

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world

Happy International Women's Day to you all!

This year's theme for International Women's Day is "Women in Leadership: achieving an equal future in a COVID- 19 world" and the campaign theme is "Choose to Challenge".

Last week when Nancy, our Public Relations Manager, requested that I give a talk on the importance of education in relation to today's theme, I was quite sceptical about coming because I had already planned out my day. So I had to jokingly ask for compensation in order to ditch my program but that was just that; a joke. I agreed to give a few hours of my day because I believe it's such a great honour every time I'm called upon to remind a group of girls and/ or women about the importance of education.

In one of our very first lectures we had in Communication Skills at The Copperbelt University in first year, our Lecturer Mr Nkonde, said something I still remember to this day, over nine years down the line. He said "Education will make you dine with Kings and Queens" to which I can truly attest. Of course I'm yet to meet the Queen of England but there are certain people I have met in my life because of my education. I know Zambia is a Christian Nation but this is not about fate or God only, education did it for me. I've been to places I wouldn't have if not for my education even if I had the money. I've had access to certain opportunities in general which I wouldn't have had if not for my education even if I had the money, this opportunity is one of them. I am putting so much emphasis on "even if I had the money" because I have heard some people say that education is not so important because the richest people didn't go to school. A few weeks back, I was reading the 2021 Forbes List for African Billionaires and guess what? Majority have tertiary education including the very famous Dangote. That's just one example and I deliberately started with the African List because these are close to home and Zambia is no exception. Now let's go to the outside of Africa: Thomas Stanley, a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) and Author conducted a survey by questionnaire on over 700 wealthy people in the United States of America which he revealed in his book published in the year 2000 that majority were actually learned people.

I have realised that life is a gamble. Just like in football, you can't really bet on a team that is known for poor performance because the odds that it will carry the day are usually small.

However, that's not to say the team can't win either. Majority of the middle and upper class citizens have some form of education and the "rich" we always refer to as not learned are less than 10% of the population, a probability of 0.1. Are odds in your favour of falling under this 10% bracket? This is the one million Kwacha question you should always ask yourself when someone discourages you from learning.

"Experience is the best teacher" they say but I say "Relevant experience coupled with education teach the most". I believe experience alone is very limiting because that only depends on your exposure. So if they say "experience is the best teacher", imagine how great you would be if you coupled that with education. Back in the days, rising through the ranks in the corporate world depended on experience but now that is not entirely the case. A 2017 Harvard Business School study revealed that Employers believed applicants with tertiary education were more job-ready than those without. I believe this holds some water and here is my two cents: university or college teaches you more than just your degree or diploma. The same experience everyone talks about is also faced at university but in a different light. Juggling between school and a personal life prepares you for work-life balance. You also learn to prioritize things of utmost relevance by knowing which assignment out of the eight should be completed first. Budgeting skills are also learned in college because out of your little stipend, you get to buy books, food, clothes, hair, make-up products, perfume, shoes etc. This is where you actually implement your first austerity measures. All these are skills you need on the job. Even our own employer, the President in this case, wants us educated and this is evident through the education allowance that appears on our payslips. That allowance even though it might not be enough, is encouragement and entitlement for you to take deliberate action towards advancing your knowledge. You don't have to wait for anyone to push your professional development agenda, do it yourself. Save if you have to for you to enrol into a course or even start up a small business. In 2019 I had other commitments and since I knew that I was going to start my Master's Degree, I deliberately cut on certain costs and started saving. I stopped buying myself clothes and shoes anyhow, I just had three wigs and didn't mind who noticed and who didn't because I had a bigger plan. You can do that too.

Let's now talk business: many young and old people alike in Zambia have brilliant business ideas eligible for several funding opportunities through grants and loans. I'm sure you too, have

great business ideas. To have access to this money, you need to be able to write up a business plan. What usually happens is you either write it yourself or you hire someone to do it for you. In either ways, you need to fully understand your business concept and monetization. For you to succeed in this, you need the ability to learn. You need to have interest in getting educated on things relevant for your business. The ability to learn is what usually distinguishes great business people from ordinary ones. As a learned business person, there is a different type of command you will possess in an auditorium because truth be told; we live in a world full of bias. Even if say you hire educated people to run your business, you still want to understand what is going on before your ignorance can be capitalized on. This clearly shows that education is cardinal in all spheres of life.

To be a leader in these COVID-19 times and beyond means continuing to learn and adapt. Life has changed in so many ways unimagined since the pandemic hit. The work culture in institutions has changed massively in the sense that we are now embracing technology which looks like the way forward for sustainability of the organisation. Virtual meetings are being encouraged which means people should take keen interest in knowing how to operate applications such as ZOOM and Microsoft Teams. From now on, as women, technology should be a part of our daily lives because apparently even education is now being conducted online. It's funny how at some point certificates and diplomas obtained through online education were not highly recognized but life has a way of making us accept certain things we deem out of the norm. We should navigate the way around progression in our career and businesses as women during and post this pandemic because it seems that's the only way of staying in the race.

Let's rise to the challenge and act!

Thank you,



NUTTAH MUMBI
CIVIL ENGINEER