construct housing for young people who have no jobs.”

This housing project falls into the continuing pattern of what Asma'u has brought to a number of business collaborations throughout the years. *“I get into a business and understand it from a sensible, business-oriented point of view – but without realizing it I divert*

everybody involved toward social business,” she reflects. “That is me, and I have always been like that.”

When it comes to searching out one’s own career path, Asma'u maintains that happiness is a critical component. She cautions young Nigerians against expectations of a cushy government job. “There are too many people in government at the moment and a lack of inspiration,” she suggests. “It doesn’t make sense just to earn money for the sake of earning money. Earn money while doing something that makes you happy and motivates you. Then you can really move forward. You’ll be able to enjoy yourself, enjoy your work, and when that happens the sky is the limit.”

In Short: *Through The Centre for Women & Adolescent Empowerment, Asma'u Joda continues to do what makes her most happy: filling the lives of others with happiness. She has displayed a lifelong thirst for social justice and service to the community, particularly when it comes to empowering women, adolescents and children. “I want to see more women out there because they make better leaders. If women are kept out of the business of government, Nigeria isn’t going anywhere. The few women who are in government are unfortunately acting like men, but we need women who can do business as women.”*

Date of Birth
11/05/1956

Education
B.Sc. in Business Administration
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria
Nigeria, 1978

Languages
Fulfulde, Hausa
English, French

I Like

- To be happy
- To have different food every day
- The smile of a woman whose life I have touched

I Don't Like

- The patriarchal system
- Being forced to do what I don't want to do
- Men that think that they can make decisions for me

Contacts
asmaujoda@gmail.com



Nwankwo Kanu

Footballer & Founder of Kanu Heart Foundation



My Mantra:

“We can’t always have the easy road, so you have to fight, and you have to work really hard.”

Nwankwo Kanu was leaving his hotel room when a rather desperate looking mother approached him with her daughter. Before the mother could even tell Kanu her story, the little girl fainted – she had a serious heart defect and needed a surgery that the family could not afford. “I had just launched the Kanu Heart Foundation in Nigeria, aimed toward helping less privileged children with heart problems,” Kanu explains, “and I promised this mother that her daughter would be the first patient the Foundation would help.”

This was back in 2000, and Kanu was in Nigeria, playing in the African Cup of Nations – just three years after his own heart surgery, which came about not long after he, as captain, had led the Nigerian team to Olympic gold in 1996. “After I was diagnosed with that heart problem, the whole country was praying for me,” Kanu remembers of that scary time when not just his career, but his life was in jeopardy. “God came through; he turned everything around for me, and I even saw my football career improve after that!”

Naturally, Kanu felt very fortunate after overcoming such a

difficult moment in his life. He was thankful that he’d had the money to pay for top healthcare abroad and knew that there were many Nigerians who weren’t so lucky. “A lot of Nigerians have heart problems but don’t even realize it because they can’t afford to go to the hospital for checkups,” Kanu notes. “This is a big deal because a lot of times the symptoms can go unnoticed or be confused with malaria or typhoid.”

The contrast that Kanu saw between the medical care he received in Europe and the reality he knew in Nigeria was a wake-up call. “I saw this as a way for me to give back. I had a famous name, and I had a little money – so that’s what led to me starting the Foundation in 2000,” he explains. “But I believe that no matter who you are, giving back is an absolute must. One way or another you have to give back to society.”

Since its inception, the Kanu Heart Foundation, in addition to raising awareness about heart health, has helped almost two hundred Nigerians receive necessary treatment and surgeries. But for Kanu this is still just a first step. “The biggest challenge with the Foundation is the expense that goes

into sending these patients abroad for their treatment. The money we use to send one person out of the country for surgery could pay for five operations in Nigeria – and there’s a long waiting list,” Kanu reveals. “So I have this dream to one day build a hospital for them right here in Nigeria, a facility where children can come for free to receive the proper treatment that they deserve. Nigeria is the Giant of Africa, so I believe we can have hospitals like this here.”

Kanu also finds other ways to give back, particularly through his football academy where he works with young athletes. “Now that I’ve retired, I enjoy the time I have to pass my experience on to the young ones,” he mentions. “It’s a chance for me to act as a mentor and to show them, for instance, that Kanu didn’t wake up one morning and become Kanu. I went through a lot of rough times, periods where I couldn’t even afford shoes or jerseys – but those things didn’t weigh me down.”

Whatever the target in life may be, you have to stay focused on the goal, remain disciplined and believe in your dream, Kanu continues. “And you always have to be positive. Because in life, sometimes things don’t go the way you want, but it doesn’t mean that you cannot achieve,” he advises. “Those are testing periods, difficult times that allow you to know your character, to know if you are strong. We can’t always have the easy road, so you have to fight, and you have to work really hard. Many people

work hard, but those who work even harder become the best.”

But then, as Kanu advises the young athletes in his football academy, work ethic is only half of the equation. “Discipline and hard work are important, but you also have to develop integrity,” Kanu explains. “The friends that you choose go a long way in influencing the kind of life you live. The best thing is to use your parents as filters; let them guide you, because if you have bad friends, you end up bad. If you have good friends, you end up good – it’s as simple as that. Surround yourself with people who will push you to be honest and to live a righteous life.”

In Short: *Nwankwo Kanu worked hard to establish himself as one of Nigeria’s most recognized footballers, but not long after leading the Nigeria team to the gold medal in the 1996 Olympics, he was diagnosed with a heart condition and needed surgery. Thankfully, Kanu made a complete recovery and was back on the field in a matter of months. The life-changing experience led him to start the Kanu Heart Foundation, raising awareness about heart health and helping young Nigerians receive treatment for heart conditions. “Each and every person must find a way to give back in some way, shape, or form to this country.”*

Date of Birth
01/08/1976

Awards
Olympic Gold Medal
Atlanta, U.S., 1996
World Cup Gold Medal
Japan, 1993

International Clubs
Portsmouth F.C.
England, 2007 - 2011

Nigerian Super Eagles
(Captain) 1994 - 2010

West Bromwich Albion
England, 2005 - 2006

Arsenal F.C.
England, 1999 - 2004

Inter Milan
Italy, 1996 - 1998

Ajax F.C.
Holland, 1994 - 1995

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like
• Family
• Football
• Doing good

I Don’t Like
• Religious war
• Dishonesty
• Laziness

Contacts
kanuheartfoundationng.com



Comrade Preye J. Ketebu-Brown

Vice President World Assembly of Youth (WAY)



My
Philosophy:
“The
essence of
leadership is
to guide your
followers to
give their
best to
society.”

When Comrade Preye J. Ketebu-Brown was elected Chairman of the Bayelsa State Youth Council, he suspected that it would be a life-altering experience, but he had no idea just how all-consuming the position would be. “What should have been part-time work – something on the side – swallowed me up. I met so many young people in Bayelsa State with a lot of challenges but who lacked an enabling environment,” Comrade explains. “They had so much energy and talent, and they needed opportunities to funnel all of these qualities into their dreams and visions.”

Comrade would spend the next eight years giving back to Bayelsa State in this capacity, coordinating youth activities, engaging young people, and interfacing between the youth and government. “I completely surrendered myself to it. Any time a young person brought a problem to me, I rose to their need – whatever the challenge posed,” he explains. “Mostly at my personal expense, I travelled sometimes even out of state and would deploy my all to overcome that challenge!”

During this period, he also got involved in a lot of activities that broadened his horizons. “In addition to youth affairs, I was passionate

about the national peace and unity of Nigeria,” he notes. “In reaction to a religious crisis in the North in 2003, I initiated a ‘National Youth Peace Tour’ under the auspices of ‘All Nigeria Youth Volunteers for Peace and Good Governance’ (Youth4Peace) that took a message of peace and unity to then Sultan of Sokoto Muhammadu Maccido, CFR.”

At the peak of the Niger Delta militancy era in 2007, Comrade facilitated a meeting between Niger Delta militant youths and then Minister for Youth Development Dr. Mrs. Salome Jankada. The Niger Delta youths negotiated amnesty and empowerment from the government as a condition for laying down their arms, a move that has helped actualize enduring peace in the Niger Delta.

When Comrade was elected Vice President of the World Assembly of Youth (WAY), he considered it an indicator of the way forward. Aside from providing a rare opportunity to represent Nigeria in a global youth activism arena, “the position was a giant step to fulfilling my dream of serving young people at the global level,” Comrade explains. “Now, after attending international conferences, I understand how development issues are perceived

and assessed, and how strategies can be put into place to achieve global goals locally.”

Today, Comrade continues to commit himself to strengthening the capacity of youth councils and organizations, as well as Nigerian and African youth leaders. “The essence of leadership is to guide your followers to give their best to society, and that goes back to my tenure as Chairman of National Youth Council of Nigeria in Bayelsa State,” he says. “My vision for the next decade is to work to ensure that the next generation of Nigerian leaders will be equipped to lead with integrity, selflessness and sincerity of purpose.”

Comrade strives to realize this goal at WAY, working with his fellow executives to organize leadership training programmes and conferences where young people can sharpen leadership skills, such as report writing, public speaking, and representing their peers effectively – without fear or favours. “Our exchange and volunteer programmes globally connect youths so they can network and cross-pollinate ideas and opportunities,” Comrade notes.

Referring to the Nigerian youth specifically, Comrade sees a lot of room for improvement by implementing capacity building and mentorship programmes at an institutional level. “We need to furnish the youth with more opportunities to identify and harness their potential,” he suggests. “Young people today are spearheading globalization through

social media, but Nigerian youths still lack the tools to convert this information and develop skills for a productive career path in life.”

Comrade hopes to see youth development institutions provide facilities for career counselling programmes where mentorship can occur at peer group levels, providing the Nigerian youth with guidance for education and a fulfilling life. “Education is key. Youths have to look inwards and identify what they are best at – the earlier the better. This is where the relevance of youth organizations comes in, providing members with exposure to a world of experiences in youth work and new opportunities to identify their talents.”

In Short: *Comrade Preye J. Ketebu-Brown has devoted his life to serving the youth. Since being elected Vice President of WAY, he continues to advocate for young people locally as well as globally. “Nigeria needs to upgrade strategies to teach youth leadership, offer career guidance and foster mentoring. We need to encourage local and international youth exchange programmes to better appreciate cultural diversity, deepen peace education and further open our local community to the world. Society owes our youth this much to ensure that they make the best of this short life!”*

Date of Birth
17/04/1977

Education
B.Sc. First Degree
Accounting
Rivers State University
of Science &
Technology
Port Harcourt
Nigeria, 2002

Languages
English

I Like
• The countryside
• Travelling
• Reading dailies
about international
affairs

I Don't Like
• Arrogance
• Indiscipline
• Filth

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Brown JP



Dauda Lawal

Executive Director First Bank of Nigeria Ltd Public Sector North

L

My Vision for
the Future:
“It’s only a
matter of
time until
Nigeria
develops
into one of
the greatest
economies in
the world.”

Dauda Lawal is a man of goals, commitment, and action. When he sets his eyes on a target, inspiration takes hold, followed by strategy, effort, and hard work. “You must always have an objective – goals that you’ve established for yourself,” he advises. “Once you have those goals, the next step is for you to sit down and carefully design how you can go about achieving them. *And if you want to maintain that all-important drive to achieve, you must willfully uphold a level of dedication, commitment, and determination to get there. But most of all, you have to believe in yourself!*”

Having built a career filled with the valuable experience of setting and achieving one goal after another, Lawal knows a little something about “getting there.” In just over ten years he has diligently carved out a position for himself among the Nigerian banking industry’s elite as the Executive Director in charge of the Public Sector North at the First Bank of Nigeria Ltd. Throughout his successful career in the banking sector, he has maintained a philosophy of unshakable dedication and integrity. “This job inspires within me a great

deal of commitment, commitment to making an actual difference in the Nigerian society by doing what is right in this industry and gaining people’s trust,” Lawal notes. *“Considering the challenges that come with a job like this, a high degree of commitment is the only way to uphold the standards I’ve set for myself and the people who work with me.”*

As an established leader in the banking industry, Lawal has a keen sense not only of the day-to-day challenges in banking, but also the vital role that the financial sector plays in any country’s economy. “Nigerian banking has undergone a lot of reforms recently and the industry is much stronger as a result. People now have a lot more confidence in the banks here, which has resulted in a huge boost for the economy,” Lawal explains. “No country in the world can develop without a financial sector – it is the backbone of any good economy, and the economy is the backbone of the nation.”

As for his own nation, Lawal is proud to be a Nigerian, and he sees great potential in the country, potential that will continue to unfold over time. “A lot of the international

headlines coming out of Nigeria are negative, yet there are so many positive things about this country,” Lawal observes. *“Like everything, there is a process at play here. It’s only a matter of time until Nigeria develops into one of the greatest economies in the world.”*

For Lawal, this level of success – or any type of success for that matter – is impossible to achieve without the development of solid teamwork. “I like to call it active participation. This kind of philosophy involves providing support for other members of your team or for people who work below you, particularly by giving them an integral role to fill,” he explains. “When people start to understand that they are important to the overall effort, when they have a sense of belonging, their determination and level of commitment become all the more dynamic. This is when people really start to achieve their absolute potential.”

Lawal has implemented a similar model of active participation in his work with First Bank of Nigeria Ltd and can attest to its measurable potency in the business world. “Empowering and building up my team like this has led to extremely successful results for our bank,” he notes. “The Nigerian banking sector is a performance driven industry, and I am quite proud of how my people have contributed. *We are always on time in achieving the goals that we set for ourselves, and there is still much more room for positive growth.*”

When challenges in the workplace do arise, Lawal likes to be consistently prepared. One of his methods for preparation is to create and have ready a variety of options for surmounting any problems that may come along. “I always make sure to have strategies in place to handle obstacles, and I always have a plan B if all else fails,” he explains. “More importantly, you have to keep thinking ahead, and whenever issues do come up, you’ve got to be able to analyze them yourself, find a solution and move forward. That is the reality of life when dealing with any problem in any situation.”

In Short: *After working for the Nigerian Embassy in Washington DC for ten years, Dauda Lawal came back to Nigeria and in 2003 began working with First Bank of Nigeria Ltd. Over the next decade he steadily climbed the corporate ladder to become an Executive Director, simultaneously establishing himself as a leading figure in the finance sector. His style of enabling employees, integrating them into a team, has played a crucial role in his success. His message to the youth: “With commitment and determination there is nothing that you cannot do in life. Believe in yourself, be focused and pursue your objectives with all your energy.”*

Date of Birth
02/09/1965

Education
M.Sc. in Political
Science & International
Relations
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria
Nigeria, 1992

B.Sc. Hons.
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria
Nigeria, 1987

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like
• Honesty
• Dedication
• Success

I Don't Like
• Lack of
commitment
• Lying
• Dirt

Contacts
firstbanknigeria.com



Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu

My Words of Wisdom: “Helping people, being useful, and adding value to the lives of others make up the ultimate recipe for happiness.”

Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu has always been interested in both social justice and the value of education – a mindset that would ultimately shape his monumental pursuit of interfaith engagement. It all started with the impact that his parents had on him throughout his formative years. “My parents instilled within me an awareness of my own feelings – if you’re not comfortable about something, say so. If you’re not convinced of something, make that clear and ask questions,” he recalls.

His mother, originally from England, always emphasized broad learning while Lemu was growing up. “She came from a different background; she grew up with horseback riding and sailing. It was because of her that we had a lot of different experiences,” says Lemu, adding that it was his mother’s influence which left him with an innate sense of curiosity. “Because of her, our family got to see a bit more than the average Nigerian.”

During his time in university, Lemu’s sense of curiosity led to interests in philosophy and comparative religion. “I spent a lot of time with the Muslim Students Society, explaining Islam to Muslims as well as non-Muslims – Christians in particular,” he notes. When he moved to Scotland for

his Master’s Degree in Resource Management, Lemu took his interest in comparative religion even further. “Then I became interested in interfaith dialogues and debates, listening to the criticisms and answers of each side. Gradually, I began to find more significance not in winning the debates, but in trying to understand the other side.”

For Lemu, these interfaith dialogues turned into something more than simply identifying where the religions differed, or who was right or wrong. “I started to look toward a peaceful coexistence. What were the things that we agreed on? The need to promote justice, the need to solve poverty, the need to care for the environment, the need to defend animal rights, the need to protect minorities,” Lemu explains. “I became passionate about all of this, and I saw a need to get more people involved and to train them in this area, which is what I spend most of my time doing now.”

Through the Islamic Education Trust, an organization founded by his parents, Lemu has taken part in expanding the capacity for inter- and intra-faith dialogue throughout the world via the “Train the Trainers” course. As the Research and Training Coordinator, Lemu has helped train more than sixty-five thousand people in various countries. “The course

A Trustee of the Islamic Education Trust (IET)

has been well accepted in many parts of the world, so much so that we don’t even have time to meet the demand,” he says. “We put a lot of effort into feedback, and I am proud of the amount of research and reading we handle to find effective solutions to religious extremism.”

The innovative and groundbreaking effort to continue moving the Trust forward is not without challenges. Whenever problems do come along – in any aspect of life – Lemu finds value in keeping a humble attitude. “With problems comes the opportunity to show your best side, to grow and to solve an issue,” Lemu suggests. “One thing that Islam teaches – and I’m sure that many other religions teach similar things – is to look at problems as tests of faith, to trust that there is something good in it, and not to keep focusing on the negative. You learn to absorb the hurt and look for the blessing in disguise – even if you can’t see it at first. This mentality allows you to hold on to hope a little longer and serves as the best shock-absorber for life’s problems.”

One “blessing in disguise” that Lemu has found is that dealing with life’s problems cultivates empathy and a desire to help others going through similar situations. “Helping people, being useful, and adding value to the lives of others make up the ultimate recipe for happiness,” Lemu believes. “Happiness is not something you strive for; it’s a by-product of trying to make others happier. It’s a by-product of service, sometimes of sacrifice. Although

if you actually enjoy offering the service, it’s not really a sacrifice at all.”

Helping others can range from simple tasks, to career paths, to tremendous humanitarian efforts. But, according to Lemu, it all starts with self-preparation. “If you want to add value to the lives of others, you need to build yourself – financially, intellectually, emotionally, socially and most importantly, spiritually,” he says. “By spiritual growth I mean working to make your conscience more sensitive and selfless. You have to be able to identify wrong and how to avoid it, identify good and how to support it, and identify opportunities for growth and how to take advantage of them.”

In Short: Muhammad Nuruddeen Lemu, through his focus on interfaith dialogue via the Islamic Education Trust as well as a number of other pursuits, has found that true happiness comes from serving others. “If you want to be happy, look for something that is a service, but also make sure that it is a contribution that you find pleasure and passion in doing,” he advises. “From there, grow in your capability to do that and look for people who are also doing it, so you can support them – and if you gradually become good at some aspects, you’ll find people ready to support you.”



Date of Birth
27/11/1970

Education
M.Sc. in Resource Management
Edinburgh University
UK, 1996

B.Sc. in Agriculture
Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria
Nigeria, 1994

Languages
English, Hausa, Arabic
Nupe

I Like

- New, useful paradigm-shifting ideas
- The company of good people
- Fishing

I Don’t Like

- A disturbed conscience
- Duplicity
- Confusion from lack preparation

Contacts
nurulemu@yahoo.com
nurulemu.org



Mallam Bello Mohammed Maccido Wakilin Sokoto

Chief Executive Officer FBN Holdings Plc



My Wiew:
“For me it
really isn’t
about getting
rich at all, but
about being
successful
in what you
do.”

Bello Maccido has diligently worked his way to the top of Nigeria’s finance sector, where he continues to toil away in an effort to better the country. Yet even as he helps shape the new direction of Nigeria, he simultaneously represents the old world as a member of the Sokoto ruling family – his late father was the former Sultan of Sokoto, now succeeded by his uncle.

This traditional background has moulded Maccido’s personality in ways that have positively impacted both his career and personal life. “To be honest, my biggest strength is my humility, which seems to surprise a lot of people when they learn about my heritage and background,” he notes. “My family has been ruling the Caliphate since the 1800s, and the reason people accept us is because we blend perfectly with the locals. It’s a matter of respecting others.”

This ability to blend contributed to Maccido’s early career success when he first moved to Lagos after finishing his studies in law and business. He entered the banking industry at the bottom rung of the ladder, determined to prove himself from day one. “At Ecobank, where I started, I was the only Muslim and Northerner at the time, so I took it

upon myself to demonstrate that our people can work with others, contribute and make a difference,” he explains. “*And that’s how I worked my way up. No shortcuts; no free lunches. I held almost every position before I got to the level of Acting Managing Director.*”

After working his way through the ranks, Maccido temporarily left the banking industry in 2004 to start a company called Legacy Pension, which built upon the newly announced Pension Reform Act. “*I started this company from ground zero, working out of my car!*” Maccido laughs, before enumerating the bigger, more significant challenges he faced along the way, such as recruiting staff. “It wasn’t easy to convince people to leave their stable jobs and come work with me, but the company started to become profitable, and after the fifth year I had raised it to over seventy-five billion naira in assets as the pioneer CEO.”

Once he reached a point where he was assured that the company was stable and in good hands, Maccido rejoined the banking industry as an Executive Director with First Bank. After about two years, the bank decided to adopt a financial holding company structure, challenging

Maccido with the monumental task of organizing the new framework for all the subsidiary companies involved in the group. In other words, Maccido is presently overseeing a complete revolution in how the bank system operates.

While Maccido continues to progress in the business world, he also believes in the importance of philanthropy; a big part of Maccido’s Muslim faith involves giving back. “*When my uncle, Sultan Muhammadu Sa’ad Abubakar, challenged those who could afford it to adopt a school, I couldn’t resist. Now every year I pick a project that will be useful for the school I’ve adopted, and I fund it.*” Maccido notes, adding that he recently funded a complete renovation as well as the construction of a medical dispensary.

After his first few philanthropic projects, Maccido is beginning to call on friends who are equally privileged to do their part as well. “I want to prove that we can actually support a community through private efforts; we don’t always have to rely on government,” he explains. “Instead of being involved in the blame game, let’s actually do something. If you travel first class several times per year, why not downgrade to business class and use the extra money to make a difference in society?”

Maccido reminds that Muslims, in fact, have a religious duty to pay alms, referred to as zakat. “You can’t imagine how many rich Muslims

we have, and if people really paid zakat, it would create circulation, a lot of which could be channelled to the youth,” he suggests. “*Just by offering something small, the elite in this country can truly change lives.*”

When it comes to money, on the other hand, Maccido cautions young Nigerians to avoid the shortcut mentality of trying to get rich quick. “For me it really isn’t about getting rich at all, but about being successful in what you do,” Maccido shares. “If you strive for that kind of success, and you give all the effort that is required, you’ll find that wealth will accrue naturally over time.”

In Short: *Bello Maccido comes from a traditional ruling family of the Sokoto Caliphate, a background that has instilled in him modesty, integrity, and a desire to not only succeed and give back to his community, but to show others that they too can do the same. “People have to take a long-term view of life as opposed to looking for a shortcut. If you are hardworking and consistent in what you do, you will be successful. The important thing is to determine the career that is right for you. Even if you’re going to be a shoe shiner, you should be the best shoe shiner in the world!”*

Date of Birth
05/08/1961

Education
MBA
Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan
U.S., 1989

LL.B. Hons.
Ahmadu Bello
University
Zaira
Nigeria, 1984

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like

- Modesty
- Traditional customs
- Sports, especially basketball

I Don’t Like

- Immodesty
- Seeing people suffer
- People who give too many excuses

Contacts
fbnholdings.com



Ledum Mitee

Chairman, Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative & Legal Practitioner



My Philosophy: “If you want to leave your footprints in the sands of time, you have to have done something for humanity.”

Ledum Mitee’s early childhood memories are filled with lush, fertile greenescapes surrounding the Ogoni community farms along with frequent fishing in the nearby river, but even in his childhood he was aware of how fragile that beauty could be. Mitee was also born around the same time the oil companies came, an event that would violently alter the destiny of Nigeria at great expense to the Ogoni people.

“I still recall with some pain my earliest memories of the oil company. The first explosion was big enough to shake the whole football pitch at school,” Mitee remembers of those early days. “Some of my classmates were so scared that they ran away, saying they would never return. I can still see the fear in their faces.”

Soon after that, less than one hundred metres from the school, an oil well was sunk, Mitee recalls, as well as a newly-constructed flow station about two hundred metres from the school. “They made so much noise that the teachers had to shout for us to hear,” he notes. “From then on, that’s what I grew up with.”

In the ensuing years, Mitee watched conflict unfold between the

Ogoni people and the oil companies. “I remember several occasions where there were problems in the community because locals demanded jobs, even menial jobs, but instead the companies were coming in with all their people from the outside,” says Mitee, whose father was the chief of the community. “My father and the other chiefs were detained a couple of times when our people went on strike. I also saw one of my elder half-brothers jailed for going on strike.”

Though oil drilling had its way with Ogoniland and the three-year Civil War also left its own devastating toll, Mitee did his best to make something of his life. Leading up to university, he had been planning on studying medicine, engineering, or something else in the sciences. But these plans changed after Mitee was struck by an injustice done to his brother. Although slight, it was an event he saw as a microcosm of the greater situation between Ogoni and the oil interests. “My older brother had one of his school books stolen. So my father gave him enough money to buy a second-hand replacement,” Mitee reflects. “When my brother went to the market, he found the same book that had been stolen from him.”

Mitee’s brother called the police, who arrested the seller along with the student who had initially sold him the stolen book. Although the thief was charged, he was later released due to unclear technical reasons. “We were so confused and saddened by this sense of injustice,” Mitee recalls. “But as I was sitting there in the courtroom, watching the lawyers argue, I realized that I needed to be part of the process, that I could help people because of the unjust environment in which I had grown up.”

After earning his law degree, Mitee went on to join a private practice for eight years before founding his own firm, with which he continues to practice today. However, his career and life were dramatically changed by his relationship with the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni author and activist who was hanged in 1995 by the Sani Abacha dictatorship.

“I was sleeping one day and Ken showed up at my house and said, ‘How can you be sleeping in the afternoon when people are dying?’ Ken wasn’t even from an area directly impacted by oil, while my own village was the source of seventy percent of the oil in Ogoni,” Mitee explains. “I felt guilty. I realized that I too had to take up the issue. From there we started meeting people and organizing what led to the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).”

Using the plight of the Ogoni as their platform, Mitee and the others began their struggle for the

environmental rights of the Niger Delta. “We were well aware of the dangers involved,” Mitee says of going against the military regime at the time. “I ended up in jail at least fifteen times, often locked up in unsanitary conditions. We were beaten, ill-treated, and several of us were killed.”

In the face of grave resistance, Mitee helped enact Nigeria’s first environmental impact assessment law. “Looking back, I see how we were able to call attention to key environmental issues in this country; it was our way to add value to the system,” he says before offering a final remark: “If you want to leave your footprints in the sands of time, you have to have done something for humanity.”

In Short: Hailing from Ogoni in the Niger Delta, Ledum Mitee saw first-hand the impact oil companies had on the environment and the Nigerian people. As a result, he grew up with an acute awareness of justice, which guided him in establishing a career in law. Also, inspired by his friend and fellow activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, he risked his life to raise awareness of the Ogoni plight. “Anything you gain through a quick fix does not leave you fulfilled or inspire others. The same can be said for wealth and material possessions – people don’t remember you for these things in the end.”

Date of Birth
03/05/1957

Education
B.L., Nigerian Law School
Lagos
Nigeria, 1981

LL.B. Hons., University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 1980

Languages
Gokana, English

I Like
• A good laugh
• Reading
• Speaking with people

I Don’t Like
• Dishonesty
• Laziness
• Ostentation

Contacts
la_mitee@yahoo.co.uk



Dr. Nuruddeen Muhammad

Former Honorable Minister of State II, Ministry of Foreign Affairs



My View:
“A lot of what we perceive as impossible could be made into reality in Nigeria.”

Dr. Nuruddeen Muhammad has been living a double life. His passions for both politics and medicine have kept him busy over the past few years, but he has continued to achieve on both fronts. He is the youngest person to be appointed as a government minister since Nigeria’s return to democracy in 1999, yet the inspiration of his father has kept him committed to completing his postgraduate medical education even during his political career.

Nuruddeen’s father was a headmaster at a local school and would bring the young Nuruddeen to classes as early as four years old. Education had become a guiding principle from the beginning. “My father was a schoolteacher even though he didn’t have a lot of academic experience, which he always regretted,” Nuruddeen notes. “Seeing that, I wanted to make sure I didn’t grow up to have the same kind of regret.”

In addition to this early enthusiasm for education, Nuruddeen became politically active at the age of eleven when he was hired on as a secretary for a political group in his ward. Although his job was only to take notes, he became

inspired to politically engage with the community around him. As a teenager he started regularly attending political rallies up until the fourth year of medical school, when his studies became too time consuming.

Although Nuruddeen had reached a point in school where he no longer had the time to actively participate in politics, it was a part of him that refused to quiet down. “I had this huge political consciousness, so I had to find other ways to channel it – like writing and debating,” he recalls. “People told me that I didn’t talk like a doctor, but a politician. And then in 2008 I published an open letter to the Jigawa State governor at the time.”

The governor read Nuruddeen’s article and within a week invited him for a chat. “And that’s how I became a full partisan politician. I became a very active member of the ruling party and was eventually nominated to be a minister during the final months of my postgraduate training,” Nuruddeen explains. “But at the same time, despite my zeal, I knew that there was no telling how long my political career would last, so I decided to complete my dissertation, which was the only requirement

left before my appointment for my postgraduate fellowship.”

While still training at the Aminu Kano Teaching Hospital, Nuruddeen was officially sworn in as the Minister of State II for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the age of thirty-four. It was a job that had him travelling across five continents, interacting with leaders from around the world. All of that experience abroad, however, taught him something about his home country. “I gained an objective view of Nigeria,” he mentions. “I realized that a lot of what we perceive as impossible could be made into reality in Nigeria. Throughout its history, this country has achieved the impossible before. The challenge now is to build a national culture, which demands a lot of introspection, tolerance, patience and forbearance.”

Although he was deeply involved in politics when he qualified as Medical Doctor in 2003, his passion for education was great enough that he could not deny himself the prospect of postgraduate work. “It was time to decide which field of medicine to specialize in, and I wanted a specialty that would best suit my political consciousness,” he explains. “Psychiatry was perfect because it would allow me the time to remain politically active and would further hone my ability to talk to people and interpret both verbal and nonverbal communications.” In 2013, Dr. Nuruddeen had been sitting as a minister for two and a half years when he took his final

exams to qualify as a Fellow of the National Postgraduate Medical College in Psychiatry.

Nuruddeen recently resigned from his ministerial duties to pursue his political ambitions, running for Deputy Governor in the 2015 elections. “This is a country that will go places – an experiment of a kind. No other place on earth has this diverse mix of cultures that are determined to stay together, and I am inspired by this,” he explains. “We have to dream, and it is important to focus on that dream. A lot of disappointments will come along, but don’t get distracted. If you can stay focused, delay gratification, and deal with the frustrations and setbacks, then there is nothing you cannot achieve.”

In Short: Dr. Nuruddeen Muhammad has followed his political zeal to extraordinary heights while continuously cultivating a background in medicine. Politics, however, remains his greatest passion, a way to have a positive impact on the community around him. As the youngest appointed minister in Nigeria’s present era of democracy, his quest is not only to engage Nigerian politics, but to take part in the process of actualizing the potential of his country. “Nigeria has a vast amount of opportunity that can be difficult for people to see, but I know it’s there because it inspires me every day.”

Date of Birth
20/08/1976

Education
Fellow in Psychiatry
FMCPsych
National Postgraduate
Medical College
Lagos
Nigeria, 2013

Bachelor of Medicine
Bachelor of Surgery
MBBS
Bayero University
Kano
Nigeria, 2003

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like
• Being physically active
• Thinking time and quiet moments
• Intellectually inclined analytical debates

I Don’t Like
• Pettiness
• Injustice
• Materialism

Contacts
nmanku76@yahoo.com



Dr. Abdu Mukhtar

Founder & Chairman Grassroot Microfinance Bank



My Top Tip:

“If you chase money, you’re not likely to get it. But if you follow your passion, the money will come.”

The path of Dr. Abdu Mukhtar’s career consists of a steady climb with plenty of twists and turns. As he segued from medicine to business, he took with him the same driving force to excel and to touch people’s lives that has guided all of his vocational choices. The bouquet of experiences he has gathered along the way is a testament to his ability to succeed and serve a community throughout a diverse professional life.

His initial choice to study medicine, Mukhtar explains, came about despite his preference for mathematics. “I was good at all of the subjects, but there was a definite element of prestige that came with studying medicine. More importantly, there was a shortage of doctors in Kano at the time,” he reflects. “So the expectation at the time was that the best students should go on to study medicine – the toughest field – because we needed doctors.”

Mukhtar had no qualms about giving up his inclination to study engineering or mathematics for the sake of public service, one of the core values passed on to him by his father, who also happens to be the longest serving traditional ruler in Nigeria at present. “My father

instilled in us the importance of giving back to the community. He also taught us core values such as integrity, honesty, and respect for other people.”

These are all values that saw Mukhtar through medical school and his two years of practice in Nigeria. “I enjoyed clinical medical practice, but it became a bit too repetitive for me – one patient after the next,” Mukhtar remembers. “I wanted new things; I wanted to discover and innovate, so I went into research, moving to the U.S. to do a Ph.D. programme in immunology and pathology.”

While doing his Ph.D., Mukhtar began collaborating with biotechnology companies, furthering his research on industrial and commercial applications of medical technology. The exposure to the corporate world provided a new experience, and it got Mukhtar interested in business. So, realizing he didn’t have any business skills, Mukhtar decided to get his MBA – at none other than Harvard Business School.

With the MBA under his belt, Mukhtar began to combine business with his background in medicine, acting as a consultant for pharmaceutical and biotechnology

companies for the next two years. By then he’d been in the U.S. for ten years and could no longer deny the urge to come back home to Nigeria. “Nigeria is the love of my life, and I felt compelled to come back because this is where I belong. This is a place where you can do so much to positively impact the lives of people – whatever you’re doing.”

Since returning to Nigeria, Mukhtar has certainly had an impact in more ways than one. He has held a number of positions in both public and private sectors, such as Adviser to a Minister and Group Managing Director and CEO at Abuja Investments Company Ltd. One accomplishment he is truly proud of, however, is the Grassroot Microfinance Bank, of which he is the founder and Chairman.

The whole concept behind the micro-finance movement, Mukhtar says, is that it’s better to teach people how to fish than to give people fish to eat. “For instance, every year people will come and ask for money to send their children to school,” he notes. “So it’s important to make them self-reliant by doing something that will help them make a living year after year.”

Using his own personal savings and partnering with friends, Mukhtar got the bank started, and today it serves over thirty-eight thousand customers, ninety percent of them women. “We gave them very small loans, enough to set up a small business selling tomatoes, bread, or cow milk, and through that

we have actually impacted the lives of so many people.”

Mukhtar maintains that one can leave a legacy in many different ways. The important thing is to have a positive attitude and to always pursue passion over money. “If you chase money, you’re not likely to get it. But if you follow your passion, the money will come because you will be doing what you love and doing it well,” he advises. “Remember also that nothing is impossible so long as you work hard and engage in activities that help you develop as a person, such as reading. Most of the things I have been able to do in my life are because I read a lot. The main thing is to never stop learning, developing and challenging yourself.”

In Short: Dr. Abdu Mukhtar’s career shows that it is possible to not only make a living doing what you love, but at the same time to have an impact on society. Coupling his passion with a knack for hard work and continual self-development, no problem or challenge has proven too big for him. “I see problems and struggles as opportunities for growth. Obstacles are actually stepping stones for doing things better or creating new ways of doing things. In fact, problems make me excited because I love challenges, and I know that they will make me stronger, bigger and better.”

Date of Birth
10/10/1967

Education
MPA (2013)
MBA (2001)
Harvard University
Cambridge
Massachusetts, U.S.

Ph.D. in Pathology &
Laboratory Medicine
Boston University
School of Medicine
Massachusetts
U.S., 1999

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like

- Travelling
- Reading
- Spending time with family and friends

I Don’t Like

- Laziness
- Dishonesty
- Cold weather

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Genevieve Nnaji, MFR

Artist



My View:

“Do unto others what you would have them do to you. If you treat someone with love, love will come back to you.”

Genevieve Nnaji is a believer in karma – the idea that what goes around comes around. “Fear of karma is the beginning of wisdom,” she suggests. “In other words, do unto others what you would have them do to you. If you treat someone with love, love will come back to you.”

This is just one of the many guiding principles that has kept Genevieve grounded throughout her ascent to fame. As an actress she has received her share of accolades while engaging in a number of exciting projects, both on and off the screen, but each day she continues to show up to work with her trademark down-to-earth mentality. “I never thought of myself as ambitious, and while I want to say that it’s the fear of failure that keeps me motivated, perhaps it is more than that,” she reflects. “I feel that anything worth doing is worth doing well, and what I start I need to finish – I believe in seizing every moment and opportunity.”

Opportunity, Genevieve continues, is more about being prepared than being lucky. “When opportunity comes, it’s up to you to take it and make something out of it. I’m sure I’ve lost opportunities in the

past because I wasn’t ready or didn’t recognize them, and there have been opportunities that I thought were mine but weren’t,” Genevieve notes. “What I’ve realized is that when you start a journey, if you do it right as opposed to going through the back door, a lot of other horizons open up for you.”

Genevieve’s talent and work ethic as an actress have garnered her plenty of successes, making her a big name in Nollywood. Although she initially began to teach herself the craft by absorbing classic Hollywood films, she remains Nigerian to the core. “Nigeria is everything to me; it is the basis of who I am today, who I’ve become,” she shares. “I can’t imagine being from anywhere else.”

Imagination is actually one of Genevieve’s strong suits. As a child she would often find herself acting out her own little dramas while playing house, or engaging in other artistic activities such as painting or singing. Ironically, however, at the outset of her career Genevieve did not view acting as a potential long-term occupation. “I was planning to study law, but shortly after secondary school I went for an audition as a temporary means of making money

to help my family,” she remembers. “I figured it would be something I would do on the side until I finished my studies. But at the same time I knew that if I enjoyed it enough, I would give it my all and the money would follow.”

Acting worked out better than she had expected – and the money did follow. But Genevieve doesn’t believe in pursuing money and fame for their own sake. “Money is only good for the things it can change. It shouldn’t change you; you should use money to change your surroundings,” she mentions. “It’s important to think about the ways you can have a positive impact on people and touch lives. For me, that’s what legacy is all about and why I work so hard.”

Genevieve believes in the power of reflecting not only on how a person affects their own environment, but how their environment can affect them. “You are what you surround yourself with – if you associate with success you will be successful. If you associate with haters, you will forever be hateful. It’s your choice,” she advises. “It is vital not to be influenced by the wrong things. If a person is shaping you in a negative way, that person is bad for you. You have to move on.”

From her own experience, Genevieve has discovered that often characteristics which ought to be considered positives are mistaken for negatives – goodness mistaken for softness, or politeness for weakness. “It’s almost as if people

are now afraid to be sweet or nice, which is wrong – we should try to be good,” she says. “If you are good and you work honestly, you will derive a sense of dignity from what you do, and you will respect yourself. You will know which way to go and which way not to go, because you’ll have pride and self-worth.”

Pride and self-worth, Genevieve maintains, could be more prevalent in society today, especially in how young Nigerians approach their work. “The youth need to be more intuitive when it comes to creating, entrepreneurship, and working in general,” she believes. “Work for a cause; work because you want to belong to society and not just be a statistic.”

In Short: Genevieve Nnaji has climbed her way up in the acting world to become a top figure in Nollywood and has also branched out into music and fashion. However, her air is not one of celebrity but of dignity and grounded wisdom gained through years of hard work and surrounding herself with positive influences. “The people you surround yourself with have a profound impact on who you are and how you think. You have to be able to recognize and avoid negative influences, and if you want to be successful then you have to surround yourself with successful people.”

Date of Birth
03/05/1979

Awards
2005 Best Actress
African Movie
Academy Awards
(AMAA)

2003 Best Actress
Nigerian Census Board

2001 Best Actress
City People Awards

Languages
English, Igbo, Yoruba

I Like
• Honesty
• Loyalty
• Integrity

I Don’t Like
• Negativity
• Bullies
• Injustice

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Dr. Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien

Founder Growing Businesses Foundation (GBF)



My Advice:

“Visualize what you believe this country can be, what it should be – for therein lies your greatest opportunity.”

To Dr. Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien’s mind, everybody is a leader – not just the ‘Oga at the Top.’ “At every level, our people must rise up to their leadership potential and seek opportunities in their fields,” she says. “Leadership means taking responsibility; it means being accountable.”

The concepts of responsibility and accountability, Ndidi emphasizes, are extremely relevant to Nigeria. “We tend to point at the government as primarily responsible, when in actuality, we must all hold ourselves jointly accountable for our country’s future,” she notes. “We live in an innovative, creative and entrepreneurial environment. The country challenges us to rise up beyond the limits of our potential.”

Ndidi encourages Nigeria’s youth to cultivate their talents and dare to dream. “Visualize what you believe this country can be, what it should be – for therein lies your greatest opportunity. Instead of aspiring to go to another country, adapt the ideas which make that country so attractive here, in Nigeria,” she suggests. “Advocate your ideals, share your hopes via storytelling and social media, adopt mentors – anything and everything to rally support for your vision. We find the support we need once we truly believe in our ideas and

summon the courage to grasp our vision of the future with both hands.”

Ndidi’s inspiring words form the philosophy at the core of the Growing Businesses Foundation (GBF), which she founded in 1999. GBF’s mission is to support sustainable economic development led by socially responsible businesses and individuals. “We work tirelessly to productively connect the public sector and private sector with Nigeria’s entrepreneurs at the ‘Base of the Pyramid,’ thereby building a more inclusive society,” she explains. “GBF has been praised for ‘investing in the poor,’ but we don’t see Nigerians at the ‘Bottom of the Pyramid’ as ‘poor’ people. We instead see social innovators waiting for opportunities to emerge as successful entrepreneurs.”

A lot of Ndidi’s desire to assist, empower and develop entrepreneurs derives from having watched the struggles of her father, whom she remembers as a brilliant and compassionate entrepreneur. “His passion for manufacturing creative, innovative, functional and perfectly engineered products was unparalleled,” she recalls. “Sadly, inadequate access to affordable capital, poor infrastructure and the overly expensive ‘route to market’ for ‘Proudly Nigerian’ products crippled his world-class

furniture design and manufacturing business.”

Looking to address the obvious growing pains of entrepreneurial businesses, not unlike the challenges her father faced, Ndidi resigned from her job running an asset management firm in 1999 to focus on GBF. It took twenty months for her to convince a leading Nigerian bank to risk investing in micro and small businesses. However, once GBF proved the viability of micro-finance as a means to promote sustainable economic development and inclusive growth, this opened up financial access for a tier of Nigerians previously considered unbankable.

Soon thereafter Ndidi began working closely with policymakers to enact further change. This led to her involvement in government programmes centred on job creation, agriculture and financial inclusion. Then in 2008 she founded Strategy & Execution Ltd (S&E), a consulting firm which focuses on building functional public-private partnerships and bridging the gap between the strategy and execution of good ideas. “The role of government,” she says of the S&E vision, “is critical as a catalyst for growing businesses to sustainably spur national development.”

To achieve sustainability, Ndidi adds, there must be a balance of innovative change and heritage, a way to harness the wisdom inherent across the generations to address contemporary issues of the economy, environment, culture and politics. One of the most crucial components in this balance is mentorship. “Our youth yearn for

inspiring role models to look up to,” she says. “Nigeria’s traditional apprenticeship systems should complement our educational system in order to truly equip youth for life outside of the ‘classroom.’”

Ndidi points to history’s greatest leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Alexander the Great, and Jesus Christ as the ultimate role models who unified their people to achieve the ‘impossible.’ This kind of transformation, she suggests, follows a clear vision and the ability to communicate a message people can believe in, unite for, and implement. “Our challenge is to move beyond the potential of transformation to achieve sustainable impact.”

In Short: Dr. Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien’s career of empowering Nigerian entrepreneurs and advocating for inclusive policy initiatives through the government has positively affected countless lives. As the founder of invaluable entities such as Growing Businesses Foundation and Strategy & Execution Ltd, she passes on a powerful message of transformation and sustainability to Nigeria’s youth: “Never be daunted by a problem. Each new challenge is merely a hurdle that enables you to rise higher. Appropriate solutions will always avail themselves to you given enough persistence and focus. Believe!”

Date of Birth
31/07/1972

Education
Ph.D. in Ownership & Management Structures
Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt Germany, 2006

B.Sc. in Economics & International Relations
London School of Economics & Political Science
UK, 1994

Languages
English, German
French

I Like
• Sunshine and light
• The colour black
• Coffee

I Don’t Like
• Arrogant ignorance
• Poverty
• Violence

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Adaobi Tricia Obinne Nwaubani

Novelist & Essayist Journalist & Humorist

N

My View:
“You can be Nigerian and reach the world, change the world even, without leaving your country.”

A lot of people look at Adaobi Nwaubani’s career as a writer – her internationally acclaimed novel, her regular publications with BBC, CNN, the New York Times, and the Guardian – and automatically assume that she’s writing about Nigeria from the comfortable vantage point of America or the UK. But the truth is she’s fully based in Nigeria.

Adaobi points out that a lot of Nigerians have the mistaken mentality that in order to achieve success they must live abroad. “You can be Nigerian and reach the world, change the world even, without leaving your country,” she encourages. “I was born and bred here, was educated here – you don’t have to leave to realize your dreams.”

While Adaobi’s current success as a writer would be a dream for any aspiring wordsmith, she admits that she never consciously chose the profession. It happened organically. She won her first writing competition at the age of thirteen, but didn’t take the craft seriously until writing her debut novel, *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*, published in 2009.

The genesis of the book was Adaobi’s inclination to write something about Africa that would

contrast the solemn tone of the other African books she had read. “Over the years I had been asking myself why these fantastic writers were always so serious. Obviously there are a lot of serious issues in Africa, but I like funny things; I like to laugh. So that’s how my vision for the book started,” Adaobi explains. “Then in 2006, I read *Angela’s Ashes* by Frank McCourt, which is full of sordid experiences, yet funny in so many ways.”

Always a voracious reader, this book gave Adaobi the inspiration to finally begin writing her own novel, the story of a young Nigerian man caught in a moral dilemma concerning email scams when all he wants is to make something of his life. “People from France, from Germany, from the U.S. have all found it funny, and to me that is an accomplishment – to be able to provide entertainment even while writing about a serious issue,” Adaobi notes. “This has become the trademark of my writing.”

After the success of the novel, which included the 2010 Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for Best First Book, Adaobi began to receive invitations to write for major publications. While she was working as an editor for NEXT newspaper in

Lagos, the *New York Times* asked her to write about the Jos crisis in 2010. “It was an unexpected invitation, but I was happy to contribute because I saw that so few media outlets were reporting on the story, including our own newspaper,” she recalls. “After that I started to receive requests from various publications, and that is how my essay writing started.”

Some of Adaobi’s articles have been considered controversial, but they have generated a lot of attention and conversation. “Gradually I’ve come to find that my passion is nonfiction, writing about specific issues, expressing my thoughts – dealing with real life situations,” Adaobi says. “I’m always discovering new things I’m passionate about.”

Another great passion of Adaobi’s is young people, and she’s looking to develop more projects focused on children and teenagers. “For instance, I’m working on a script for an animation movie set in Nigeria – probably the first of its kind,” she reveals, adding that she hopes to merge it with another project she’s doing: “I go to villages and show cartoons to children who live twenty minutes away from Abuja – and have never seen a cartoon!”

Through Adaobi’s interaction with the village children, she has come to understand how undeveloped their education often is. “You speak to them and they don’t know anything about the outside world – not Mandela, not Obama, and they can’t speak

English,” she explains. “So I’ve since come to realize my passion for education. Someday I would like to found schools in rural areas so that I can have a wider impact. Nothing fancy, just teaching the basics.”

As Adaobi continues to discover new passions through her writing and her work to bring the outside world to underprivileged Nigerian children, she maintains that her faith is at the core of her drive. “The main reason I decided to look into myself, share my talents, and do things for people is because of my faith. Without it, I’d be content to sit in a big house, have a few charities, and just watch the world go by – but instead I am called to something greater.”

In Short: *Adaobi Nwaubani’s career as a writer sets a powerful example for young Nigerians. The acclaim she has received from her novel and regular contributions to major publications shows people that you don’t have to live abroad to find success, but instead dreams can be achieved within Nigeria’s borders. Her work also exemplifies how opportunity can be found through an open mind and an attitude of discovery. “I discover something new about myself every day. I never planned on being a writer. My going into writing was purely accidental – I knew I had a talent, so I simply decided to use it.”*

Date of Birth
28/03/1976

Education
B.Sc. in Psychology
University of Ibadan
Nigeria, 1998

Languages
English, Igbo

I Like

- Beautiful people
- Laughter
- Faith

I Don’t Like

- Disloyalty
- Ignorance
- Poverty

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Frank Nweke II

Chairman ONTV Media Network



My Top Tip:
“Problems must be approached with clearheaded courage and intent to bring about a resolution as soon as possible.”

Frank Nweke II has special insight into what it means to be a public servant. For him it is a responsibility that can breed passion, grace and integrity. He began to discover this experience for himself when initially invited to fill a government position as a resident consultant with Enugu State in 1999.

Since then, Nweke has continued to fill one public service role after another, with each position offering a chance for him to serve to the best of his abilities. “Nothing gives me greater joy than to deploy public policy in an effort to bring change and improve the quality of life for the greatest possible number of people,” Nweke notes. “I was born to serve.”

Nweke’s willingness to serve did not go unnoticed by his superiors. By 2001 he had been appointed Chief of Staff to the Governor of Enugu State, where he stayed on until 2003 when he was called upon to serve as a minister for the Obasanjo Administration.

But regardless of whether the role was at the state or federal level, Nweke has brought an equal sense of tenacity to each position. “I have put forth my best efforts on every assignment I have been given, and I

am proud that I have been ethical and extremely dedicated in the discharge of my duties,” Nweke explains. “I have demonstrated clearly that you can come to public service without sacrificing your values; you can come to public service and really do what public service is all about, which is to serve.”

Mr. Nweke’s most recent position was Director General of the Nigerian Economics Summit Group (NESG), a private sector think tank dedicated to developing a globally competitive Nigerian economy through policy advocacy, research, communication and education. Since taking the position in 2009, Nweke worked tirelessly to elevate the NESG to the world-class entity that it is today while simultaneously serving on a multitude of boards and chair positions for private interests. He decided recently to step down from the role in order to further pursue his political aspirations.

The Nigerian people are certainly aware of the work that Nweke has done both as a public servant and with the NESG. On many occasions people even come up to him and thank him for things he did eight years ago while serving under the Obasanjo Administration.

“It is certainly a flattering experience when people come up to me like that, but more importantly, it signifies the thirst for quality leadership, for ethical leadership, and for committed leadership,” Nweke suggests. “It’s no secret that in Nigeria quality of governance and corruption are problems today.”

With regards to corruption, Nweke believes that if ethical standards were upheld in business and government, three-quarters of Nigeria’s problems would be solved. “When you have been corrupt and unethical in the conduct of public or even private business, you lose any moral authority to hold other citizens accountable,” Nweke reasons. “If there is no sense of accountability then ultimately the entire society is in jeopardy – security, infrastructure, even lives.”

Corruption, like any problem big or small, must first be recognized, according to Nweke. “After you have recognized the problem, you must next consider your options. You decide if you can handle it by yourself or if you need help, and then you approach it,” he advises. “Whatever the case, you must always confront your problems; you cannot afford to run away from them.”

Nweke notes that problems are a regular part of life, and everyone must face them in their different ways – be they economic, social, health, academic, or other issues. “Problems must be approached with clearheaded courage and intent to

bring about a resolution as soon as possible. When problems linger they can become more complicated and lead to greater losses, so early recognition and a focused approach are absolutely paramount.”

Nweke goes on to emphasize that in terms of Nigeria’s problems, the government and the people have a shared responsibility. For him, young Nigerians especially are a big part of moving forward. “Young people in particular, through hard work and a dedicated pursuit of a clear vision, can achieve their goals,” he believes. “Only you can stop yourself. The moment that you doubt anything you have failed at it. So don’t doubt, but instead prepare, believe, and achieve.”

In Short: *Frank Nweke II discovered his passion to serve when he first took on a role that directly impacted public policy at the state level. His zeal for serving soon led him to become a minister for the Obasanjo Administration. From the start, his tenure as a public servant has been characterized by honesty and fair dealings. “I would never trade my integrity for anything in the whole wide world. My motivation in life has always been to simply put a smile on the faces of people. I love to make people happy, to help them realize their dreams and to inspire them to be the best they can be.”*

Date of Birth
18/09/1965

Education
Master’s in Public Policy & Administration
Harvard University
Kennedy School of Government
Cambridge
Massachusetts
U.S., 2008

Master’s in Public Administration
University of Maiduguri
Nigeria, 1995

Languages
Igbo, Yoruba
Hausa, English

I Like
• Knowledge
• Helping others
• Travelling

I Don’t Like
• Disorder
• Dishonesty
• Unpredictability

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Ndidi Nwuneli, MFR

**Founder & Director, LEAP Africa
Co-Founder, ACEE Foods
Partner, Sahel Capital
Partners & Advisory**



**My Dream:
“I’m not
satisfied
with Africa’s
current level,
and I am
compelled
to make a
difference
within the
continent.”**

Although Ndidi Nwuneli is excited about the present-day rise of Africa, she believes that there are still many more chapters to the continent’s story. “I see a widening gap between those who have and those who have not – Africa’s growth has not been inclusive and this widening gap between the rich and poor is a ticking time bomb if we continue to ignore it,” she notes. “This is a huge obligation for my generation – we have to do something about it.”

For Ndidi, this obligation has become a way of life, a sense of urgency that keeps her working. “My faith inspires me, but I’m also inspired and challenged by all of the problems I see, problems which other people don’t necessarily notice – such as poverty or hunger. These situations make me feel upset and even angry. I’m not satisfied with Africa’s current level, and I am compelled to make a difference within the continent.”

Before Ndidi began her quest to make an impact by working for and founding a series of non-profits and private companies, she was living a successful business life in the U.S. that many would envy. She had graduated from some highly esteemed business schools and was working with a distinguished

management consulting firm when she got a call from Nigeria to come home and set up the FATE Foundation, working with unemployed graduates and helping them become entrepreneurs. At just twenty-five years old, it was an offer the young Ndidi could not refuse.

A lot of people thought she was crazy to resign from her high-paying job, but today Ndidi still believes it was the best decision she’s ever made, one of those decisions that would lead to even greater opportunities and achievements. “After FATE, I started LEAP, which stands for Leadership, Effectiveness, Accountability, and Professionalism,” she notes, adding that the overall mission is to create an army of social change agents, training people to go out and start their own initiatives to improve the lives of others. “The focus of LEAP is to inspire, empower, and equip people to be African leaders, helping them initiate personal and community transformation by giving them the skills and tools they need.”

Another focus of LEAP is entrepreneurship and preparing people to build enduring companies. “Many companies die with their founders, but our goal is to help these entrepreneurs build companies that will outlive them,” Ndidi

mentions. “We also place a lot of emphasis on integrity and ethics, and we have an employability programme to prepare unemployed youth for meaningful jobs.” LEAP has also published ten pioneering books on a range of topics including succession, governance and ethics, which it uses for training youth and entrepreneurs.

The list of Ndidi’s accomplishments and initiatives goes on. In addition to serving on a number of boards, she also started another non-profit called NIA – a name formed from the Igbo words for life, strength, and wealth. This organization empowers young women, another part of the population Ndidi focuses on, to reach their highest potential.

Ndidi has also spearheaded efforts to trace problems even further back to their roots. She is the co-founder of ACEE Foods, a social enterprise that sources produce from local farmers, processing them into spices, spreads and complementary food, which is distributed to FMCG companies, wholesalers and retailers across Nigeria. “The goal is to support smallholder farmers, providing them with micro-finance, inputs and training. We then source our raw materials from these farmers, giving them a steady stream of income,” she explains. “We started this because of the high rates of post-harvest losses and malnutrition in Nigeria. ACEE is currently in Nigeria’s leading retail

outlets and is gradually displacing imports. It is also improving the livelihoods of farmers.”

Ndidi is eager to inspire young people to commit to the values of hard work and integrity. “People see others who’ve gotten rich quickly, and they think that’s their path,” she observes. “But nothing can replace sheer hard work and values. You have to develop a moral compass with established boundaries, a clear code of conduct that governs your life and is set by your faith. You have to have values so that people will know you as a person of integrity – your word has to be your bond; you have to be accountable.”

In Short: Ndidi Nwuneli left a comfortable life in the U.S. to return to Nigeria and make a difference with social enterprises such as LEAP Africa and ACEE Foods. Through her tireless efforts, she has transformed and inspired countless Nigerians to join her in her mission, and will continue to do so for years to come. “My mantra is an African proverb – if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go with others. In other words, it’s nice to go fast, but if you do it all by yourself, it’s not sustainable. You have to bring others along as you go forward.”

Date of Birth
22/03/1975

Education
Master’s in Business Administration, Harvard Business School Boston, Massachusetts U.S., 1999

B.Sc. in Multinational & Strategic Management Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia U.S., 1995

Languages
English, Igbo, French

I Like
• God
• My family
• Africa

I Don’t Like
• Corrupt rulers
• Poverty
• Ignorance

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H.E. Olusegun Obasanjo

Founder Olusegun Obasanjo Foundation



My Advice:

“Unless you know the root of a problem, trying to solve it is like boxing blindfolded.”

To most Nigerians, Olusegun Obasanjo needs no introduction. Since the 1950s, the former military general, ruler and President of Nigeria has spent his life serving the country and the continent.

To this day, Obasanjo continues to make an impact through projects such as building the Presidential Library complex in his hometown of Abeokuta and establishing the African Leadership Forum. He has also founded the Olusegun Obasanjo Foundation (OOF) with initiatives focusing on public health and welfare, youth empowerment, and education for girls.

When it comes to tackling such significant issues through OOF, as well as problems in any context, Obasanjo maintains that the key is to locate the heart of the issue. “Unless you know the root of a problem, trying to solve it is like boxing blindfolded,” he explains. “You have to think about whether or not to confront the problem head-on or to approach it from the side. Think about if you need help and who might help you. And you must react quickly before things get worse.”

Obasanjo’s extraordinary career in problem solving began when he joined the army in 1958. He remembers the strong impression his

first commander had made on him. “He was strict in every sense of the word – quite a contrast from civilian life! He was immaculately dressed, and he was proficient in every subject,” Obasanjo recollects. “He always said to us: ‘There is no easy way to success. If you want to get far in the world, you must work hard. If you work hard, the only limit is your ambition.’”

After officer training, Obasanjo followed that advice, working hard to ascend the ranks. When the Biafra conflict arose, he led a commando division stationed on the Biafran front in southeastern Nigeria. Six years after the war, leadership of the country was passed on to Obasanjo, who returned the country to civilian rule in 1978.

Over the ensuing years, Obasanjo held various teaching positions and diplomatic posts, most notably with the United Nations. In 1995, he was imprisoned for three years after being accused of organizing a coup against General Sani Abacha. After Abacha’s death Obasanjo joined the People’s Democratic Party shortly before serving two successive four-year terms as President of Nigeria, fighting against poverty and corruption while striving to reintegrate a democratic system.

Today Obasanjo is still called upon for critical situations of diplomacy and still fighting for the betterment of the country through his Foundation, and he has as much faith and love for Nigeria as ever before. “When it comes to Nigeria I am an incurable optimist!” he exclaims. “Nigeria has the largest population of the black race, a fact that obligates us to uphold a certain level of leadership that we are not currently maintaining. The sooner we correct that, the sooner we can reach our destiny of a better Nigeria.”

One of the most critical components to the country’s destiny, Obasanjo believes, are the Nigerian youth. But he is also aware of the challenges they face. He points out that while there are more educational institutions than ever before, there are fewer opportunities for young Nigerians. “When I was old enough to go to university in Nigeria, there was only one. Today there are about one hundred fifty universities in this country. What’s more, when I left secondary school – without even going to university – I had five different appointments offered to me,” Obasanjo remembers. “Today when anybody graduates university, no matter how brilliant they are, he or she will be extremely lucky to get one or two job offers.”

Obasanjo emphasizes that while more opportunities need to be created, young Nigerians should not simply wait for something to be given to them. “I believe that we have to educate, orientate and create

an environment that encourages our youth to realize that they must take part in the process of creating opportunities in our society,” he states.

Obasanjo is a living example of the dynamic challenge of embracing and cultivating opportunity. “When you have an opportunity, take advantage of it to the best of your abilities, not only for yourself but also for the people whom you have to serve, and for God. Because when God gives you opportunity, he expects the best from you,” Obasanjo advises. “I put my best into everything, and if I do not succeed it won’t be because I haven’t tried. If you fail, you have to realize that it wasn’t for you and move on to the next opportunity.”

In Short: Olusegun Obasanjo, military general, leading diplomat, and the former President of Nigeria, has devoted his entire life to a vision of peace, democracy, education and opportunity for his beloved country. For several decades he has been a prominent voice throughout Nigeria and Africa, and today he is as active as ever, particularly through his Foundation. The underlying pattern has always been the same – helping and serving others: “I have always loved coming to the aid of people who need help. Anywhere in the world you go, there is no shortage of people in need.”

Date of Birth
05/03/1938

Education
Engineering
Indian Army School of Engineering
Pune
India, 1966

Royal College of Defence Studies
London
UK, 1959

Languages
Yoruba, Hausa, English

I Like
• Interacting with people who have ideas
• Travelling
• Helping people in need

I Don’t Like
• Injustice
• Inequity
• Marginalization

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Prof. Godswill Obioma

Former Executive Secretary Chief Executive Officer Nigerian Educational Research & Development Council

My Recipe for Success: “When I face challenges, I pray about it, I think about it, I get inspired – I keep my eye on the target.”

Mathematics professor and internationally renowned education expert Godswill Obioma learned early on that he would have to distinguish himself in order to transcend poverty. He would have to struggle through years of abject penury, a war, and miles upon miles of walking to eventually earn his Ph.D. This mentality of striving for excellence first began when Obioma discovered that distinguishing himself was the only key to an education.

Obioma and his eight siblings were raised in a remote community in Abia State. Before the Civil War, his parents lived in the commercial city of Aba. “We were so poor that my mother sold akara in a rickety makeshift stall on a street corner and my father would try to sell second-hand clothes in the market since he could not own a store himself,” Obioma remembers. “It was really bad! I was born into a very poor heritage.”

Neither of Obioma’s parents went to school, but they wanted education for their children. “I started school when I was four, and as young as five, I would trek alone into the city for school from the remote places where we stayed – about half a mile each way,” Obioma recalls. “Even the most basic education required school fees, which my father couldn’t afford. So

every term I was sent back home for not having paid – and often flogged by the head teacher in the process. My father would end up having to borrow money from his friends to pay the fees.”

Luckily for Obioma and his parents, he was consistently the top student in his class, skipping two grades in primary school and earning the Eastern Nigerian Government scholarship for secondary school. “For secondary school, I took entrance exams and passed them all, but I had no way of getting to school from the village,” Obioma explains. “My uncle, who was living in Lagos at the time, recognized my academic potential and promised to supplement the scholarship with any assistance he could provide.”

That lasted until July 1967, when the Civil War began. “Structures and institutions collapsed completely and part of our country was ravaged – I was stranded academically until January 1970,” Obioma grimly recalls. “After the war, finding a way to get back to school was a huge problem. My father had lost everything, my uncle had come back from Lagos, and I had eight other siblings – all of whom had to come out of school for my family to get me back into school!”

So in January 1970, Obioma began what would become a weekly

trek from his village Amaokpu Nkpa in Bende Local Government Area to a high school in Old Umuahia. “The war had left no public transportation, let alone money for transport,” Obioma notes. “I would start off on a Sunday morning, carrying a little load on my head as I walked. It took from six o’clock in the morning until four in the afternoon to arrive!”

During the week, Obioma would stay at a house near the high school belonging to his church’s pastor, and each weekend he would return home to replenish his meagre supply of food donated by family and friends and earn a small stipend by selling firewood at the railway stop. “My only hope was that I would still have that scholarship money from before the war,” he explains. “So I got creative and wrote a letter of appeal to the then East Central State, inquiring about the status of my scholarship, and, surprisingly, they replied! After two months, they informed me that the scholarship was still there.”

While Obioma continued to distinguish himself, he also continued to encounter obstacles hindering his academic pursuits, including an inability to pay for all of the university examinations he had passed. However, he found an opportunity to study at an advanced teachers training college funded by UNESCO – his mother actually had to sell her only wrapper to pay for his transport to the college – and ultimately went on to earn his Ph.D. at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, on a federal government

scholarship.

“Even now when I face challenges, I pray about it, I think about it, I get inspired – I keep my eye on the target,” Obioma says. “My driving force is to make the best of life, to meet my targets and to excel in whatever I am doing, to show a distinction between myself and the next person.”

This element of distinction finds its way into everything Obioma does. “I always like to do something in a different and positive way. How do you think I became President of the Governing Council of the UNESCO International Bureau of Education in Geneva?” he says. “I made a conscious choice going into the meetings that I would listen to everybody present their ideas and impress each of them with my own. I am passionate about giving impoverished students opportunities to rise through education. Because I know the background I’m coming from. If I hadn’t distinguished myself from that background I would not be where I am today.”

In Short: Professor Godswill Obioma has achieved his life’s goal of rising above his impoverished background through creativity, determination, focus and hard work. “I tell my children to never take anything for granted,” he says. “Work hard, apologize for your mistakes, remain focused and set targets for yourself that you know you can strive to achieve.”



Date of Birth
12/12/1953

Education
Ph.D. in Measurement & Evaluation
University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 1985

M.Ed. in Measurement & Evaluation
University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 1982

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like
• Music
• Travelling
• Making friends

I Don’t Like
• Telling lies
• Injustice
• Greediness

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Phillips Oduoza

Chief Executive Officer & Group Managing Director United Bank for Africa Plc (UBA)



My View:

“I see Nigeria as a country that has quite a lot of opportunities, people with a lot of potential and great talent.”

Today, as Chief Executive Officer and Group Managing Director of United Bank for Africa (UBA), Phillips Oduoza knows a lot about banking, an industry in which he has accumulated many years of experience. “When I started working in the banking industry, you would have thought it was a crime for anybody to stay longer than six years at any one particular bank. Many people in the industry were jumping from one bank to another in order to climb the career ladder more quickly,” he recalls.

“I, however, spent fourteen years at one bank, working with a group of other young people – about five of us. This bank, which we had started from day one with a fresh licence, is today one of the most successful banks in Nigeria.”

It is obvious that Oduoza is not a man who believes in shortcuts when it comes to career growth. “You cannot expect to just grow up overnight. People need to learn the ropes, and they need to exercise patience,” he says. “You want to avoid climbing up too many levels at once, otherwise you might find yourself in a situation where you are lacking in competence, or you can’t do much because you don’t have the right level of experience.”

Naturally, Oduoza’s years of valuable experience came with lots of hard work. “My friends say that I am a workaholic, but the truth of the matter is that I simply like to work,” Oduoza explains. “I look forward to work every morning because there is quite a lot to do. I have a very busy schedule that never really ends.”

Addressing young Nigerians on the matter of work, Oduoza advises: “You have to work extremely hard if you want to get ahead, whether you are a student or an employee – you must put in a lot, you must be committed and above all, you must like what you are doing.”

When it comes to choosing the right career, Oduoza believes that a lot of young people can easily be lost in the process of making such an important decision. “I think a lot of people are not sure what to do. They may be very talented, but they are confused and don’t see the opportunities,” he says. He adds that with the challenges Nigeria faces today, ranging from the lack of employment prospects to an environment that is inconducive for startups, opportunity can indeed be difficult to come by. As a result, a lot of extremely talented people have yet to realize their aspirations. “However, I see Nigeria as a country that has quite

a lot of opportunities, people with a lot of potential and great talent. If all of these elements are properly harnessed, the result will be a dramatic transformation of the country as a whole.”

Oduoza experienced a different type of confusion than what most might expect when he was faced with the prospect of choosing a course of study at the university – he saw too many opportunities. The love for reading he had cultivated since early childhood had opened his mind to an immense variety of possibilities. “I wanted to be an astronomer; I wanted to be an aeronautical engineer; I wanted to be a medical doctor; I wanted to be an engineer; I wanted to be a lawyer – the number of potential paths was very confusing for me,” he admits.

He ended up bagging a Bachelor’s Degree in Civil Engineering, but soon thereafter he came to the realization that a career in engineering was not for him. Fortunately, Oduoza had the prescience and confidence to go for an MBA in Finance after his stint in engineering, which paved the way to his successful banking career.

Since then, he has risen to the top of the Nigerian financial world. And along the way, Oduoza avoided any shortcuts in his career, which allowed him to gain the necessary experience to become deeply adept in management, leadership and problem solving. “When I see problems – and I see them all the time – I don’t just jump toward the

first solution that comes to mind,” he explains. “First of all, I need to understand the situation, the cause of the problem, the various options – as you never have just one solution to any particular challenge.”

In general, Oduoza prefers to avoid hasty decisions in his approach as a manager. “You have to give things time. For example, there have been instances where employees weren’t performing very well, and instead of simply asking them to leave, I would coach them and help them restore their confidence,” he remarks. “Sometimes when people are not performing well, it’s because they have lost confidence in themselves.”

In Short: *With more than two decades of experience, Phillips Oduoza has ascended to the top of Nigeria’s banking industry, becoming the Chief Executive Officer and Group Managing Director of United Bank for Africa (UBA) in 2010. His contributions to the finance sector are bolstered by a work ethic imbued with integrity, diligence and discipline. He is inspired by Nigeria’s future, which he believes holds potential waiting to be harnessed. “The key is work. Avoid idleness and keep yourself engaged properly at all times,” he says. “Hard work doesn’t kill, and in a lot of cases, it results in rewarding outcomes.”*

Date of Birth
24/08/1962

Education
Master’s in Business Administration & Finance
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1988

B.Sc. Hons. in Civil Engineering with First Class
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1983

Languages
English

I Like

- Working
- Playing golf
- Time with friends and family

I Don’t Like

- Lack of integrity
- Lazy people
- Going on water

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Gabriel Ogbechie

Managing Director Rainoil Limited



My Vision for the Future: “With Nigeria there is enormous potential because it is still a developing country where challenge is embraced as opportunity.”

Gabriel Ifeanyi Ogbechie is more than passionate about his work. “I get to the office at times, and my staff is flabbergasted about having received e-mails at three in the morning,” he laughs. “As long as my eyes are open, I am at work, be it at the office or at home. When I wake up in the middle of the night, I’ll go to check my e-mails really quick and end up working for like thirty minutes.”

This passion is a big part of what has allowed Ogbechie to rise from very humble beginnings. “As a kid I would sell bread – what we call petty trading – to help augment my parents’ income so we could go to school,” he recalls. “Although my parents had a limited education, they insisted and ensured that all six of us kids received a good education and went to university.”

It was in school that Ogbechie discovered his love for mathematics thanks to a persistent teacher who saw his potential. “I went from being one of the worst math students to the best, and it was because of my love for math that I got into engineering,” Ogbechie explains. “But also as a kid I knew I wanted to get into business. I grew up trading and always knew that someday I would do something for myself.”

This “something” would turn out to be Rainoil Ltd, a company that thrives today. **However, much like Ogbechie himself, Rainoil Ltd had a very humble start: one man with an idea.**

It was 1996, and Ogbechie had already been working at Ascon Oil Company for a few years when he realized that if he could raise enough money to buy and sell one truck of diesel in a month, he would make enough to cover what he was already making in salary. **“People tend to have too much attachment to employment,” Ogbechie believes. “If you can find a way to cover your salary by doing something else – then great! Just don’t plunge in with both feet until you’ve tested the waters.”**

As logical as Ogbechie’s business idea may have seemed at the time, he could not find anybody to back him financially. “There I learnt my first lesson – people rarely give money to those who don’t have it,” he recalls, adding that it would take him two years to eventually come up with the necessary \$2,000-worth in naira to actualize his idea. But even then the obstacles did not stop coming.

“I had already identified the first company that was going to

do business with me, already had everything arranged with the purchasing manager. But when I went to pick up the purchase order, I was told the General Manager did not want to sign!” Ogbechie remembers. “So I went to his office, rushed past his secretary and barged in. At first he refused to sign, saying that the company only bought diesel from suppliers with established names. I practically begged him to give me a chance. I had come too far to take ‘no’ for an answer!”

In the end, the GM gave the young Ogbechie his chance. Better still, Ogbechie ended up making more money on the deal than he’d calculated due to prices having changed and sold another truck of diesel within two months. Within six months, business was good enough that he decided it was safe to quit his day job and focus on Rainoil Ltd full-time. Today the company has risen to great prominence in Nigeria.

Ogbechie uses the astonishing success of his company to illustrate the opportunities that Nigerians have before them. **“It is entirely possible to create something out of nothing! Look at the giants like Ford, General Motors, or Shell – these companies didn’t just drop out of the sky. At one point somebody conceptualized each one of them,”** Ogbechie notes. **“With Nigeria specifically there is enormous potential because it is still a developing country where challenge is embraced as opportunity. Here, there are a lot**

of investments to be made where you get the kind of double-digit growth that isn’t possible in more developed economies like the U.S. or the UK.”

Although Ogbechie has gained much from participating in this growth, he maintains that it’s not about money at this point. **“For me it’s now about going back to add value to the system, to inspire people and to teach people in any way I can,”** he explains. Ogbechie does just that on a regular basis through the DayStar Business Academy, a programme sponsored by his church. Here he mentors entrepreneurs of various experience levels on how they can be successful. **“For those of us who have gone down that road, it is important that we set an example, that we enable others who are trying to navigate their own entrepreneurial journeys.”**

In Short: Gabriel Ogbechie is a modern-day rags to riches success who started out selling bread as a child to help support his family. Today that precious value of humility still carries him forward, along with his zeal for hard work and a strong sense of integrity. “There will always be challenges and stumbling blocks. I take things in their stride, always remembering that the only way to go is forward,” Ogbechie says. “Whatever challenge you face, you must keep striving. Don’t let it bother you, and stay focused on the goal.”

Date of Birth
28/05/1966

Education
B.Sc. in Production Engineering
University of Benin
Nigeria, 1987

Languages
English

I Like
• Tennis
• Good food
• Hard work

I Don’t Like
• Liars
• Laziness
• Gossip

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Godwin Ogechukwu

“Godwin Strings”

Violinist



My Top Tip:
“If you’re
committed
to doing
something
that you’re
meant to
do, you can
overcome
any
problem.”

The violin is not a popular instrument in Nigeria. But then again, young violinist Godwin Strings – born Godwin Ogechukwu – sees Nigeria as a place of new frontiers for achievement. “Nigeria is made for great people; it opens your mind to the beauty of life and adventure; it educates you and builds your faith in yourself,” he believes. “To be honest, I don’t think I could have survived in any other country.”

Godwin first began playing the violin in 2006 while studying at his father’s music school. He actually started out with the keyboard, but he couldn’t get into it – there was no spark, no passion. But when he saw a video of professional violinist Karen Briggs, he had a new goal in life and a new instrument to learn. “Her videos motivated me to pick up the violin. I wanted to be at the point where she was,” he recalls. “The inspiration was strong enough to really speed up my learning, and she still inspires me today.”

Back then, however, Godwin’s early ambition was to become a lawyer as opposed to a professional musician. So when he was admitted to study linguistics instead of law at the University of Benin, the

disappointed Godwin didn’t want to go to university at all. But his father encouraged him to pursue linguistic studies, reasoning that Godwin could use the degree to study law afterwards.

During Godwin’s first academic year, he experienced an unexpected merging of language and music: “For me it was like those two things were in line. I was learning violin and at the same time studying language, studying about people, learning about their cultures and their music,” Godwin says. “I was suddenly a lot more interested in linguistics – it all made sense!”

This formative period in Godwin’s life explains the multicultural approach to music for which he is so well known today. “I got to know the language of music and how to address people, how to perform different notes in different tones or scales,” he remarks. “Because I learned how other cultures interpreted their languages and how they related to their music, I was able to apply that to the violin.”

After graduating in 2012, Godwin continued with music instead of going to law school. Approaching the violin as his nine-to-five job, it didn’t take him long

to gain recognition. He made it all the way to the grand finale of the first season of *Nigeria’s Got Talent*, which was followed by even more high-profile opportunities, such as the 2012 Koko Concert, the Ebony Life TV Launch, an Arsenal FC championship match and a performance for President Goodluck Jonathan.

As with any profession, being a violinist has its share of ups and downs, challenges to overcome and problems to solve. “Sometimes when I’m practicing, scoring some songs, or trying to get some notes to sound different, I can get stuck at certain spots and become upset or frustrated,” Godwin discloses. “But when that happens, I take a deep breath and reassure myself that I am meant for this, because if you’re committed to doing something that you’re meant to do, you can overcome any problem.”

The important thing with problems in any facet of life, Godwin continues, is to face them rather than worrying about them all the time. “Worrying about problems creates more problems,” he suggests. “It all comes down to focus, hard work and commitment if you truly want to handle a problem in any aspect of life – be it marriage, work, family – anything.”

Wise words from the young Godwin, lessons learned during a time early in his career when he had doubts about his path. “It got to a point where I was actually wondering if I’d ever make

money from doing this, especially considering the state of the country with so many people in need,” Godwin admits. “But then I finally got a team that believed in me, my work, and my talent, and it’s been awesome from there. They really motivate me with all their effort and energy, so now I can’t give up!”

Godwin insists that work ethic and focus, while important, are only half the story. “I believe that hard work is vital, but I can’t depend only on that. I also need the grace and favour of God,” he says. “A lot of people work hard, but that doesn’t mean good things will come their way. For me, work has to be coupled with grace. That’s when things will fly fast for you and you’ll see where your life can go.”

In Short: *Godwin Ogechukwu, better known as Godwin Strings, at the young age of twenty-two, is reintroducing Nigeria to the passionate sound of violin. Through his penchant for world music, Godwin’s playing harnesses styles ranging from Afrobeat, to rock, to blues. He hopes to one day inspire young musicians just as he himself has been inspired. “I want to be a mentor and an icon. I want my name to be synonymous with violin in Nigeria – for young people interested in music to look up to me and think, ‘I want to play like that person.’”*

Date of Birth
25/08/1992

Education
B.A. Hons. in
Linguistics & African
Languages
University of Benin
Nigeria, 2012

Languages
English, Igbo

I Like
• Music
• Food
• Video games

I Don’t Like
• Unnecessary
pressure
• Heat
• When someone
disturbs my sleep

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Chief Michael Ade Ojo, OON

Founder Elizade Group of Companies



My Wiew:

“You cannot reap what you do not plant, so plant what you want, because who you will be tomorrow starts today.”

When Chief Michael Ade Ojo was studying business administration at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, he had a professor who constantly declared that the students would one day become the top business people in Nigeria. Ojo, however, used to make jests at such remarks.

“I often challenged his high expectations. I couldn’t understand where he expected me to get the money to do business!” Ojo recalls. “But, as we were exposed to the curriculum, reading articles and business books, I gradually became inspired.”

By his last year of university, Ojo had made it his goal to occupy the workforce no longer than ten years before starting his own business. His girlfriend and future wife was also in on the pact. And though they had yet to decide on the nature of the company, they already had a name: ‘Elizade’ – a combination of their own names. Confident from the beginning, Ojo would arrive at his ambitious goal well before the ten-year mark.

Firstly, Ojo finished his last two years of school thanks to the assistance of a company scholarship. He assumed that he would then be required to work for

the company after graduation, so he did not bother with any other job interviews. “When I finished school, the company surprised me by saying that the sponsorship had been freely offered and there was no obligation,” Ojo remembers. “Seeing as how I hadn’t interviewed anywhere else, I was luckily able to convince them to hire me!”

The job was an introduction to the art of selling cars. “I proved to be quite good at it, and I won a contract for twenty vehicles to be sold to the Electricity Power Authority,” he says. “But when the day came to collect the purchase order, the manager took all the credit for what was considered a big contract in those days. I was so frustrated – and more than happy when they decided not to renew my employment contract.”

Ojo ended up finding his next job through somebody he had sold a car to – the head of Federal Inland Revenue. Yet working as a civil servant left Ojo’s sense of ambition unsatisfied. “After two months of wasting time in the office, I decided to take advantage of the situation,” Ojo reveals. “Utilizing what I had learned about insurance while selling cars, I began going through the Inland Revenue registry, making

a list of all of the company officers who weren’t insured.”

For the next few months, Ojo would work at the office for two hours, then go out and sell insurance. “Not only was I able to go directly to uninsured people, but as a tax officer I was able to explain to them that with insurance they would save money on taxes,” he discloses. “So that’s what I did instead of just sleeping – and I was very successful at it.”

That summer, Ojo landed a job with British Petroleum Nigeria Limited (now African Petroleum). “I still had this ten-year goal in mind, so I was selling for them one hundred percent, but eventually I started selling insurance on the side again,” Ojo notes.

After more than four years at BP, Ojo had, despite becoming the top sales representative, reached an impasse with the company and decided to take a leave of absence to try selling cars again. Little did he know that the Elizade brand was about to take off. “I went to R.T. Briscoe, the sole distributor of Toyota in Nigeria at that time, and proposed that I sell their cars on a freelance basis, being paid only through commission,” Ojo explains. “In four weeks, I sold forty cars and found that through commission alone I’d made more in one month than a whole year at BP!”

For Ojo, it was enough incentive to resign from the BP job and start his own business selling Toyotas under the Elizade banner in August 1971 – six years after

graduating from university. “One thing I made sure of was to never waste money,” Ojo says of his early days in business. “Aside from making sure my family was taken care of, every penny that I earned went back into the business.”

Over the next four decades, he would grow the business into a group of companies, today employing approximately fifteen hundred people. “A lot of young Nigerians want to get rich without working at all, which is a mentality I strive to re-orientate through Elizade University,” Ojo says of the thriving institution he founded in Ondo State. “You cannot reap what you do not plant, so plant what you want, because who you will be tomorrow starts today.”

In Short: Chief Michael Ade Ojo’s impressive career in business and sales is a lesson in what it means to stay true to oneself and pursue long-term goals with persistence and ingenuity. He has never been content to rest on his laurels and today his legacy is shining bright through the Elizade brand and Elizade University, where he endeavours to ensure the coming generations are prepared and able, ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow. “The biggest danger in one’s life is self-deceit,” he advises. “You must work hard to achieve what you want and don’t expect things to happen by accident.”

Date of Birth
14/06/1938

Education
Honorary Doctorate
University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 1999

Bachelor in Business
Administration
University of Nigeria
Nsukka
Nigeria, 1965

Languages
English, Yoruba

I Like
• Dressing well
• Eating well
• Being near God

I Don’t Like
• Lies
• Cheating
• Stealing

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Prince Julius Okojie

Chairman & CEO Shamah Emporium Ltd



My Recipe for Success: “I worked diligently because I wanted to make sure that I implemented the value system I had gained from my upbringing.”

Prince Julius Okojie remembers his childhood in a small Nigerian village vividly: a polygamist family with twenty other children, scarce money and plenty of farm work. One night he came home from the field to find his mother in the kitchen, trying to cook. The roof was leaking; water was cascading down, continually extinguishing the fire and frustrating her efforts. “She was crying, saying she had no help,” Julius sadly remembers. “I told her not to worry, that I would help her.”

It was a promise that the young Julius would keep the rest of his mother’s life. One day he would even make enough money to help out the entire family. But in order to do that, he would have to leave the small village for the big city. On the day he finished secondary school in 1984, he came home and told his mother his plans to seek bigger and better opportunities away from home. “I said: ‘Mom, if I go I may be happy; if I remain here we all sink together.’”

Julius was gone by sunrise the next morning. He had saved enough money to pay for his fare to Lagos, where he boarded with an aunt for a few weeks until he had outstayed his welcome. “I then found myself in Kaduna where I began to hustle,

but I knew I needed a formal job that could provide me with a consistent stream of income,” Julius remembers. “Around that time I heard that Niger Insurance Plc was looking for young men capable in marketing.”

Recalling his successful experiences helping his mother to sell in the village marketplace, Julius signed up for the training. “It was a six-week sales training programme, but after four weeks I was the only one left,” he recalls. “It was difficult work – a lot of trekking, wearing a tie and learning how to smile even when there is no food in your stomach. The experience was so challenging because there was no salary attached to the job; I had to generate my income through commissions only.”

Julius, however, remained determined to see the experience through, knowing he was destined to prosper. Eventually he did start making commission, and in three years he was making more money than the manager of the company. At the same time, he enrolled at a polytechnic school while continuing to excel as a salesman. “A time came when the company offered to hire me on as a full-time staff member,” Julius recalls. “They sent me to set

up a branch in Abuja, giving me an official car with a driver as well as a house. Within six months I was given a best salesman award, and so it continued. I was always number one in the company.”

By 1998, after ten years with the company, Julius decided it was time to part ways to begin his own business ventures. As soon as he resigned from Niger Insurance, he set up a private insurance brokerage outfit and a real estate company. After the initial struggles associated with new business, these companies were tremendously successful, and Julius was finally able to accomplish his lifelong ambition of helping his entire family.

Today, Julius continues to flourish as an independent businessman. However, he maintains that money was never his driving force, but rather he was motivated by integrity. “It all starts with righteousness. When I was a young man, I worked diligently because I wanted to make sure that I implemented the value system I had gained from my upbringing,” he shares. “Though my parents were poor, they were people of integrity. Throughout my father’s lifetime, he never did anything in the dark. I learned from him the way to do things right and the importance of hard work.”

With his sense of integrity, Julius has earned the trust of developers and investors throughout Abuja and other areas. They come to him for his advice on land deals

and for his help in negotiations, because they value his experience. “If it’s a bad deal or a scam, I advise them to walk away. If it’s genuine, I help negotiate for a better price and as a ‘thank you’ they’ll send me a check out of appreciation.”

Before pursuing material wealth, Julius encourages Nigerian youth to develop their own sense of righteousness, to always do the right thing. “Righteousness, hard work, integrity – this is what has made me successful today,” he explains. “When you pursue righteousness, it attracts money. I tell people, making money is the easiest thing, but first you have to do the right thing, so people know you can be trusted.”

In Short: Prince Julius Okojie, who came from a huge family in a small farming village, is the epitome of a rags-to-riches story. Getting his start in the insurance business, he quickly became a top salesman before ultimately venturing out to run his own business. Throughout his history of financial success, he maintains that righteousness has always been the core value. “If you think of yourself as a money person and only pursue money, nobody will trust you in life,” he advises. “Righteousness comes first. Everything you do should revolve around righteousness – standing up for what is right.”

Date of Birth
05/07/1965

Languages
Edo, Hausa, English

I Like
• Humanity
• Exercise
• Travelling

I Don't Like
• Liars
• Deception
• Noise

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Onajite Paul Okoloko

Group Managing Director & Group CEO Notore Chemical Industries Plc



My Top Tip:

“Don’t ever be afraid to follow your dream, but at the same time always be truthful to yourself.”

Onajite Paul Okoloko is a man who often sees opportunity in overlooked places. The genesis of his company, Notore Chemical Industries Plc, is a perfect case in point. “We started with a plant that had been abandoned for over ten years, completely left to the elements. Nobody thought it could have been revived or rehabilitated,” Okoloko remembers, adding that today the facility runs at one hundred percent capacity.

It is around this once abandoned plant that Okoloko has built a top-shelf business with five hundred employees and another thousand jobs created through subcontractors. Notore specializes in fertilizer, seeds, and education in the agricultural sector. “We are making a positive impact in helping farmers improve crop yields,” he notes. “This plays a big part in helping Nigeria to one day become self-sufficient in production.”

While the ability to recognize opportunity has brought Okoloko a degree of professional success in his quest to add value to Nigeria, it is only part of the equation. Being able to bring ideas to fruition comes from years of cultivating strong business acumen, gaining experience as an entrepreneur, and keeping both feet firmly planted on

the ground. “Don’t ever be afraid to follow your dream, but at the same time always be truthful to yourself,” Okoloko advises. “You must be realistic: recognize your strengths and develop them to your maximum ability, but also be aware of your weaknesses.”

This kind of self-awareness, Okoloko suggests, can lead to a stronger sense of vision and persistence. “Do everything you can to keep going and do not be afraid of failure,” he encourages. “Failure is no excuse to quit. When mistakes occur, you learn from them, you pull up your bootstraps, and you continue. Life can be tough, but that’s how it is.”

For Okoloko, the notion of being truthful and realistic in business is equally significant when it comes to problem solving. “One of the biggest challenges businesses face, be it in Nigeria or globally, occurs when an organization is not truthful with itself,” he explains. “When there are challenges, you have to be able to recognize them. More specifically, you have to identify and deal with the root cause of the problem as opposed to just treating the symptoms.”

Teamwork, according to Okoloko, is also paramount in handling day-to-day challenges

in business. “With any company, you always have to have a variety of talents: the visionaries, the operational people, the financial experts, consultants – there is a role for everybody.”

Okoloko’s own role in business as an entrepreneur has been inspired by other successful businesses, such as international companies that have come to Nigeria with practical visions. “When I watched these businesses thrive, I knew that indigenous companies could just as easily succeed if properly equipped with opportunity and access to capital,” Okoloko says.

In fact, when Okoloko returned to Nigeria in 1994 after several years spent working in the U.S., he was motivated by the economic progress he found. “The banking revolution had started and there were young corporate people all over the place. I could see the middle class beginning to emerge because of job opportunities, and new government policies were encouraging investments in Nigeria,” he recalls. “With Nigeria’s vast resources, there were – and still are – a lot of opportunities largely untapped, which is why I made the decision to come back. I wanted to be a part of this.”

Okoloko wasted no time after repatriating, starting businesses – such as Oando Energy Services or Ocean and Oil Group – that have since grown to world-class companies. “It was a lot of hard work, searching for real opportunities and converting them

into sustainable businesses,” he says. “But in Nigeria it is possible to build businesses because of the natural and mineral resources and also the intellectual capacity of the people. The country has a large population and a growing market – what more could you want when developing a business?”

In addition to his remarkable work with Notore, Okoloko in recent years has served as Director of Union Bank of Nigeria and as an appointed member of the Presidential Committee on Oil & Gas. In 2011, he was recognized for his business prowess and innovation when he was the first to win Ernst & Young’s ‘Entrepreneur of the Year’ award for emerging entrepreneurs in the West Africa region.

In Short: *Onajite Paul Okoloko and his career as an entrepreneur serve as evidence of the growing number of business opportunities in Nigeria, for both Nigerians and international investors. The key components of his success have always been to maintain a truthful and realistic mentality and to work hard. “Knowing your strengths and weaknesses will serve as a strong foundation from which to build. What’s more, this type of self-awareness offers a vital component that will allow you to determine the role you need to play when it comes to making the most of opportunity and embracing challenge.”*

Date of Birth
22/02/1966

Education
Owner/President
Management Program
Harvard Business
School, Cambridge
Massachusetts
U.S., 2008

B.Sc. in Economics &
Statistics
University of Benin
Nigeria, 1986

Languages
English

I Like
• Good food
• Good wine
• Intelligent people

I Don’t Like
• Poor quality wines
• Lazy people
• Time wasted

Contacts
notore.com



Alex Okosi

Senior Vice-President & Managing Director Viacom International Media Networks Africa



My Recipe for
Success:
“To become
great at
anything you
have to be
dedicated,
hardworking,
and
passionate
about what
you do.”

Alex Okosi was just twelve years old when he travelled to the U.S. to visit his older brothers and convinced his parents to let him stay. He ended up getting into a distinguished prep school, Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire, which he claims amplified his passion for learning. “The school was amazing because it was academically rigorous and offered me the opportunity to learn with students from diverse countries,” Alex recalls.

For university, he attended a small Catholic school in Vermont on a basketball scholarship, graduating at the top of his business and economics classes before landing a job at MTV. “I convinced MTV to hire me because I had a strong resume for a recent graduate. In addition to being an athlete with excellent grades, I was also a resident adviser, and the internships I held enabled me to gain real experience that I could apply to my work at MTV,” Alex reveals. “This is why I tell young people, if you want to be great, you’ve got to put your all into whatever you’re doing at the moment so that you’re ready to seize any opportunity that comes up.”

This kind of effort, Alex

continues, is part of how to establish a solid foundation in life. “Be hungry for opportunities that will allow you to hone your skills, even if the financial benefits are not great – like internships,” he advises. “To become great at anything you have to be dedicated, hardworking, and passionate about what you do.”

The next step in Alex’s career was an integrated marketing position at MTV in New York City. *At twenty-two years old, he was a marketing executive responsible for pitching content and event ideas to help brands authentically connect with the young adult demographic.* After a few years, Alex relocated to Los Angeles to join the affiliate sales and marketing department at the parent company, MTV Networks, where he worked on securing the distribution of new brands, such as MTV 2 and CMT. During that period, Alex delivered great results for the company and was introduced to the Global CEO by his boss as a star performer. The CEO, after hearing about Alex’s success, suggested they meet for lunch. “It was an opportunity that I grabbed with both hands, and a few weeks later, I started pitching him the idea of MTV in Africa. *I had to articulate how we could build a business that*

would not only showcase Africa’s vibrant music and youth culture, but that would also deliver profits,” Alex says.

The CEO was receptive to Alex’s innovative ideas, and in May 2003, Alex was seconded to the International Strategy and Business Development group based in London to help drive MTV Networks’ global expansion and develop the business plan for launching MTV in Africa. “It was not easy, because I had to develop a plan that encompassed our revenue and cost models and that promoted the development of quality content. In Africa at the time, there were very few quality music videos, so we had to lay the groundwork for improvement of the visual content by facilitating workshops for directors and artists in ten different countries,” he explains. “It was important that African music had an opportunity to travel across the continent and overseas. Today, contemporary African artists are having their music played all over the world, and I believe MTV’s work has served as a key catalyst to this new reality.”

Alex now helms Viacom International Media Networks Africa (formerly MTV Networks Africa) and has launched several other channels in addition to MTV Base (Africa). The network now encompasses ten multi-media brands such as Nickelodeon, Comedy Central and BET. Based

between Johannesburg and Lagos, Alex is responsible for managing the development of the business. And as a staunch champion of African youth culture, he still finds time to get involved with initiatives such as “MTV Choose or Lose,” a campaign that encourages young people to vote. He also mentors young musicians. “A lot of our young artists aspire to be a big hit in the United States, but it doesn’t quite work like that,” Alex reveals. “I don’t dissuade them from global ambitions, but you’ve got to become a hit in your own country first. I tell our young artists to focus on improving their music and finding success here, and then the world will hear about them.”

In Short: *Alex Okosi aimed for success at a very young age. At just twelve years old, when he moved to the U.S. to live with his brother, he was thinking ahead to ensure he got an education there, but he was also focusing on each step as it came. He made it a point to excel in whatever he was doing, and he strived to gain as much experience as he could. One milestone at a time, he climbed his way up to a job with MTV that eventually led to him launching MTV Africa. The philosophy that got him there? “Be the best at whatever you’re doing at any point in time and more opportunities will arise.”*

Date of Birth
11/09/1974

Education
Bachelor in Business Administration & Economics
St. Michael’s College
Colchester, Vermont
U.S., 1998

Languages
English, Igbo

I Like

- My son
- Sports
- Making a difference

I Don’t Like

- Lazy people
- Clutter
- Conflicts

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Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Former Honorable Minister of Finance



My View:

“Almost every sector in Nigeria is bursting with creativity and possibility.”

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala closes her eyes and can see back to when she was fifteen, living in the squalid remains of the family home during the months following the Civil War. She can still see her father sitting in what used to be the living room, a cement block for a chair. She couldn't understand how he could smile and carry on despite having lost everything.

One day, almost in frustration, Okonjo-Iweala inquired into her father's disposition, and he taught her something she would never forget. “He told me that all you need in life is your head,” she says. “Material possessions come and go, but as long as your head is attached to your body you have everything.” Her father explained to her that he would work hard and regain everything that had been lost to the ravages of war. In three to four years' time, he would do just that.

Her father's example really shaped Okonjo-Iweala's life. Although he was a renowned university professor, he was not one to lecture his own children. “My father simply demanded the best of us,” Okonjo-Iweala recalls today. “He showed us the value of honesty and transparency, taught

us that education is paramount. *Imagine losing everything in your forties, having to start again, and yet still being able to smile and to show your children the beauty of life. That taught me a lot.*”

Contrasting the country's war-torn era with the present booming economy, one can see a resonance in her father's enduring resilience. “There is so much happening here now, so much potential for change,” Okonjo-Iweala says. “Almost every sector in Nigeria is bursting with creativity and possibility.” Okonjo-Iweala actually deserves much of the credit for her country's astounding transformation and rise to economic might.

She took over the helm at the Ministry of Finance while Nigeria was still reeling in the wake of the global financial crisis, weighed down further by heavy debts. “I came in, I mapped out an action plan for debt relief, we followed it, and we earned it,” she explains. “It was hard work – my hair went grey, but we succeeded in reducing the debt!”

Okonjo-Iweala had to work hard to prove to finance ministries around the world that Nigeria not only needed but had earned a reduction in its debt. “I told them

that Nigeria could handle the tough reforms necessary for debt relief,” Okonjo-Iweala notes. “And, sure enough, we delivered.”

It wasn't just external stakeholders that Okonjo-Iweala needed to convince. She also had to win backing from Nigerians who were sceptical. However, Okonjo-Iweala, determined to see through her economic plan and her pledge to the people of Nigeria, pushed through an ambitious programme.

Okonjo-Iweala has earned much acclaim for her role in steering Nigeria's economy toward growth and stability. Still, she insists that it takes a team to achieve success. “You cannot succeed by yourself,” she explains. “From the secretary to the driver, everybody matters. Regardless of hierarchy everybody makes up the team, everybody plays a role.”

As the top economist in the country, Okonjo-Iweala is often approached by young Nigerians curious about choosing a career. Her advice is always the same: find something you love. “Make sure that at least seventy-five percent of the time you find yourself wanting to get out of bed to go to work,” she advises. “You don't want to cultivate a career of drudgery, but of passion, something you can commit yourself to and at times have fun.”

And even during the times when her work wasn't so fun, when it challenged her endurance to the extreme, she would recall her father's philosophy that “working to serve others is a privilege and an honour.” This and the knowledge

that she was building a better future for Nigeria gave her the strength to persevere.

Through the course of her career Okonjo-Iweala has found inspiration in many of the world's leaders, past and present. She carries their lessons with her and uses them to shape her approach to life and policy. One of her favourites has always been Dr. Martin Luther King. “If you read through some of Dr. King's speeches, you'll see that he had some very profound things to say,” notes Okonjo-Iweala. “He speaks of critical issues that people even today are not really focusing on. There is incredible poignancy in his belief that if you are rich but your neighbour is poor, then you're not really rich at all.”

In Short: Coming from a family that had lost everything during the Civil War, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala rose to become a leading figure in global economic policy. As Minister of Finance for Nigeria, she was a major force in helping the country climb out of debt to become the strongest economy in Africa. Her remarkable commitment to Nigeria and its people can be traced back to her father's belief that serving one's country is the highest honour and the best application of knowledge. “I have used my mind to try and help my country by working through the right policies.”

Date of Birth
13/06/1954

Education
General Manager's Course Certificate from Graduate School of Business Administration Harvard University Boston, Massachusetts U.S., 1997

Ph.D. in Field-Regional Economic Development Massachusetts Institute of Technology Cambridge, U.S., 1981

A.B. Field Economics Magna cum Laude Harvard University Cambridge, U.S., 1976

Languages
Igbo, Yoruba, English French

I Like
• Writing
• Reading
• Swimming

I Don't Like
• Hypocrisy
• Mediocrity
• Lack of passion for one's job

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Chief. Mrs. Oyenike Davies-Okundaye “Mama Nike”

My Belief:
“Know what
you want to
do, package
it well, and
you will get
there.”

Chief Oyenike Davies-Okundaye is one of the most celebrated artists in her home country of Nigeria as well as on the west coast of Africa. Her creative energy expands beyond her colourful textiles and paintings and into her philosophies on life and into the very art of survival. Through the Nike Centre for Art and Culture she has enabled thousands of Nigerians to not only hone their artistic skills but also to use these skills as a means of creating income.

Raised by her aunt and great-grandmother, Davies-Okundaye comes from the most humble of backgrounds. While her childhood was far from easy, it was an upbringing that shaped her view of the world as an artist. “Both of my parents were craftspeople, and education in those days involved passing on skills from one generation to the next,” Davies-Okundaye says of her heritage. “My father was a leather worker. He made shoes and bags. And my mother was a fifth generation textile artist. What I learned from both parents was a huge inspiration to me.”

After her mother and grandmother passed away, the young Davies-Okundaye was forced

to come up with the money for her own primary school fees, which made her rough childhood all the more difficult. “In order to pay for school, I worked for my neighbours, carrying stone, which was very tough,” she recalls. “During that time I also taught myself to speak English little by little.”

While these formative years instilled in Davies-Okundaye a sense of steadfast resilience that would serve her well in the years to come, today she prefers to look forward through a lens of optimism and hope. “I always believe that I am going to make it. In times of struggle it can be easy to get depressed, but you can’t let it scare you,” she remarks. “Not having money can actually enhance your creativity. What motivates me every day is my work. I wake up very early, excited to get started, or even in the middle of the night sometimes if I dream of my work.”

One of Davies-Okundaye’s biggest opportunities as an artist came when she was selected by the U.S. government to join a delegation of teachers to lead workshops in the States. “Visiting the U.S., above all, inspired me to work even more. I saw a young woman, for example,

CEO of Nike Art Limited & Nike Centre for Art and Culture

raising a child and working two or three jobs,” says Davies-Okundaye, who today has more than one hundred fifty students in Europe and the U.S. “And I saw masterpieces painted by women, brilliant work that simply amazed me. So when I came back, I was inspired to work harder and take more risks as an artist, experimenting with watercolour, pencil, ink, and with beads – this is what allowed me to achieve something financially.”

The trip to the U.S. also allowed Davies-Okundaye to transcend a few long-outdated taboos from her own culture. “Where I come from it used to be that women were not allowed to read or write – so I sent my daughter to the U.S. Virgin Islands to learn those things,” Davies-Okundaye reveals. “All the things she was limited from doing here are possible there. But females are starting to become more empowered in Nigeria. For instance, we have a female Chief Justice for the first time ever. I want to see more of that. I would like to see a female governor and a female president.”

The same resilience and dissatisfaction with the status quo is evident in Davies-Okundaye’s business smarts as an artist. On one occasion, for instance, she and four fellow artists had mounted a show in the U.S. but were unable to make any sales. “It was a setback that wiped us out financially, but I refused to be discouraged,” Davies-Okundaye shares. “I went back home and was able to save three

thousand naira and get to work again. I started making batik, men’s tops, skirts – they were creative, original, wearable art!”

With continuous persistence and unending patience, she was able to gradually grow a customer base. She continued teaching workshops as well, her fame ascending to the point where she began establishing art centres offering free courses to young Nigerians. “In Nigeria we have something called ‘tsuru’, which means patience and honesty,” Davies-Okundaye notes, reflecting on the arc of her career. “This is the kind of mentality that enables you to stay focused, set goals and achieve them. Know what you want to do, package it well, and you will get there.”

In Short: *Chief Oyenike Davies-Okundaye has played a vital role in reviving aspects of traditional Nigerian craftwork among the country’s youth. Her work as an artist and a teacher combined with a commitment to positivity and making the most of life has lifted Davies-Okundaye from her humble beginnings. It is a remarkable journey that will continue to inspire young artists locally and internationally. “My art has helped me a lot throughout my life,” she says. “The important thing is to be honest and to have patience, to do your best and know that it will all work out in the end.”*



Date of Birth
23/05/1951

Education
Honorary Doctorate
Degree in Art
Stanton University
Florida
U.S., 1996

Primary level 6

Languages
Okun, Yoruba, English

I Like
• People
• Food
• Travel

I Don’t Like
• Dishonesty
• People cheating
• Sickness

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Spencer O. Onosode

Managing Director & CEO Pillar Oil Limited



My Words of
Wisdom:
“Each
generation
has its
share of
challenges,
and if you
look at
history you’ll
see how they
tackled those
challenges.”

When looking back on his career, Spencer O. Onosode remembers when the concept of building a business around small oil fields first came to him in 1995 as one of those “light bulb moments” in his life. He had held various positions in multinational oil companies throughout the years leading up to the decision to start his own oil firm, but he had never been able to shake his own managerial urges. “The one thing that I was always certain about was that I would one day run my own enterprise,” he says. Over time the valuable experience Onosode gained throughout his jobs for different companies would add up and help him eventually shape the entrepreneurial vision that simmered in the back of his mind.

However, knowing just what that enterprise would be eluded Onosode for many years during his education and career. Throughout university and even during the immediate years after graduation, Onosode admits that he really had no idea what he wanted to do with his life. “In high school, it took vexatious thought to decide what I would study at university because I had generally been a well-rounded

student and could have gone in any direction,” he recalls. “I ended up choosing economics simply because my father was an investment banker.”

It was his father’s work that provided a comfortable childhood for Onosode and his siblings, an upbringing that afforded him the opportunity to study in the United States, where he remained for five years after graduating from Baylor University in Waco, Texas. “Though I worked as a programme engineer with a software data processing firm, I spent those years playing the social circuit and seemingly enjoying myself, until one day I decided that it was time to return to Nigeria and get more focused on my career. I was twenty-five years old at the time.” Onosode explains. “I came back home and got a job with PricewaterhouseCoopers, and then I moved to DuPont (now Conoco Phillips) and later on I worked for Statoil/BP, where I spent about six years.”

While Onosode was climbing his way up the corporate ladder, the desire to run his own business steadily grew stronger. In 1997, when he finally decided to incorporate Pillar Oil Limited,

nothing could stop him from following his business intuition. “Quite frankly, when I started out with Pillar Oil, I didn’t have much reference point; I just did what made sense to me,” he notes. “Of course there were some people who did not see things my way, but when you are focused on a vision that is based on faith and hope, you can generally expect some level of reward.”

Today the company has successfully grown to command multi - million - dollar drilling projects. However, Onosode does not consider this monetary success and positive growth an achievement of any particular significance. “We started as a small company and have worked our way through the corporate web, employing people and exploring, developing and producing oil – trying to add value to the industry while keeping our long-term objectives firmly in view,” he says.

While Onosode sees the growth of Pillar Oil as following the right trajectory, he hopes to take his life and work in Nigeria to the next step. “There are things I would like to do in the future, particularly when it comes to empowering the youth,” he explains. “There is rampant poverty out there, and I think, outside of government, those of us in positions of influence must fashion practical solutions to uplift and empower young Nigerians. I’m not sure how long we can continue to remain at the fringes of ignorance and mediocrity. Much work still needs to be done to

uplift the masses from hopelessness, but I believe that day will surely come.”

In spite of the various problems and challenges Nigeria faces today, Onosode wants to remind the younger generation that there is always hope for the future. He advises the youth of Nigeria today to look to the past for reassurance that their efforts will eventually bear fruit: “Each generation has its share of challenges, and if you look at history you’ll see how they tackled those challenges,” Onosode says. “I have no doubt that the youth of Nigeria will rise to the occasion, fulfil their destinies, and face up to the challenges of the present day.”

In Short: *While it took Spencer O. Onosode a few years to develop the vision that would lead to the formation of Pillar Oil Limited, it was a vision that he has actualized through hard work and focus. And while others may see Nigeria itself as having a lot of potential, Onosode suggests that the country has transitioned from the realm of uncertain potential to the reality of achievable opportunities. “The key is to remain focused on what you’re doing and to leave the world a better place than how you found it,” he says. “There is no time like the present to get busy – time for us to give back to society.”*

Date of Birth
21/05/1964

Education
B.A. in Economics
Baylor University
Waco, Texas
U.S., 1981

Languages
Urhubo, English

I Like
• Grilled guinea fowl
• Travelling
• Reading autobiographies

I Don't Like
• Dishonesty
• Dirty environments
• Bananas

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Prof. Chidiebere R. Onyia

Founder & Managing Partner Center for Education Reform



My Words of
Wisdom:
“Success is
not always
about
material
acquisitions,
but
something
that occurs
at multiple
levels.”

Professor Chidiebere Onyia grew up in an environment where education was highly valued and accompanied by equally high expectations. To make his father happy, he earned a degree in Parasitology and Entomology at university – only to realize medicine was not the career he wanted to pursue.

“At first there was a period of hopelessness,” he remembers of those first months after graduation. “The one thing I knew was that I wanted to get out of my hometown; I wanted to explore.” Onyia wound up moving to live with his uncle in Lagos, where he began buying and selling cars to keep busy, unsure of what else to do.

Opportunity struck in 1998, when Onyia attended a religious conference in the U.S. “The family I stayed with offered to help me with my papers and change my visa status, which would allow me to go back to school in the U.S.,” Onyia explains. “It was a huge chance for me to follow my real passion: education. I knew I wanted to impact lives through knowledge, but my previous training had not allowed me to do that.”

With his papers in order, Onyia then migrated to California to attend classes at Argosy University. After graduating, he took up a teaching

position in a high-risk school district in Los Angeles County, unburdening himself of his student debt in the process. “The government offers an incentive for teachers who are willing to risk working in these areas, forgiving their student loans in twenty-five percent increments every year,” Onyia explains.

While Onyia enjoyed the economic advantage of the government incentive, the intense experience of working in such a violent school district proved to be even more life changing. “Some of my students would come to school one day, and the next they would be gone – shot or killed. It was such a high-risk situation,” he grimly recalls. “Just us being there and engaging with these young people – talking to them and listening – was sometimes the difference between life and death for them.”

Onyia spent the ensuing years climbing the ranks in the school district, rising from classroom teacher all the way to principal and director. At that point he began to take on even greater leadership responsibilities in the U.S., serving on advisory boards for the Department of Education in Washington DC. He also began teaching teachers. “Once I started teaching in the graduate schools, it gave me an opportunity to speak to new teachers, to pass

on to them the message of values – how truth, respect and love are something that every human being needs,” Onyia says. “Some of these children have gone their whole lives without somebody telling them that they love them, instead receiving only negative messages. If you can demonstrate love to a child, you’ll be surprised at how you can change a life. I knew that for every single kid, for every single teacher that I was able to reach, that they would later touch other lives. This is why I chose education as a profession.”

By 2010, Onyia was ready to return to Nigeria. He sensed it was time for him to give something back to his own country, using all the experience he had gained in the U.S. Upon returning, he immediately established the Berkeley International Science Magnet group of schools in Lagos, offering a tuition free private education to the poorest students in the community. The schools provide scholarships all the way through secondary school and, if the students continue to perform well, university.

Today the system has grown to two schools with three hundred students, another sixty on the waiting list, and one hundred twenty faculty and staff. Onyia views the group of schools as a way to enable youth through education and to have a positive impact on their lives. “I strive to communicate to them that success is not always about material acquisitions, but something that occurs at multiple levels. You can be successful as a businessman yet a failure as a family man – it is always about balance,” Onyia

says. “A good way to maintain this balance is to associate with good people, friends who can mentor you and strengthen your spiritual life. Hanging out with the wrong people, on the other hand, can change your life for the worse no matter how old you are.”

Onyia also endeavours to teach the students that they must have a deep desire for excellence, a critical component that he sees deteriorating among today’s youth. “Because of time constraints and a desire for immediate gain, a lot of young people settle for mediocre performance, which prevents them from excelling and becoming people of quality,” Onyia suggests. “I want to ensure that I intentionally add value to Nigeria and striving for excellence is a big part of that. I take this country very seriously, especially when it comes to the younger generations.”

In Short: *Professor Chidiebere Onyia has worked extensively with youth in Nigeria and throughout the U.S. In addition to founding the Berkeley International Science Magnet group of schools, he is also a founding partner and Chairman of OrgLearning Consult Nigeria, as well as the Center for Education Reform and Sustainability Initiative. He has devoted his life and career to having a positive impact on younger generations. “The Nigerian youth are so excellent. We just have to give them an opportunity to exhibit those gifts that they have inside.”*

Date of Birth
05/02/1969

Education
MBA International
Business
Argosy University
Orange County
California
U.S., 2011

Ph.D. in Education
Argosy University
Orange County
California
U.S., 2005

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like
• Travelling
• Bookstores
• Hanging out with family

I Don't Like
• Prejudice
• Procrastination
• Careless people

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Evelyn Ndali Oputu

My Vision for the Future: “We want to renew hope in people, help them rise above the corruption for which Nigeria is so notorious.”

Even in the face of overwhelming obstacles, Evelyn Ndali Oputu has achieved the balance so many women strive for: a strong mother, successful career woman, and community activist. Her proudest achievement, aside from her brilliant banking career, is having raised four children alone. After leaving her husband, she worked especially hard to make sure they got the best education. However, when her only son passed away at the age of twenty-nine, it absolutely shattered her.

“We had been living together for a year and a half after he graduated from Harvard, and his passing was the one thing in my life that has ever broken me,” Oputu discloses, adding that once he was gone she knew she had to do something in his memory. “My son believed that the future of Nigeria would depend on the young people, that young people should be more entrepreneurial, more ambitious and more willing to put forth the necessary effort. He believed that if Nigeria’s youth could realize their true potential, then they would be able to choose good leaders from among themselves.”

Keeping her late son’s vision in

mind, Oputu set up the Ovie Brume Foundation (OBF) in his name. “We started with the Youth Centre because I wanted to provide children with a stimulating environment that would allow them to thrive,” Oputu notes. “I used my house on Victoria Island as a centre where these kids from state schools could receive the attention they deserved.”

With about eighty children attending on a daily basis, OBF today has grown to include a wide range of programmes and activities designed to give young Nigerians a leg up in the world. OBF provides a variety of opportunities, including scholarships, mentor programmes, summer camps, art and literacy workshops, sports projects and community health seminars.

“It’s a project that continues to give me tremendous satisfaction,” Oputu mentions, citing the significance of volunteers in what has become a true community effort. “I even bought some land and we just got approval to build, so we’ll soon have better facilities to host all the things that we do with these children.”

According to Oputu, the entire driving force behind the Foundation is her desire to do something that her son would have been proud of.

Chairman Ovie Brume Foundation

“I believe he would be very excited about what we’re doing here. We have this project called ‘No Excuses’ where people can sponsor a child, help pay for their school fees and food,” she says. “It is through programmes like this that we have actually managed to change lives. We want to renew hope in people, help them rise above the corruption for which Nigeria is so notorious.”

This battle to imbue weary Nigerians with hope was equally evident in Oputu’s banking career, particularly the latter phase. Right around the time she launched OBF, Oputu was appointed as Managing Director for the Bank of Industry (BOI). It was a position Oputu was well-qualified for, having been one of the first women in Nigeria to enter and rise to the top of the investment banking field.

While BOI was certainly in need of Oputu’s expertise, she saw the new position as a chance to do her part in reinvigorating Nigeria’s middle class. “I felt that for Nigeria to change, Nigerians themselves have to own the productive assets. They have to work to change the country themselves,” Oputu explains. “So I shifted the model. We started directing our loans toward SMEs, small businesses that would utilize local materials and create jobs up to the village level.”

It took four years for Oputu to change and implement her new model, but in the end it substantially increased the bank’s performance while simultaneously empowering small businesses. “The change I was most proud of was creating a

special desk for women who wanted to borrow money,” Oputu notes. “People who ordinarily would not have gone into a bank were suddenly able to create wealth. This alone had a huge impact on many lives.”

Her rise as a role model and enabler of other women through banking is no doubt a result of the values her father had instilled within her at an early age. “I come from a community that could be very chauvinistic, believing that women should be seen and not heard, but my father was different,” she reveals. “He always had very strong views about things and raised us with the mentality that we could do anything we wanted to in life if we were willing to work hard and take charge of ourselves.”

In Short: After the tragic passing of her son, Evelyn Ndali Oputu made a huge personal loss bear fruit for others by establishing the Ovie Brume Foundation, which empowers children and youth. Through both her work with the Foundation and her groundbreaking efforts in the banking sector, Oputu has infused Nigerians young and old with a new sense of hope. But she offers priceless advice from her years of experience specifically to the younger generation: “Although we live in a material world, finding the best in this life is not about money. It’s about integrity, honour, hard work and staying centred.”



Date of Birth
13/08/1949

Education

Diploma in General Management, Harvard Business School Boston, Massachusetts U.S., 1987

B.Sc. in Business Administration University of Lagos Nigeria, 1975

Languages
English

I Like

- Grounded, creative people
- Arts, music and creative activities
- Gardening

I Don’t Like

- Insincerity
- Lack of character
- Laziness

Contacts

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Dr. Paul B. Orhii

JD, MD, Ph.D.

My Dream:
“I look at
what will
make a
maximum
impact in
the lives of
my fellow
Nigerians
and the rest
of the world.”

“I’ve never experienced prejudice, because I’ve consistently sought to distinguish myself and was recognized for it – equally so in Russia, in the U.S., and here in Nigeria.” **Bold words from Dr. Paul B. Orhii, yet ones that carry weight coming from a man whose prolific career has spanned medicine, law, and government – on three different continents, in four different languages.**

Orhii’s successes were hard-earned given his early life. Growing up, he watched his father lose everything in the early 1960s in the turbulence of Nigeria beginning to forge itself as a nation. “For some time my father could not even pay for my school fees,” Orhii remembers, adding that when he did make it into primary school he quickly rose to the top of his class.

For secondary school, Orhii was forced to wait another two years for tuition money, but by 1980 he had graduated with distinction – and again waited two years for university. But finally, in 1982, he immigrated to Russia to study medicine, first spending a year learning Russian before he could begin classes at the State Medical Institute.

Orhii had debated whether to study medicine or law, he explains. “I had always wanted to be a doctor,

but my father wanted me to be a lawyer because my uncle was one of the first lawyers from our region in Nigeria, later becoming the Chief Justice of Nigeria,” he notes. **“I excelled in the sciences and liberal arts, so I had my pick. In the end, my uncle decided that we needed a doctor in the family.”**

Orhii earned his medical degree with honours in 1989 and immediately after studied for a Ph.D. in Chrono-Neuropsychopharmacology, also in Russia, finishing in 1992. He then returned to Nigeria, ready to give back. But after spending his year of National Service teaching pharmacology, the school went on strike, and Orhii began to consider job offers from abroad. He decided on the U.S., and in November 1993 found himself in San Antonio, Texas.

Orhii spent the next ten years in San Antonio, first working as a university scientist on a number of projects such as developing medications for postmenopausal osteoporosis and prostate cancer. Little did he know that the previous fork in the road between law and medicine was about to re-emerge.

He began to reconsider law while following the famous O.J. Simpson murder trial, in which the athlete and actor had been accused of murdering his ex-wife. “I saw that

Director General National Agency for Food & Drug Administration & Control (NAFDAC)

the lawyers could not understand medical evidence, and the doctors who testified could not understand the legal terminology,” Orhii notes. **“I understood that I could have an impact in the legal sector, so eventually I resigned from my job and went to law school in Houston, Texas.”**

Orhii had been practicing law for two years before receiving a call in 2009 to take his current job as Director General of the National Agency for Food & Drug Administration & Control (NAFDAC) in Nigeria. Since then, he has begun to revolutionize Nigeria’s pharmaceutical industry. “My immediate goal is to make sure that Nigeria has good quality medicines available to all,” he explains.

Orhii has focused on working with Nigerian laboratories to meet international standards and gain approval from the World Health Organization. He has also placed himself at the forefront of the fight against counterfeit medicines. “We are working to abolish counterfeit products from the market because fake medicines have been killing many people in this region,” Orhii explains. **“So I have introduced technology to put the power of detecting counterfeit medicines in the hands of more than eighty million Nigerian consumers through the use of their mobile phones.”** This, together with the use of TruScan, a handheld device that enables the agency to identify counterfeit medicines on-the-spot, has made Nigeria a global leader

in cutting-edge technologies for fighting counterfeit medicines, with Nigeria’s NAFDAC rising to a ranking among the top twenty medicines regulatory agencies in the world. In recognition for this, Orhii was unanimously elected the first Chairman of the Steering Committee of the newly created WHO membership mechanism of Spurious Substandard, Falsely Labelled, Falsified Counterfeit Medical Products.

This kind of progress aligns with Orhii’s overarching professional goals: “I look at what will make a maximum impact in the lives of Nigerians and the rest of the world. I know what it’s like to struggle through a humble beginning, and I want to give people the opportunity to realize their own potential.”

In Short: Dr. Paul B. Orhii broke through the limitations of an impoverished background to achieve numerous goals in science, medicine, and law. Now, in his capacity as Director General of NAFDAC, he has embarked on an inspiring campaign to clean up the pharmaceutical industry. “Nigeria means everything to me. Whatever I’m doing in life, I strive to be a shining example, a role model to show other people what is possible no matter where you come from, no matter what race you are – your dreams are valid. And if you work very hard and focus, you can realize those dreams.”



Date of Birth
09/05/1960

Education

Juris Doctorate
Thurgood Marshall
School of Law
Texas Southern
University
Houston, Texas
U.S., 2006

Ph.D. in
Neuropharmacology
State Medical Institute
Stavropol
Russia, 1992

Languages

Tiv, English, Russian
Hausa

I Like

- Good food
- Good music
- Good friends

I Don’t Like

- Dishonesty
- Laziness
- Lies

Contacts

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Adenike Oshinowo “Nike”

My Wiew:
“Instead of
pursuing
money, it
is better
to pursue
satisfaction
and
happiness,
which is
what I have
done.”

Hard work, hard work, hard work – Nike Oshinowo repeats it like a mantra, which it is. It is a philosophy, a mentality, a way of life – one that has led this woman from beauty queen to business leader. “Each and every person determines their lot in life through hard work,” she believes. “And if you couple that with education, success is inevitable; failure is not an option.”

While pursuing her own education at a boarding school in Shropshire, England, Nike felt her way around for a possible career path – something that would speak to her sense of ambition and her appetite to make things happen. “For a while I wanted to be a doctor – until I discovered I didn’t like dissecting animals in biology,” she remembers. “So I started looking at other possibilities and couldn’t help but gravitate toward the business mindset that I had cultivated while working for my father.”

Although Nike had inherited a business mind from her father, it didn’t stop her from going in her own direction. She would go on to study politics at the University of Essex, but something unexpected happened before she graduated that would alter the course of her life.

In 1990, while home for a holiday, Nike competed in the Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria pageant – and won.

Looking back on the experience, Nike is proud of becoming a National Beauty Queen, and more so because of what she has since accomplished. “Countless women have been crowned beauty queens, but why is it that twenty-five years later I am still relevant?” she says. “I honestly don’t think there is anything special about me other than that I work really hard, and I never take no for an answer!”

After her year-long reign as beauty queen, Nike landed a sponsorship deal and was tapped to host a fashion and beauty show on television. Taking advantage of her growing profile, she eventually began to launch a number of business ventures, including a restaurant and a spa, before deciding to establish her own line of beauty products. In 2010 she was featured in the first ever celebrity workout video in Nigeria and, more impressively, that same year she took over the reins of the Miss Nigeria Franchise.

With a career that combines elements of fashion, beauty, and business, Nike pulls inspiration from icons of both worlds, such as Donald Trump, Jacqueline Onassis, and

Chief Executive & Creative Director AOE Events & Entertainment Ltd

shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis – Jackie O’s second husband. “I once read a book about his daughter, Christina Onassis, and she became my inspiration for how not to live my life. She showed me that instead of pursuing money, it is better to pursue satisfaction and happiness, which is what I have done.”

One of the happiest moments of Nike’s life came recently when she became the mother of twins with the aid of a gestational carrier. For most of her life, she has been plagued with endometriosis, so for her the miracle of motherhood has an extra shine. “Those twins have become the biggest achievement in my life,” she shares. “Going from a young lady that was not supposed to be able to have children to becoming a mother at close to fifty years of age is nothing short of amazing.”

As Nike reflects on her life’s journey, she can’t help but be grateful for what has been and what will come. “I’ve done things my way, and with God’s permission and guidance, I made things happen,” she notes. “Even in business, there are no glass ceilings for me. When I decide to take on a project, for instance, it is because it’s something I want to do, and I go after it and achieve it.”

Like any entrepreneur, Nike has certainly faced her share of challenges and problems along the way. And when problems arise, she faces them head-on. “I don’t shy

away from them because I know that if I run, they’re just going to turn around and bite me when I am not looking,” she remarks. “I strategize and I tackle whatever the issue is bit by bit until it is dealt with and I can move on.”

And although Nike spent her school years in England, the time outside of Nigeria taught her to enjoy her home all the more. “After being away, my love for Nigeria is even more intense,” she explains. “Because of that contrast, I know what it means to be in a place where I am one hundred percent accepted and free from discrimination. There is no height I cannot reach within the borders of my home country.”

In Short: *Winning the 1990 Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria pageant was an unexpected surprise that could have easily been the high-water mark of Nike Oshinowo’s life, but on the contrary it was a spark for greater achievements to come. The business success she has gone on to realize in the twenty-five years since is paralleled by her penchant for hard work and determination to find satisfaction and happiness in all that she does. “Life should never be about pursuing money. It should be about doing what you love and what makes you happy – but we have to work hard and we have to support each other.”*



Date of Birth
19/12/1965

Education
B.Sc. in Political
Science University of
Essex
UK, 1992

Languages
English, Yoruba, French
Spanish, Japanese

I Like

- Beautiful vacations
- Spending time with my children
- Achieving goals

I Don’t Like

- Liars
- Women not supporting other women
- Lack of discretion

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lnwno.com



Ayisha Osori

CEO

The Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (WF)

My Philosophy: "Reading is what allows young people to look beyond the shores of Nigeria – or whatever other boundaries surround them – for inspiration."

After pursuing a career that has bridged both corporate law and communications, Ayisha Osori has come to realize that she can make her mark in politics as well. Through her capacity as CEO of the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund (WF), she encourages other women to also step into the political arena with a classic truism: "Plato said the result of not getting involved in politics is that your inferiors will make decisions for you. And that's what we have in Nigeria right now – the best people going into corporate and the worst people going into government."

Osori has known for some time that she could bring value to Nigerian politics. "With my legal background and experience in a corporate setting, I could see how laws impacted our bottom line," she explains, mentioning all of the government-imposed costs a business faces, whether it's a myriad of taxes, licencing requirements or discrepancies in utility payments. "I experienced a gradual awareness of how important government was to the business sector, and it woke me up to how much of an effect bad government policy can have."

Osori's versatile career in Nigeria began after four years in the

U.S. earning her LLM at Harvard and gaining experience as a lawyer in New York. "I studied law because I like the idea of being a crusader," she reveals. "Any type of injustice does not sit well with me. I don't like bullies or people who misuse power."

By 2006, Osori had been back in Nigeria for four years and was not entirely satisfied with her job. She heard that British American Tobacco was recruiting and secured an interview for a legal position – an interview that would unexpectedly lead to her first career shift. "During my conversation with the director, she thought I would actually be a better fit for a different position: internal communications," Osori recalls. "I didn't even know what that meant at first, but the director explained that it's like acting as a PR person for the company, but internally."

Osori agreed to think about the suggestion, and diligently went home to research. "I read a book on internal communications and decided to give it a try," she says. It turned out that Osori loved it. "It was all about talking and self-expression, bringing the employees and the management together – almost like a mediator between two

teams." Osori proved so successful that after two years, the company decided she had outgrown the role, and she was promoted to Regulatory Affairs Manager for West Africa, yet another opportunity to exercise her versatility.

By this point, Osori had already proved that she could move easily between law and communications, and these previous shifts had nudged her towards her next frontier: politics. Following her interest in public affairs, Osori took a year off between positions at British American Tobacco in 2009 to return to Harvard, where she earned a Master's Degree in Public Administration.

This fruitful career trajectory, however, is only part of Osori's work. Aside from her corporate pursuits, Osori has developed additional outlets for her abilities. She is the founder of Advocates for Change & Social Justice and an active writer, publishing regular columns on law and leadership, as well as children's books. Now as the CEO of WF, Osori is adding more value to the community than ever as she strives to strengthen the balance of women involved in Nigeria's governance.

The position with WF is actually an extension of Osori's proudest achievement: remaining true to her principles in a country where it seems to her that so many people are for sale. "Being able to stick to a strong belief system comes from having inspiring role models, which today's Nigerian youth don't see a lot of. They see

that the people who are doing well are the ones breaking the law, the ones who don't care about society but are milking it for all it's worth – these are the people in leadership roles."

Osori's remedy to this is simple: reading. "This is what allows young people to look beyond the shores of Nigeria – or whatever other boundaries surround them – for inspiration. Gandhi wasn't from Nigeria. Martin Luther King wasn't from Nigeria. But these are just a few of the role models I grew up reading about, and when you read about people like that it lets you know that human beings can be higher. We can walk tall, do good, and stand for something other than ourselves."

In Short: After working as a corporate lawyer, Ayisha Osori's life took a professional twist when she was offered an opportunity to take her expertise beyond the legal field and into communications. The resulting momentum has led her to participate in elevating equality in her country through the Nigerian Women's Trust Fund. "Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do something. All my life I've been told I couldn't do this or do that – I've heard it so many times and yet I went out and did what I supposedly couldn't do. Listen to all the advice you can get, and then follow your gut."



Date of Birth
03/08/1972

Education
MPA
Harvard Kennedy
School of Government
Cambridge
Massachusetts
U.S., 2010

LL.B.
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1996

Languages
Hausa, English, Yoruba

I Like
• Books
• Ice cream
• Talking

I Don't Like
• Telephones
• Irresponsible
public officials
• People you cannot
trust

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aosori@
nigerianwomentrustfund.org
@naijavote



Dr. Alex Otti, OFR

My Belief:
“For me
challenges
are a chance
to exercise
my intellect
in thinking
outside the
box.”

Dr. Alex Otti greets the beginning of every day with the conviction that he will make an impact. Each morning starts with a mantra: “Today I’m going to conquer new grounds! I’m going to help people solve problems, bringing solutions to my customers, my staff and others who depend on me.”

As the former Group Managing Director and CEO of Diamond Bank, Otti had approximately twelve thousand employees whom he led directly. “Sometimes managing that large of a workforce is a Herculean task, but I had very good people for whom I tried to set an example, because that is what leadership is all about,” he notes. “A leader needs to be the one who shows the light so that people can follow.”

Of course, Otti’s management style isn’t only about the leader, but focuses significantly on harnessing the power of teamwork. “When working together we are able to deal with all the issues that come our way,” he says. “Obviously things don’t always turn out as planned, and when that happens you either deal with it if you have a solution, or you go around it and just keep moving on.”

Otti cites teamwork as a major contributor to Diamond

Bank’s success in the past three years. “When I joined in 2011, the bank was confronted by many challenges and had lost its lustre. However, in just those three years we were able to reposition the bank substantially. Today Diamond is number six in Nigeria and knocking at number five,” he says. “Diamond has amazing people who don’t see impossibilities, so whatever needed to be achieved, we sat down, discussed it, came up with a solution and moved into action. We tried to keep everybody moving in the same direction.”

One of Otti’s best qualities as a leader is his ability to embrace the day-to-day challenges that any organization worth its salt encounters on a regular basis. Whenever a challenge comes his way, he perks up at the promise of opportunity: “For me challenges are a chance to exercise my intellect in thinking outside the box. I think about how I can deal with the challenge, how I can rise above the challenge, and how I can use it as a stepping stone to get to the next level,” he explains. “Whenever I approach issues in this manner, I am almost always able to resolve them. You want to take on challenges that provide you with an opportunity to rise above the occasion, to create a

Founder Laz & Rose Otti Foundation

solution and build on that solution. Your ability to do this is what will separate you from those who cave in when confronted with challenges.”

Otti adds that when it comes to excelling in any job or project, perseverance is everything. And the ability to persevere, he maintains, only comes with a strong foundation. “Anything that is built on a shaky foundation will not stand; it will collapse once there is a little wind,” Otti suggests, emphasizing that the soundness of a person’s foundation comes through education. “Learning can be in different forms, such as reading, for example, or looking at other people who have done well and trying to understand what they do, trying to improve on what they do – I think we’ve gotten to a level where many people have abandoned these kinds of values.”

Otti admits that when interviewing potential employees, he meets a lot of applicants who don’t seem to know much of anything, who are unable to put together correct sentences or reason properly. “Those of us now occupying positions of responsibility must take it upon ourselves to ensure that the youth actually go through the necessary crucibles so that they become the kind of people that we want them to become,” Otti states. “The youth of today will lead the country of tomorrow, so if we do not pay attention to the quality of leadership that we are building in them, it is going to be a question of time before everything will come down.”

With regards to the youth, Otti believes that if more attention is paid to education, young people can learn how to create jobs for themselves as well as for others. “Diamond Bank, for example, does as much as possible to encourage entrepreneurship, supporting SMEs and retail banking,” he says. “The world is not lacking in resources, only ideas. If you have a good idea, financial support is available. People just need to keep thinking of ways to make life better for others. That is where you find value: research and development, thinking and more thinking.”

In Short: Dr. Alex Otti, as former Group Managing Director and CEO of Diamond Bank, is a true gem in his own right for Nigeria and Africa. Through his energy and leadership skills, he strives to make an impact on anybody he meets. His passion for expanding the self through education and embracing challenges will have a huge influence on the next generation’s own capacity for self-empowerment, leadership, and entrepreneurship. “People should be thinking of sustainable vocations that they can latch onto as a job and eventually develop into a big business. There have been people who started from their garages and today they run multi-billion-dollar companies!”



Date of Birth
18/02/1965

Education
Master’s in Business Administration
University of Lagos
Nigeria, 1994

B.Sc. in Economics
First Class Honours
University of Port Harcourt
Nigeria, 1988

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like
• Squash
• Working
• Reading

I Don’t Like
• Lies
• Laziness
• Filth

Contacts
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Dr. Oba Otudeko, CFR

My Advice:

“If you envision properly, strategize diligently, and execute efficiently, the results can only be the best.”

Dr. Oba Otudeko is one of Nigeria’s top entrepreneurs and investors. As a Chartered Accountant, Chartered Banker and Corporate Secretary, his professional prowess is far-reaching. Yet behind the remarkable exterior of his distinguished career and keen business acumen, Otudeko is a man of even more remarkable substance. “My primary motivation in life is to continue to inspire people as a moral leader and to embody the classic principle that Nigerians possess the inherent ability to make the best of their environment,” Otudeko notes of his vision to have an impact on society. “The truth is that we are all a product of our own efforts. If you envision properly, strategize diligently, and execute efficiently, the results can only be the best.” Otudeko’s tried-and-true recipe for success goes even further, harnessing values such as determination, passion for excellence, and indefatigable resilience. These are all valuable characteristics a young Otudeko developed during his formative years, growing up in a large polygamist family. “We had a natural competition among the children from different wives, which made it a compelling environment

that constantly motivated me to aim for the top and consequently to excel,” Otudeko recalls of his childhood. “It was a breeding ground for excellence that has shaped my life up to date.” At the heart of Otudeko’s motivation-infused upbringing was the leader of the family, his father. “My father was a wealthy man with a great heart; he was a wonderful and warm gentleman. Above all, he had a passion for people – he was always willing to lend a helping hand to the entire community,” Otudeko remembers. “It was he who always encouraged a healthy sense of competition in us while growing up, not only among one another but also to be the best in the community.” The inspiration Otudeko derived from his father gave him an integral foundation on top of which he would strive to cultivate an exemplary banking career. But Otudeko didn’t stop there. Never content to rest on his laurels, he used his experience and education to expand beyond the banking world. In 1972, building on his mother’s business, Otudeko founded the Honeywell Group, which started out as a simple trading company, but rapidly grew into a premier Nigerian conglomerate, which today operates in several key sectors under

Chairman, Honeywell Group Chairman, FBN Holdings Plc

Otudeko’s continued guidance as Chairman. The success of the Honeywell Group comprises a major part of Otudeko’s legacy, and, as he points out, a solid mixture of teamwork and self-confidence has always been part of the status quo. “I am always a good team player, and I love to have people around. I’m a man who deeply cares for orderliness and cleanliness – a peaceful environment where fairness is the standard,” he explains of his professional vitality. “Self-confidence is also significant. As long as you have faith and confidence in yourself, you can achieve good results in every effort. The only limit in life is yourself.” In addition to his position with Honeywell Group, Otudeko is also the Chairman of FBN Holdings, the oldest Financial Services Group in Nigeria. He has also chaired several other corporations as well as having been a former President and Chairman of the Council of the Nigerian Stock Exchange. Having climbed up the career ladder to earn so many distinguished leadership positions, Otudeko, from the vantage point of his own experience, sees a lot of hope and beauty in Nigeria. “For me, Nigeria is an especially inspiring nation, uniquely blessed and endowed with abundant human and material resources; a land rich in talent and opportunities, especially for the discerning,” he says of the country’s vast potential. “We have an extremely diverse land blessed

with rich minerals, soil resources and tremendous agricultural opportunities.” However, Nigeria’s most valuable asset is its people, emphasizes Otudeko, who has also established a foundation in his name with initiatives including human capacity development and education. The entire project is an inspiring effort that builds on the valuable experience Otudeko gained while serving as Chancellor of Olabisi Onabanjo University from 2001 to 2010. “Nigerians are very good people, and we are a loving people. Most of all, we love our nation,” he remarks. “Nigeria means everything to me. For me this country is gold, it’s a diamond – it’s the very best.” **In Short: Instilled with a strong sense of competition and excellence early in life, Dr. Oba Otudeko ascended the corporate ladder in the banking sector before branching out into other ambitious ventures, most notably founding and chairing Honeywell Group. The success of his entire career is the result of strong values, including self-determination and discipline. “Discipline is very important for every level of achievement because without pain there is no gain. And I hope, because of my own pursuit of discipline, that I will be remembered as someone who left Nigeria a better place.”**



Date of Birth
18/08/1943

Education
Doctor of Science
Honoris Causa
Olabisi Onabanjo
University, Ago Iwoye
Nigeria, 2001

Fellowship of the
Institute of Chartered &
Corporate Accountants
with Honours
(FCCA), 1968

Fellowship of the
Chartered Institute of
Bankers (FCIB), 1964

Languages
English, Yoruba

I Like
• Adding value
• Building leadership
capabilities
• Mentoring
budding
entrepreneurs

I Don’t Like
• Indolence
• Pessimism
• Wastefulness

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Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami

My Vision for the Future: “We must aim for self-reliance, and we must work hard if we want to find lasting success.”

My childhood was very productive, because I grew up in a house of knowledge and religion,” recalls Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami, who has dedicated himself to both of these values throughout his life. “My parents also taught me to be independent, trustworthy, just, to be kind to all – Muslims and non-Muslims alike – and to help people whenever the chance arises.”

This mentality has engrafted in Pantami an open mind and a voracious appetite to learn as much as possible. “I cherish knowledge. I believe that all of us, no matter where we find ourselves, must constantly seek learning – keeping in mind that knowledge can be either harmful or beneficial depending on how it’s used,” he advises. “If you seek knowledge and use it to serve humanity, people will admire and cherish your work.”

Pantami’s own pursuit of learning began quite early in life. By the age of eleven he had memorized the entire Quran and would go on to become a Chief Imam. “At the same time I was also acquiring worldly knowledge: mathematics, English, science...” he remembers. “I always maintained an intentional balance between the religious and the worldly, which has allowed me to serve both my Creator and

humanity.”

Looking back on his life pursuit of knowledge, including his Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees in Computer Science, his MBA in Technology Management, and his Ph.D. in Computing and Information Systems, Pantami – now a lecturer, writer and teacher at the university level – can’t help but feel blessed. “In spite of the fact that my parents were poor and they had no resources, I managed, I struggled and I achieved all of these things, so I am very grateful,” he explains. “To stand up and acquire knowledge in a country like Nigeria – where even potable drinking water is a problem, where there is no constant electricity, and where people are so often suffering – is something of a feat. A lot of people begin to pursue their first degree and give up because life can be so difficult here. I hope that in my work as an educator I can help begin to overturn that mentality.”

It is exactly because of life’s difficulties that Pantami finds so much value in his faith. “Whenever something bad happens, I calm myself, and I know that I have a Creator who is ready to help me,” he shares. “So I believe that nothing will happen to me in this world unless it is destined. I believe that if I am in trouble and I pray to God, he will rescue me.”

Chief Imam Lecturer at Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa University Professor at University of Madina

At the same time, Pantami is not all interior faith and no action. “When I see a problem, I do not simply fold my arms and do nothing! I strive to see how I can overcome it, because believing in God does not mean that you should stand by and watch,” he suggests. “One of the advantages of cultivating your knowledge is that you may use it to solve problems. You can use knowledge to do all sorts of things that are beneficial to you as long as they’re legal and legitimate.”

When it comes to challenge, Pantami believes that no conundrum is too big to be solved. “I believe that there is no challenge that could remain forever harmful to mankind,” he notes. “As long as we collectively stand up and face whatever the challenge is, it will have an end.”

One of the challenges that Pantami sees Nigeria facing today is the lack of independence among a lot of the youth. “They don’t want to work. They want to get everything easily without acquiring knowledge, without making any sacrifice,” Pantami observes. “We must aim for self-reliance, and we must work hard if we want to find lasting success.”

Equally important for Pantami is not only self-reliance, but working together as a society. “Do nothing that would bring harm to society. Such negativity only destroys what we’re trying to build,” he advises. “We must always try and

do something that will make our society develop and grow, which will make our country progress.”

It is along these lines of working together for the common good that Pantami brings forth his ultimate piece of advice: “If we are unable to control our great avarice, if we remain greedy people, then we will continue looting the resources of the country and our people will continue growing poorer,” he suggests. “Instead of elevating our personal issues or demands higher than the needs of our community, we have to sacrifice our enjoyment so that others may enjoy. This is how the country can progress.”

In Short: Dr. Isa Ali Ibrahim Pantami has dedicated his life to three interconnected pillars: religion, knowledge, and putting the needs of society before his own. He is so devoted to these values that they define his existence and imbue his everyday mindset with joy and humility. He encourages other Nigerians to do the same: be kind to each other, accept each other, pursue knowledge, and work together for a better future. “I am so proud of Nigeria that I will sacrifice my wealth, my knowledge, my energy, my wisdom – everything I have at my disposal – in order to see my country move forward.”



Date of Birth
20/10/1972

Education
Ph.D. in Computing & Information Systems
Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen UK, 2013

MSC: Master’s in Computer Science
Abubakar Tafawa-Balewa University Bauchi Nigeria, 2008

Languages
Hausa, English, Arabic Fulfude

I Like
• Company of good people
• Perfume
• Living in peace

I Don’t Like
• Conspiracy
• Injustice
• Instability

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Dr. Muhammad Ali Pate

Chigarin Misau

Founder & Chairman Chigari Foundation



My Top Tip:
“Honesty, integrity, courage – these things cost nothing and yet they are the values that determine your success.”

When Dr. Muhammad Ali Pate was hired as Executive Director of the National Primary Health Care Development Agency in 2008, the polio outbreak was at its peak, particularly in the Northeast, his home region. One of his first moves was to implement a policy that would engage traditional rulers regarding the importance of proper immunization. As a result of Pate and the agency’s proactive work, polio cases dropped from 803 at the end of 2008 to only eleven in 2010.

Pate’s impact on healthcare in Nigeria does not stop with the eradication of polio. He has pioneered a number of initiatives and policy changes that have collectively saved hundreds of thousands of lives. “I’ve always known that I wanted to contribute to make the world a better place, and figuring out how to do that has been part of my thinking throughout my career,” he explains. “First as a medical doctor, then as a health systems and health policy expert, then as a development practitioner with the World Bank, and finally as a minister, where I have been able to see government in its totality and the ways it can effectively help people.”

The perspective gained after

all that experience is what enables Pate to continue his efforts, now as a stakeholder and a citizen, to make the world and Nigeria a better place. “Nigeria, being the largest, most populous, and most promising country in Africa, is a core driver of where this continent is headed,” he believes. “The diversity that this country offers is a great strength that has implications beyond the geographical boundaries of Nigeria.”

The successes Pate has achieved for Nigeria were sparked by an early appetite for education, which was encouraged by his father. “My father didn’t have a lot of capital, but the one thing that he wanted to ensure he left behind for his children was education,” says Pate, the eldest sibling of a very large family. “So right from early childhood I focused on getting a quality education and being the best that I could in my studies. As I progressed in life I pursued education vigorously. It was my means to build human capital, which would ultimately translate into well-being for me, my family, and for the rest of society.”

On the other hand, Pate believes that the secret to success is much more intrinsic than education. “The foundation of success in life is good

character, a standard toward which all young people should aspire,” Pate advises. “Traits like honesty, integrity, courage – these things cost nothing and yet they are the values that determine your success. So the youth should focus on building good character and associate with others who have good character.”

Working with youth in his region is the heart of the Chigari Foundation, which Pate founded as a starting point to address the tremendous challenges the region faces. “The Foundation has the triple objective of helping to educate, energize and empower the youth, and we also host an annual colloquium to bring people together and stimulate dialogue,” Pate explains. “One of our current projects is the building of the largest privately-funded community and youth resource centre in Northeast Nigeria.”

The Foundation and the lives it will impact are the fruition of the same action-oriented, problem-solving approach Pate has been implementing all throughout his career. “My philosophy is that if you have a lot of despair, a lot of blackness, then you need to light your own candle and find other people in a similar situation,” he shares. “You can’t just complain about it; you have to actually do something about it. So I said, let’s do something where we can train our youth – give them skills and confidence, and connect them to each other through networks.

Let’s inspire and enable the youth to have higher aspirations and be even better than us in the future.”

As a parent, Pate finds inspiration for the future as well as the present through enjoying his family life just as much as work. “You have to have a balance. You cannot sacrifice one at the expense of the other and do it sustainably over a long period of time, so you have to always use your time wisely,” he notes. “Time is one thing we can never get back, so whether I am resting, spending time with my family or friends, or working to make the world a better place, I try to make sure that I never waste the time I do have.”

In Short: Dr. Muhammad Ali Pate throughout his career has played a major role in transforming key aspects of Nigeria’s healthcare sector, as well as made strides in youth empowerment efforts. His mission in both medicine and youth development is all about improving the world around him, starting with Nigeria. “At the end of my career, if I can look back and see I’ve contributed to alleviating the suffering of some other being, I think I would have achieved the goal I have set for myself. My goals are not anchored around material or physical things, but rather in making this world a better place.”

Date of Birth
06/09/1968

Education
MBA in General Management & Health Sector Concentration
Duke University
Durham, North Carolina
U.S., 2006

M.Sc. in Health Systems, London
School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine
UK, 2000

Medical Degree
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
Nigeria, 1990

Languages
Fulfude, Hausa
English, Arabic, French

I Like

- My family
- Meditation
- The colour white

I Don’t Like

- Dishonesty
- Darkness
- Flamboyance

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Atedo N.A. Peterside, CON

My Advice:

“In any industry, working your way up from the bottom is very helpful. You get a chance to learn more about the business, to make your mistakes early, and to understand how it’s done.”

When Atedo N.A. Peterside formed Investment Banking & Trust Company Limited (IBTC) – an Investment Bank – in 1989, the biggest challenge came with deciding to build a proper business. “I had no interest in shady deals, corruption, paying bribes – if you build a business in that way, you have not really built anything but merely executed a scam,” he says. “On the other hand, if you establish a genuine business and a solid brand, people will be happy to do business with you at a market-determined price. I was interested in building a legitimate investment bank – efficient and respectable and capable of attracting real customers.”

Peterside admits trying to do business responsibly and ethically in a marketplace where so many were trying to cut corners wasn’t always easy. “Naturally we sometimes lost business, refusing to be a part of any bribes or kickbacks or illegal commission payments,” Peterside notes. “But at the same time we established a reputation for ourselves. People realized that IBTC was for real, a bank that people could trust when it came to honesty and integrity. Perhaps I was lucky in the sense that, by sticking to what I knew was right, we achieved real success and so there was never any need to contemplate doing things any other way.”

In Peterside’s mind, to have accepted bribes or kickbacks would have been a measure of greed. “If you’re doing well and earning a good income, do you have to start going around breaking the law just so that you can be richer still?” he asks. “Don’t forget that extra wealth comes with a price. In my case I could sleep well at night, because I knew I didn’t break any law.”

Peterside had known since university he wanted to establish his own investment bank and so meticulously fulfilled the then-required ten years’ banking experience before one could become the CEO of a bank. “In any industry, working your way up from the bottom is very helpful. You get a chance to learn more about the business, to make your mistakes early, and to understand how it’s done,” he explains. “Ten years is enough time to become an expert in just about anything.”

Indeed, at his previous post Peterside had risen to Acting General Manager before leaving to start IBTC. When he did make the shift he was just thirty-three years old – the youngest CEO in Nigeria’s banking industry at the time. Despite his young age, Atedo Peterside had enough know-how to navigate the necessary steps to start a bank from scratch, which included raising capital, purchasing computers and

Founder & President ANAP Foundation

furniture, hiring staff etc. The latter point was the most critical for Peterside. “At the end of the day, the business is only as good as the people you surround yourself with,” he advises. “Finding good human beings to bring in as employees is the key to being able to execute your business plans seamlessly. One bad person can destroy the whole thing whereas working with people whom you trust is much less stressful.”

Peterside’s other ingredients to success firstly include pursuing projects or positions where he already has an advantage, experience, knowledge and special insight. “It has to be something where you’ve already done your homework; you completely understand the nature of the terrain from where you can compete and where you cannot. This includes being able to identify areas where you are probably even better than those in the business already,” he notes. “Obviously when I started an investment bank in Nigeria, I knew the business thoroughly because I had spent ten years working for an institution that was competing in that same market segment.”

One other fundamental aspect to Peterside’s professional mindset is to avoid complacency. “Whatever principles lead you to being successful, you’ve got to continuously apply those same principles every day,” Peterside suggests. “Don’t start getting complacent because people are telling you how wonderful a job you’re doing; don’t relax and stop doing your homework – you’ve got to keep enforcing those disciplines that you started with on day one otherwise you will go from being on top straight back to the bottom.”

A couple of years after turning fifty, Peterside resigned as CEO

of IBTC and became Chairman of Stanbic IBTC Bank right after the merge with Stanbic Bank in 2007. By then, it was time to execute the next stage of his plan, to give back to Nigeria. Completely separate from his banking career, he created ANAP Foundation, the focus of which is to promote good governance in Nigeria and beyond.

“We are involved in all manners of projects and activities that will help to bring good governance, because it is through good governance that you can improve the lives of Nigerians and others,” he says of the Foundation. “I am totally committed to improving my country. It is a very personal commitment and much more fulfilling than owning and running your own bank. At the end of my life I don’t want to be remembered as a guy that just made some money for himself but somebody who also spent the rest of his life trying to improve Nigeria and Africa.”

In Short: Atedo N.A. Peterside built a career – and a bank – on values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and commitment. His confident nature and his ability to transcend fear allowed him to forge a path that will inspire millions of Nigerians for years to come. Since retiring from banking, he has shifted focus to his ANAP Foundation, which is dedicated towards promoting good governance in Nigeria and beyond. “I have always wanted to be able to contribute to improve Nigeria as a place, and the only way you’re going to improve Nigeria significantly is by helping to institute good governance.”



Date of Birth
12/07/1955

Education
M.Sc. in Economics
London School of
Economics
& Political Science
UK, 1977

B.Sc. in Economics
The City University
London
UK, 1976

Languages
English, Kalabari

I Like

- Being surrounded by good people
- Managing my expectations
- Being stress-free

I Don’t Like

- Untrustworthy people
- “I can’t suffer fools”
- Snakes

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Nuhu Ribadu

Founder Nuhu Ribadu Foundation



My Mantra:

“I will take any situation or challenge head-on, knowing that I am guided by what is right.”

“I can go to any length when necessary to ensure that justice is achieved,” says Nuhu Ribadu. As the pioneering Chairman of Nigeria’s Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Ribadu went head-to-head in court with some of the nation’s most corrupt individuals. But his distinguished career dedicated to bringing peace, order and justice to Nigeria goes back much earlier to even rougher roots.

After working to earn his law degree in the early 80s, Ribadu made an unusual move: he joined the police force. “Although it was an unattractive, uncomfortable job with poor compensation and no respect, I saw it as a vital way for me to give back to society,” Ribadu explains of his decision. “Peace, rules, and regulations are a necessary foundation for any society to grow and develop. I was prepared to sacrifice and to do my own part in order to ensure that my country could have law and order, security and stability.”

After nearly two years of police training, Ribadu worked as a divisional crime officer in some of the most notorious parts of Nigeria, ultimately rising to the position

of Assistant Inspector General of Police. “Even though it wasn’t the best job in terms of monetary gain or physical safety, I had the satisfaction of doing what I liked,” he reflects. “All my life I just wanted to be of help. I don’t like people who take advantage of power or resources to intimidate and cheat. It makes me happy to confront such injustices, which working on the police force gave me the opportunity to do.”

As Ribadu ascended the ranks in the police force, he also found a way to put his law degree to effective use. “Because I was also a lawyer and a prosecutor, I was among those who fought for the police’s right to prosecute, and we started prosecuting our own cases up to the Supreme Court of Nigeria,” Ribadu notes.

In his capacities as a prosecutor, Ribadu accumulated an unparalleled amount of convictions over the years. By 2003, it was clear to the Olusegun Obasanjo administration that he was the man to form and lead the EFCC. “For the first time in the history of our country, we were punishing people for corruption, and it was working. Through the EFCC we brought people to justice, returned stolen money, and changed

the image and perception of Nigeria within a short period of time.”

Fighting corruption, however, came with a high level of personal cost for Ribadu. “When you fight corruption, it fights back, and I got into trouble with those who were on the receiving end,” he recalls. In 2008 Ribadu was forced out of his position with the police and the EFCC due to the newly-appointed Yar’Adua Administration’s reluctance to work with the tenaciously justice-oriented Ribadu. “My life was in terrible danger at the time – I survived three assassination attempts before going into exile.”

Looking back on his time with the EFCC, Ribadu confesses that he wasn’t afraid while his life was in jeopardy. “God just didn’t give me a fear trigger, so nothing scares me in terms of problems. I will take any situation or challenge head-on, knowing that I am guided by what is right,” he notes. “The days on which I successfully convicted corrupt individuals were the happiest moments in my life.”

When Ribadu returned from exile in 2010 after the passing of Yar’Adua, he became involved in politics, announcing his intention to run for president in 2011 under the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). But in August 2014 Ribadu took a surprising step of cross-carpeting to the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), later running for the governorship of his native Adamawa state.

In his work in the police force,

courtrooms, and now in politics, Ribadu has consistently looked to historical figures known for their own pursuits of justice; some of his biggest inspirations throughout his formative years were radicals, activists, and social crusaders. “On an international level, I have a lot of admiration for Nelson Mandela. He taught me a lot of things through his example of tenacity, his courage to stand up and continue the struggle in spite of all the risks,” Ribadu says. “He avoided violence and bloodshed, but always pursued what was right, trying to bring peace and understanding even where there was conflict.”

In Short: *Nuhu Ribadu’s entire career has been a campaign against injustice and corruption in Nigeria. His devoted time in law enforcement and as a prosecutor will inspire young Nigerians as they unite to form a prosperous country where integrity reigns. “As a young person, when you’re going to choose a career, take the path that will make you happy. Passion for what you’re doing and job satisfaction are really important in life,” he advises. “Don’t be driven by the financial aspects in choosing a career, but by the chance to contribute and to do something that will make you proud of yourself.”*

Date of Birth
21/11/1960

Education
LL.M., Ahmadu Bello University Zaria Nigeria, 2006

LL.B., Ahmadu Bello University Zaria Nigeria, 1983

Languages
Fulfulde, Hausa English

I Like
• Nature
• Football
• Reading

I Don’t Like
• Corruption
• Vanity
• Not having privacy

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Orode Ryan-Okpu

CEO, Exclusive Brands Africa Founder, Pink Pearl Foundation

R

My Mantra:
“It’s
important to
think positive
in a world
where there
is a lot of
negativity
and where
people look
down on us
youth.”

When Orode Ryan-Okpu was eighteen, studying at a university in Canada, she took on a project to help raise money for breast and cervical cancer. But when she returned to Nigeria for the fundraiser, she discovered that there was a tremendous lack of knowledge about these types of cancer, an issue that had become close to her heart. As she puts it: “I had just lost someone close to the family to breast cancer, so I knew I had to do something to sensitize women in this area.”

Orode’s initial campaign to raise awareness began as a small, humble effort, but over time became more encompassing. “I found myself doing more and more to try to close this knowledge gap among Nigerian women,” Orode explains. “With time, I also began to see a lack in other areas, such as women’s empowerment and care of children and orphans, so I started to focus on those things as well – this was the birth of the Pink Pearl Foundation (PPF).”

PPF has since gone on to impact thousands of women and children in Nigeria, Cameroon and South Africa through fundraising concerts, radio and television programmes, seminars, rallies and school tours.

A more recent aspect of the campaign includes the production of a breast cancer awareness film called *Living Funeral*.

The success of PPF is a remarkable accomplishment for somebody as young as Orode, especially given the difficulties she faced launching the Foundation. “I can’t even begin to tell you how much I was turned down initially,” Orode remembers. “People kept saying that I was too young, that I had to go back to school – nobody could get behind what I was trying to do.”

Instead of being discouraged by this early resistance, Orode was all the more motivated to persevere with her vision, to prove those naysayers wrong and show that she was indeed capable of succeeding. “It’s important to think positive in a world where there is a lot of negativity and where people look down on us youth, assuming we can’t achieve or won’t amount to much,” she advises. “You need to learn to be yourself, be comfortable in your own skin while doing what you love.”

Of course, Orode reminds, it’s important to know what you want, both professionally and personally. In her case, she knew the path she

wanted to take early on. “I had planned on being an entrepreneur for a long time; I knew that was what I was going to do, no matter how hard it would be,” she notes. “I wanted to do my own thing and could never see myself working for anyone else. If I had to sit behind a desk all day, I would either get fired or fight with the boss all the time!”

That’s not to say Orode doesn’t have an inclination for hard work. In addition to PPF, she currently runs a few other businesses as well as a production company and a restaurant. She attributes her ability to successfully balance such a rigorous workload to the strict upbringing her parents provided. “I come from a background of parents who demanded excellence,” Orode notes. “When I was younger I did not appreciate such serious parents, but now I’m thankful for how much they pushed me.”

To this day, Orode’s mother remains one of her greatest inspirations in life. “Just watching how my mother balanced work and family had a big impact on me. Even when it became overwhelming at times, she was always able to manage,” Orode reflects. “She showed me what it means to be a strong, powerful woman.”

The other significant inspiration in Orode’s life is a little more famous: Oprah. “She started in the midst of a lot of negativity about her and where she was from, yet she was able to break through and succeed,” Orode observes. “This is the same type of

negativity that women in Nigeria face when trying to be independent or build a business. But once you break through that negativity and eventually start succeeding, people begin to respect you for what you’ve done.”

Though she has already overcome her own share of obstacles, Orode still has much more she would like to accomplish. “When people ask me how I do what I do every day for so long – especially at my young age – I tell them I don’t know how much time I have left. I hope I have a lot of years ahead of me, but you never know,” Orode mentions. “I want to leave a legacy behind; I want my name to be remembered and to mean something. I want my children’s children to know that I had an impact.”

In Short: *Orode Ryan-Okpu has accomplished more at her young age than many do in a lifetime. Whether it’s through her handful of businesses, her production company, or the Pink Pearl Foundation, she continues to achieve with the hope of one day being remembered as an inspiration to those around her. For those who want to lead inspiring lives as well, her advice is simple: “Try to see things from a positive angle. It might not always be easy to do – the environment we are in doesn’t give us a lot to work with and can be tough at times – but that doesn’t mean we should give up.”*

Date of Birth
31/07/1989

Education
Effective Project Management
Lagos Business School
Pan-African University
Nigeria, 2010

B.A. Hons. in
Psychology
University of Windsor
Ontario
Canada, 2009

Languages
English

I Like
• Food
• Sleep
• Kids

I Don’t Like
• Phone ring tones
• Dishonesty
• Chocolate

Contacts
pinkpearl-foundation.org
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Breast Cancer Foundation
@PPF_PPF



H.E. Hajiya (Dr.) Amina Mohammed Namadi Sambo

My Goal:
“My goal every day is to find ways in which I can help the less privileged members of society.”

Peace, unity, equality, good education and justice form Her Excellency Hajiya (Dr.) Amina Mohammed Namadi Sambo’s vision for her beloved Nigeria. “My goal every day is to find ways in which I can help the less privileged members of society,” says H.E., who is the wife of the former Vice President Namadi Sambo. “I want to see a society in which people go from being poor to being independent – to the point where they are able to provide for themselves and even contribute to the development of our country.”

The I Care – Women & Youth Initiative, an NGO founded by H.E. in 2007, is designed to address these needs and so much more. “The initiative touches upon three areas: education, health and empowerment,” says H.E., who also serves as Chairperson for I Care. “We have a direct, positive impact on disadvantaged groups, including widows, orphans, vulnerable children, and the physically challenged.”

In the health sector, for instance, H.E. and her team have taken on an inspiring array of significant projects including raising awareness on the importance of polio vaccines and offering free eye operations to cataract patients, who would

otherwise go blind because they are unable to afford treatment on their own. “We have also been organizing workshops on maternal mortality reduction and how mothers can prevent transmitting the HIV virus. We care about our women and children, and because a lot of people don’t have access to medical care and are forced to deliver at home, they sometimes lose their lives or lose their babies,” H.E. explains. “We even go as far as to organize ‘big sister’ projects where we have mothers who have experienced giving birth going door to door to counsel pregnant women on the advantages of going to maternity clinics for routine checkups before they give birth.”

Through I Care, H.E. has also been conducting much-needed workshops on substance abuse, which she sees as a serious issue in the North. “Because of the poverty here, we have a lot of young people coming up with their own types of intoxicants, whether it’s overdosing on cough syrup or inhaling diesel,” H.E. notes, explaining that with such dubious substances the abusers can go quite mad and become a menace to society. “In Kano State, where I am from, we estimate that we have the highest rate of drug consumption in Nigeria.”

Founder & Chairperson I Care – Women & Youth Initiative

The population of Kano State, H.E. adds, is about fourteen million – the most populated state in Nigeria. “The streets are teeming with youths who are idle, hopeless, useless, just roaming around. They can be picked up and exploited for any type of job, positive or negative,” she notes. “With I Care, we endeavour to work with them and their parents, to sensitize them. We inspire these young people to be something in life, to be productive.”

The I Care teams work with the wayward youths one group at a time. After collaborating with the doctor to remove any toxins from their bodies, they are given an education in a specific trade and reintegrated back into society where opportunity awaits. “We also encourage them to speak to others who are drug addicts, which has led to them actually becoming mentors,” H.E. explains. “Every three months we graduate another set, although it is not easy on us because it costs millions.”

H.E.’s efforts to empower young Nigerians complement her husband’s previous accomplishments as Governor of Kaduna State. During this time he worked hand-in-hand with the educational system and parents to keep kids off the streets. “He was the first to combine Islamic education and Western education in the schools, a practice now being duplicated throughout Nigeria,” H.E. notes.

For H.E., a Muslim herself, the combination made perfect sense

after her experience attending St. Luke’s Catholic School for her secondary education. “They had a lot of Muslims, and religion was never a part of the curriculum. What they were interested in was education – how they could impart knowledge in a moral way to develop disciplined women, and that is what the school accomplished,” H.E. fondly remembers. “Today I am proud to say that any St. Luke’s alumna you might come across is a well-disciplined, educated woman with a lot of qualities that anyone would be proud of. This is the level of education that everyone in Nigeria deserves.”

In Short: *Wife of the former Vice President, Her Excellency Hajiya (Dr.) Amina Mohammed Namadi Sambo is known throughout Nigeria as a vocal force for unity and equality. Above all, she is a woman of action. As Chairperson and Founder of I Care – Women & Youth Initiative, she has made a world of difference in the lives of countless Nigerians. “We need to wake up our youth, motivate them, and enable them to contribute to society, to be good citizens, to be law-abiding. There is no obstacle you can’t overcome with determination, sincerity, hard work, focus, and the inner will to truly become something.”*



Date of Birth
31/01/1965

Education
Honorary Doctorate in Public Administration
Fountain University
Osogbo
Nigeria, 2013

B.Sc. in Political Science
Bayero University
Kano
Nigeria, 1989

Languages
Hausa, English, Arabic

I Like

- Decency
- Humility
- Peaceful, harmonious society

I Don’t Like

- Injustice
- Hypocrisy
- Sycophancy

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Toyin Ojora Saraki

Founder & President The Wellbeing Foundation (WBF) Africa



My Top Tip:

“Knowledge

conquers

fear in any

situation

where you

find yourself

scared.”

“A challenge should never be an excuse not to do something,” says Toyin Ojora Saraki, former First Lady of Kwara State. “I see the challenges in my country as a reason to rise, a reason to overcome problems and to find solutions – and a reason to shine.”

Toyin’s love for Nigeria is intertwined with her sensitivity to the country’s unique pulse. “It’s like a heartbeat, a passion you can feel in the air; you can feel it in the ground underneath you, a very strong current,” she says. “I think what makes or breaks you is your response to this current emanating from the very foundation of our country.”

Toyin’s own response to this electrical Nigerian current is one of expectation and buoyancy. “I wake up every morning with a sense of optimism, always looking for a solution, a practical method that works – anything to properly address every little problem or challenge that I see,” Toyin notes. “This approach is much better than letting problems weigh me down. And when I do find these solutions, I like to share them with those who need them most.”

Her efforts in sharing these solutions have established Toyin as a catalyst of action. She sits on various boards for causes ranging

from domestic violence to children’s rights. She has also founded proactive charities and foundations that have impacted thousands of lives in Nigeria, starting with Lifestream Charity in 1993. Lifestream from the beginning had several philanthropic aims: sponsoring corrective surgeries for children with heart deformities, offering scholarships to destitute students, sending relief funds to disaster victims, and building schools. In 2002, Toyin also helped establish a programme called Positive Lifeline, designed to support HIV patients.

According to Toyin, a lot of her work involves empowering people through the transfer of knowledge – helping them to help themselves. “Not having information is like being blind and disabled,” she notes. “Knowledge conquers fear in any situation where you find yourself scared.”

Toyin applies this philosophy to one of her biggest philanthropic ventures, the Wellbeing Foundation Africa (WBF Africa). The Foundation’s passionate mission includes work in many fields such as human rights, social welfare and education. WBF Africa’s most remarkable impact, however, has been in the improvement of maternal, newborn and child health

(MNCH). As well as advocating for digitized personal health records, WBF Africa provides additional aid, particularly in supplying expecting mothers with the MamaKit, which contains all of the necessary items to turn even a simple hut into a sterile environment and an equipped medical facility.

“The MamaKit also gets women thinking about the conditions of the birth. They start considering the various options available to them,” Toyin explains. “The most important thing is that they’re able to make decisions advantageous to their own health, and in this case to avoid possible infection for both the mother and the baby.”

The heart of WBF Africa stems from Toyin’s own traumatic childbirth experience back in 1992. Her twins were born two months premature; one of them did not make it while the other fought for her life. “It was not the best way to discover the top-to-bottom inadequacy of the country’s healthcare system,” Toyin recalls. “Once I began to recover from my own feelings of loss and grief, I tapped into a sense of anger and outrage. I realized that things could’ve ended up a lot worse.”

The traumatic experience was a turning point in Toyin’s life. She put her successful law career on hold to dedicate all of her efforts toward philanthropy. “Before all that happened, I was living a filtered life. And once I had a chance to really think about it, I realized that the core things I wanted to spread through philanthropy were

education, accurate information, and higher expectation of outcome,” she recollects. “So many people who go through similar traumas have such low expectations. They just shrug their shoulders and accept the negative, literally waiting to die or waiting for their child to die.”

Indeed, education is at the very centre of Toyin’s crusade for well-being. “Health and education go hand in hand, and having these two things together is what allows for empowerment opportunities,” she believes. “Information is everything. The internet has revolutionized the world in this sense. Anytime I don’t have the knowledge that I need, I simply find it.”

In Short: *Suffering a traumatic experience led Toyin Ojora Saraki to a pivotal moment in her life that motivated her to question the integrity of Nigeria’s healthcare system. She continues to do her best to answer these questions with programmes and charities such as WBF Africa. The heart of her mission is not only to give back but to empower people and communities with the information and knowledge they need to make healthy choices. “We all come into this world as blank canvases. What you make of yourself in this life is only half influenced by the environment you were born into. The rest is up to you. If you can read, there’s nothing you cannot learn and know.”*

Date of Birth
06/09/1964

Education
LL.M. Hons.
Kings College
London
UK, 1988

LL.B. Hons.
SOAS, University
of London
UK, 1987

Languages
Yoruba, English, French

I Like

- Warmth
- Turquoise colour
- Laughter of children

I Don’t Like

- Snakes
- Rodents
- Sharp noises

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Moses Siloko Siasia

Chairman & CEO, Mosilo Group Chairman & Founder Nigerian Young Professionals Forum (NYPF)



My Goal:
“Wealth is
how many
lives I can
affect, how
many young
people I
can inspire
toward
greatness.”

Moses Siloko Siasia was in secondary school when his father died. With eleven children in the family, he was left with little option but to go around the streets of Port Harcourt, selling oranges and ice blocks to make money. The lack of food, toilets and a proper roof over head resulted in an illness that almost killed Moses because there was no money to take him to the hospital. It was a difficult time, but also a childhood that shaped Moses into someone who would go on to do incredible things for Nigeria and the world at large.

“The challenges that I faced while growing up have enabled me to reach where I am today,” Moses explains. “I learned to look at the opportunities instead of the challenges, and that translated into hope for the future. So I committed myself to changing my situation, which meant focusing on education – meeting people, creating awareness, and having this constant desire to learn. It wasn’t easy, but I was driven by the passion to succeed and to have a positive impact on my generation.”

Growing up in a community where education was not usually a priority, Moses remembers having to fend for himself, paving his own way to study mass communication

at Rivers State University of Science & Technology before moving to the U.S. to earn a Master’s in Public Administration, as well as an LL.B. Law Degree from the University of Bradford, UK. When he wasn’t studying, he was working odd jobs to pay tuition.

Moses next worked in the oil & gas sector for a year and a half before starting his own company, but he was interested in more than just money. “Wealth is how many lives I can affect, how many young people I can inspire toward greatness,” he notes. “I want young people to be seen as trustees of prosperity. Leadership should be anchored in good morals, good character and good discipline. This kind of inspiration will go a long way to safeguarding Nigeria’s future.”

Moses’s company would grow into a far-reaching group of companies – the Mosilo Group – but he started small and engaged the young people who worked for him. Today Moses deals as Chairman of Mosilo Group, with huge investments in engineering, real estate, oil & gas, agro processing and project management. The Group is a wholly-owned, indigenous company with strategic partnerships with some of the world’s leading technical companies. [Mosilo Group](#)

has employed a critical mass of young people and continues to up the ante in human capacity development locally.

Moses has earned several local and international honours and awards, such as being named Young African Leader by a United Nations organization. He is also a Commonwealth Youth Ambassador for Peace, and in their 2014 ranking of business leaders of tomorrow, the Choiseul Institute for International Politics and Geo-economics described him as a young African leader who is reshaping the continent’s economic scene. According to Choiseul Institute, men like Moses Siasia “embody the vigour and renewal of an entire continent and carry the hopes of an entire generation.” The ranking highlights the future of Africa, a future that is shaped through the commitment of its young, dynamic economic elites.

In his effort to develop Nigeria’s future, the projects closest to Moses’s heart revolve around the progress of young Nigerians. “We have engaged ourselves in several efforts to reshape the lives of this country’s youth,” he says, explaining that after serving as the coordinator of the Niger Delta Peace Forum, he moved on to Chairman of the South-South Youth Leaders Forum. He later conceived the Nigerian Young Professionals Forum, an NGO made up primarily of young, dynamic and upwardly mobile individuals with innovative ideas to develop Nigeria through

quality educational programmes, national and global networking, and leadership opportunities.

“We’ve done a lot of work in helping young professionals in Nigeria and beyond, trying to affect as many lives as possible. We have been offering scholarships and mentoring opportunities, but it’s also about building capacity and connecting young people,” he notes. “We bring young people together to teach them that we all have a stake in the future; the destiny of Nigeria belongs to us. We must avoid following the example of some of our elders who have destroyed the legacy of our founding fathers and instead initiate the process of change.”

In Short: Moses Siloko Siasia is leading a remarkable career, one launched from an impoverished background through sheer determination to seize opportunity. Now as Chairman of the Mosilo Group and through his involvement in regional and national youth programmes, he is working to impact the lives of young Nigerians so that together they may ensure the future of the country. “Nothing good comes easy. Anything that comes fast will go fast, but anything that comes slow will remain. Make sure that you have a goal in life and that you pursue it with all manner of sincerity, discipline, and good morals.”

Date of Birth
06/06/1981

Education
LL.B.
University of Bradford
UK, 2013

B.Sc. in Mass
Communication
Rivers State University
of Science & Technology
Port Harcourt
Nigeria, 2004

Languages
English, Ijaw, Italian

I Like
• Working to create positive impact
• Reading
• Charity

I Don’t Like
• Deceit
• Unprofessionalism
• Insincerity

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Professor Akinwande Oluwole “Wole” Soyinka

My Belief:
“There should not be too much of a difference in accessibility to what human beings need – healthcare, shelter, food.”

Professor Wole Soyinka recently visited an orphanage in Chibok where former kidnapping victims were living. He spent a few minutes talking to them and then asked a question: “When I look at all of you, what do you think I see?” He continues, “A few people gave various answers, and then I told them what I saw. I saw among them Nobel laureates in medicine, engineering, literature, chemistry, economics – I could see this enormous human potential in their eyes, expressions that read: ‘nothing is impossible for me.’”

Soyinka began realizing his own potential long ago as a professor and writer. And even though in 1986 he became the first African to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, Soyinka maintains that he never aspired to be a writer, let alone a famous writer. “My aspiration was more along the lines of fulfilling interior desires, exercising my creativity to a satisfying degree.”

In addition to creating an immense body of literary work and inspiring countless students during his years as a professor in the U.S. and Nigeria, Soyinka has also used his sharp creative abilities for both humanistic and political ends, on occasion getting himself

into trouble. In 1965 he famously took control of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Service studio and issued a broadcast of his own, protesting the regional elections. He was subsequently a political prisoner during the Nigerian Civil War, and during the Abacha regime, Soyinka was forced to live in exile until the ruler’s death.

While Soyinka has gained notoriety for both his writing and his political activism, he reflects on his life and achievements with humility. “I hope I have contributed to the sense of dignity of the people in my environment,” he explains. “I have this constant need to ameliorate the condition of humanity around me. I’m distressed when I see beggars; I’m distressed when I see injustice; I’m distressed when I see inequality on a level that seems to me obscene.”

Soyinka points out that while all human beings have their different talents and beliefs, material differences should not be so drastic. “To me there should not be too much of a difference in accessibility to what human beings need – healthcare, shelter, food,” he suggests. “I feel unfulfilled and even guilty if I see too much of a gap between myself and those who are in need.”

Emeritus Professor Obafemi Awolowo University Nobel Laureate in Literature, 1986

Tracing his earlier influences in social consciousness, Soyinka recalls his uncle’s wife. “While my uncle inspired me intellectually, she inspired me politically, because she was an activist and a leader of women traders who rose against a feudal monarch and a system of unjust taxation. They rebelled and resisted the oppression of the police agents of the feudal monarch, eventually chasing him out of town,” he notes. “So that was an immense influence on me in terms of human rights – issues of liberty and freedom.”

Soyinka was perhaps naturally open to such an influence as his young mind was constantly absorbing whatever he could find. “I was always a voracious reader. From what my parents and my teachers had told me, I was apparently reading by the age of two and a half!” he exclaims. “I would read anything I came across, and it didn’t take me long to work my way through my father’s small library. From reading I became intrigued about how words are put together and about how the nature of human beings is explored in books.”

It was through reading, Soyinka explains, that he made the transition to storyteller. “The first stories I came up with were all oral – stories I told to my siblings,” he recalls. “I was never content with just reading something. I would always reformulate it in my own way, changing the characters and the action.”

Today, Soyinka is still quite the reader – as evidenced in part by the small library he keeps in his car for when he gets stuck in traffic. And while he is constantly finding inspiration in the written word, he also finds inspiration in Nigeria itself. “Nigeria for me is an artificial construct that Nigerians are trying to make a reality – which is quite an inspiring task,” he says. “This means that Nigerians do not take the nation for granted as a finished business. There is a kind of dynamism about it which involves obstacles and at the same time a level of creativity that is quite challenging in all fields. So for me, Nigeria is a destination – not yet a reality.”

In Short: Professor Wole Soyinka achieved international fame in 1986 when he became the first African to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature. However, he admits that the recognition came as a surprise, an honourable accolade that went against the grain of his preference for anonymity and the solitude necessary to exercise his creative pursuits. Nevertheless, it was a well-deserved recognition that called attention to an individual whose passions for political truth and social justice landed him in prison more than once. As he has repeated over the years: “Justice is the first condition of humanity.”



Date of Birth
13/07/1934

Education
D.Litt. Hons.
University of Leeds
UK, 1972

B.A. in English
Literature
University of Leeds
UK, 1957

Languages
Yoruba, English, French

I Like
• Books
• Hunting
• Flamenco and fado music

I Don't Like
• Those who lie about others
• Lack of discipline
• Being interrupted when I am writing



Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman

My Words of Wisdom: “Never give up, always remain consistent and true to yourself – never take your eyes off the target.”

Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman is a breaker of boundaries. Throughout her life and career, she has made it a point to defy expectations placed on women in the Islamic community while still maintaining the core values of her faith. “I am the daughter of a Sharia Court judge, but a very forward thinking judge who believed in progress,” Suleiman explains. “I was brought up to learn the Islamic literature while simultaneously receiving a modern education.”

In fact, it was her father who encouraged education early on in Suleiman’s life. After she’d performed well enough on her national common entrance exams, he sent her to Queen’s College, Lagos, one of the top schools in Nigeria at the time. The experience had a major impact during the formative years of the young Suleiman. “Going to a top-notch school like that provided a pillar for me to move up in life,” she remembers.

After graduating from Queen’s College, when it came time to enrol and pick a major at Ahmadu Bello University, the one thing Suleiman knew was that she had a passion for helping people. Her decision to study law, however, meant more than just following in her father’s footsteps. “For me law offered the opportunity

to be versatile,” she mentions. “I’ve always been interested in knowing more and doing more.”

After earning her law degree, Suleiman continued to break barriers when she began to work as a lawyer for the Sokoto State Ministry of Justice. “It was an interesting time because it was so rare for a woman to practice law in our part of the country,” she reflects. “There were so few women in the field, which made it all the more exciting – I was part of a new horizon.”

As Suleiman continued to carve out her niche in the legal world, she quickly grew accustomed to thriving in male-dominated workplaces. “It can be lonely at times, but you have to be able to hold your head up and communicate that you are there to contribute and perform at an equitable level. Not to serve tea or to simply listen and obey,” she advises.

In 1986, Suleiman took a break from the Ministry of Justice to pursue her master’s degree at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Soon after, she embarked on the next chapter of her career, putting her legal skills to use in the investment bank industry. She would spend the next several years working with Continental Merchant Bank, climbing her way up to Company Secretary. After an

Commissioner for Political Affairs Peace & Security ECOWAS Commission

additional year with NAL Merchant Bank, she accepted an offer to work with Aluminium Smelter Company of Nigeria before later moving on to Legal Adviser with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

By 2008, Suleiman’s CV had landed on President Yar’adua’s desk. He was impressed enough to offer her a position on his cabinet. When President Goodluck Jonathan took over, he retained Suleiman for his own cabinet until 2011, naming her Minister of State for Foreign Affairs. “It was a wonderful experience for me, one that opened up new horizons and opportunities,” Suleiman recalls of her time as a minister. “Since I was able to contribute in other areas of government as well, Mr. President nominated me for my present position after the end of that administration.”

That current position has made her the first female Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace & Security (PAPS) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). It is a position that allows her to further her passion for supporting others, which she also endeavours to do through an NGO she recently set up. Named after her father, the Alkali Hussaini Foundation is designed to empower women, children and orphans – the less privileged in society. “We’ve been able to train more than four hundred women so far, providing literacy classes, training in skills

like sewing, knitting, detergent making, pomade making – trades that can give them a leg up living in communities where women don’t ever really get out of the home,” Suleiman explains. “For them to be able to do something different, to earn a living even, makes a huge difference.”

Suleiman is eager to lend a hand, not only because she can empathize with what it means to grow up in an inopportune environment, but also because she embodies the drive to face difficulties head-on. “Never give up, always remain consistent and true to yourself – never take your eyes off the target.”

In Short: Salamatu Hussaini Suleiman has consistently broken boundaries in her life and career by pursuing her passion to make a difference. She has cultivated a distinguished law career, served on the cabinet of two Nigerian presidents, and presently serves as the Commissioner for PAPS of ECOWAS. “You will achieve if you persistently go for what you believe in, particularly if it enhances people’s lives,” she advises young Nigerians. “When you make a difference and add value to society, it is so fulfilling – you get enormous strength from places you don’t expect, enabling you to do the job.”



Date of Birth
27/10/1960

Education
LL.M., London School of Economics & Political Science
UK, 1987

LL.B., Ahmadu Bello University
Zaria
Nigeria, 1981

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like
• Children
• Life
• Gardening

I Don’t Like
• Pettiness
• Cruelty
• Injustice

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Ambassador Hassan Ardo Tukur, OFR, MFR

Former Principal Secretary to the President of Nigeria



My Words of Wisdom: “Whatever knowledge you acquire can be very useful in life and in work, especially if you have an open mind.”

When Ambassador Hassan Ardo Tukur was first posted to Equatorial Guinea in the mid-1990s, he couldn't help but think that he was somehow being punished. “There was initially a lot of hardship. No telephone, no water, no electricity – absolutely zero amenities,” he recalls. “But I immediately said to myself that I would turn the situation into a positive.”

With renewed determination, Tukur buttoned down, learned the language, and proceeded to get things done. “One of the biggest tasks I worked on there involved demarcating the maritime boundary between Equatorial Guinea and Nigeria, which is an extremely difficult thing to do because the area has oil deposits straddling the border,” Tukur explains, adding that as Chargé d’Affaires, he also helped with other projects, such as building schools and hospitals. “In the end, I turned this difficult situation into a success, and it made me a stronger person. This is how it goes when anyone faces a problem, especially if you can look at it in a different, optimistic way to help you address the obstacles.”

When he was still in secondary school, Tukur knew that he wanted to be a diplomat, so from an early age

he decided to focus all of his energy on making it happen. “Diplomacy is a profession that speaks to the nomad inside of me,” he discloses. “I enjoy developing networks, seeing other parts of the world, and cultivating close relationships between Nigeria and other countries.”

Tukur remembers his first post in Saudi Arabia as a dream come true. “The Holy Mosque in Mecca is a place that every Muslim hopes for the opportunity to visit at least once in their lifetime, and I got to pray there every week for almost a whole year!” he recalls. “After that I was posted in London, working with various departments, before going to Equatorial Guinea.”

For the past four years, in addition to his diplomacy work, Tukur had been working as the Principal Secretary for President Goodluck Jonathan. “That was a whole different ballgame which had me working with security issues, diplomatic issues, national issues, local issues, global issues,” he explains. “Because as the Principal Secretary of President Goodluck Jonathan, I had to be wherever he was, ready to take on any assignments he gave me.”

Between his diplomatic work and duties assigned to him by the president, Tukur knows what it

means to carry a lot of responsibility – but he is consistently up to the challenge. “I take things as they come. My aspiration is to positively contribute to the development of Nigeria at all levels,” he says. “Working for somebody – even the head of state – who has one hundred percent confidence in you compels you to do more than necessary. It gives you the motivation, the extra push to do the best for the person you’re working with – and then to do the best for your country.”

The passion that Tukur harbours for Nigeria is no doubt one of his core motivators to go above and beyond the call of duty. “In spite of the challenges we have, Nigeria is a country that inspires. We are doing a lot, internally as well as in Africa and throughout the world,” he notes. “The true test for us – as with any country or individual – is how much stronger we become after coming out of each challenge. We grew stronger after overcoming the Civil War for instance, and we will grow stronger from dealing with the present security issues.”

Tukur’s positive attitude toward challenge is no coincidence, especially when considering the impressive individuals who have influenced him over the years. “The late Dr. Bala Mohammed, for example, inspired me intellectually. From him I learned that if you want to excel you have to be intellectually sound; you have to read widely and have a thirst for acquiring knowledge,” Tukur

shares. “Whatever knowledge you acquire can be very useful in life and in work, especially if you have an open mind.”

Having an open mind is what has allowed Tukur to learn from many different world leaders, both historical leaders and ones he has met throughout his career. The trait he admires most in a leader is humility. “I’ve worked with very humble personalities, leaders who were careful to never make decisions impulsively but instead take the time to think things through. You learn something from that,” Tukur advises. “Whoever you meet or work with in life, you can learn things big or small that will help you to succeed.”

In Short: *Knowing that he wanted to be a diplomat early on allowed Ambassador Hassan Ardo Tukur to focus his efforts in the right direction. Add to the mix his ability to view problems from a positive angle and an open-minded mentality, and it's obvious how he climbed up to play a significant role in Nigerian government. “So long as you maintain the urge to be well-educated, the opportunities in Nigeria are infinite. The country is growing fast and there is a lot of work to be done in every sector, but if you want to find your niche you have to keep a positive mindset.”*

Date of Birth
03/01/1957

Education
B.Sc. in Political Science
Bayero University
Kano
Nigeria, 1980

Languages
Fulfude, Hausa, Chamba
English, Spanish, French
Arabic, Portuguese

I Like
• Family
• Passion about my country
• Helping people

I Don't Like
• Dishonesty
• Laziness
• Corruption

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Patrick Okedinachi Utomi

Founder & CEO Centre for Values in Leadership



My Dream:
“For me,
Nigeria is an
opportunity
to show
that Africa
has the
capacity and
commitment
to renew and
re-create.”

Several years ago Professor Patrick Utomi wrote a book called *To Serve Is to Live* – that title is his motto in life, a motto that has defined his career, his ambitions and his faith. “The idea is that if you serve, you will be fulfilled, and of course if you serve to the best of your abilities, you will be duly rewarded,” Utomi explains. “And I constantly ask myself, ‘Am I working towards doing all things I do well?’ That is the biggest challenge.”

A widely renowned academic in political economics, management expert, and presidential candidate in 2011, Utomi comes from a wide ranging Nigerian background, geographically as well as culturally. With his father working for British Petroleum, the family was obligated to move from one part of the country to another on a regular basis while Utomi was growing up. His high school education, for instance, started with Christ the King College in Onitsha and ended at Loyola College in Ibadan.

While many adolescents might balk at being uprooted with such consistency, Utomi managed to see the positive side. “Experiencing so much of the country enabled me to see the best in the different people of Nigeria,” Utomi notes. “That also

happened to be a time when there was a lot more trust in the system. As a nine-year-old I would travel alone from Gusau to Kaduna, where I would change trains for Enugu, and then get on a bus to Onitsha. Back then everybody looked out for each other; my parents knew that if I needed help I could simply ask another adult. Living in such a strong community provided me with a very warm childhood.”

By the time Utomi went through high school, he was set on becoming an airline pilot, mainly because it was a fashionable occupation at the time. But early on in university he hit a detour: the library.

“It was my father who initially convinced me to go to university. The plan was to go, make some good friends, and afterwards go to flight school. Instead, I wound up going to graduate school,” Utomi remarks. “A lot happened to me during university that changed the course of my life, but one of the biggest things was my volunteer work managing the library. Because I had to be there a lot, I didn’t have much choice other than to read the books – and that’s how I became an academic.”

For graduate school and his Ph.D., Utomi headed to the U.S.,

immediately returning to Nigeria after his studies. Once home, Utomi was soon enlisted by then Vice President Alex Ekwueme to work as a consultant on a few public policy papers. This in turn led to his appointment as Special Assistant to President Shehu Shagari, which he held until the military coup in December 1983. Utomi then joined Volkswagen of Nigeria Limited as Head of Corporate Affairs in 1986 and was promoted to Deputy Managing Director and Chief Operating Officer two years later, eventually becoming acting CEO in 1991.

After leaving Volkswagen, Utomi began to further cultivate his career in academia. He had already co-founded the Lagos Business School (now Pan-Atlantic University) in 1991, and in 1996 he went back to the U.S. to serve as scholar-in-residence and research associate at American University in Washington DC as well as Harvard Business School. “There have been so many achievements and experiences along the way, but the biggest thing that makes me proud is people coming up to me and communicating how inspired they are by the things I say and do,” Utomi reflects.

A lot of this inspiration comes from Utomi’s regular columns as well as his involvement in civil society groups such as Transparency in Nigeria and Centre for Values and Leadership, to name a few. “For me, Nigeria is an opportunity to show that Africa has the capacity

and commitment to renew and re-create,” he says of his constant efforts to move the country in a positive direction. “I believe that Nigeria is the best chance for African peoples anywhere to get the respect that is their due.”

Utomi’s vision for a developed Nigeria is clear and his passion to improve the country is limitless. “We as Nigerians must establish Nigeria firmly, not just as a big or populous country – but as a growing, economically and politically stable country where social harmony is the status quo,” he states. “The possibilities are there. Nigeria just needs the right kind of leadership to leverage such opportunity, to make Nigeria a nation that the international community respects as the voice of the African people.”

In Short: *Professor Patrick Utomi is deeply passionate about his country. It is a passion that revolves around service to others. As he continues to develop vital organizations along these lines, such as the Centre for Values and Leadership, his eyes are firmly set on the future of Nigeria and its people. “I teach something I call the pedagogy of the determined, which suggests that people must have a vision for tomorrow. You can then work towards that vision by creating an optimal learning climate, by choosing ideas that move you in the right direction. But it starts with vision.”*

Date of Birth
06/02/1956

Education
Ph.D., MPA, MA
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana
U.S., 1982

Languages
Igbo, English

I Like
• Hard work
• Friendship
• Study

I Don’t Like
• Narrow-minded people
• Corruption
• Irresponsible people

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Maryam Uwais, MFR

My Vision for the Future: “I want to know that I lived life to the fullest and did everything I could for my community.”

As you grow older, you realize you only have so much time on this earth, and it hits you – why waste time worrying about things you have no control over?” says Maryam Uwais. Of course, she makes the most of the things in life she can control. She surrounds herself with positive people, and she does everything she can to have a positive impact on the community. There is also a degree of control, she maintains, in choosing to persevere when faced with difficulty or challenge.

A cursory glance at Uwais’s remarkable career history reveals a woman who indeed strives to do her best. The trajectory of her career as a legal practitioner alone warrants praise. She began as a prosecutor for the Kano State Ministry of Justice, followed by work with the Nigerian Law Reform Commission in the 1980s, then nine years with the Central Bank of Nigeria before opening her own practice, Wali-Uwais & Co, in 2001.

However, she prefers to use her law degree to focus on human rights and development issues, rather than spending her work week in court or applying herself to corporate law, which is the mainstay of her firm’s practice. “I don’t want to look back on my life someday and be forced to

describe it as boring,” she explains. “I want to know that I lived life to the fullest and did everything I could for my community, that I helped make people happy.”

Uwais, in fact, remains tireless in her efforts to do her part in the community. She never stops pushing herself to be the positive change she envisions, as demonstrated through her work with the Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (IWEI) and by her work on numerous boards and projects. “I ask myself every night, ‘Did you do your best today?’ Because there is nothing that gives me greater fulfilment than seeing children walking again after overcoming malnourishment, or adolescent women reading and writing when previously they couldn’t even hold a pencil.”

For Uwais, this selfless approach to life is part of her Islamic values, which she gained from her father even though he passed on when she was quite young. “Even though I lost him very early, he was a big inspiration in my life through all of the articles that he had written and what people said about him,” Uwais notes. “I learned how he tried to enact a positive transformation of traditional practices and perceptions. He used to write articles about the position of women in Islam,

Chairperson & Founder Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative (IWEI)

reminding people of the women who had done so much in Islamic history, and then he would ask why Islamic communities would make their women – half the population – so unproductive. He called it an extravagance that Islam couldn’t condone.”

After Uwais’s father passed on, her mother remarried into a polygamous family. This shift found the young Uwais in a competitive atmosphere, but her mother remained completely focused on her and her siblings, determined that they would get a good education. When Uwais performed well in her exams, she earned a spot at what was then the best boarding school in Lagos. “Going to Queen’s College in Lagos provided us with a more cosmopolitan environment where we could learn not just about academics, but about our country and the different cultures,” Uwais remembers. “It was an education that taught us that we are all human beings and we all have the same challenges – such as parents who struggle to pay school fees – even if we call God various names, even if we speak different languages or have different cultures.”

For university, an elder brother encouraged Uwais to study law, a subject in which she would also go on to earn her master’s degree. Later, she would further submerge herself in the world of Nigerian law by marrying a judge, who served as Nigeria’s Chief Justice for more than a decade. “He’s always been very patient, very understanding – like a rock,” she says of her husband.

While Uwais enjoys the “awesome responsibility” of having her own firm and employing people, for her the most important focus is on raising standards in the community through IWEI. “For me, the most significant cases I’ve worked on involved helping girls who were married off early,” she says. “For instance, there was a little girl that I learnt about, in Lagos – twelve years old and married off. She had run away, so I met her, brought her back to Abuja, fostered her and put her in school. Now she has just finished secondary school, is back on good terms with her father, and wants to go to university. Working with women and children, helping them – that is what gives me fulfilment.”

In Short: *Maryam Uwais has worked hard over the years to build a strong career as a legal practitioner. Yet she was never content to rest on her professional accomplishments alone. While cultivating her distinguished career in law, Uwais has simultaneously remained committed to her greatest passion in life, her selfless dedication to improving the lives of others, particularly through the Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative. “We must commit ourselves to enhancing our communities. It is not up to the government alone – everybody has a responsibility to do something, to improve the conditions of those around them.”*



Date of Birth
10/12/1959

Education
LL.M., Ahmadu Bello University Zaria
Nigeria, 1985

B.L., Nigeria Law School
Lagos
Nigeria, 1981

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like

- Empowering women and developing children
- Music from the 60s and 70s
- Reading

I Don’t Like

- Dishonesty
- People who patronize others
- Hypocrisy

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Ambassador Aminu Bashir Wali, mni, CON

Former Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs



My View:
“We have to start orientating our youth to think like entrepreneurs, to create jobs for themselves.”

It was around 2008 when Ambassador Aminu Bashir Wali returned to Nigeria from a four-year post in New York with the United Nations. During this dynamic period in his career, Wali was able to participate in major international issues, including the creation of the Human Rights Council and efforts to reform the Security Council.

But as productive as his time in New York had been, Wali was thankful to be back on home turf. “When I came back to Nigeria I remember thinking that I was done serving anywhere else. I wanted to stay at home and see what I could do in Nigeria,” Wali recalls. “And then the president approached me with the proposal that I go to China to promote relations there, particularly in the economic sector. With my experience in the private sector in various areas of business and my stint on the international scene, he thought I was the right person for the job.”

Although a bit reluctant at first, Wali accepted the proposal, which turned out to be for the best. “I am so thankful that I accepted because it turned out to be a tremendous challenge, which I found very inspiring,” he discloses. “I was there for four and a half years, and

all in all it was quite a successful outing. I know I achieved great things between Nigeria and China, and many of the projects I work on in Nigeria today are a result of my midwifing that relationship, which has brought about a lot of Chinese involvement in Nigeria.”

The results of Wali’s efforts in China were so successful that he was named Nigeria’s Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is a role that Wali took quite seriously. “Naturally we had a lot of challenges facing the country, and we were working on improving our relations,” he explains. “We especially wanted to reaffirm the historical role we had played in maintaining peace and security in the African sub-region.”

Wali’s expertise as a diplomat comes from a wealth of experience accumulated over a long career in the private sector and in politics. “I always had a pretty good idea of what I wanted in life, and I’ve been quite adventurous along the way,” he notes. “As soon as I finished my studies in Kano, I took the train straight to Lagos, spent a year training in clerical work, then got a job for the Federal Ministry of Works in Lagos during the 1960s.”

But after a few years, Wali wasn’t satisfied with government

work. So he applied for and won a scholarship to study at a polytechnic school in the UK, where he studied company secretaryship. The education gave him a strong foundation in business administration and he qualified as a member of the Chartered Institute of Secretaries. “After that I came back home and started my career in the private sector before ultimately moving on to promote a business of my own.”

Once in the private sector, Wali wasted no time getting involved in everything he could, ultimately rising to hold a number of chair positions, directorships, and interests encompassing everything from manufacturing, to mining, to construction. When Wali made the switch to politics – where he would go on to become a founding member of the People’s Democratic Party – he sold a lot of his holdings because he no longer had time to look after them, but he still looks back on this time in his life with pride. “I found it fulfilling. I was able to create a lot of jobs and help a lot of people – all as a young man in my twenties.”

Likewise, he encourages Nigerian youth today to seek out their own opportunities in the private sector. “The outlook of youth today is inherited from the colonial system – you go to university, graduate, then work for the government or a major corporation. However, the time has come to go beyond looking to others to give you a job,” Wali advises. “We have to start orientating our youth to think

like entrepreneurs, to create jobs for themselves, to really look at the opportunities in this country.”

Wali encourages the youth to leverage opportunities for themselves by taking advantage of the communication technologies available in today’s era of the global village. “The privileges afforded to us by the internet are huge. A young person now has access to research and guidance that will really allow them to zero in on prospects for success. They can find their own paths while also creating jobs for others – so long as they deviate from looking at the government to give them work.”

In Short: *Ambassador Aminu Bashir Wali has lived a long and fulfilling life, always working hard to create opportunity for himself and for others. His rich, varied background in the private sector paved the way for his involvement in politics and eventually as a Nigerian ambassador. He has worked at the UN in New York and also played a pivotal role in expanding relations between Nigeria and China. “There is no country on earth like Nigeria, no country has so much diversification – and I love everything about it. I want to see this country achieve its potential, to see it become a first world power.”*

Date of Birth
03/08/1941

Education
MNI, National Institute for Policy & Strategic Studies
Kuru
Nigeria, 1986

Associate of Certified & Cooperate Secretaries (ACCS) North Western Polytechnic (now North London University)
UK, 1967

Languages
Hausa, English

I Like
• Peaceful, secure and prosperous Nigeria
• Family
• Helping people

I Don’t Like
• Injustice
• Dirty and unhealthy environments
• Negative assumptions about Africa

Contacts
foreignaffairs.gov.ng



Herbert Onyewumbu Wigwe

Group Managing Director Access Bank Plc



My Top Tip:

“Stick to the areas where your true competence lies and develop that competence.”

Herbert Wigwe’s first job in the finance sector happened to be with a bank that – like him – was just starting out. One day a loan request came through and Wigwe, using his better judgment, rejected the deal. When Wigwe’s boss found out, he was extremely upset. “My boss felt that we were challenging him, although I saw it as my job to actually protect him,” Wigwe remembers. “In the end, the loan went through and I resigned.”

The resignation came about not because Wigwe was offended or embarrassed, but because he saw the job as a dead end. “Any day when I feel that the system will not allow me to exercise my best judgment, wherever I’m working, I’ll leave,” he notes. After the incident, Wigwe decided to go back to school for a year – and later found out that the loan in question had sunk the entire bank. Wigwe was not surprised. “When you employ people to come in and express their own professional competence, you can’t think you’re better than everybody – it’s not sustainable.”

Wigwe’s career actually began a short time earlier when he became a Chartered Accountant with Coopers & Lybrand Associates at the age of twenty-two. He had

initially decided to study finance because he knew that he had strong numerical skills, but once he got started as an accountant, Wigwe realized his aspirations were much greater. “Chartered accountancy was fun for a while, but I soon felt too limited and bored,” he explains. “I wanted to do something that was truly interesting; I wanted to build, to make a difference, and to be responsible for the creation of job opportunities.”

Over the next several years, Wigwe steadily climbed his way up in the banking industry. He spent over a decade at Guaranty Trust Bank, managing high-profile portfolios for financial institutions, corporations and multinationals. For his last three years at GT Bank, Wigwe served as an Executive Director, valuable experience that would further prepare him for his next post.

In 2002, Wigwe was part of a new management team that took the helm of Access Bank Plc. His task was to turn what was considered to be a small bank into a world-class entity in the financial service industry. “In 2002 a lot of small banks were facing imminent danger of extinction. There were challenges with liquidity and capital – a lot of

growing concern,” Wigwe recalls. “So we all had to button down, remain extremely focused and push as much as we could.”

Extreme focus is characteristic of Wigwe’s day-to-day lifestyle, and it has served him and his team quite well in building Access Bank to what it is today. “We are now eleven-thousand strong in terms of employment. There is an energy behind the institution we run and the great strides that we continue to make,” he says. “We intend to stop at nothing short of becoming the world’s most respected African bank.”

Wigwe believes that the success he has achieved in his professional life is no coincidence. Along with his stellar sense of focus, he is completely confident in his ability to persevere in a career while maintaining high standards of excellence. “If you do a job well, you will do well for yourself. It doesn’t matter what you are doing – whether you are an entertainer, a writer, or a teacher – whatever it is, you have to stick to the areas where your true competence lies and develop that competence.”

Another aspect of his success, Wigwe shares, is a fear of failure. “I cannot have a bank that will have a problem – psychologically it will destroy me,” he mentions. “The fear of failure is what keeps us going. This desire for success can at times allow us to go for days without sleep, working as much as humanly possible.”

In other words, the basis of

Wigwe’s professional drive is to achieve the highest level of excellence. “I will not stop until I am the very best, and the day that I think Access Bank is truly where we want it to be, I will move on to do something else,” Wigwe explains. Whatever that ‘something else’ is, Wigwe assures that it will more than likely involve a contribution that will positively impact society. “I don’t know how to function in a mediocre way; it’s just not part of my constitution. If I don’t think I am building something new or interesting, I will get bored and move on. I need to continually be at the heart of growth and improvement.”

In Short: *Herbert Wigwe has steadily climbed his way up the corporate ladder in the banking industry to become Group Managing Director of Access Bank Plc, which he has helped turn into a world-class operation. Through determination to be the best while maintaining a high degree of integrity, he has laid the foundation for his legacy. “I want to know that I’ll be remembered for creating a sustainable institution, which will far outlast me as an individual. Nothing lasts forever, but for as long as something can humanly be remembered, people will know that others came before them and did something great here.”*

Date of Birth
15/08/1966

Education
M.Sc. in Financial Economics
University of London
UK, 1996

M.A. in Banking & International Finance
University College of North Wales
UK, 1991

Languages
English

I Like
• Loyalty
• African arts
• Children

I Don't Like
• Weakness of character
• Dishonesty
• People that challenge my integrity

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Barrister Timipre Wolo

My Belief:
“Making a difference in the lives of people is the most important legacy you can leave behind.”

“I’ve always wanted to be a lawyer, because I’ve always identified with the plight of the oppressed, the deprived and the less privileged,” says Barrister Timipre Wolo, who has always been ambitious about reaching her goals. “Growing up, I knew that I could achieve whatever I set out to accomplish.”

Despite her humble background, Timipre remembers her father teaching her to dream big. “I grew up with the mentality that nothing is impossible, that one must always aspire to be whatever one wants to be in life,” Timipre recalls. “So I was never afraid to pursue my dreams.”

Knowing that she wanted to become a successful lawyer gave Timipre the incentive to do well in school. She and her friends were always competing with each other for the best grades, and although Timipre was the youngest in her class, she was appointed Deputy Senior Prefect. She enjoyed the responsibility so much that while attending university, she was elected as the first female National Vice President of the National Union of Bayelsa State Students in all tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

After university, Timipre was elected to represent Nigeria at the UN Youth Assembly in New York

from 2005 to 2008. “It was quite enlightening – meeting young people from all over the world, everyone coming together to exchange ideas and learn how to be the change you want to be,” Timipre recollects. “It was inspiring to hear stories from so many parts of the world. Overall, the experience helped shape my desire to look at things from a broader perspective.”

After graduating from the Nigerian Law School and subsequently being called to the Nigerian Bar, Timipre moved to Scotland to study for a master’s degree in the oil & gas field with no scholarship or financial support. “I was determined to do my master’s overseas, so I had been saving for that. I paid part of the tuition upfront, and then I was able to make up the rest while I was there,” she explains.

While studying in Aberdeen, Timipre found an innovative way to raise money for her tuition fees. “I had noticed that there were no Nigerian restaurants, so I saw an opportunity for a new business amidst the growing Nigerian community there,” she notes. “I registered a catering company in the UK, partnered with a deliveryman and distributed flyers at a Nigerian Independence Day party I hosted to advertise the business. After that,

Head of Industry Collaboration Unit at Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF)

people would call and place orders, which I would prepare myself and have the delivery person bring to their doorstep. It became very popular in Aberdeen.”

The catering project was a stroke of ingenuity, the kind of inspiration which Timipre attributes to her mother. “My mom was very inspiring – very hardworking and industrious,” Timipre remembers. “Even though I lost her at the age of twelve, I had already learned so much, enough to carry me through for a lifetime.”

Immediately after finishing her studies in the UK, Timipre returned to Nigeria. Her primary desire was to have an impact on young Nigerians, which she has done in her present role as Special Assistant to the Executive Secretary & Head of the Industry Collaboration Unit for the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF). Through the Industry Collaboration Unit, Timipre and her team launched a number of youth empowerment initiatives targeting young men and women from less privileged backgrounds across Nigeria, such as the PTDF Youth Entrepreneurship Programme and the Special Training and Educational Scheme. Recently, Timipre also launched the first-ever helicopter training programme by the PTDF that enabled five young women and ten young men to qualify as international certified commercial helicopter pilots. She has also engineered ongoing education and training partnerships between the PTDF and various international institutions such as the United Nations Institute for

Training & Research (UNITAR), Jacksonville University in the U.S., Goundong University of Petrochemical Technology in China and Haugesand University in Norway. Through these partnerships, young Nigerian men and women receive the requisite skills and qualifications they need to contribute to the nation’s development.

For Timipre, her dream of being a lawyer allows her to fulfil her number one desire in life. “For me, making a difference in the lives of people is the most important legacy you can leave behind,” Timipre says. “In the end it’s not how much money you have, or how many material possessions you acquire – it’s about the lives you were able to impact.”

In Short: *Rising from humble beginnings, Barrister Timipre Wolo has proven that anything you set your mind to is truly possible. To all young Nigerians, she passes on the same message that has brought her so much inspiration and success: “Nothing is impossible with hard work, determination and discipline,” she encourages. “You can achieve whatever goals you set for yourself. It doesn’t matter what background you come from, it doesn’t matter what colour your skin is; it is not about you being from the northern or southern part of Nigeria. The only thing that matters is hard work and determination.”*



Date of Birth
27/05/1981

Education
LL.M. in Oil & Gas Law
University of Aberdeen
Scotland, UK, 2009

B.L., Nigerian Law
School
Abuja
Nigeria, 2007

Languages
English, Izon, Igbo

I Like
• Travelling
• Photography
• Shopping

I Don’t Like
• Deception
• Disorganization
• Cheating

Contacts
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Do you want to meet Nigerians who will make a difference in the years to come?

In the following pages we present a brief snapshot of the Nigerian Youth to show that there are no age restrictions to start inspiring. These four remarkable students inspire us through their successes, unique skills and dedication to their country. More importantly, they reflect the promise of the coming generation.

We congratulate these impressive young Nigerians on their accomplishments and wish them – and all Nigerian students – the best in their future endeavours.



Daniella Nengi Dan-Jumbo Clinton

Student / Author



Daniella Nengi Dan-Jumbo Clinton aspires to be the youngest author with the highest number of published books in the world. It is a bold ambition, but one which she is already well on her way to achieving. *Believe it or not, her parents taught her how to read and write at the age of three.* They inspired her and challenged her, and she never once took the value of literacy for granted. With her prodigious appetite for story, the young Daniella began reading the likes of J.K. Rowling and Enid Blyton, as well as Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe, Chimamanda Adichie, Chimeka Garricks, and Elechi Amadi.

Reading all of these influential writers fed Daniella's appetite for good storytelling,

and just as important, inspired Daniella to record her own stories. "I grew up with story. From the time I was an infant, my parents would tell me stories. And then reading the stories of other writers, watching movies, as well as absorbing all of the things happening around me – I couldn't resist the act of writing it all down," she explains.

Daniella started writing, and she couldn't stop. Line by line, her inclination turned into a passion. Today, at just twelve years old, Daniella already has several published books, including *The Snake and the Hunter's Wife*, which she describes as the story of "an insatiable Hunter's wife who insists on eating the eggs of a snake before having her baby."

She's also published *Daniel in Toyland* and *The Leprous King* – the latter an adaptation of a

legend about a leprous man who stumbled into wealth after being ostracized to an evil forest. As imaginative as these books may seem, Daniella's next published book further exemplifies the power of her imagination, and it also shows Daniella's intent to share the joy of writing with others her age. Her book *Basic Steps to Story Writing & 5 Stories of a Plot* is a collection of five short stories that function together as a story-writing guide for children and teenagers.

Encouraging other children to write is the precise vision behind the Daniella Clinton Child Authors Foundation, which includes initiatives such as the Read & Write with Me project. *"The focus of that specific project is to inspire and groom more child authors. It takes me to different schools and communities throughout Nigeria," Daniella says.* "Eventually I want to take the project beyond Nigeria to get more African children into writing."

Daniella's work as an author and with the Foundation has earned her a number of awards and accolades, but for her it all comes back to writing and inspiring others to write.

Whether it's through sharing a good story with other children or organizing a writing contest, she believes writing is an important activity that anybody can explore. In fact, her motto explains it all: "If I can do it, every child can do it."

Although Daniella has a Pan-African vision when it comes to encouraging other children to write, she is quite perceptive when it comes to the potential of her own country. "Nigeria, with its abundance of human and material resources, is currently crawling," she says, offering a metaphor. "But this country has the potential to leap and overtake most leading nations of the world."

And of course, despite her busy schedule, Daniella still makes time to just be a kid. When she's not writing, reading, or attending literary festivals, she enjoys singing, roller skating and dancing. But most of all, Daniella just wants to inspire – to invite others to share in her world of reading, writing and storytelling.

My Motto: "If I can do it, every child can do it."

Date of Birth
15/12/2002

School & Grade
Brookstone
Year 8

Languages
English, French

Interests

- Writing and Illustration
- Singing
- Roller skating
- Dancing

Contacts
dcaf.org



Florence Ifeoluwa Otedola “DJ Cuppy”

On a recent visit to her hometown of Lagos, Florence Ifeoluwa Otedola – better known as DJ Cuppy – was invited to do a gig, and though her manager encouraged her to rest, she couldn’t resist. She finished at three in the morning, with the crowd still begging her for more. “I feel like I have the best job in the world. I celebrate with people for a living!” she exclaims. “I love the ambience, the dancing, the power of the music and the lyrics – the way we as Nigerians can jump in and out of Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, English – it’s almost like poetry.”

Cuppy played her first gig in Lagos when she was just sixteen, and she has been carving out a name for herself on an international scale ever since. A lot of people come to her for advice about how to get started

in the business, and her usual response applies to any creative industry. “Why do you want to be a painter or a dancer? Why do you want to use creativity to express yourself? Because if you’re not doing it for the right reasons, the likelihood of succeeding is very low,” she cautions. “Do it for yourself. That’s what will keep you going.”

The love Cuppy puts into her work as a DJ enables her to stay up until four in the morning for gigs and still make it to class later that day. “It can be challenging at times, but having that passion, that hunger to succeed keeps me going,” she explains. “And on a personal level, it’s about more than just me having something to prove. I feel like I am in a way representing a generation of African women, and taking that upon myself gives me a lot of energy.”

In addition to having passion,

Student / International DJ & Producer

Cuppy believes hard work, determination, education in your field, and the right skill set are equally important to success. “Preparation meets opportunity,” she advises. “And people always have opportunities, big or small. No matter how little, it all depends on how you execute it. I started DJing at friends’ parties and sixteenth birthdays. I probably sounded horrible at first, but you have to throw yourself out there. You never know.”

Cuppy is no stranger to putting herself out there. “I’ve never been scared to take chances and to put myself into new situations. You have to throw yourself into the unknown and be able to learn from mistakes,” she adds. “I think that’s one issue with a lot of young people in Nigeria. They want to be told what to do and when to do it.”

The main thing, Cuppy maintains, is that people should pursue careers that they actually want. “I see a lot of young people who are pushed into becoming doctors or lawyers, and then if things go wrong, it always hits them hard because they’re not doing what they want to do. But thankfully now, things are starting to change, and parents are realizing that there are other careers you can flourish in. I always say find a job you love and you never have to work a

day in your life!”

Of course, Cuppy’s ambitions do not stop with DJing. Her passion for Nigeria’s wealth of creative talent is what is driving her to seek a master’s degree in New York. “It’s very important for me to come back home and help build a structure for the different creative industries, because so many opportunities are being missed right now,” notes Cuppy, who last year started her own management and publishing company, Red Velvet Music Group. “Creativity is something a lot of Africans appreciate and enjoy, but we refuse to put structures in place so that the creative people themselves are protected.”

Cuppy is just as passionate about her country as she is about creativity. “A massive spotlight is on Nigeria right now,” she observes. “With so many young people here, it is up to the new generation to realize that the future is in their hands. It’s a blank page; it’s up to us to write the story.”

My Philosophy:
“People always have opportunities, big or small. No matter how little, it all depends on how you execute it.”



Date of Birth
11/11/1992

School & Grade
M.A. in Music
Business
New York University
U.S., 2015

B.Sc. in Business
Management
King’s College
London
UK, 2014

Languages
English, Yoruba
French

Interests

- Cupcakes and baking
- New challenges
- Innovating
- Meeting new people
- Exploring new cultures

Contacts
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@cuppymusic
Facebook: cuppymusic



Sophia Amara Obiago

Student / Artist



The best advice Sophia Amara Obiago has ever received in her young life is manifested in how she embraces each day. “Do what you love doing, do what you’re passionate about, and let that consume your time when you are young,” she says. “Because when you’re young, you don’t have to worry about a lot of things and you can develop yourself. *Whether it’s a hobby, like my photography, or school, or certain subjects – do what you like doing and immerse yourself in it.*”

To Sophia’s mind, doing what you love is the best way to lay a foundation for the future, something you can turn into a career perhaps. “You don’t gain a lot by forcing yourself to do

things you don’t enjoy,” she explains. “But it’s not simply about enjoyment; I have this drive to not only do what I like, but to do it well. I want to succeed in every aspect of my life.”

Sophia has already begun to find success as an artist, having recently held a photography-poetry exhibition featuring her and her mother’s work. “I actually discovered photography through my mother, who would always buy us disposable cameras when we were growing up,” Sophia notes. “*Even today, I’m still developing my craft as a photographer, and art is indeed a passion of mine, but it is not my sole focus.*”

Currently, instead of studying art, Sophia is studying international relations at George Washington University in

Washington DC. “Ultimately, I would like to study law, specifically intellectual property law. I’ve noticed that in Nigeria the artists are not very well protected. There is a lot of copying, a lot of fraud and stealing of ideas,” Sophia observes. “Maybe I can have an impact in that area. Nigeria is so big, and there is so much artistic ability – but it is not always easy for artists to manage their work. Because I’ve experienced the art world first-hand, maybe I can contribute in a different way.”

Aside from law and photography, Sophia is especially interested in business. “*After the photography exhibition, people have been pushing me to pursue the craft more seriously, but I’ve always been attracted to business and feel that I have a good business sense,*” she shares. “I spend a decent amount of time looking at the Forbes 100 companies, reading up on their histories, reading about developing entrepreneurs from all over the world – so hopefully, ten years from now, I will have my first company going!”

Of course, Sophia realizes there will be plenty of challenges along the way. “*When it comes to facing struggles, I am very*

head-on and rational. I like to overcome and solve issues as soon as possible – I don’t like to leave anything unsettled,” she reveals. “To be honest, I physically can’t sleep or relax if there is a problem. It could be a problem with another person or with work – I just have to face it directly, reasonably and in a diplomatic way.”

Whichever path (or paths) Sophia chooses to pursue, she’s got plenty of drive and inspiration to keep her moving. “On a global level, people like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi inspire me through their virtue of forgiveness. I think that’s something that everyone struggles with in life. Being able to forgive people is so important, and it’s something I strive to do every day.” But the inspiration has also been there in her personal life from the start: “My family has always inspired me to be the best in my chosen field, to excel at the highest possible level in what I’m good at.”

My Philosophy: “*Do what you like doing and immerse yourself in it.*”

Date of Birth
19/10/1995

School & Grade
George Washington University
2nd year student of International Affairs
Washington DC U.S.

Languages
English, French

Interests
• Music
• Photography
• West African Art

Contacts
saobiago@gmail.com
Instagram:
sophiaamara_ photography



Zuriel Oduwole

Student / Activist



Zuriel Oduwole is a girl of far-reaching and dynamic aspirations. And having already accomplished so much at an extremely young age, inspiring other children and even adults throughout Africa, she is well on her way to realizing those aspirations. Born in the U.S. to a Nigerian father and a Mauritian mother, Zuriel considers herself a Pan-African child. She's spent plenty of time both living in and visiting Nigeria, and is proud to be part of the country's future.

"I'm trying to make a difference in Nigeria and Africa by advocating for children's education, especially education for girls. We girls have a role to play in Nigeria's growth as well as the development of the rest of the continent," Zuriel explains,

adding that this is the main focus of her project Dream Up, Speak Up, Stand Up. "I started the project in March 2013 at the Lagos Business School as a way to talk to children about the need to go to school and seek empowerment in life through education."

Through the programme, Zuriel has already spoken to more than twenty thousand children in seven countries, including Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Mauritius. "I hope that the work I do is inspiring others. I get a lot of feedback through Facebook from people I've encountered who were inspired, and sometimes people will even stop me in the airport," she reveals. "One of the coolest stories came from an orphanage I spoke at in Malawi. The principal of the school there reached out to

let me know that I'd inspired one of the girls who had previously been extremely shy."

Zuriel does more than just speak at schools through the programme. She has also met with several African business and political leaders, including one in six of Africa's fifty-four presidents and prime ministers, to discuss the issue of education. In addition, she has gained recognition as an accomplished filmmaker, having become the youngest person in the world at the age of twelve years old to show a self-made film in a cinema chain. "I make documentaries so as to show the world a positive image of Africa, to show that Africa is more than wars, famine and disease," she explains of her filmmaking ambitions.

The initial inspiration behind all of her work, Zuriel notes, comes from her parents, who have fostered her world-changing dreams and have developed her Pan-African attitude. "They have always encouraged me to explore new things, to learn and to communicate my ideas. And they've also been careful to teach us about our roots," she

says. "For instance, my parents make sure we watch news from around the world; we regularly see stories about Africa and know what's going on there. When I first saw young children on the streets selling things when I knew they should be in school, I felt so sad. I knew I had to do something."

Zuriel plans to continue her endeavours to motivate children throughout Africa, especially girls, to stay in school at least until the age of eighteen. But she also has plenty of colourful and ambitious dreams for her own life. "I want to be an athlete and hopefully compete in the 2020 Olympics, and then I would like to become a robotics engineer. But when I get older, I'd like to be the president of the United States," she discloses. "If I'm president of the U.S., I can have an impact on the entire world – and of course education!"

My Goal: "I'm trying to make a difference in Nigeria and Africa by advocating for children's education."

Date of Birth
24/07/2002

School & Grade
Connections
Academy Year 9
(2 years ahead)

Languages
English, Mandarin

Interests

- Documentary filmmaking
- Inspiring African youth on education
- Athletics
- Robotics

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