

LEMONS, LEMONADE, AND AN OVERUSED CLICHÉ

PROLOGUE

“For without adversity, there can be no victory”.

The quote “If life gives you lemons, make a lemonade” is one that has been widely used in the last decade (no thanks to Beyonce’s 2016 multi-award winning album named after the popular beverage).

The message in the aforementioned quote is relatively simple and quite apt. It is an exhortation that no matter what ugly situation life throws at us, we should endeavour to make the best out of it. However, after a personal scrutiny of the popular quote, I came to the conclusion that the conjunction ‘if’ situated at the beginning of the sentence was better off expunged and replaced with ‘when’ to illustrate the certainty of the fact that life must at some point throw challenges at every one of us. Ultimately, it is the response of every individual/group of individuals to these challenges that determines to a very large extent the fortunes of such an individual/group.

The winners in the game of life are those who stand and fight in the face of setbacks, refusing to be cowed by life’s unexpected travails while the losers are those who when faced with troubles slide into self-pity, wallow in hopelessness, and ultimately accept defeat.

“When life gives you lemons, make a lemonade”.

Nobody better embodies the message of resilience espoused in the above quote better than the Australian-American Christian Evangelist, Nick Vujicic.

Born in 1982 without any limbs due to a rare and adverse medical condition known as tetra-amelia syndrome, Nick had a tumultuous time growing up. His abnormal looks caused him severe depression and drained him of every iota of self-confidence. His pint size made him an easy target for bullies and he couldn’t live a ‘normal’ life like the other kids. His disability and the attendant negative experiences even led to his attempting suicide at one time in his life.

However, Nick at some point came to discover his purpose in the world. He chose to no longer see himself as ‘awkward’ but rather as a unique being. He resolved that he would make the most of what he had. Life had given him a full basket of the sourest lemons but he determined that he was going to make the sweetest lemonade out of it.

Today, Nick is a happily married and proud father of four kids, an internationally renowned speaker, a New York Times best-selling author and the CEO of a non-profit Organization that has positively impacted millions of lives across the globe.

“In the end, it is not about what happens to a Man but what a Man does with what happens to him”.

RESILIENCE AS A KEY FACTOR FOR ORGANIZATIONAL SURVIVAL

“No one invites a crisis, but handled well, it can be what your company needs”.

(Jeff Booth, Founder BuildDirect)

The outbreak of the novel coronavirus in 2020 dealt a huge blow to businesses and business owners across the world. In response to the speedily rising fatalities and the rapid spread of the virus, most Governments of Nations declared lockdowns and other forms of restrictions which only exacerbated the enormous challenges the pandemic had brought on businesses. Enterprises in sectors such as sports and recreation, transportation, film and cinema, tourism and hospitality, education, and religion etc witnessed rapid drops in patronage which culminated in plummeted incomes, job losses and furloughing on the part of the workforce, and in extreme cases, bankruptcy on the part of the business owners.

I co-run a Nursery and Primary school (Shining Star Academy, Enugu, Nigeria) with my Mum and our business was one of the several that were affected by the global covid-19 pandemic. Following strict Government orders, schools were shut for several months and our pupils were forced to stay at home. Tuition and sundry fees that form the bulk of our earnings and are necessary for the remuneration of our staff and for the general running of the school were no longer as forthcoming as ought to and this led to a financial and administrative imbroglio.

So, how did we manage to navigate this unexpected and unprecedented crisis?

Following my experience as an Entrepreneur who was able to bounce back strongly after being adversely affected by an unexpected crisis, below are seven key points I have come up with on how businesses can build their resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges.

(1) Preparedness – I have already established the fact earlier in this essay that no individual or corporate entity is immune to setbacks. No matter how long the good times last for, a point must come when the bad days arrive.

The first step to enabling resilience in the face of challenges is anticipating the coming of the 'bad days' and making adequate arrangements to mitigate the attendant effects. This preparedness can be in the form of Insurance, prior and adequate training of personnel, setting up and maintaining an emergency fund etc.

(2) Prompt response – Challenging times do not give any room for dillydallying else the business would suffer catastrophic losses. In dealing with a problem confronting a business entity, time is of the essence and the Entrepreneur must be expeditious in doing whatever is required to salvage the situation.

(3) Creativity and Initiative – Challenging times for any business always provide a window for the Entrepreneur to think outside the box.

During the covid-19 pandemic, we swiftly moved from physical to virtual classes and we also integrated the parents of our pupils into the teaching process via a unique and highly effective teach-your-child curriculum which we created specifically for the period of the pandemic. These and other innovations were the products of high levels of creativity in the managerial process and these helped us in no mean way to weather the covid-19 storm.

(4) Strategic partnerships – As the popular saying goes, "No Man is an Island". This truth also applies to businesses. In order to successfully navigate troubled waters, the Entrepreneur must establish strategic and mutually beneficial relationships with other brands. During the period of the pandemic, we partnered with a local I.T firm and a data vendor to supply us tablets and internet data respectively with very flexible payment plans. These business partnerships not only helped us to meet our increased demand for internet connectivity after we had taken our classes online but also ensured that we didn't put too much pressure on our already lean resources.

(5) Learning from past experiences – Experience they say is the best teacher and this process of learning from past experiences comes in two folds; learning from your own past experiences as a corporate entity and learning from the experiences of other brands that have been faced with similar challenges. The former calls for retrospection while the latter calls for research.

(6) Maintaining a Positive Attitude – In dealing with any of life's challenges either as an Individual or an Establishment, it is imperative to always maintain a positive disposition. The Entrepreneur must see the challenge facing his business as a gift and an opportunity for victory to be achieved. Immediately the business owner accepts defeat in his mind, he automatically stands defeated but if he believes firmly and uncompromisingly that his business will surmount the challenge no matter how daunting, this confidence will precipitate a form of reinvigoration

that will spur the management and workers to do whatever is necessary to rise above the unpalatable situation.

(7) Effective Resource Management – This is a very critical factor in building a business organization’s resilience for dealing with unforeseen challenges. Research has shown that when most businesses are thriving, they fail to properly manage the financial and material assets that accrue to them and this always creates a problem when times of paucity come along.

Beyond the prudent management of financial and material resources, the Human resources of the organization must also be adequately managed. Staff motivation and welfare must be prioritized at all times because in the incident that a business organization falls on hard times, the ability of the business to survive the situation would largely depend on two things; the enormity of the financial and material resources the Enterprise has saved up as well as the commitment of the workforce to whatever plans and processes the Management comes up with in order to tackle the problem.

EPILOGUE

“For where there is a will, there is always a way”.

I read the book ‘Tough times never last but tough people do’ by Robert H. Schuller in the year 2014 and it totally changed my life. It brought me to the realization that it is rather how men handle situations and not the situations themselves that make men. It pointed my perspective towards the fact that in the journey of life there are bound to be challenges but that no matter the magnitude, there are no obstacles that cannot be surmounted. I have lived my life ever since with this knowledge in mind.

In both individual and corporate existence, tough times provide opportunities for innovation, for introspection, for rebranding, for developing tougher skin, for learning valuable lessons that would help shape future decisions, and ultimately for achieving victory. Tough times call for resilience and resilience remains a necessitous principle for dealing effectively with setbacks and recovering from them as well as for guaranteeing long-term individual and organizational survival.

The role of resilience in the entrenchment of organizational longevity cannot be overemphasized as resilience is the pillar upon which corporate existence rests. Hence, it becomes absolutely

imperative that the managements of organizations put in place robust mechanisms to build and sustain their levels of resilience to setbacks.

Finally, it is my sincere hope that the experiences and knowledge I have shared in this essay would inspire, encourage, elevate and most importantly help in building an individual's/ organization's resilience towards surmounting whatever challenges they may be facing in the present or which they may face in the future.