

Lessons From One Hundred And Three.

Introduction

My Inspiration was broken. Five weeks as head prefect in my high school, Queency International School I was 'No Leader' I was discharged from my duties.

I had poorly managed my responsibility, during my administration, I ran a weak system with poor planning, lack of organization, and absence of moderation. Chaos reigned as everyone was powerful and independently controlling, I was not the leader I had envisioned. This was a stigma I shouldered each day, I had failed even at 16years.

I guess I may have forgotten I was still young.

See Possibilities! Taking action! Enables progress!

These were chants from a group of students about 4 yards from where I was sitting having a chat with my good friend Abdulhazeez in my University years after high school. These students called themselves the ENACTUS team. An international non-profit organization present in thirty-two countries independently managed by students on their various campuses, using business prospects to solve challenges in the world with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals.

From the flier they distributed, I could clearly read “we live our values of integrity, passion, innovation, and collaboration in all that we do”. I could feel that sudden bond which automatically stirred up an energetic want of finding oneself within.

'Could this be it?'

I didn't want to be broken forever a decision that retained me and made me attend the meetings.

Attending the ENACTUS weekly meeting the next Sunday was the beacon of life ecstasy, a decision I never regretted. Enactus was and still is an organization that engages students in entrepreneurial action for impact. I became an official member of the Enactus team in February 2017. The team executives at that time had decided not to participate in the National competition for Nigeria. There was no globally competitive viable project, plus the team's finance wasn't sufficient to fund travel and meal expenses for delegates to serve as observers.

My interest in leadership and entrepreneurship grew exponentially in 2017 at the university when I became much closer to Kabir. He was one of the few team members with raw talent in innovation, the one I call, “trailblazer”. He had found it difficult to neglect an idea he had to support over three hundred thousand persons living with special needs in Kano State, Nigeria. “With clean energy from solar cells, I could make a difference”, he said. Kabir had designed a blueprint of a 3D smart tricycle which eases mobility and creates decent jobs for persons with a

disability, a product he called ZAZOO. This convinced me that talent yet existed on the team. I further realized Kabir and other team members were driven by creativity and innovation but at the time I observed the team spirit was down. Meeting attendance was low, dropping each week. Everyone was simply seeking for what the team yet had in store for them.

I discovered a gap while further engaging with Isa, Fatima, and other team members who had community impact-driven project ideas just like Kabir. They found it difficult to harnessing their abilities to solve social and economic challenges identified within our community, utilizing the means available to make their ideas happen while accessing resources available to them for their idea development. Something hovered inside me, each day followed another with the guilt I couldn't be successful at helping or leading Kabir and others at this, but I couldn't resist their profound traits of elements in creativity and passion to create positive change.

I knew from there on, just as Kabir, Fatima, and Isa couldn't let go of their passion I couldn't let go of me leading ...this is another door to expand me, and I had to take it'

“Instruct Me, Teach Me in the Way I Should Go”

I do not know how many times I said those prayers of guidance, seeking strength from God. “I had failed myself once at High school. I wasn't particular about making another history of failure in leadership, I was concerned about not trying to take initiative, not trying to take action, not seeing possibilities, not enabling progress. I believe at this time, accepting failure, lessons from it, my preparedness to launch rockets of success based on what I defined them to be were steps towards the beginning of leading myself.

Working with other members on the team, I became very much active. Owning up the challenge to revive the team spirit, my vision for the team was “*to develop leaders around me through adaptive leadership*”. If we could in the long run have various team members who were exceptional and stood out amongst their peers, the vision was achieved. I began holding knowledge sharing sessions, taking online training, encouraging, and engaging the team on various activities outside campus with visits to communities to identify challenges we could proffer solutions to in our own efforts. These were motivating, that by October 2018, I was nominated and appointed project manager, we had won a pitch competition with a reward of USD 820 from Icreate Africa for the Reeba Project.

Although it wasn't smooth sailing, sacrificing over 28 hours of volunteer time per week, coupled with my academic activities, I was already doing so much. I was constantly researching, visiting numerous online resources for opportunities. It was Malcolm Forbes who said, “diversity is the art of thinking independently together”. I decided to bring pitch competitions at home. I felt I now know a few tricks, so let's have local organized competitions. I further elicited channels for Kabir, the team members, and other like-minded students on campus to co-create solutions in form of entrepreneurship pitch competitions, workshops, and ideation sessions that brought the attention of investors for the support that had an interest in green energy and social entrepreneurship.

This was enabling the student-preneurs access resources in respect to expert mentorship from business leaders, start-up funding, accelerator programs and pitch challenges available to scale up projects channeled towards tackling poverty, identifying more talents for the team, after which I would head-hunt them and convenience them to be part of the ENACTUS program on campus, to essentially build talents for sustaining the team even after my exist from school two years later. It brought eyes of the media to see what amazing projects students were executing or prototyping, tell their stories, and directly/indirectly provided means to raise funding for these projects.

This model birthed, the Hult Prize Foundation on-campus program, my engagement as a student ambassador with Civic Innovation Lab which hosted the Student Innovation Challenge at Bayero University, this led to Kabir securing USD 6,900 in seed fund for ZAZOO with proposals and pitch sessions that brought the attention of the Vice President to the University on September 4th, 2018. I had developed networking skills, learning to manage my emotional intelligence, collaborating with other organizations, being conscious of others' opinions, respecting their values in contribution to the organizational goals. Approximately, two years on my ENACTUS journey, I had become the team leader, we had built close relationships, our new identity, one hundred and three members of the team was “family”.

Ten Years Challenge

In the history of ENACTUS Bayero university, we had won the national competition only once in 2009 and represented Nigeria at Germany while the program was under the name SIFE (Students in Free Enterprise). Our mission at this year’s competition was to win in 2019, we took up the famous Instagram #TenYearsChallenge to display our trophy in 2009/2019. I had dreamed of it, fantasized it so much it messed with my sleep as we drew closer to the National Competition scheduled for July. I had a lot of pressure on me from the alumni network meetings, the ENACTUS business advisory board members, were all expecting so much from us to perform as champions again after years of absence and weak performance.

The Big Bang

“Why had the bus stopped”?

When I thought I had seen it all, the experience of a leader that would shape my school of thought in leadership for good wasn't during risks of moving from one city to another, sleeping in rural communities to execute community projects, nor was it when I sacrificed my upkeep money to remain in school two months after the end of a session. Little did I realize even mere words could hold so much water. I was going to experience yet another degree of self-leadership. It was the 8th of July, 2019. All was set, forty-four delegates heading for the ENACTUS Nigeria 2019 National competition in Lagos. 1,003.5kms away from Lagos, we had to go by bus.

“Why had the bus stopped”? We could still see the bus provided by the school moving ahead of us. The commercial bus we had hired to convey eighteen delegates of my team had broken down. Fortunately, we were close to Katari, a small settlement beside the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. It was 11:48 am by my time, I quickly discussed with the driver who was just returning with a mechanic and a towing vehicle. “It happened here”, this was Abdulhazeez’s reminder about press statements on scores of individuals being kidnapped at Katari, about a week ago. Katari was well known as the den to kidnappers who take their victims on this road. I said a prayer of guidance in my heart as I walked, watching the towed vehicle ahead.

"The engine dey overheat" the mechanic replied in vogue language.

As I placed a call to our Faculty advisor, on our status report, I looked at my team members scattered around the vehicle and others sitting under a mango tree. Before now, all we had planned for failed consecutively, our outfit didn't reach us on time as promised by the garment makers, we left late in the morning, and not every delegate paid their contributions completely, this mean a shortage of funds. Immediately, I got off the phone, I could hear a call for prayers at a small mosque close by. 80% of my team were Muslims, "please stick together and do not go far fetched without company" I advised.

I began to feel dizzy; we were all hungry and tired. What now! The mechanic had promised the bus would be ready in a few hours. The National competition begins in 34 hours. We were nowhere close to Lagos. We have to proceed by splitting the team, seeking opinions from my project manager, and financial secretary. It’s only logical that all project presenters, technical team, and females proceed with the school bus. We all agreed of forty-four members, seventeen delegates, all males were left behind with the fate of a broken bus.

At about 4:17 pm they took off waving with smiles and well wishes. The program officer from the ENACTUS Nigeria had also called for random checks on all teams. I had received five calls from my team parents, parents who were worried about their wards, worried about the safety of their children who had never traveled such a long journey by road. There have always been stories of bandits on the road, stories of how passengers who travel by bus were robbed.

This last call was from an angry parent that changed my life. It constantly influenced my thinking, I felt the world was against me. "Hello, I have just learned from my daughter, your vehicle broke down at Katari. Recall you are the team leader, responsible for everyone on those buses. If anything happens to a single person, you will have the school management and their entire parents to answer to". Suddenly, I got goose bumps, I was scared. My guard was down, the hunger inside of me vanished. I sat down, with my heart racing, I could feel my head ticking. I was broken, yet hope kept me moving. I hoped that the universe was with us.

It was 7 pm already, about 3 hours since the first bus had left. Of course, we had paid the commercial company. I looked around and found a police station close to the Mosque; I tagged two others along as we approached two policemen just leaving their station duty post. After

explaining our situation they followed us to the position of the broken vehicle. The driver suddenly became harsh asking us to calm down, his vehicle would soon be fixed. To my utmost surprise, the policemen only admonished the driver, spoke in Hausa language, after a brief conversation with the driver "you are not safe here, not even us being policemen, that's why we leave our station duty on time to meet our families at home. We advise you to stay together until the vehicle is fixed". I was disappointed.

What do we do now? We cannot remain here, I saw 8 pm become 11 pm, yet the bus wasn't ready. Suddenly, at 11:43 pm headlights from another empty bus arrived. Finally, came help, Ahmed had called a driver earlier from Suleja, the closest city to Katari. We had made series of calls for another vehicle to be sent, instead, we met with adversity. They all wanted funds transferred ahead of time. Ahmed was sitting pretty in front of the school bus earlier when I selected him as part of those to remain behind.

Conclusion

The journey ahead is profound. Remarkably, I have continued to always preached self-leadership to myself, this is how I retain my sanity, this is how I look forward to greater heights in life. The years 2017 to 2019 were few years in my entire personal development that brought more blessings to me than ever before. I experienced leadership, I discovered myself, I figured out there isn't a limit towards what I can achieve, at this point the word "impossible" gets me charged, it has become a mere support towards proving to myself I can expand my horizon of dreams and aspirations to the entire world.

How do you develop, expand, and retain critical thinking skills in yourself?

To retain, develop, expand critical thinking skills in yourself, one cannot stop learning, nobody is a monopoly of information, feed yourself with diverse thoughts and opinions from your team, your mentors, your friends and family, put these pieces together to spark your thoughts for ideas. This gives room for a reset, a channel for the mind not to cast regrets but bring the little pieces of information together from different angles, leveraging on the power of collaborative thinking. Like a steam under pressure, this will strengthen you to think in thoughts angles you have not personally considered.

When we make societal challenges or common challenges identified with others a shared responsibility, and helping them grow out of it with love and enthusiasm, we give room to a critical thinking environment. This environment makes us think in their shoes, it further gives us the momentum to co-create, develop the constant strive to help others try new ways of approaching problems for common good. This adaptive feature expands you, helps to make you continuously redefine and iterating your personal vision as your progress along the ladder of self-leadership, recall mine "*to develop leaders around me through adaptive leadership*".

Another crucial point is to have a personal motto. One that keeps you on track, my personal motto is *“to makes ideas happen”*. This was coined from the Arabian story of Aladdin and the Genie bound in a lamp, who could grant the wishes of his master almost instantly. When I continuously tell myself this personal motto, it gets me charged that I cannot be lacking with ideas, I can be creative if I choose. Ultimately, this should connect to your personal vision for



others. By “*making ideas happen*” I want “*to develop leaders around me through adaptive leadership*”

When you find yourself in a difficult situation, take the situation as an asset, and try to use the invaluable resource which operates in us as humans. Our intuition, the power of silence within. That feeling in your guts that gives you inner peace. As spiritual beings on earth, we are constantly wheeled by a creative energy which constantly permeates through our intuition. Merriam Webster Dictionary defined the word intuition as “the power or faculty of attaining to direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference”. When I listen to my intuition, I collate thoughts in silence, thoughts and intuitive feelings that I am in control, responsible to take action and I seem to know what action is required of me.

Do not accept to be broken with failure. When we transform our failures to strength and personally become obliged, not to let ourselves down or people around us within our open source leadership cycle, this shapes our ability to manage mental health, emotional intelligence to manage projects, people, time, balance life experiences towards others which spells out our unique capacity to strive and tap into the world of critical thinking and to ultimately lead oneself.

REFERENCES

Aisha, Abdul, Abdulazeez. “BUK hosts Hult’s campus competition.” *Daily Trust*, November 22, 2018. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/buk-hosts-hults-campus-competition.html>

Bala Muhammad “ENACTUS: WHEN YOUTHS ANSWER THE CALL”. *Daily Trust*, June 29, 2019. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/enactus-when-youths-answer-the-call.html>

Merriam Webster, s.v. “intuition”, accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intuition>

Misbahu Bashir. “How BUK students learn hands-on entrepreneurship.” *Daily Trust*, August 21, 2019. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/how-buk-students-learn-hands-on-entrepreneurship.html>

Punch, July 19, 2019. “Nigerian youths turning environmental, power problems into opportunities”. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://punchng.com/nigerian-youths-turning-environmental-power-problems-into-opportunities>

Ronald Mutum. “Police arrested 93 suspected kidnappers” *Daily Trust*, May 2019. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/police-arrest-93-suspected-kidnappers.html/amp>

The Cable, September 05, 2018. “Nigeria’s future billionaires will be technology innovators, says Osinbajo”. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.thecable.ng/nigerias-future-billionaires-will-technology-innovators-says-osinbajo>

Yunsha’u Ibrahim. “Osinbanjo tasks youths on entrepreneurship”. *Daily Trust*, September 05, 2018. Accessed May 28, 2020. <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/osinbanjo-tasks-youths-on-entrepreneurship.html>