

Breaking the



Tales of 11
Inspiring African
Agents of Change



Charles Umeh

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to you Ralph Somkenechukwu Uchechukwu Leon, Bryan Muna Dunn and Jahden Arubayi having been born at the very period this project progressed. This dedication is targeted at admonishing you to grow in Gods wisdom and outdo your parents in making a difference around the globe. We've got your back.

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Foreword

GIVEN THE CHALLENGES THAT AFRICA faces in education, healthcare, technology, finance, and other sectors, our continent needs many more change-makers and social entrepreneurs who will brave the odds in order to create lasting change in our various communities through creative and innovative solutions. Our youth need to know that they can make a difference, they can and should lead, and they embody the ideas and solutions that can transform our country and indeed our continent. *Breaking the Coconut* succinctly conveys this important message by chronicling the journeys of dynamic young African youth in their quest to make a positive impact in their various communities. The language used is simple, making this book an easy read for young readers. Oftentimes, young people believe that creating positive change in their environment is a daunting task that is better left for political leaders or philanthropists.

However, *Breaking the Coconut* dispels this notion completely. The change agents whose stories are told in this book are everyday young people fuelled by a passion to see positive change in spite of limited resources. Their commitment, enthusiasm, and tenacity in the face of challenges are inspiring. They have impact stories cutting across the health sector, education, information technology, and media, that every young person can identify in one way or the other and learn from their successes as well as their mistakes. To every young person out there hungry for positive change but too scared or unsure of how to begin, *Breaking the Coconut* will provide the fuel you need to begin the journey to make an impact and leave an indelible mark in your society. Read this book, and be inspired to join these dynamic individuals to defy the odds and recreate the Africa that we long to see, the Africa of our dreams.

Foreword by LEAP Africa

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS, ACCOUNTABILITY AND PROFESSIONALISM (LEAP) Africa, established in 2002, is a non-profit committed to developing dynamic innovative and principled African leaders. We recognize that raising leaders is critical to nation building and wealth creation. Over the years, LEAP has inspired and equipped youth, business owners and social entrepreneurs to lead ethically while implementing initiatives that transform their communities and organizations for better; sustaining livelihood and contributing to national development. LEAP achieves this through its training programmes, publications and eLearning.

Acknowledgements

FIRSTLY, MY GRATITUDE GOES TO God. Thank you for keeping me to do this one. I feel blessed, honoured, and grateful for being given the privilege to share these lessons. By your grace, there is more to come.

This is one journey I will always remember with fond memories, and I am forever thankful to everyone who chose to be part of this first book. You have shared a part of you to the rest of the world, especially when your lives are still evolving balls down to character and courage, this I must applaud. Irrespective of others' opinions and the vulnerability involved in sharing, you refuse to be cowed by the fear of the unknown.

I would like to thank the following persons; Maple Dappa, whose evolving odyssey inspires us to rise above circumstances even if they emanate from our own close-knit circles. Sara Nana yeboah from Ghana (thanks to the power of referrals) for upholding the legacy of volunteering. Marion, whose exploit at a very young age sends more positive news on what possibilities await youths around Africa. Chinonso Ogbogu, whose personal story and constant objective critique during the course of this work helped in my balance of objectivity (he was my reminder). Kenechukwu for helping us realize we can dream again if we sow good seeds. Ambrose for not giving up when life took away his joy and the future looked bleak. Chinonso Arubayi for sharing her story and the choices she had to make for her goals at some stages, most especially for sharing her story at very uncomfortable circumstances (her first child was on the way then). Thanks plenty. Olufunbi for his new perspective on social development. (In an era when we view social development from a one-sided lens, Funbi helps us see the full view.) Daberechi for the insight on social entrepreneurship. Dunn Eustace, who was my first editor on this project. Amaka Alusi for

her insights on relationship which went down extremely helpful, especially during the review of this work. I feel more privileged and honoured having met these minds.

The success of this book reinforces the power of community, which is the benchmark of Africa's philosophy. Like the South African philosophy of "*Ubuntu*", "*I am because you are*". A very popular African proverb states that it takes a whole village to raise a child. And hence like drops of water, we hope the stories in this book would be helpful in sharpening the perspective of the next young African change-maker.

It was easy working with the people whose stories I have shared in this book because they are amazing breeds who are not scared of what the world thinks about them; instead, they think about what they can do for the world.

Like I have said in the beginning, they might not make your tabloid headline, or have more bitter experience to justify your own situation; however, in their own corner of the world, they are unforgettable and rake in good karma points. Wherever you are in the world reading this, I hope these stories inspire you to do more and keep beating on your craft.

Writing a book is team work. I had my share of amazing team from around the world. My gratitude is boundless from my amazing art director Amaikwu Steve (@steevyradio), who designed the book cover. Steve gave me the first real picture of this book, to my book teaser campaign manager Sam Olorundare (@samisill) whose advert campaign on this book endeared people to it. Thank you Patrice Al'om Blessing your scriptwriting skill-set and critique rubbed off.

Thanks to Gift Madojemu, who was reviewing the first drafts from Canada as at the time of writing. Her objectivity and feedback put me on track. You really know great friends when they aren't scared of hurting your ego and respect you especially when it has to do with your first book. Gift didn't spare me on this one, and I kept smiling at her professional feedback at the book's infancy.

Wale Salami for really taking time to read and review the first draft from the United States and then critique it. Grace Ihejamaizu, founder of Opportunity Desk, one of the rising online platforms for global youth opportunities in Africa. Udechukwu Chimezie, Rotaract Nigeria Assistant

District Representative for two states in Nigeria (Chimezie wears various hats. You must forgive me if I remember him only as this.) Solomon Ojeagbase of Complete Sports Communication and Solobase Digital, Mr Ajigbade Seun, Mrs Yemisi Ayeni (M.D,Shell Nigeria Closed Pension Form Administrator Ltd) for taking out time to read this work even at short notice.

Mrs J.O Adedugbe (Owner of MD schools Lagos, Nigeria for her ideas during the first draft) Mr. Dele Kayode Ojo for his kind words when it mattered. My neighbour Mr Bawahala whose feedback on my style of writing helped improve my final work. I feel more privileged being on his busy schedule.

Special thanks to the students of Oxygen Advertising Academy and to the academy founder, Mr Ozoemenna Mbanefo, as well as the amazing bunch of young breeds of admen, making impact in the advertising world in West Africa. Kudos, guys! We brainstormed on the book title.

When people take out time off their schedule to read a book that possibly isn't a household name, you tend to appreciate their time, considering that a lot of people are busy and can't give their opinion because of their schedule.

Thanks to the CEO of LEAP Africa (one of the foremost leadership-grooming organizations in Africa), Mrs Ndidi O. Nwuneli (MFR) and the COO, Mrs Iyadunni Olubode, as well as all the pioneer staff for shaping my thoughts on leadership. My leadership lessons as an alumnus are priceless.

To my lifetime friends from Enactus Nigeria and the bright intellectual minds who challenge me each day to be better than I was yesterday, thank you comrades. Special thanks to the former Country Director of Enactus Nigeria, Mrs Adesua Ifedi, and the Country Director, Mr Mike Ajayi, I am a protégée of Enactus Nigeria. Thanks also to Dr. Isaac Nnadi (OFR) for his guidance at the tail end of this work. I am most appreciative of your kind words.

Thanks to my publishing team from Partridge Africa, Paul Ivan, Rebecca and Geraldine Samson, for your constant reminder.

To all my teachers and mentors, I finally put in a bit of all you have put inside of me to galvanize this work and my gratitude knows no bound.

Special thanks goes to Dr. Romanus A. Okafor and Mr Siji Otenigbagbe for believing in this project even when they knew very little about it, I feel honoured to have earned your trust. Thank you

And lastly to my parents, amazing siblings, and friends your love and understanding always reminds me of how much family matters.

The most important person on this piece to whom I say a big thank-you is the next game changer who is reading this piece and would rub off from the lesson learnt and make an amazing life from it. Brace up for your journey. I wish you a reading full of serendipity. May your next audacious steps be bullish.

Introduction

IN AFRICA, IT IS BELIEVED it takes a whole village to raise a child. One of the tools we use to this effect is the art of telling stories. We live by stories. Growing up, our parents communicated more by tales which at that time simply made us happier and strengthened our communal nature. Remember the tortoise folktale? One of such which sticks out for me is that of the tortoise going for a meeting alongside all the animals in heaven, where he decided to have a new name, *All of You*. When meals were served for All of You, you guess who owns the food already. With time, we got to understand most of those stories had lessons on values marinated in them.

I am yet to recollect a tortoise story where he didn't end up being the cunning one. If you are referred to as tortoise you are either foxy, crafty, or sometimes wise (a school of thought believe the tortoise isn't all about crafty or foxy hence I decided to recast the statement).

Fast-forward into the social era with the Internet telling our stories and we all embracing the evolving new communal nature. Tribes are formed not as a result of communal or geographic locations but as a result of thought patterns. The art of storytelling in a geographical setting has evolved. Maybe the stories we hear about tradable values are not as it used to be, and we all are drawn to the perfect fairy tales which aren't completely out of place either. In *Breaking the Coconut*, we choose to share everyday stories of eleven young people who inspired change in Africa at some stage while growing up. They probably wouldn't make your news headline; however, their stories would definitely rub off with its lessons.

This book contains insights from some of Africa's change-makers—how they did it, where they came from, and what keeps them going. Sharing this part of them was a privilege hinging on the fact that their journey is

still ongoing. Being a change agent myself, I must admit I had met young people who had affected their circle of influence in ordinary ways which make them stand out. Most of them have flipped on different pages of their lives, and probably their exploits in their younger years remain memories. However, these memories aren't completely one we wish to forget so easily; hence, we thought of letting them sit in our circle and tell us their journey while we relish their lessons.

The beauty of all of them is that they belong to a generation classified as millennials, who coincidentally have been adjudged the most self-absorbed and narcissist generation. One pattern seems to resonate among a majority of them: they believe making the world a better place is a collective effort of every one of us, and they refuse to believe in the status quo and wish to be forever young at heart and be the solutions rather than the problem. The world tells them they lack experience, and they shock you with results that probably didn't match their experience. We would let you draw your lessons from theirs.

As the world always heralds new change-makers in seasons, it's my belief that sharing insights from these millennials, whose involvement in their craft shapes their world and serves as heads-up to the next generation of game changers.

Below are snippets from their stories:

Maple Dappa is an enigma of a breed. Maple grew up in the South Southern part of Nigeria. As a child, the beginning looked hostile and bleak at a time, and even the future looked uncertain. His story sheds light into a childhood which prepares him for his journey and how he thrives through. Maple serves as a beacon to his immediate community. As of the time of writing, he has spent over half a decade under his belt leading an educational institute and the Southern Brands, one of the top image consulting firms in his geographical axis in the southern states. He has published works to his credit and shares and excels in fields he has no prior educational background. Maple shares an ongoing story from a boy who once looked up to his mother to a man and influencer who must stand for his generation.

Sara Nana Yeboah is a nurse who is passionate about preventive healthcare for girls and youth empowerment. In her fatherland, Ghana, she

is being referred to as the Florence Nightingale of Africa. Sara's profession and passion endear her to this cause and this revered title. She shares her story of her lifelong dream and how she takes on each challenge. Her passion keeps making her achievement visible, and she soars around Africa.

Ngozi Marion Emmanuel became a lecturer in a Nigerian university at age 22. She would possibly be classified as a geek after finishing with a 5-point CGPA in her master's degree. As an undergraduate, she stood out among her peers, carrying out several social projects which put her in the spotlight. Marion only gets to be offered the responsibility of being a custodian of knowledge at an age she believes she never envisaged in her dreams, with young people looking up to her for direction. Marion tells her story.

Chinonso Steve Ogbogu is what you might refer today as 'knowledgepreneur' (don't search for it on Google; I just coined it). He sells his knowledge via books, social media platforms, and his website. He has two books to his credit and has once been listed as an under 30 in his country making impact. Chinonso gives a nip into his childhood experiences and how he survives and still surviving life's curveballs in his niche. What make his story lesson-filled are his vulnerability and how much we will learn from it.

Kenechukwu Uba's story is that of grit. He sowed a seed of perseverance among a team of young college students and raised and led a team of undergraduates whose goal was to represent their country of birth in a global competition for youths around the world. His goal was to lead his team to the Student in Free Enterprise (SIFE) World Cup. His goal never came out like planned, which broke him. One year after he left college, he got a phone call from his team, among whom were his protégées, to inform him on the news he always craved to hear all his life. Kene tells his story.

Ambrose Adole was awarded the best young team leader in Nigeria by the global blue-chip firm Accenture Nigeria as a reward for leading a bunch of energy-filled young Students to cause a social change in his community. But that wasn't how his story started. Years before he got into college, he lost his dad and mum at very short intervals, and not everyone sees these invisible scars because Ambrose goes ahead to create a new world for himself

and inspire his peers. He sheds light in his journey as he strives to achieve and be the best version of himself.

Chinonso Arubayi's dream of changing the world wasn't completely unfounded. An opportunity to express impact opened with a student magazine she pioneered on campus as an undergraduate. Her thoughts evolved to a movement widely known as Building Opinion Leaders with a Difference (BOLD), which opened doors of opportunities for a dream. Chinonso also met her challenge along the way when the battle between graduating with good grades and following BOLD stared her in the face. She shares her lessons and hopes someone takes a cue as she evolves into a new version of herself. She lets us into how she overcomes her own challenges, learns her lessons and shares her hopes for the future.

Olufunbi Falayi, in my own words, portrays the picture of the saying that when a man is faithful in little things, he can be entrusted with more. While serving his fatherland in what is called the National Youth Service scheme, Funbi decided to carry out community projects where he gave hope to high school students with a community project called Project 4. Clips of his project on social media platform YouTube got the attention of someone outside the shores of his country. This earned him a seven-month-scholarship course on entrepreneurship. On coming back to his country of birth, he conceived a new vision in an enterprise, where his goal was to help small-scale entrepreneurs nurture and project their craft.

Daberechi Okedurum is a social entrepreneur (you can google this one). Dabs, as he is fondly called, shares his story on social entrepreneurship—the opportunities available and his lessons. Having learnt from the best tutors and mentors, Dabs connected the dots of his life only to observe that his new-found love wasn't completely new but one which had probably existed but never had a name. Dabs shares his dreams and what he hopes to do with his skills. There is a Dabs in all of us. Possibly our inner gifting has not been defined on the global scale.

Eustace Dunn is a print journalist. His passion for journalism in his early years inspired him to study mass communication in college. With the dream to change the world with his pen, Eustace immersed himself in journalism. The reality of what the real world of journalism was hit him when he finally met the profession of his childhood dream and realized that

his expectations and his reality were worlds apart. Eustace came up with a collection of thoughts on journalism. Many are unpleasant; however, his story helps us see beyond our dreams.

Amaka Alusi also known as Maxy is an on air personality (OAP) and relationship coach from the studios of a radio she shares her thoughts on relationships and lessons. She has been trusted by her audience who cuts across continents to lend a listening ear to their problems with the belief that she would solve them. With her observation of patterns in relationships and her own personal life, she shares her insights on improving relationships for young people. The amazing thing about these patterns is that they are obvious but always ignored.

The stories in here are not complete yet because they aren't fiction and the characters are still beating on their craft. It takes an ordinary act to pull out an extraordinary impact; the goal of the change-maker is to inspire change casually while they cause an outstanding ripple. Literally, the coconut hasn't been completely consumed yet! Most of the contributors choose to sip the water and have now decided to move on with the new deal life is offering them. As you read and get inspired, go ahead and choose how you write your coconut story.

Reviews

1. Solomon Ojeagbase

Breaking the Coconut is a must read.

If you must move from point A to B in life; you have to persevere, recognise God as the centre that holds everything else together and BELIEVE that with God, nothing is Impossible.

There were life lessons to be learnt in this book and all 11 writers interviewed by the author had something in common, which is “Self Belief” in their abilities and talents. With Good leadership, there is no limit to what we can achieve as a team – this was demonstrated by the audacious feat achieved by the SIFE team. In all, the transition and writing style are impeccable.

I would recommend this book to all the youths living in Nigeria and Africa because it gives a detailed account of our shared experiences growing up. More importantly was how they were able to motivate each other collectively as a team and the steps they took to climb up the ladder of success.

Profile:

Solomon Ojeagbase is the owner of Complete Sport Nigeria and CEO of Solbase Digital Marketing Company, which employs the best IT practices, latest technologies, and competent professionals in executing projects, supporting SMEs and start-ups while changing the face of Africa as a global business hub.

2. Grace Ihejimaizu

With myriads of social, economic, and environmental problems in Africa, it is fascinating to find youth leaders who are rising up to the challenges in their communities. No one else will do for us what we need to do for ourselves, and that is why I believe *Breaking the Coconut* is a timely documentation. This book serves as a platform to showcase the uncelebrated talents and initiative of young change-makers from across Africa, telling their stories in a very easy-to-read and relatable way. No doubt, these stories will inspire the next generation of leaders to take positive actions in their communities.

Profile:

Grace Ihejimaizu is a social entrepreneur, educator, and global shaper, with over six years of experience working in the non-profit and youth development sector. She is a lecturer at the University of Calabar in Nigeria and the founder of iKapture Networks (formerly known as RYPE Initiative), an organization strategically focused on providing educational and leadership services to students and out-of-school youth in Nigeria using creative learning methods and ICT. She is also the founder and chief editor of Opportunity Desk, one of the largest online platforms for global youth opportunities.

Chapter 1

Until the lion has his or her own storyteller, the hunter
would always have the best part of the story.

African proverb

MY INITIAL MEETING WITH MAPLE was like that of a lost brother. I could remember vividly I was in college then in the ancient city of Awka. Maple was in town for leadership training from the city of Port Harcourt. I was fortunate to have a beautiful place I called home in the school campus. So when a non-profit organization which I was an alumnus of told me about some colleague from Port Harcourt coming over to my residence, I was excited—we were of like minds who were making change in their part of the world. However, my room in school was a bit empty and not a modern kind of room.

Let me explain. Maybe I lived like a recluse in my self-contained apartment with a bed to lay my head on, a plastic table and chair to read at night, stickers of words, and to-do lists fighting for space on my walls. Most were affirmations to boost my morale and to remind me when I forget who the man inside of me is, and the others were deadlines. I remember my brown ceiling fan to keep me warm when I started feeling hot as a result of the weather, then the sight of my brown-laced shoes! Oh, those shoes! Everybody knew they were mine because whenever I walked into the class or arena, my laces were loosely tied, and even though I had taken several short lectures on shoelace-knotting, I think I finally gave up (I possibly didn't have shoelace-knotting genes). So in the future, should you see me with laced shoes, it must be a gift or possibly I have learnt how to lace them. Back to my room, books most times took all the space on my bed

(I couldn't afford putting them away from my sight as I could easily forget I bought them). I had a nice bathroom, toilet, and kitchen . . . Don't even go there. My kitchen was cool! Whenever I choose to cook, my neighbours knew I was around (nobody sleeps well). My muse for cooking was stronger during the early morning hours when everyone was asleep, between 3 and 4 a.m., so I woke them up with the aroma of my concoction meant for me or my friends who would come around. I was literary a busy bee during the daytime. I had three likely places you would find me in: the library because of the fascinating books in them (not necessary related to my course of study; I love learning new things from books just to feed my curious mind), the radio station (my first job in college was working in a radio station), and my classroom! Lest I forget, community project sites. My world revolved around these places during the day; hence, for the night, I needed a sane place to lay my head, and by my standards, my room topped my list—"Room 105 of the Marvelous Hostel".

Okay, enough of my apartment. Maple was meant to be my guest; hence, it then occurred to me that my place was just probably my taste. I think I tried talking to him about it just to allay his fears, but that was the least of his concerns. A brother was in town and needed a place to stay. His being my guest in my small world was the beginning of a friendship that would lead me to know more about the man that lived inside of him. Interestingly, we were both born on the eleventh day of the eleventh month. When we met he could easily be mistook for a fresher in the university, with no sign of someone who had a picture of what life was all about he could easily pass as one who was probably just figuring his way around life however a little voice in my head told me to just shut up and listen more than talk. Whenever that voice speaks i normally do not object and I did not this time. The more time we spent discussing at night, the more I knew there was more to him than the exterior, and I wasn't wrong! His journey as a change agent in the axis of the world he lives gives us much to learn from.

Let's meet Maple as he leads us into his journey.

Growing up, I was like living in two worlds. I was hopeful, maintaining a positive perspective against all odds, and not complaining. My reality was homelessness, hunger, residing in slums, exposure to dangerous habits, and

midnight tears. Each time I got distressed by my ordeals, James Thiong'o Ngugi's book *Weep Not, Child* served as solace to me.

At six, Dad evicted Mum, my brother, and me to be with another woman. Mum did her best to cater for her boys with a modest teacher's pay. Housing was our biggest challenge. We had to put up with relatives. We live in a classroom in mum's school and lived on the waterfront for years. Rainy days were our greatest nightmare. A frequently waterlogged room, leaking roofs, outdoor bathroom were the picture of our reality then. It was a really horrible experience right in the city of Port Harcourt, but I never surrendered to that standard of life. I gave fate a fighting chance.

My name is Maple Dappa, and I was born on 11 November. I hail from Kalabari in Rivers State, Southern Nigeria. My primary education was at Sea Shell Model Primary School, while my secondary education was at Emarid College, both in Port Harcourt. I studied marine engineering at the Rivers State University of Science and Technology and graduated in the year 2006 with a bachelor of technology (B.Tech) degree. After an extensive period of self-evaluation and introspection, I decided to venture into the world of entrepreneurship and social development.

Waking up and getting ready for school, we frequently had local food beans and garri (grated cassava) for breakfast because it was one of the most affordable meals we could get. I could hardly talk about home at school because all I had to say would have been embarrassing to say the least. We once lived in the kitchen of the school, where Mum worked as a teacher; then we had no TV, radio, or any of such luxury. Ours was a meagre living. Payment of school fees was a huge burden. Herbs and shrubs were a ready option whenever we fell ill since Mum could barely foot hospital bills. Close friends and relatives aided us with raw foods. We cultivated yam, pepper, and pumpkin at our abode—Mum's school premises. Yes, we were farmers but not because we wanted to contribute to the gross domestic product (GDP) but because that was one way of ensuring we don't run out of food items to keep the body and soul together.

I grew without the everyday supplies many had, and I missed out on fatherly advice, but I didn't see my experience as difficulties. I held the belief that I just had to face such reality. Many people didn't even know I was passing through such difficulty in life then. I knew the choice was still my call; hence, I chose my attitude!

We have all heard various stories of antagonistic stepmothers. I had my own bit of such treatments which even left a scar on my lower lip. My maternal village was my favourite holiday spot though Grandma was such an unrelenting disciplinarian.

Staying with Grandma was one ritual that paid off positively in dividends. Staying with some relatives had its own awful experience. Truly, nothing is as sweet as your home, even if it's a shanty. I learnt early to live above envy, self-pity, and low esteem. I just had to maintain a positive outlook. That made a big difference. Those I expected to be of solace and support were rather insensitive, but I guess they all had their personal challenges, and irrespective of how I was blind to them then, that what it.

Against all odds, I got into university at the age of 17. Thanks to Mum, she supported me at all cost. A scholarship from Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) helped too. We know stories of lecturers who persistently seek their handouts on students and how they victimize those who fail to purchase the handouts. Let's say they were also prevalent in my times. My grades suffered because I wasn't as focused as I should have been. Typical with Nigerian students, I strived to excel, held the line, and obtained a degree in marine engineering.

Upon graduation, while awaiting the National Youth Service scheme, I participated in LEAP Africa's youth leadership programme, and it gave my life a different direction. I was able to integrate my outer self with the inner, and I gained a better sense of direction in life. Purpose! LEAP Africa guided me towards discovering my purpose, potentials, and passion. I crafted my personal mission statement (PMS).

Beyond that, I began to feel a vacuum that mere church attendance couldn't fill. I needed to get to know God. It became a quest—a quest that led me to the feet of my Saviour Jesus, even though I was raised in a Christian home and a church boy. That journey hasn't been as smooth as I thought and expected, but it's been fulfilling. It's a whole story on its own!

I got posted to Afikpo North's local government area in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, for National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 2007. It was another life-defining period—new friends, community development service projects, and being a teacher just like my mum. I experienced intense boredom. To avert such moments, I always scribbled down my

thoughts in various notepads. And that was how I discovered my talent in writing. I wrote my first two books (unpublished) during this period of boredom. During the same period, I conceived the Maple Institute (TMI), a personal development organization and After-School Graduate Development Initiative (ASGDC). After NYSC in 2008, I launched TMI and trained over 100 undergraduates and graduates between that period and 2010. I am presently holding discussions with a friend with whom I hope to reinvent TMI into what we have agreed to call Life after School Academy (LAS Academy) to prime young people with essential life, leadership, and soft skills that will aid them in their various aspirations.

My efforts in tackling the challenges I faced with the programme was what led me into business. Prior to this time, I had worked as a marine engineer (trainee) with Shell Petroleum Development Company during my industrial training programme. However, I had to create a business around my area of interest and skills. The constant bashing that Nigerian made products and services received from consumers engendered my business, Mapemond.

My dream for Mapemond is to make it a firm that every young and smart Nigerian would love to work with (not for). To achieve that goal, we are currently setting up an office apartment with live-in rooms for members of the staff. It is an audacious dream, but dreaming is what spurs me on to the next milestone.

I'm also working on Southern Brands Project; it is aimed at showcasing creative and enterprising young people in Nigeria, especially in the South South region of Nigeria. The project is about young Nigerians in the Delta rewriting their stories that they are not hostile, lazy, or unproductive. I strongly believe that young people need as much encouragement as possible; they need to be inspired to make the most of their innate potentials. The featured stories are published in the form of articles and video documentaries on the project website, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.

[Maple has been, over the years, an advocate for social change in the axis where he lives and an influencer whose perspective of leadership has gone beyond what he reads in books to experiential learning, His life experiences shaped his thoughts, having seen life's pattern reshaped under his tutelage. We thought it best to share the perspective and personal lessons his journey.]

Looking Back at Life from My Perspective and Lessons

It hasn't been a jolly ride, lots of ups and downs, but passion, focus, and grace have kept me going. We all have stories to tell, and yours might be worse. But always know that life isn't what it makes of you but what you make of it. I always got to my next level by seeking solutions to my prevailing predicaments. Be inspired by challenges. Don't bow out! Every obstacle that happens to you along your journey works for you.

I prepared for the biggest successes by preparing for the biggest failure. No failure or obstacle could stop me. There are so many goodies of life to acquire, but learning to delay instant gratification as much as possible has been a key lesson. *Never* let any pain you felt and tears you shed go in vain. Give fate a fighting chance. But let God lead you through his Word.

A key lesson I have learnt which every young person needs to know is the need for good mentorship. No matter how much we know as young people, we need our older folks to guide and counsel us. They do not make choices and decisions for us, but they help us in the decision-making process; they help us stay focused and positively influenced.

Meeting My Amy Beryl

In my first book, *Seeds of Greatness*, I remember vividly writing a letter to my wife way before we met. I called her my Amy Beryl (you could read it online) among other things. Unconsciously, this helped me set my standards and become accountable. Looking back at that section of my book, I am so grateful to God for the gift of my better half, Ireti. So like the story goes, we became friends through a mutual friend of ours, and we remained very good friends for about two years before we started dating. A year after we started dating, we got married. My wife ticked all the boxes on my list. We prayed about it, and God has led us on this glorious journey called marriage. We have people in our lives we look up to, and we try to be accountable.

Striking a Balance between Passion in Entrepreneurship and Marriage

It was a pretty smooth one since it is something I had prepared for months before my wedding. Business and marriage are two things that demand the most of one's time, so effective time management became essential to me.

I learnt prior to marriage the need to evaluate my daily activities so that I could eliminate time-wasters. I also learnt that keeping busy all day is not what brings about your desired results, but being purposefully busy. Based on that lesson, I withdrew from a lot of usual engagements and also slowed down my involvement in some other activities. That has helped me tremendously in managing stress. Life is a journey, and I hope as you keep making yours, my story inspires you, wherever you are, not to give up on it. Wish you God's grace on your path. Thank you.

Sharing Maple's story was one we felt necessary, irrespective of the fact that he is still evolving; however, our goal is to share the ordinary stories of young people who have influenced their environment and have been, at some time, a leading voice. Look him up on social media and hear his thought pattern. Trust me, this story is incomplete, but we chose the relevant details, and our goal was to help you see yourself in his story. How he had evolved to being married was our own way of saying that the life of a change-maker, like any other person, still passes the marriage test and, like every cycle, their goals are not kept on hold.

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 2

Kindness is a language which the blind can see
and the deaf can hear.

African proverb

SARA NANA YEBOAH'S STORY FROM Ghana sheds more light on what to expect from the journey even in different lands. Our challenges are all the same, and they make our ongoing life story a cornucopia of teachable moments. Should you be visiting Ghana any time soon, ask them about the Florence Nightingale of Africa, and you will be inspired more by her touch to humanity. Her passion for volunteering stands her out in her turf. One of the much interesting ways to meet someone is when you get introduced by a trusted mutual friend. On my search for young people who had influenced their corner of the world, I was made to meet Sara. One of the very observable traits of passionate people is their simplicity, and Sara isn't left out on this one. It isn't nerve-cracking to understand her contributions and philosophy in her part of Africa.

Sara's passion for her calling is contagious and on another level. Coincidentally, the year we wrote this book alone, she carted away several awards on her contribution to her cause. There were so many pointers to the fact that she holds her own and is an influencer. Her simple story will inspire you to see a different perspective about life's curveballs.

Her story confirms that even with our passion and distance, we still experience challenges. Sara teaches us that our struggles are the same even in different lands.

Let's meet her

My name is Sara Nana. I am a nurse and passionate about preventive healthcare for girls and youth empowerment. I am a Ghanaian by nationality and pride of Africa. In my country, there has been several articles across magazines, websites here in Ghana and across Africa naming me the Florence Nightingale of Africa. This is as a result of my profession and passion for girls. Personally, I feel, as a nurse, I have been honoured with the lifetime responsibility to take care of the girls, and this is one reason I was born. I would be sharing my experience on this journey. Though short, the goal is to inspire you to continue with your own journey, believing you are not alone, and our role as humans is to help one another.

One question on the minds of young people when I try to talk about my journey normally is, how did you get to that point when it became clear why you were born? How did I know I was cut out for this path? I believe our paths are different, and no one path has the ultimate solution. However, we can always rub off from one or two experiences. These things aren't as predictable as they sound. For me, I believe my innate skills showed greatly while growing among my peers. My benchmark to what I would love to be when I possibly grow up was Florence Nightingale, the famous nurse. She is synonymous with modern-day nursing. History has it that she was born into a wealthy family in the city of Florence in Italy. Her parents frowned at her idea of studying nursing because nursing wasn't classified as an academic course in her league then! Florence Nightingale made nursing more attractive and endearing especially to the female child. Thanks to her contributions, modern-day nursing is today viewed as a noble profession. There were three reforms Nightingale brought into the nursing profession as a social reformer. Aside from her reforms, it must be said that the Crimean War in Europe was her launch pad to global relevance. The world saw how the empathy of Nightingale endeared people to the new era of nursing. Her kind nature to wounded soldiers (especially British) during the war made the nursing profession more enviable to the girls because she became a model and every girl child's dream. If she were born in our times in the twenty-first century, we could liken her to the young teenager Malala Yousafzai in some ways (the young Pakistani Nobel Peace Prize winner).

Nightingale showed women how to be protective of their health through her nursing notes and other self-help books she authored. She helped abolish regulations that were unfair to women by standing for them. Looking back at her story and contribution, I choose to stand for what she stood for in my community.

In my family, I am the second of four siblings. Growing up was quite engaging for me. As the big sister, caring for my siblings was a responsibility I did with so much grace—I loved it. My three siblings—were all under my radar. I could remember the memories we shared as kids and how protective I was with them. Looking back, I now see them as signs of what was to come in the future and how much those moments help grow my caring muscles.

My family gave me so much love to last a lifetime, and my parents turned out to be my ideal of what perseverance should be. They were my biggest inspiration and living models.

One incident remains evergreen in my mind on lessons from my parents. After spending so many years living in Germany, they asked someone to build a house for us to live in when we relocate back to Ghana. After so much of preparations, we returned only to find out that the person entrusted with such responsibility had in fact sold the house and then rendered us homeless. It was a trying period, considering the fact that my parents were coming to their home in Africa.

For all of us, it was challenging because we never saw it coming, and the way my parents handled it placed them in a high place with respect. For them to stay through those trying times, in my mind's eye, motivates me to rise above every obstacle for greatness. Personally, I consider my parents my living role models. They were the first gods I had to see and revere. Like every human, I had my low moments, and looking back, they all come off as teachable moments.

I never watched TV until after 18 years. I made the radio my companion, and these experiences gingered me to never settle for less and provide for the less privileged in my immediate society. I had seen what struggling to survive tasted like, and I was driven to never let it bring me down, having gone through life's vicissitudes. The amazing thing about my life perspective is that I was very hopeful and always saw light at the end of my tunnel, which is still work in progress.

Growing up, I also had my choice issues with career. At first, I wanted to be a medical doctor. Looking back, I guess that was the only interpretation to what I felt. Due to factors only known to my parents, I was advised to study nursing. This is one twist I never saw coming. At first, I felt my world was crushed, and my dreams were gone! I really wanted to study medicine. Looking back, I think time has proved me wrong. Today I have been compared to Florence Nightingale by being referred to as the Florence Nightingale of Africa. I didn't become a doctor; however, I am a Nurse.

I had an amazing social life on campus. I fell in love with the nursing profession. As a student, I had good grades. I taught it and was even nicknamed Teaching Assistant (TA) because of the love and passion I exuded for nursing.

I have also had ironies in my life that really were humbling. One of them was when I failed my obstetrics paper. How could an intelligent lady fail her obstetrics paper? People were surprised and couldn't stop questioning the ironies. I had vowed that immediately after the exams, I was going to study medicine to become a medical doctor, but I failed. Surprisingly, I thank God I failed because in my failure I rose, dusted off the experience, and now the rest is glorious. This temporary experience drove me to set up Sangy Foundation, a non-profit organization which provides nursing services, including medical screening and outreach, home care for kids and the aged, as well as mentoring support for young girls.

We have met challenges on the journey, which include getting volunteers, transportation, and inadequate funding. Still, we have persevered to provide health education and embarked on promotion and prevention programmes and medical screening programmes to children, youth, and adults in schools, churches, and organizations. We have renovated and painted schools across rural Ghana, paid medical bills, and registered over 2,000 kids for the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS).

Should I be opportune to have a chat with the younger Sara, I would look into her eyes and tell her, 'Sara, there is no barrier in life. Dreams do come true. Pursue your passion, and the sky is only your springboard.' That's what the summation of what my life's journey has been like.

Charles Umeh

This is an ongoing story since it involves my life, and I believe the sky is my springboard. I believe success without failure makes an incomplete story.

‘The first question which the priest and the Levite asked was, If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But the good Samaritan reversed the question, If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’
(SaraNana Yeboah)

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 3

If you think you are too small to make a difference you
haven't spent a night with a mosquito.

African proverb

AT THE AGE OF 22, Ngozi Marion Emmanuel became the youngest academic lecturer with the Nnamdi Azikiwe University. This is a track record, considering that the university, as a federal university, has high academic standards in its employment of academic staff.

This achievement has debunked the far-fetched assertions that the educational system in Nigeria is a crumbled mess. In the least, the very fact that this very educational system, which has been accused of churning out nonentities, has successfully produced a sound academic lecturer in the discipline of mass communication goes a long way to fortifying the credibility of the curriculum employed in Nigerian federal universities. As a country, to say that Nigeria is mother to young intelligent leaders is to say the least. Nigeria is also more than capable of training and fortifying these young leaders and presenting them to the world to compete favourably with their global counterparts. All this takes a combination of determination, opportunity, skill acquisition, and a relentless spirit that says, 'Never do die.' No doubt, we are a work in progress, and we understand we have more room for improvements. However, her story epitomizes the fact that we could still be hopeful and dream dreams. I met Marion way back when she was an undergraduate. I must say I never knew she was that young then. I've read her write-ups online while she worked as a reporter for a national daily and have listened to her interviews and broadcast. We hope her story inspires young peers who are still at the junction of negotiating their dreams.

Her journey to this achievement was trailed by lack, unrelenting vigour, hard work, and a driving passion that swept away every obstacle that came her way.

Ngozi Marion Emmanuel's story is a perfect example of the immense inspiration that one young person can create in the hearts of others just by living life and striving for the best.

Unrelenting Passion

Marion was born on 10 March 1991 and is from Ohazara in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The greatest lesson she had learned was never to waste time.

She was born into a comfortable middle-class family and was the apple of her parents' eyes as the first daughter. She recalled her father showering her with gifts of gold necklaces and trendy dresses, leaving her an almost spoiled child. Her mother's duty was to do the mother's job—slap her back to shape! Soon after these glorious days, things turned around. The family's economic standing changed, and they were all forced to cut down on their budget.

As a child who was the centre of her parents' world, *lack* was not a word in Marion's dictionary. So she had it quite rough, and in high school, she was identified as the odd girl who wore patched pinafore and rubber sandals. This was when she discovered her own healing balm.

Let's meet Marion.

My First Day in Class as a Teacher

I was dressed in a pair of blue sneakers, blue jeans, a white shirt, and black jacket. Wearing my amazing smile, I walked into the classroom, looking every bit a freshman assigned to teach the sophomore class the principles of advertising. That morning, my pulse was racing with expectation. I greeted the class and asked them to settle in for their lecture. Uncertain, pessimistic, and cynical looks were cast at me as everyone wondered what this 'kid' was up to. Half of the class paid me no attention at all. Indeed, I could have passed for a kid sister to most of them. However, my confidence was wrapped around me as I stood in front of the class. 'My name is Ngozi

Emmanuel. I am your new lecturer for the course.’ Let’s just say that got their attention, and young faces from every corner of the hall turned their full gaze on me. It was one of the most precious moments of my life. I will never forget the look on their faces. That was my first day in class as a lecturer.

I started writing at the age of 9. Father was my editor. He was and still is a newspaper addict; he loved to read and brag about being the first to know with his friends. Father is a big inspiration. Although we had our moments, like those times I wondered if he hated me when he got angry with me over particular misbehaviours. Let me mention here that Father is a disciplinarian. He didn’t have all that money at that time, but he wouldn’t allow his daughter to be second best. I had to be first in class, first in the debate club, first in sports, first in quiz competitions and first in the drama unit in school just for my father. He was so proud of me. Always, he told me I could be more. He drove me to limits, and Mother supported him all the way. I wrote poems, articles, short stories, and drama scripts, and Father took time to read them all and score me.

Thereafter, there was senior secondary school. In this period, things normalized. I reverted to being the spoilt only daughter but, this time, with limits. I was extravagant and exuberant. Mother nagged at me every day. Father began to drift away from me. I thought I was the queen of my high school until my literature teacher, Mrs Elizabeth Adejumbi, and my English language teacher, Mr Ade Gbadegesin, took it upon themselves to restore me. I will never forget the teachings of these two in the history of my life. Through their positive influence, senior secondary school saw me excel once again. I won several awards and laurels. I ruled the tracks and the debate club. My peers began to listen to me. I was a youth leader in church at age 15. I was the choral director, and I ruled my turf. Father was proud and happy; he couldn’t stop talking about his young achiever daughter to his friends.

Thereafter, I began A-level classes in preparation for my JAMB examinations. There was something then that made me walk the streets like I owned the world; I was shapely, young, and smart and walked with a model’s grace. I wanted to be Naomi Campbell, model of the twenty-first-century runway. Again, my mum was there to slap me back to focus. At

some point, I cried thinking the small population of the world that mattered to me actually hated me and were denying me of living.

Training is a very important stage in any life. Truth is that, at some point, default knowledge will fail, and it is the painstaking skill acquired in the training front that kicks in to save the day. With this at the back of my mind, I applied to study mass communication as my first degree.

After I had written my Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB)—in Nigeria, this is an exam you write before you get into the university—I went into the city of Awka, in Anambra State for the first time in my life to sit for my Post-University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (POST-UTME).

As the bus sped past the city structures, I said to myself, ‘I’m going to rule this city.’ And with that saying, even before thinking whether or not I had a chance at the admission quota, my fate was sealed. Of course, I was admitted into the university, and yes, to study a course of my choice—mass communication. This was a huge celebration at my mother’s church. It was almost a no-brainer how tough getting admission into colleges was.

At the university, my first year was almost a haze. It was the first time I was left alone without parental guard or guide. I spent the whole session trying to find my feet and understand what university was all about and why I had to be there. I put my ears down for stories that could get me something, but most importantly, I read.

There were classmates then who had better O-level grades than I did and had better JAMB scores, and they revered in that knowledge. For me, however, I had to read to prove myself. I dare say my class was intimidating. In age, I was almost the youngest in class, and with all my adventures, I was so naive. Nothing I had experienced prepared me for the challenges of college. So my first year was spent in between reading and finding myself, and pressures from home not to let the family name down. When the session’s results came out, the entire class thought I was brilliant. I remember now that I was the only A student in the course Introduction to Reporting and News Writing. With this, I made new friends in my class. Then I learned that things aren’t exactly what they appear to be and I should not be intimidated by another’s seeming success.

The Role of Good Friends

In the Holy Bible, there is the proverb that says ‘There is a friend that sticks closer than a brother’. It, thus, becomes advisable to surround oneself with good friends who are willing and ready to be encouragers—friends with visions, who are themselves vision helpers for you, with the ability to key into the vision you have. Such friends, simply put, make your world go round.

Eustace Dunn and Ikenna Afoenyi shaped my life. Dunn was a class ahead of me in the university, while Ikenna was my pastor friend. Dunn was young, in his early twenties. Ikenna was about 33 years at the time. I’m still in love with these two men because they shaped my life somewhat. It was Dunn who saw my writings and introduced me to the campus life page in *The Nation* newspaper (a national daily in Nigeria), and it was Pastor Iykes (as he’s popularly called) who would later sponsor my community outreach projects.

So I started writing for *The Nation* newspaper at 18. I wrote proficiently and more frequently than others that the editor then, late Ms Ngozi Nwozor, noticed me and outright fell in love with me. No week went by without my bylines on the pages. I went to cybercafes to type and wire my stories. I was happy; writing was my life, and my father was my biggest fan. Dunn urged me on, telling me how much more I could do. I don’t still know, honestly, why Dunn thought the world of me. So I wrote persistently and with so much fire to impress Dunn, my editor, and my father. I got invited to workshops organized by Coca-Cola (Nigeria). I was booked into hotel rooms on the Lagos Island and ate hotel foods, rode elevators, and saw movies at the Silverbird Cinemas. I was popular, so popular across campuses in Nigeria that no week went by without my receiving several emails from student fans from across campuses. Some emails made me so humbled that I cried (for instance, an email sent in from the University of Ibadan in Nigeria from a fan who called me ‘the golden girl of UNIZIK’) and wondered if I were as much as how these other young people saw me. Others pushed me to the limits by asking me not to let them down. So I wrote every day.

During my second semester of sophomore year, I ran for elections in my department for the vice president’s post. At this period, I began working with the then newly licensed campus radio (UNIZIK FM). I’m still proud

to be one of the pioneer presenters at the radio station. I was known by the radio name NG Sparkle and anchored news, presented a programme called *Controversies*, and did continuity announcing shifts. I worked there all night most days of the week and slept at the floor of the production studio, without light and with plenty of mosquitoes competing for attention. Those days simply make me smile. I loved it. So when I ran for vice president of my department, I won with a resounding number of votes. I was excited and I felt alive. I wanted to serve.

The Never-Die Spirit

Yes, I was mass communication vice president. Yes, I was a leading voice at the radio station. Yes, I was a voracious writer for *The Nation* newspaper. Yes, I was a church leader. Yes, I was everywhere in school. But I was not yet satisfied; I wanted more. So in my third year in the university, I created an idea for a youth empowerment magazine. I called it SLAM. It is an acronym that stands for Smart Leaders Are Made. I thought I could build more young people like me, sort of replicating myself in other people. I thought it was the point to give out. I quickly assembled a team of other students like me and taught them to aspire for more. They listened to me. So together, we started SLAM. I was proud of what we achieved.

It was at this period when I thought I had everything in perspective that I got a call from home that my immediate younger brother was critically ill. I was not only his sister but his role model. I remember now staying with him in the hospital some days and occasionally catching him cry his heart out to the universe. I remember that moment as the moment I cried the most in my life. I wondered about how vain life really is and how short breath is.

At school, I was missing classes and tests, and everyone worried about me. At the hospital, I watched my brother helplessly on the hospital bed, grappling with his life, sharing stories with me. Everyone thought he would die. It was such a brief moment yet the longest memory of my life. I talked to God to save my brother and help him. I told God why he should give my brother his life back and how fine a young man he is. It was a tortuous moment, eating hospital foods and lying on hospital floors, inhaling the

peculiar smell of hospital. However, by the whim of fate, my brother lived, and I realized I've never loved a human being more passionately than I loved him then. But a gash was left in my heart after the incident.

When I got back to school, I rode on the winds of fear—fear of death exactly. Everything I did was done with a sense of urgency and haste. With the experience with my brother, I thought I had very short time left, so I had to be fast. So I took MC jobs for events. I wrote more ferociously and read with all my strength. In the second semester of my third year, by some stroke of luck or grace as I would put it, I became the first female president of the mass communication department. I stretched my limits.

I didn't stop writing too. After my tenure as the president, I faced final year squarely. Besides, my university management had promised to retain me as they assumed I was an exceptional student. However, final year was not exempt of its share of troubles. The records said I was one of the top student in my class, and Father was again proud.

[It was no surprise when the awards began coming. Ngozi saw these awards as motivations to achieve more. She had the desire to inspire other young people like her to go all out and achieve as much as they can while there is still time. SLAM Youth Heroes Awards started in 2011 and was proudly sponsored by the DBC Associates. It was an award targeted at young achievers across the south-east and served as a motivation to these young achievers to keep pressing on till they occupy Nigeria.]

The university saw Ngozi win several awards including Coca-Cola/NBC Award and Most Outstanding Student in UNIZIK Award. She was top nominee for the LEAP Africa's Nigerian Youth Leadership Awards in 2011 and nominee for the Nigerian Youth Merit Awards.

When I was called upon to take a teaching appointment at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (UNIZIK) at the age of 22, I employed that never-die spirit as my foundation. I was excited to stand in front of young people like me and impart knowledge. It was humbling to now refer to those who once taught me as colleagues.

Back to My First Day in Class

While they kept questioning me, the head of department was passing by. She looked in and called out, 'Ngo, well done!' Young faces stared on

at me, questions forming on their lips. Suddenly they couldn't hold it any more as the questions began tumbling out: 'How old are you?' 'When did you graduate?' 'Do you have your masters?' 'How did you manage?' 'I have heard a lot about you. You were so good with the media.' 'You have always been my role model since I came to school. Advise me?' Indeed, for more than half of the lecture period, I answered questions from my peers. The class was like a group of friends sharing. When I finally did an introduction on the course, they branded me a great teacher. According to them, learning has never been more simplified for them. I was so happy to be imparting knowledge. I couldn't wait to pour all my passion and knowledge on these young people. This was when I knew that lecturing is not a job; it's a calling, like community service. It should not have been about any pay. This is about building minds and nations which ended up paying. When you are called to do this, there is nothing in this world more important, more rewarding like building the leaders of the present.

As I rounded off my master's programme with a smashing record of 5 points, I looked up to the universe and said, 'We did it, God. Bravo!'

Here in the university, I love my colleagues and those who taught me. They have influenced and are still influencing me very positively in my life. They see me as the baby of the faculty, and I respect them so much as mentors and role models. All of them, from Prof. Chinyere Stella Okunna (former Anambra State commissioner and now head of mass communication department) to Prof. Kate Omenugha (current commissioner for education in Anambra State) to Dr Ifeoma Dunu, Dr Allen Adum, Dr Chinwe Uzochukwu, Mr Cornelius Ukwueze, Mr Dike Ibemesi, Dr Nwabu Mgbemena, Mr Uche Ebeze, Dr Ogo Ekwenchi, Mrs Uche Ekwugha, and Mr Chikezie Uzuegbunam, they all inspire me in so many ways than one, and for that, I'm grateful. Currently, I can only look forward to what the future holds for me, and by God, I cannot wait to rule my turf and beyond. Sharing this story brings back goosebumps, and sometimes I cannot believe I made it here. I didn't get here alone. I never would have.

Once more, I hope my story inspires you and that you learn a thing or two from it. Most importantly, what I've learnt with living with myself is that mistakes and failures cannot hold you down except when you let them.

This has formed part of my life's philosophies as I've also come to learn that 'there is no time to waste time and there is no mountain too high; never can there be one'. See you at the top.

#breakingthecoconut



Chapter 4

A wise man fills his brains before emptying his mouth.

Kenyan proverb

CHINONSO STEVE OGBOGU WEARS MANY hats. Describing him in my own lexicon I would say, he sells knowledge for money. He gets paid to challenge your knowledge pattern, and he always puts you on your edge (positively). He has authored two insightful books, and this story goes deeper to his core, where he explores all the situations that made him who he is. We tried not to change most of his words because of his engaging nature; we only hope you take notes. How did I meet Steve? I might not finally remember when, but I was an undergraduate and the project manager for my campus SIFE (Student in Free Enterprise) team. I remember vividly one of those days he was my guest on a radio show I once anchored. He talked about the *future*, which turned out to be today and all the things he would do. As fate would have it, he is still on course. Let me warn you before you go ahead reading this story, you are about to read a story of a young man who never gives up on what he believes in. This is one trait commonly rare among the new generation of young people where everyone wants to be like everyone who is hip and trendy.

Let's meet Chinonso Steve Ogbogu.

Telling My Story

My name is Chinonso Ogbogu, and I am an African from Nigeria. Yes, a very proud one, I must add. As a custodian of the breath of life, I have come to become deeply conscious of the fact that I will pass through this

space just once; hence, I passionately strive daily wanting to create a great once-upon-a-time.

Simply put, my life is a story. And my singular assignment is to live each day telling it the best way I can, believing that it comes through as open, sweet, and worthwhile to my audience. So when I was told to pause and share my story on white and black, I found myself being both nervous and excited. Nervous because this would be the first time to share my story on paper, more or less, writing my first autobiography and to audiences I may or may *never* meet. However, I am excited because it allows me to use this medium to add incredible value to my generation and to the generations coming ahead of me whose real stories the world would one day cherish and treasure. Given the two, my excitement ranks higher!

I am of the school of thought that believes the art of storytelling isn't breeze, yet there is no better way to tell a story than to tell it the way it is. Therefore, I will tell you my story the way it is while being real to it. Stories are best told from the start. So I will try to tell mine from the start while sticking to only the necessary details.

Roughly nine months before the midpoint of the 1980s, my dad and mum met, and roughly nine months after, I was ushered into the world as the first son and second child of my parents. And just for the records, the Gregorian calendar read 30 March. I was born in a small village in Enugu State in south-eastern Nigeria, and then I grew up with my other siblings in a small one-room *face-me-I-face-you* apartment in the ghetto streets of Ajegunle, Lagos State, Nigeria.

Growing up for me was normal (yes, normal), just as it would be for anyone living in Ajegunle at that time. I went to local schools with other street kids, fell sick and got well, played on the streets and under the heavy rain (on my birthday suit), got myself and others injured, stole a few dough of my parents (oh, yes, I did), watched *Voltron* and *Tales By Moonlight*, and engaged in all sorts of puerile doings like table soccer, kite-flying, war-chana-start, street wording, police-and-thief, I-like-your-thing, leke-leke-give-white-finger, name-name-name. I mean, the list was just as long as they came. Pardon me if you don't understand some of those play names mentioned. There are *no* real modern words that can best describe them. That's just what we called them back then in Ajegunle.

As a kid that grew up in Ajegunle, many humorous memories continue to stand out in my mind. I remember one funny incident that took place one faithful Sunday service in church. I must have been just 3 years old then, I can't remember. I was in church that Sunday with my parents, and it was time for the offering procession. Everyone was just filing to and fro the big offering basket situated in front. My mum gave me money to go drop inside the offering basket, but instead, under the watchful eyes of the entire church congregation, I boldly took it, moved past the offering basket, walked up the altar, and handed it over to the Reverend Father, a white priest. That made me popular in church that day. I chose to go the extra mile, more like it.

There was also a time, one fateful sunny afternoon, I was knocked down by a hit-and-run motorcyclist on my way back from school, and I had to pretend as if I were dead just because I wanted to know how my elder sister who was with me would react. She cried and cried and cried, and jeez, I felt like a celebrity! Imagine. Thank God I didn't die.

And then there was another fateful day I charred an entire pot of raw beans because I tried to hurriedly prepare the beans without using water. The beating I got that very day from my mum succeeded in escalating my prevailing hunger and left a permanent stamp of needed wisdom.

I choose you lay this overture so you can have a glimpse into how playful, unserious, mischievous, and silly I was as a lad. Even in school, I wasn't really bothered about being the best in class. It didn't concern me! I was just a happy-go-lucky kid with an average life to show for it. I was a breed in my own league, yet unfortunately, my league bore no recognition. My elder sister was far better, far smarter, and far more serious than I was. In fact, she was even the head girl in our primary school, and I was just contented being called the brother of the head girl. At least, *no* student tried to mess with me. If they did, my sister was there to level the person's mountain, at least so I thought.

Holding school or class positions wasn't my thing. As a matter of fact, the only time I became a prefect was when our class teacher appointed me as class monitor in primary 3 or 4. But my tenure was short-lived. I was stripped of my position the next day. Why? I flogged a fellow classmate, and our class teacher felt I would kill my entire classmates before the end of the term. And she must have had a point!

Academically speaking, I was just there, not too good and not too bad. I was just okay, scratching my way through various exams and coming through by slim margins popularly called *let-my-people-go*. Fast-forwarded to secondary school, and there came the next big silly thing I did: I became an addicted gambler! Somewhere in my later years in secondary school, I found myself entangled in the addictive world of gambling. I gambled and wasted away *my* money and that of my parents'. I remember I once gambled away some large sums of money that my mum asked me to keep for her. I would never forget the horrible look on her face that very night when she realized what her son had done.

I was as unsuccessful in gambling as I was in class. I was never lucky in it, yet I blindly continued with the hope that if I just kept on going with it, I would one day capture and recover all. Well, I never did. Rather, I lost more and more. I was warned, prayed for, counselled, and punished by my parents and those who cared about me, but I never listened. I continued, paddling my way through the ocean of further ensnarement while silently struggling with the various pains, frustrations, emptiness, and disappointments that came with the ocean waves. As a young boy addicted to gambling, I knew deep within me that my life was heading south. I was confused, visionless, still stupid, and I had no purpose for existence. I was simply drifting away, yet I tried to pretend nothing was wrong. Just like the beautiful movie *Three Idiots*, I kept on saying to myself each day, 'All's well. All's well. All's well!'

And then one day, the worst happened. My gambling escapade got me into a hot bowl of pepper soup with the state authority. I was summoned to the police station, and the news broke out to my parents, neighbours, and siblings. I need not say that the whole news was embarrassing, and the gossips it created in our neighbourhood could turn any struggling tabloid into smashing bestseller—every pun intended.

During that same period, I had sat for my WAEC (West African Examination Council) exams. The results had been released. Unfortunately—nay, fortunately—when I checked my results, I came out as one of the biggest failures in the entire West African subregion. It was a monumental disaster! I failed every single subject but managed to pass just two: Yoruba and CRK! Yeah, you got me right: Yoruba and CRK. For a result like that, just forget it! I wouldn't even be allowed to come close to the gate of JAMB

or any higher institution. Well, I had no option but to shift my hopes to NECO (National Examination Council) exams, so I waited for the results to be released too. And then they were. But then, same story. Again, I failed woefully my mathematics, English language, and other key subjects, still leaving me in a serious fix. It was a devastating period in my life. I knew I had disappointed myself, and more painfully, I knew I had disappointed my parents and siblings. More so, as the first son, I ought to have been the one setting the right examples for my younger ones.

Because my parents and relatives had always warned and tried to get me back on track but I refused to hearken, and now the consequences of my wrong decisions were glaring, I felt my life was completely washed out. During that period, I lost confidence in myself, and my passion to go through life was at an all-time low. My mental, social, and physical life was affected. I beat myself up psychologically and emotionally. It seemed as if the Murphy's law was activated in my life and there was nothing I could do about it. And then there were people who laughed at me for my failure, while others made me feel intimidated by their own success stories. For the first time in my life, I saw my future. And it looked bleak!

Talking about the future, when I was little, I had dreams. First, I wanted to be a policeman. Why? I just loved the way they held their guns and the respect their uniforms commanded in the society. Coupled with what I had seen in various movies, I just wanted to be like them. But as I grew up, my dream changed. I wanted to be a banker. Why? I once visited a bank with my dad, and I just fell in love with the way the bankers looked, the quiet air-conditioned ambience, the English they spoke, and how everyone respected him or her within the bank premises. Visiting banks became an exciting experience for me. This second dream lasted longer than the first. But with my failure, I knew that the dream of becoming a banker would never come true.

Fortunately for me, those early failures eventually marked the turning point in my life. During those dark moments, it dawned on me that I had travelled far through the wrong pathway and it was time for me to make a U-turn. I needed no rocket scientist to tell me that all I needed at that time was a real personal change—a strong commitment to gather the broken pieces and make something out of my life. Just like the prodigal son, I

came to my senses and decided go back home—to all that my parents had been telling and teaching me. I made a strong vow to do better this time. I decided to change. Thank God for my loving, supportive parents and siblings, who were still willing to accept me and help me build a better life. Of course, at first, they were slightly doubtful about my new-found commitment, but they chose to still trust me and lend their unalloyed support. And then there was this home teacher we had back then in our compound who also added his faith and encouragement to the process. He called my parents one fateful evening and told them that he had taught me and he had somehow noticed that I had great potentials waiting to be tapped and that if they would give me a second chance, I would make them really proud. And sure, I was given a second chance.

My parents gave me some money to register for another WAEC exams, and it was now left for me to get it right this time. The stakes were very high, and I just had to deliver. The pressure was on, the time was ticking, but I was willing to face my giant. It was during this period that life taught me the beauty of hard work, passion, and discipline—virtues that continue to play tremendous roles in my life even up to this very moment. Because I was deeply hungry to succeed and make my family proud, I decided to view and do things differently. I enrolled for evening classes, registered at a local library, and then I started investing my resources, energy, and time into buying and reading books. I cut down on all social activities, did away with the friends I once kept, and I almost stopped watching TV. I would visit the library by 8 a.m., read till about 5 p.m., attend evening classes from 6 p.m. till about 9 p.m., and then when I got home that night, I would read again from about 10 p.m. to 12 a.m. It was a hard, nerve-racking process for me, but I was hungry. I wanted to succeed, I wanted to create the right future, and I was ready to pay the hard price. I soaked myself into reading deeply and widely, learning all I could from wherever and whomever I could.

When I started investing so much into doing all those, I noticed that my confidence level began to rise. I began to attach different meaning to the way I spent my time and with whom I spent it with. I began to attract new set of people—people who were also serious-minded and who had something invaluable to offer. The right people began to draw closer to me, believing I was intelligent and focused. Teachers used me as an example in

classes and took my suggestions, views, and questions seriously. I was even asked on several occasions to come teach the entire class while the teacher just sat back and watched with a smile or a surprised look on his or her face. My neighbours began to wonder what I was up to, and my family's belief in me grew even further. To cut a long story short, I sat for the WAEC exams, and I succeeded in it. I remember the day I went to check my results. At first, I was really anxious and scared, but then I gathered enough courage and went. My entire family was waiting at home for the breaking news. When I broke the news of my success, they were all elated, and we had a great ball celebrating as a family. I was treated to a delicious meal, and then that evening, my dad asked me one of life's greatest questions: 'So, son, what's next?'

From then henceforth, hard work, passion, and discipline became my life's core philosophies. I went on to study banking and finance at Federal Polytechnic—Oko (Anambra State), where I graduated with distinction in national diploma and upper credit in higher national diploma.

My View about Life

My view about life has been shaped not just by my experiences and beliefs but also by the rich experiences and beliefs of those who chose to live life to the fullest—people with enduring stories that inspire us and make our world a better place. My view about life is this: I believe everyone is born with a unique purpose and potentials. We didn't show just up here so that we would one day die and be buried. No. I believe each life—irrespective of race, background, or socio-economic standing—is worth far more than that and it's our daily responsibility to discover what this purpose and potentials are and spend every day living and maximizing them. I don't want to pass through earth only for me to realize at the end that I didn't do the assignment I was sent here for. There's no disappointment as worse as that. I want to really matter. I want my life to make a difference. I want to make an indelible statement. I want my life to tell a story that endures.

But that's one-half of the coin. The other half of my view about life is this: I also believe that as we all strive daily to live out our purposes, we should also be sensitive, ready, and proactive towards helping others live theirs. No purpose stands alone. We are all connected, and my purpose is

not about me alone. It's bigger than me. It is also about others. That's what I choose to always remind myself of each day even as I strive to grow my business, build various relationships, push towards various opportunities, go through challenges, achieve my goals, and set new goals. In other words, I define success and fulfilment as when I am constantly living out my purpose while at the same time helping others live theirs. In my opinion, that's the best thing since sliced bread, and I wouldn't trade it for all the tea in China.

Exposed to Mentors while Growing Up

Yeah, while growing up, I was exposed to different people with better knowledge, experiences, and insights about life. First, my parents taught me a whole lot at home. And I am privileged to be born into such a humble family where laziness and irresponsibility were never tolerated. We were all taught to be hard-working. I guess that was why we never had a housemaid. We were made to handle every chore at home, and that helped us a great deal. My teachers and elderly neighbours at various levels also had positive influence on me.

My View about Facing Reality and Using My Potentials

I don't try to deceive myself with the notion that life is easy—because, actually, it's not. The journey through life comes with a lot of challenges, and there's nothing anyone can do to change that. As long as we are all alive, challenges will continue to coexist with us. We will be faced with setbacks, disappointments, fears, and blows. But even in the midst of this, the best we can do is to rise above these challenges and still become all that we have been designed to be. The best we can do is to live our dreams, no matter what life throws at us. Fortunately, we have what it takes to rise above our challenges. And it lies inside of us, not outside. Unfortunately, most of us allow what lies on our outside to lord over the enormous powers we carry on our inside.

Yes, I agree that life can be unfair sometimes, hitting us with challenges that appear overwhelming. But then I believe life is always fair in giving us the freedom to choose how we respond to these challenges. We can choose to focus on our challenges, or we can choose to focus on the vast potentials we carry within. I have had my share of challenges. I still go

through challenges in my personal life, business, relationships, etc. But as I brace up to them, it allows me to maintain the control of my destiny and become more responsible in creating the results that I seek. I believe the results we produce in life are not determined by the challenges we face or don't face but by how we respond to these challenges. Yet the truth is that most people don't know how much they are truly capable of. Most of us don't explore even a slice of our potentials before we give up on our dreams. We can't wish away our challenges. We can only solve them by drawing out our potentials and putting them to work. My deepest motivation in life is built on the foundation of wanting to always challenge myself to unleash the limitless potentials I carry inside of me. I want to spend each day of my life knowing that I am releasing more of my potentials in solving the right problems and making the right difference not just in my life but also in the lives of those around me.

Choosing a Vocation

Like I said, I wanted to be a policeman, but that was only a childhood fantasy. And then I wanted to be a banker, so I went on to study banking and finance. My parents never objected to my choice of career. As a matter of fact, they respected my choice and gave me the needed support all through my years in tertiary institution. And then my dream *changed* again. But this time, it wasn't necessarily about changing dream. Instead, it was more about discovering purpose, about finding my soul code, what I was born to do. It all started during my industrial training in a bank. I had graduated as one of the best students in my department—with distinction actually—and later secured a great place for my industrial training. The pay was reasonable at that time, and I also learnt a bunch working in a bank. But towards the end of that one-year programme, I began to ask myself a new set of questions. I enjoyed the beautiful people I worked with and the customers I served, no doubt, but deep within me, I knew there was something still missing. I didn't know what, but the gap was there. During that period of self-awareness and a quest for meaning, I made a commitment to myself that when I got back to school for my HND programme, I wouldn't focus only on academics and getting good grades. I decided I was going to make a difference.

Back in school, I began to view my life behold academics. I began to search for ways to make a positive difference in the lives of people around me. That led me to form a student organization that was geared toward helping students build the right awareness and capacity to become entrepreneurs, maximize their potentials, and succeed in the real world. It was during this period when I enmeshed myself in the work that I found what was missing in my life. I discovered where my true passion was, and that was another major turning point in my life. I knew banking and finance wasn't just it. I knew I was born to instruct and inspire people to live their dreams and help them maximize their potentials.

In school, I started speaking and training at different departments, student programmes, and even off-campus events. I discovered I enjoyed what I was doing, and I watched with excitement the positive impact it was having in people's lives. That was when I made the decision to follow my true passion. Now, the next thing that followed was how to sell this new vision to my parents. At first, I didn't know how they would take the news that I wouldn't be going into banking, having spent four years studying it in school. But I chose to tell them, anyway. They were apprehensive when I told them because my new dream sounded strange to them. I told them I wanted to go into human capacity building and public speaking, and that sounded more or less like Greek. But seeing the conviction I carried, they chose to give me their blessings and promised to support me all the way.

Life in College

Campus life for me was fun yet stressful. I knew where I was coming from, and with the passion to make my parents and siblings proud of me, having goofed earlier, I was highly focused and dedicated to being the best in my department. Without trying to sound immodest, back then in campus I would say I was a voracious reader, and I used to run extra classes for my classmates. Lecturers respected (and tolerated) my perspectives to issues, and I made quite a number of friends (and enemies) as a result of that. I remember vividly something that happened during my first year. I had secured a bonus mark of 10 from a certain lecturer during a class because I answered a question nobody could. After the exam, I had a score of 92 out of 100 (excluding the 10 marks). Funny enough, I still chose to visit the

lecturer's office for her to award me my initial 10 marks. When she looked at my exams score of 92, she looked at me with bewilderment and asked me to get out of her office! I guessed she wondered how I could score 102 out of 100! Remember, this was in stark contrast to my earlier days in school. By then I would have gotten 2 out of 100 definitely!

What Made Me Cope on Campus

I would say the four major mechanisms that helped me to cope effectively on campus were my deep hunger to succeed, my well-planned-out work schedules, my discipline to push myself beyond comfort and read beyond what the lecturers taught us in class, and the quality of student and lecturer friends I chose to surround myself with. I wasn't the party type, so it was very easy for me to avoid the various parties and student get-togethers that were being advertised on campus. I wasn't also really cut out for campus or class politics, so I simply avoided getting myself involved as a player. I was too busy focusing on my studies while providing leadership and making a difference through the student organization I formed. Sure, I had buckets of fun with male and female friends that aligned well with my values, but I never allowed that to come in the way of my mission in school. And just in case you want to know, yes, I had girlfriends too. But I didn't allow them to be a bane to my goals.

Ironies between Today's Reality and My Yesterday's Dream

I think for me this is not a yes or no answer. Reason? I believe every dream is a journey. We start out from one point, and then we keep moving forward, evolving while pushing towards new horizons. Looking back at where I started out from, I simply would say a lot have changed and I celebrate myself for how far I have travelled hitherto. Think about it. When I started out, nobody ever asked me to share my story in a wonderful literary project that will forever positively influence the minds and hearts of young leaders across Africa, but today I am here doing just that. That's huge for me! Yet when I look into the future, I see great possibilities of things to come which, therefore, make me to keep striving to get better and dream bigger. Over the years, my dreams have grown in flavour, depth, breadth,

and intensity. And as I keep moving forward, I continue to gain new inspiration, better education, renewed passion, and stronger awareness to solve life's challenges and refine my dreams to tell a better story. Like I said, when I started out, my dream was to be a human capacity developer and a public speaker, but today the dream has evolved dramatically. I have also discovered my writing gifts. I have also discovered I am equally gifted in the area of strategic thinking and team building. I now own my own radio programme called *Success Matters*. I have authored books, audio-educational programmes, and study kits. I work with organizations and individuals to development training intervention programmes that help them create the change they desire. I own my own blog and website. I am a columnist to some magazines. I get various bookings to speak at different schools, organizations, religious bodies, and conferences. I organize my own self-improvement seminars, talk shows, workshops, and coaching programmes. And I appear on many live print, radio, and TV interviews.

Driving Force

Asking someone his or her driving force is one of the greatest questions anyone could ask in life. It is such an important question which is a key part of our foundation upon which our lives find true strength, expression, and uniqueness. So whenever I am asked this question, I slowly take in a breath of fresh air and clear my throat just to make sure I got my answer out the best way possible.

I would like to look at my driving force in two inseparable folds. The first fold is my *deep sense of purpose*. Over the years, I have come to realize that my life has a deeper meaning—a meaning that forms the reason why I showed up in the first place. I believe I am here on a unique assignment, and my life can only be meaningful in the proportion to my acceptance and expression of this timeless truth. I want to live a life that truly matters—a life that constantly adds value, a life that counts, and a life that makes an incredible impact. It is this consciousness of purpose that drives me to go out of my way to do what I do. Sometimes when I just feel like giving up, slowing down, or moving off-course, my purpose jolts me to rethink and get back on track. Putting this simply, my desire to fulfil my purpose is a driving force.

And then the second fold is my *strong desire to maximize my limitless potentials*. I dislike thinking or living in mediocrity. I consider mediocrity as me short-changing myself while also being ungrateful to my creator. Think about it. I have limitless potentials deposited in me but with limited time-space to unleash them, yet I choose to act in mediocrity? That's unfair and pathetic, isn't it? I mean, why would I want to do such harm to myself? I want to spend each day knowing that I am stretching myself to grow, learn, and get better in life. I want to push myself away from my safety nets and dare to aspire to greater results. I want to create incredible outcomes that affect my world and endure in the minds and hearts of people. I want to always learn new tricks. So when I get to face each day, I look at what I do from an elevated perspective of not just what I am getting but also of who I am becoming in the process. I just don't want to *rest on my oars yet*. I want to stretch, stretch, and keep stretching towards extending my unique voice in making the world I live in a better place.

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 5

A boat doesn't go forward if each other
is rowing his own way.

Swahili proverb

KENE'S STORY RESONATES MORE WITH me on a different levels. If you've ever felt like all you have ever done doesn't count and possibly it doesn't make sense to keep begin yourself, then you must read Kenechukwu's thoughts. One major teachable moment was the positive effect of sowing positive seeds.

His protégée team represented his country, Nigeria, in the Enactus World Cup, a global competition where the best entrepreneurs showcase social projects they have carried out which affected their environment positively. I remember vividly he wasn't the one who told me his story; rather, it was one of his protégées. When we met, I was glad he shared those emotional moments and the lessons.

Kene is a writer and very obstinate when he believes in a cause; however, his selfless nature reveals his emotional side against his obstinate and very strong-willed nature. This story is one which he shares from his heart. It took him a while to accept to share because in his words they are simply 'personal and don't count'. Not to me. I've seen how things which we thought were just meant to develop our character helped many we never envisaged. For the record, Kene is a thinker, and if I wasn't aware of his first degree in engineering, I would have classified him a philosopher.

Let's meet Kene.

The mind is a big gift, a great gift. God gave man this gift—a large infinite spiritual space to process information and events, to meditate, to reflect, to pray. The result of this is threefold: thought, meditation, and prayer.

We use our minds to learn, to control our environment and surroundings, to evaluate our relationships with people, to even direct the outcomes of happenings around us. There are lots of things we can do with our minds—beautiful things at that. We can daydream, we can imagine, we can think, we can reflect.

What is thinking? It could be said to be the exertion of the mind on a particular object in order to get a desired result. The things we think about don't always originate in the mind. Usually, they are fed to the mind from the surrounding environment. This could be through what we see, hear, or read about. It could also come as a result of what we want to do. All these provide matter for thinking. At the end of the day, our thoughts are the ideas we get from the effort of thinking. The mental process of analysing or comparing issues in our heads so that we know what to do—that is thinking.

My name is Kenechukwu Uba. For the time you would spend reading my story, I would take you on my leadership journey. I consider it a privilege to be sharing this part of me. When a story is told, there are different interpretations. I would rather you choose yours. However, I would be sharing my thoughts on the power of thoughts and how it has a very strong effect on your life journey.

My first conscious efforts to *think* ended rather poorly. I was opportune to lead a team of an organization in school, Federal University of Technology–Owerri, in the academic year 2008/2009. I had to think Students in Free Enterprise (now Enactus) is an organization of students who design, develop, and carry out projects meant to change the world through the positive power of business. Essentially, SIFE students are business-minded students. Therefore, I was supposed to be business-minded. Well, truth be told, I wasn't.

Being business-minded suggested a lot of things—being practical, being punctual, being decisive. I had very few of these. If I wasn't tardy by habit,

I knew for certain that I was hesitant and next to indecisive. Irrespective of these beautiful flaws, I was given the task of being the team leader of the most innovative student organization on campus. Although I had read a myriad of business books, they didn't automatically confer a business mind. Many years before, on the threshold of university, I got myself engaged in reading newspapers and periodicals on business. Even with that, the hood does not make a monk. When I graduated, I carried a bag loaded with those papers and donated them to the university library.

One day I went to see my faculty adviser, Dr Thad Ebiringa. I had just closed with my lectures and was looking to clarify a thing or two about our projects. As we drove away from his office, I remembered something I had read about Mr Henry Ford. He had said something in line with the fact that most people in the world did not know how to think. So I decided to put it to Dr Ebiringa to know his opinion on the matter. 'It is possible,' he answered in his usual reflective way, 'what many people say, thinking is not really thinking. If they were really thinking, then of course, they should be doing better.'

As I fingered the door handle to get out of the car just by the faculty of engineering roundabout, I reckoned that if I was to thrive well as a team leader or anything, I would have to learn how to think and apply the result in what I do. I was the team leader of one of the most influential groups on campus. That then implied that I was supposed to be one of the most influential students on campus, yet the truth is I wasn't.

Now if I wasn't, then who was I? This is the story I shall attempt to tell. Whether things remained in the end as they were in the beginning is for another to decide.

February 2008

Joining an organization in school was an impulsive February decision. At that time, most of my decisions were taken on impulse, and so nothing was unique about this. Walking back home after an evening at his place, Precious told me about this group that was going on a trip to the city of Jos (northern Nigeria). I had some money. I needed some mid-semester distraction, and this business conference for students provided just the escape I wanted. The price was ₦4,000 and I could afford that then. The trip was to be next morning.

The trip to Jos introduced me to some other students on campus whom I used to see but had not met. After the trip, we would meet on the way, exchange pleasantries, and walk away smiling. In Jos, I saw people who smelt like business. Someone bad-mouthed me for reading novels, and I immediately took a handsome dislike to him for my favourite escape was novels. They provided a refuge from the banality of a harsh physical and mental existence—the kind I was living. To attack my haven was to attack my mind, to attack me. I would not have it. There in Jos, for the first time, I felt safe. I saw myself reflecting from others, as in a mirror. As a very impulsive and obstinate person, I realized that I liked to do things my own way; if you called me a bit recluse, you wouldn't be completely wrong, though I wasn't.

Three days later, the trip to the cold plains of Jos was over, and a bus load of young adults all in their twenties frolicked back cross-country to Owerri through Enugu. On the outskirts of Opi, the bolts on the left back tyre began to slice off one by one. By the time we noticed it, the poor tyre was held on to the wheel by just two bolts. To save our lives and souls, the driver practically crawled us into Enugu, where we passed the long night in the University of Nigeria—Enugu Campus (UNEC). Thanks to a teammate Chidi Igweomoke, whose brother lived on campus, though the Enugu campus wasn't our abode, we were welcomed.

Augustine Opara was the team leader. He was in his final year of electrical engineering. As team leader, he needed to get things done. He tried but couldn't because there was no need to. As he moved his lips, we formed the words. As he mouthed sentences, we were already carrying them out. We seemed made for this. In a word, we were ready before him. I had already seen in the SIFE orientation an opportunity to live, dream, and achieve. We didn't need goading. We were fishes that needed no bait to be caught.

As the competition drew near, the university went on a nationwide strike action, which afforded us the much-needed opportunity to prepare our lines for the competition. As an organization, SIFE sent our team to go to institutions of learning under the SIFE network to prep teams for the competition. We were praised, corrected, and taught. I was green, but I was a green sponge. I soaked till I was full.

Yet there was something lingering about in my mind. It was like a blurry voice telling me things I didn't want to hear, things about knowing how to do it and being able to self-doubt. Around that time, Nigerian song artist Asa released her new song album *Asha*. Her song kept playing on my mind. We did our rehearsals and put final touches to the video for the presentation, with backup presenters should the unexpected happen. In the end, we presented our team's SIFE story. At the end of our presentation, our team and those in the room applauded us; at the end of the competition, no one applauded us. Our name didn't even feature among the first three best teams, and there were five who presented in that room. Later we learnt that we had been disqualified for coming for the competition with about fifty-four students, which was more than twenty over the stipulated number.

Losing dismally didn't dampen our spirits. We had our fun as usual. We came, we saw, and we were seen. That was what counted. If we didn't make it that year, we could always try again the following year. When the final round came up in July 2008, I was in Lagos. I was supposed to be doing industrial training, but I wasn't. Some of my team members wanted to be part of the final round action, hair-raising and exciting. My team wasn't participating; hence, I was volunteering. Throughout that period, I had been in some form of depression, and it hadn't lifted. We had fun controlling the crowds of students from participating. In the end, the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) carried the day, winning the chance to go to Singapore to represent the Federal Republic of Nigeria in the SIFE World Cup in October.

Academically, I had been gunning for first-class honours, but that wasn't to happen. I had poor grades in first-year biology and chemistry, and physics practicals made me sick of the labs and their attendants. As I learnt later on, some students arranged for their practical scores.

Third year was the worst year. I didn't fail because a nationwide strike shut down the university a week before the harmattan semester exams. Were it not for that strike action, I'd have gone home with straight F's. Providence stepped in. By the time the strike was called off, I had recovered sufficiently from my ailments to hold my academic fort. However, the illness that brought me so perilously close to an extra semester did not leave. It stayed with me even long after I'd graduated; it was there while I struggled to be the best SIFE team leader in Nigeria.

November 2008

In November 2008, we signed up to organize the Global Entrepreneurship Conference with With-Worth Enterprises. On the eve of this conference, I received a call from Noble Igbokwe, who was head of programmes at SIFE Nigeria.

‘Whose burial and where? Where was Onitsha? Who was Florence Okocha?’

She was the team leader of Ahmadu Bello University–Zaria SIFE team. She was in her final year, studying French, when she slumped and passed away. It seemed she was related to Nkechi Odiari. I remember I was at the SIFE country office at Ikoyi the day the sad news broke. That day, the office mourned, and Mrs Ifedi, country director, shed more than a few tears. So when I heard it was her funeral, kin spirit took over. For as burials are better to attend than weddings, her burial came before any conference. I assured Noble that we would give him feedback soon. He enjoined us to hasten and hung up.

The SIFE family led by the country director went to pay condolences to the family. It is sufficient to say that most eyes that were reddened by weeping for Florence had been some kind of bright butterfly that gave delight. Her passing was, therefore, heavily felt. She was 22 at the time.

What if she knew she was in the last years of her life? Did she die empty or unfulfilled?

She was lowered into the bosom of the earth by her townsmen. Then there was some dragging of feet about covering her. Now, whoever heard of an open grave? Noble looked at me, and I apprised him of the situation. Turning to my men, I explained in a few words, and everybody upped and grabbed a shovel or hoe. By the time the young men returned from their haggling, we had interred FO ourselves. I was proud of my people, and it was easy to see too that they were proud of me. The work was done. Sporting the white-collared T-shirts emblazoned Florence Okocha (1986–2008) and branded with the SIFE logo, we went to a close-family house for refreshments.

We had to report to Lagos for the team leaders’ training. It was held in December at the First Bank Training School, Iganmu. It was a great opportunity for learning. There was much fun—memorable meals and forging of friendships that have lasted till today. All the team leaders and

project heads were inundated with questions, learning scenarios, and camaraderie.

In my room were Joshua from University of Lagos and Bebe from University of Agriculture–Ado Ekiti. We were all paired in different pairs. All of us rolled together in the halls. Occasionally, I had mood swings, which always happened when I was in crowds, but it was easily covered with barbs and repartees. I also met Yashim, who was in the same team with Florence. He told me more about Florence during those days when she sure had so much of life in them.

On the last night of our stay, the country director (then) had an interview with all the team leaders and project heads. She smiled at me when I came in and said, ‘So tell me, Kene, what are your dreams for your SIFE team in the coming year?’ I couldn’t dodge this one, for the answer would determine how far I go with my team. I could commit myself with whatever that came out of my lips at that moment. So I smiled and replied calmly and confidently saying, ‘We shall do our best so that we can represent Nigeria at the next SIFE World Cup.’

Everybody in the room laughed, save three—Mrs Ifedi, Noble, and me.

‘Well, I’m sure you can make it if you work for it.’ She smiled and nodded. The interview was over. I thanked her and the others, got up, and left the room.

In the meantime, alliances were being formed among the young men, young women, and in-betweens. In all, the training went well. I singled out teams to visit during the coming year if time permitted. Among them was the Niger Delta University under the leadership of Ms Priscilla Suobite. At that time, the Niger Delta was a boiling cauldron of unrest, and I loved the impact she was making.

I did pay her team a visit in March of the following year, picking up a thing or two in the process from her and her team members. This proved timely, for throughout the months of January and February, all we had done in our team was sell newspapers for business day, come to SIFE meetings for pep talks, and go home, wishing for some action. A question hung in the air: what was the missing link?

During the team leaders’ training in December, while talking with Noble, I’d said that no community can rise higher than its leaders, and he

had agreed with me fully. Someone added to my conversation by saying that no chain is stronger than its weakest link. I pondered on this and soon began to realize that perhaps the right question was ‘Who is the weakest link?’ Such were the kind of subtle brainstorming session we had at a SIFE training.

The drive to succeed, execute a resounding project, and win the national competition had almost deadened me to life around. I skipped my lectures to fare for my team (which was nowhere to be seen). I forced myself to meet certain people I had no stomach for (leaving myself feeling disquiet afterwards), and I tried to effect a pose of competence (which my well-fitting suits helped me to achieve). By this time, my sudden downward plunge and extreme desire for success had soured my friendship with a member of my team.

I drafted a letter empowering my team executives to act in my absence while I attended to my health. Already I had a misunderstanding with an executive which had made us strange bedfellows, as the adage says. I tried to keep everything in, playing it close to chest, but when I felt my head would implode, I had to blurt out. I first saw a priest who lectured in psychology. He told me nothing was wrong with me, yet obviously, everything was not right with me. I dovetailed out of school, shunning lectures, assignments, and tests if they came up. Clearly, I was nearing total mental or nervous breakdown. It was simply a matter of which happened first. An early morning goodbye found me in a bus heading for Lagos. I needed to see my parents.

I arrived in Lagos safely. That night, I laid my case before my parents, queried, argued, and listened to them. The summary of their wisdom was ‘If you’re doing something with people and they won’t follow you, perhaps preferred to linger, leave them and keep going. Just make sure that you get there.’ I took it in half-heartedly.

I took this counsel to heart, side by side with my parents’ words, and went back to school. When I got back, the old environment threatened to drown my spirits, but I fought back very hard. A dark cloud settled on my brow during this time, but towards the end of the month, it gradually began to disperse. The sun shone through, and we started working. From one planning session to the other, we were gradually getting to something.

Without knowing it, I had started listening to the opinion of others. I kept on listening to others, not only because I was learning from them but also because it was easier than talking. Gradually our projects began to take shape.

One day we fixed a date and outlined the logistics for what was to be known as Becoming a Fisher Project, which was born as a way of tackling the job displacement that we saw would arise from the implementation of the then governor of Imo State Governor Ohakim's ban on commercial motorcycle riders in Owerri city centre.

This project was launched in May. After our team recruitment on 22 May 2009, SIFE became a real campus affair. Our new members distinguished themselves by their zeal to achieve. Many of them are still close friends till date. We achieved.

Our project seminars, like teaching natives on how to rear snails and raise fish, were well attended by men and women of varying ages. When one of our facilitators who was a lecturer began to sound too technical even for us undergraduates, we quickly substituted him with our own SIFE students who already reared snails or had fish farms. This style won.

Having before our minds what we wanted to achieve, it was easy for us to strike several chords with the Ihiagwa people, beginning with their traditional ruler. He received us well and laid the first grounds on which the success of our outreach projects in the community was hinged. As a matter of fact, relations between students and villagers underwent significant improvement in the face of what we were doing.

Had not the initial difficulties arisen, it would have been difficult to see how important the members of our team were to the success of everything. They had bolstering courage and confidence that minimized hurdles. As a voracious reader, I could reinvent myself into any role that caught my fancy, though not as an actor in a drama but as a person in real life. However, this ability failed me many times for want of confidence. When I realized this, I stood back then, and as Sir Francis Bacon would say, I rode on the shoulders of giants. That is to say I either borrowed confidence from those around me or I hinged it on theirs. It's an odd thing to do, but I did it, and it worked. This was how we pushed things till we got to the competitions.

Organizing things like this is not usually easy, and for a thorough neophyte like me, in retrospect, it seems to have been quite a smooth ride.

Nonetheless, there were the usual human failings. Feelings were hurt, egos injured beyond bruising, and bad blood raised in the various aspects of the preparations, like costumes and presentations. These were matters which a little prudence and discretion would have assuaged or even nipped in the bud. Yet in all these, the power of silence in quelling storms showed itself forth, and I agree entirely with whoever first said that ‘speech is silver, silence is golden’. A cautious and properly timed silence added to the new-found attraction for listening to people pulled me through many scrapes. Occasionally, I fell through a loosely guarded tongue and an impatient temper. It is very easy to hurt the feelings of others. All you need to do is think that you are above them, then utter or do any silly thing that comes to your mind. You can be sure of scoring and being either disliked or hated, depending on the person you offended.

There is something that needs to be said and maybe easily passed over in silence. During this time, as has been seen, I was seriously under the weather, at least mentally. Certain close people will attest that even as the preparations for the first round were going on, I was sorely tempted to pull out or give in or throw in the towel. The amount of pressure that came with the preparations added to the state of my mind before it all started; all threatened to bowl me over. It was then that I realized the power of religion and of prayer. Karl Marx is quoted to have called religion the opium of the masses, and irreligious people have taken up that silly idea over the years. But religion cannot be called opium. Opium is a sedative that makes people forget or be unable to act. Religion is fire on which one cannot sit still. Were it not for a true understanding of prayer dawning on me in those days, I would have packed up forever, just like what one of my course mates did that year. I am Catholic. The prayers for the team’s success, the Masses offered in school and the local parish, and the devotion of many of our team members supplied the spirit with the strength to push the body. With these, we pushed on till we got to the end.

It was in this ambience that we prepared for our appearance at the first round in the nationals. Presenting in the same room with Abia State University among others, we swept that room. Our performance was impressive. One might say we won easily. It was a burst of joy when the results of that opening round were announced and we had made it to the

finals. We were one of the finalists. As soon as FUTO was called, all our students were flying out of their seats. If that stage had been made of light material, it would have crumbled like a pack of cards, for our people knew no limits in their joy. It was the first time we had ever come close to a third place in the first round, and we were one of the finalists. All the doubts that had been eating at me fled into the darkness that night. I knew then that I was competent. Yet I was broken inside, for the victory so easily won in the Ladi Kwali Hall of Sheraton Hotels and Towers in Abuja seemed to me a pyrrhic victory. It had come at great cost back in Owerri, so much so that I wondered if it was worth it after all.

We celebrated there in Abuja with a party to let off steam; then the following day, we went back to school to get ready for the final round, which was in about three weeks. It was to be preceded by a monitoring and evaluation visit from the country office. Noble paid us the visit one Sunday afternoon. After going round to see some of our beneficiaries and checking out one of our projects, which was our fish pond, he told us that OAU had failed the verification process of their project. It was stunning news that year because the fear of the OAU team in the SIFE Nigeria competition was the beginning of wisdom.

They were the current national champions and were the world's second-best team. Let me paint the picture clear to you. It's like playing soccer and competing with a team judged as best in the continent and second best in the world. They were sure in a league of their own. Their absence at the national finals was a great relief to all other finalists. At the end of his visit, Noble certified us fit for the finals, and we went on with our preparations. By now, spirits were generally low in the team. The vigour with which we prepared for the first round was no more there. We had to drag ourselves about to meetings and rehearsals the first week we returned. Somehow, though, we managed it. We made a new annual report, updated our lines, and pestered the vice chancellor's office with a fresh demand for support. We also had a brief visit to his office to present our performance and express our hopes of success at the final round. He received us well and encouraged us to step up in order to represent the school well.

We did better with the new opportunity. There was Eco-Drive, a project ultimately directed to recycling polythene, and then there was our financial

literacy project, which took us to the market teaching traders how to use the petty cash book. We got to Lagos and were put up in a hotel at Amuwo-Odofin. The next morning, we stormed the Muson Centre at Onikan, which was the venue of the competition.

Despite the heavy tension in the air, we had an impressive presentation, after which we took the judges' questions. Every one of the finalists presented. University of Agriculture Makurdi replaced OAU as they had been disqualified and banned for one SIFE year. Then it was time to call the results. By general unspoken agreement, the competition was between two strong teams, Bayero University–Kano and Federal University of Technology–Owerri.

My siblings came visiting to see what big brother could do, to see him clinch the cup he had been talking about and head away to Germany.

The presentation team had been groomed and refined by their fellow team members and students. I had made the arrangements based on suggestions.

To say that I was ambitious would be putting it mildly. For this presentation, we had studied the world's best SIFE teams at the World Cup finals for three years running, read the entire SIFE handbook cover to cover, and prepared our scripts first by answering the questions in the evaluation sheets then preparing our stories around those answers. It would take the dullest person to miss the points we shot from the lips of our presenters.

When it was time to give the verdict, the judges were not ready. The more the delay, the higher the tension in the room until in the end people began to walk about to ease off the tension. Then the event compère came up and requested that we return to our seats. It was time to announce the winners. Before the results were announced, prizes were given to deserving teams for winning in various categories. Best environmental project, best financial literacy project, best business ethics project, Spirit of SIFE awards (this came to our team) first and second places. There was also some prize money attached to some of those awards. At last, even the awards were over. It was time for the real thing, the main thing.

The third position goes to Federal Polytechnic–Oko. They went up and took their cup, celebrated. The second position goes to . . . (The entire hall—judges, lecturers, guest observers, and SIFE students—hung on that breath, and when it came down with Federal University of — (I didn't hear

the rest), something burst in the crowd. A wild cheer. Everywhere was agog. I didn't go to collect the trophy. Our students were there before I could move. Then the first place was announced, 'Bayero University–Kano!' The hall tore apart. Tears sneaked out my eyes and ran down my cheeks. The rock-solid team leader cried like a baby. Hugs of 'Congratulations, that was great!' only made the tears run faster. My younger sister held me, consoled me. 'Kene, you tried!' someone said. Even when Noble told me that it had been a tie and they had to give the winning point to Bayero University–Kano because of sustainability, it didn't help. I still cried.

The surprise at my tears was understandable. We had never got through the first round before, and so getting second place at the finals was a big feat for us. Yet for me, there was only one victory, to get to the World Cup finals. I was happy with our achievement, but I wasn't satisfied. I wasn't content. That was why I cried. In the process of pursuing this goal, I'd almost lost my friends, classes had suffered, my mind nearly caved in under pressure so many times, and all we had to show for it was second place? Desmond had cried too.

I was alone in Owerri for a few weeks before the strike was called off, and school resumed. During that time, I called Priscilla, and she told me she had prayed that we don't come first if it was the best thing for me. I looked at her and wondered how she could say such a prayer. All my prayer had been for the German consulate to ask for our passports since that was the venue of the competition. That was the end of my era as team leader, or so I thought.

The following year, our SIFE team, under the leadership of Alison Opara, continuing from where we stopped, came first at the national finals. I was there. I'd walked out of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) orientation camp and boarded a bus to the state capital Abuja. I had to witness this victory. I saw it. I smelt it. I saw the team we had built come first and clinch clearly the ticket to the SIFE World Cup to be held in California, USA, later that year.

When I returned to Kaiama, one of my former teammates sent me a text message. 'The real winner in this competition is you. You laid the foundation for this victory. Without your work, it would not have been possible.' With this knowledge in mind of our collective victory, I spent the

Charles Umeh

rest of the time reliving great memories of our journey, and I was thankful to have seen a team I was part of succeed.

I didn't get to Germany a year before now, but the first visa to embrace my passport was that of the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America. With my teammate and the rest of the contingent, I was there in Anaheim, cheering the 2009/2010 SIFE team as they presented their projects. In the end, Germany wasn't a bad loss after all.

The mind is capable of many things and must be protected and shielded from any unwholesome influences. This is an act of thanksgiving of the precious gift of the mind.

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 6

An army of sheep led by a lion is better
than an army of lions led by a sheep.

AMBROSE LOST HIS PARENTS IN a space of ten months. That was enough reason to host a pity party, but no, he didn't! He made up his mind to never look back. His years in college proved very productive because he puts in his energy into inspiring young people who possibly never had a clue of his scars, having been recognized as one of the best young team leaders in Nigeria by the blue-chip company Accenture Nigeria.

How did I meet Ambrose? I couldn't forget this one. We both met for the first time in a leadership training. We were lodged for it, so at night, when it was time for us as young people to socialize and familiarize with our new abode, every one disappeared to go party and have some drinks as young people would do. I think we both claimed we were going to have a drink only for the both of us to meet at the same spot (as at that time drinking wasn't our fancy). We laughed at each other because it became obvious that we both didn't fancy drinking, or maybe we were going to drink but not that night because we had so much going through our minds.

We got talking. I got to know him more, and I was so glad we met. Ambrose is fearless and very instinctive. He was awarded the best young team leader in Nigeria for his laudable project. I remember that project vividly because it was based on innovation to agriculture. I am full of joy for the many other milestones he has reached, but I know not everyone knows his scars.

Let's meet Ambrose.

In Greek, the meaning of the name *Ambrose* is 'immortal'. Fifth-century British military leader Ambrosius Aurelianus was probably a prototype for legendary King Arthur.

People with this name have a deep inner desire to create and express themselves, often in public speaking, acting, writing, or singing. They also yearn to have beauty around them in their home and work environment.

People with this name tend to initiate events, to be leaders rather than followers, with powerful personalities. They tend to be focused on specific goals, experience a wealth of creative new ideas, and have the ability to implement these ideas with efficiency and determination. They tend to be courageous and sometimes aggressive. As unique, creative individuals, they tend to resent authority and are sometimes stubborn, proud, and impatient. Funny enough, none of these descriptions skips who I discover myself to be.

Okay, I guess I've been reading too much about me. However, the personality trait that comes with the name had its underlying effect. Even as the years roll by, my discovery process keeps evolving. I was the first child of my mom. She often smiled at the purity I was born with. She said my dad was the first and only man that slept with her, and the result was me. Growing up was always in seclusion. My early days were spent in the cold city of Jos.

My mom often said that despite the cold, I loved playing bare chest. With the many pictures of my childhood flashing in my head, the prominent was the fact that I often sneaked to the tap and let it run all over me just to feel the bounce of water drop on my skin. I so enjoyed those moments and the beating that came with it from my mom whenever I did that. Did it stop me? No! I was stubborn. I only did things I felt were okay to my thoughts. Years later, this trace found its way into my life and thought pattern.

I grew up in a middle-class family. We grew up content with what we had, and we were really happy with it. Dad made sure we had all we needed and accept the company of other kids. He believed early childhood should be a development only the family should mould. We often lived in the outskirts of any town he was transferred to. Hence, I grew up talking to few people and learning core family values. I seldom talked as far as I can remember. My mom once recounted that she was almost giving up on

my speech. Even when I started speaking as a child, my words were always mumbled. Thank God for her patience.

My journey as a child saw many light and dark moments of life, but my parents were bonds that held every piece of it together. They never raise their voices while having an argument and always expected us to take that gift to our home when we jumped the broom.

Let me tell you about my mum. Mother was a trader at some time in our family; she took the entire responsibility of catering for the family for over two years. It was a revealing moment. We hawked, stayed in her shop in the market, but she made sure we were not withdrawn from the private school which we attended. The school was the best in town then. Most of my early thinking character came from my mom. She spent more time thinking than talking. When my dad had issues from work and was pulsed, all he needed to do was to pass it on for her to resolve while he rested. She possessed what I term thinking or cognitive intelligence, especially in decision-making I see this to shape who I eventually become.

I love thinking, and lots of it never gets me tired. Since this is not an autobiography, I am going to dwell on the lessons I've learnt, my deepest desires, and the various incidents that have been the contributing factors to my understanding of the world. We all have life, but we all don't live it in the same direction. Our lives are determined by the things we see as essence and definition to our cause. Growing up for me was heaven as far as I can describe it.

I looked up to my dad basically as a model. He loved deeply and never allowed bitterness close, no matter how much he faced it in his days. I always stayed awake till he was back from work; then I would sit and watch him eat—probably to have a taste of his meal. Then he would tell me stories till we both slept off to wake up on our bed the next day. Most of the stories he told me were that of bravery and conquering evil. He talked about believing. Till this day, his voice resonates with it. His face always lit up with joy if he chose to tell a story of hope. I loved those stories; they made me happy and ignited my energies.

While growing up, I had a contradiction on who I wanted to be. Mum wanted me to be a priest; Dad believed being a medical doctor was for me. I had a different plan. I had always wanted to be a business person and a leader.

There wasn't a complication about this view until I graduated from secondary school. While in secondary school, I lived the life Mum and Dad wanted. I was resolved to model my life to become a missionary doctor. With such, I would please my parents. I did well in business subjects and English. This was a pointer to the direction my life was heading, but I was obliged to stay on course.

In secondary school, I never did what most students did. No girlfriend, no drugs, no truancy. I was just about what you would term the most disciplined. This I felt was the life of a priest. I was also far from being an angel. In all this, I was something.

Subtle revolt against authority was my penchant, instigating the most stubborn students to raise their voice while I repatriate at the background. I remember I once had a teacher pay back on his way from evening prep. I got my friend to shoot him with a catapult, which almost threw him off the motorcycle.

I guess I was more spiritual in my journey as I consciously looked up to the things that will make me a good priest and a doctor. To the best of my abilities, I did much of that. I guess a time comes in a man's life when the light bulb suddenly opens you up to new ideas and opportunities.

The shadows of my life appeared the moment I seemed to be opening up to the truth and reality of life. I was just 21 and got admission for remedial in Kogi State University. It was the hay for me because I eventually got the chance to be in the four walls of an institution. I took the challenge by all pride and dedication. It was a big deal for me because my dream would eventually see the light of the day through this means, or so I thought.

My dark night started on a Wednesday morning. I was in school, happy and having my day like every other person, when I felt something was strange. I was fired up with the energy of the sun, yet I felt some emptiness inside. Such defines the moments ahead which makes pulling from the crowd a much easier thing to do. I believe I am a restless soul, and the universe was telling me something I could only feel but never understand.

The grey spot of my brokenness and the onus of my faith flew to divine providence. I lost my mum on 14 September 2005. It was the worst moment

of my young life. Much worst was the year ahead. How I crossed the hurdle to this very day is an amazing thing.

After reading from her the previous night, her last words still echoed, 'I wish you eternal success. Just let your every day count.' I guess those were the words that have been keeping me going. I loved Mummy so much that I was fondly called 'Mum's handbag'. Her quietness and charisma were essence that attracts. Losing her at that point of my life was more that was my heart could handle. No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear, the same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, I kept on thriving—.

The grief process was more like rehabilitation, and my transformation landed its weight on my dad. Although we were buddies before my mum's demise, he never was stronger than when Mum was alive. It doesn't matter how prepared we are; a loved one's death always leaves us feeling disoriented. I cried for days, but it did not change the pain I felt till today.

Exactly nine months after, Dad was assassinated, and all the heavens crashed on me. But this time, after moments of disoriented thoughts, I realized that I owe my world nothing but to get better. Years after their demise, I had to train myself through school. My life in school was amazing, falling in and out of life, learning and constantly developing my skills.

My leadership journey was an adventure. Leading has always been the way I envisage my destiny unfolding. I always yearn for quality leadership and look forward to the opportunity. While growing up, I had imagined myself leading some group of persons in my head, and I often wake up to talk to them and address them on the vision I have for a company or organization that never existed. Somehow this has never stopped as it has formed the largest part of my big dream and pictures.

In 2009, a year after the first black man made history in America by becoming the first black president, I saw connecting dots in my life as every inch of Obama's life flashed before my mind as I was sleeping. My leadership journey was an adventure to behold. Believe me, Obama's victory was a huge inspiration August 2009 opened this light. I had become very passionate about a student organization known as SIFE (now Enactus). The community engagement and weekly speeches fascinated me, and I never had enough of it. As a junior I saw my ideas and voice

raving and making meaning in every meeting. I wasn't sure of it, but every bit of my actions was swallowed up in passion for impact as we enabled little progress in the community. I remember the first project I was assigned to work on. It was targeted at helping young secondary student manage their time effectively and be the best in their local community. When asked to name the project, I named it My Tomorrow., I knew little of this impact but all in all, it was fascinating. Back to the August story, I was selected to be the team president among four other candidates and was the youngest of all candidates. My journey through leadership for the first five months was the most challenging. I knew what to do, but how to engage others to get thing done was one of the major challenges. I was torn between a leadership that guides people to carry out a job and a leadership that does all the work while others follow me and celebrate the result. The effect of which was a single resultsI was said to be the busiest person on campus. It was a little wonder why I did not graduate with a first –class honours. In all, I chose what mattered over what didn't, and with the help of my planner, I had an effective life in the end—not without hurdles of meeting up to targets and appointments, which I sometimes forgot. I was yet to feed on anything. I was not concerned about my health; I was concerned about my tasks and the dreaded fear of failing in my responsibility.

I was able to create a synergy through the diverse experiences I gathered over the years, eventually winning me the best SIFE team leader in Nigeria. My life is a continuous journey and a never-ending one. My graduation speech to my Student in Free Enterprise (SIFE) team captured the moment I shared with my team.

The Lonely Path

I have never heard a story so remarkable that needs to be told repeatedly even when the sound is so profound. I'm not going to dazzle you with my inspiring words—that is if they do at all. I choose this speech title not to scare you but to tell you that you are on the road to a great destiny only if you will listen. A lot of vibrant young SIFERs

have listened to this wonderful speech and are yet to find their way. Others have found a path with destiny and are overwhelmingly accomplishing what they have ever dreamt of. The road is different and less travelled, so I expect you to know you are coming up right.

Now that you have graduated, congratulation! I just did too. Perhaps I took a step to graduate outside the campus. Go figure, right? I'm going to be talking to you on the essential lessons of life school never teaches you. The amazing fact is that it is the only thing you are going to meet out there and the essentials you will need to succeed.

1. God and his blessings
2. life love and romance
3. work and finances

God is the essential of all we are and all we can ever be. When you are in his blessings, you flow easily in life and you are built for whichever situation that confronts you. Learn to trust him. When you can't figure life out, he will be ever ready to show you the way. One prominent thing about him is that no matter how bad we may be, he still loves us more than we love ourselves and his wish is that you lead a happy life. Live your light of God.

I can't give you caution on falling in love because you can't stop some of these things, as it's more to the issues we have. But the essential of it is clinging to someone who does make you happy. Don't beg for love because if love is yours it will find you. Learn to be happy with who you are and your background, and love will find you.

The politics of life has got me through all, but in all, I remain defiant, and the story goes on. To the chain or cord that hangs me between the balances of hope and time, to the strength that defines me through all my trials, I found my way in such manner that proves to their ears. In all, I see the light of my very own breath brought out. That which I thoroughly love became vague in infinity, yet I trust to dare the enormous task ahead and

Charles Umeh

one day hope to be a leader that drives the ultimate vision of restoring the dignity of man and establishing his essence on earth.

I wish you well as you go figure out your life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Charles Umeh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

#breakingthecoconut

Ambrose's story is one I feel privilege Sharing because I've followed him closely and may I add that along his path he met a mentor who took him under his wings. That singular act has turned a game changer in his ever evolving journey and points to the fact the role of mentorship in the life of every young person.

Chapter 7

The person who grew up without correction would find
his mouth slipping instead of his foot.

African proverb

ONE OF THE BEST WAYS to inspire change is not much in the words we speak but more in our actions or inaction. Chinonso Arubayi is an unassuming lady. I met her firstly in a leadership workshop. She stood out when she shared her audacious goals of starting out a campus magazine. Coming from a 100-level undergraduate in a very interesting environment at that time, the campus magazine project was, to say the least, but a dream! But there was something about this dreamer that made me keep quiet, and never doubted her. She was fearless, and I respect fearless people. Unconsciously, every time she was given to change her choice of goal of starting a campus magazine, she never blinked and insisted on that dream. Years back, looking at that same lady as she evolved through time, one might have asked her what her inner convictions were, what she believed in, and what lessons she would love to share on her campus magazine project. You know, I saw that project go through its own learning curves, and it is interesting to know really made her resolute as an influencer because in the end that simple act of starting a campus magazine opened up opportunities that ended up giving her a voice in her circle of influence, which grew in numbers.

Working with a team of inspiring minds, she shed light into her experience, growing and leading her bold campus magazine team and meeting challenges and lessons on the way.

Let's meet Chinonso Arubayi

Growing up for me was filled with unique experiences. I am forever thankful to God for his grace and mercies. I experienced many failures growing up, but I never pitched my tent in those sad moments. I always looked for the lessons in them and moved on unscathed. Whenever I am asked a description of my life, Romans 8:28, I believe, best defines me.

I attended three schools for my primary education. I finished off in Pampers Private School in Lagos, after which I got into a girls' secondary school. But I transferred to Nigerian Navy Secondary School in Port Harcourt midway in JSS2. As a transfer student in a new environment, I had so many things I was grappling with. I was thrown into the senior hostel, where we seemingly had all the Cruella de Vils and I seemed generally like the misfit. I hated school at that time. I suffered, and my academics suffered too. I was sad. I had no friends and felt trapped in my new environment. No one could tell me school was cool. School was cruel to me! My first experience of what seemed like failure was that I had to repeat a school year. In retrospect, that experience was a blessing in disguise. At first, it was devastating, but I became grateful and started to see failure as an opportunity to experience things differently and do better. Fortunately, I was moved to the junior dormitory, which was perfect for me. School had a new meaning, and the lonely girl blossomed into a social butterfly.

Academically, in that phase, I was content being average. I became president of Literary Debating Society and Dramatic Society. I loved the stage. I was up for the social prefect position, but for some reasons that eluded me at that period, I started to think there was more to me.

Winning Miss Teen Nigeria

In between secondary school and university was when I had to write preparatory exams (we call it JAMB exams in Nigeria), and yes, I was jammed by JAMB. Meaning, I failed JAMB exams too. My first JAMB result was withheld, and the second one, I didn't meet the cut-off mark. This was another bitter taste of my first attempts in learning which I learnt to overcome. I know God was preparing me, but during that period, it seemed nothing like preparation. Seeing my peers get along while I stayed at home for two years hurt a little, but the lesson was that it didn't really matter

how fast but how well. I am glad, for those were the times that helped me grow. A lot of positive values and thought patterns were formed that period, and by the time I got into the university, I knew exactly what I wanted.

It's often said that two important things define our lives—they are the people we meet and the books we read. One of the books after the Bible that influenced me heavily was *Gifted Hands* by Ben Carson. My mum (God bless her heart), seeing how discouraged I was with my first JAMB experience, gave me the inspirational book about Dr Ben Carson, and his story inspired me and taught me that I could do better than average academically despite any experience of failure. I also took with me the principle of delayed gratification.

Rather than staying idle while waiting to gain admission, I ventured into the world of modelling. I am not six feet tall, but I describe my height as where modelling begins (vain me). Armoured by my billion-dollar smile and a lot of confidence (you need a lot of that in life and business), I started going for castings. I snagged a few modelling jobs. I did a little TV, calendar, and runway before deciding to participate in the Miss Teen Nigeria beauty pageant, which was a non-bikini-wearing pageant I was comfortable with.

The Miss Teen Nigeria platform positioned me as a young role model, and I was often invited to give pep talk to young students on self-esteem and how to develop a healthy dose of it. This helped me read motivational books and get acquainted with life principles. Most of what I learnt and shared can be summarized below:

- We are made in the image of God, and God doesn't make junk.
- Believe in yourself.
- It doesn't matter how others see you. What counts is what God says about you and, ultimately, how you see yourself because in life we don't see things the way they are but the way we are. A pessimist sees a glass as half empty, and an optimist sees the same glass and says it's half full.
- We all have a talent or two. Develop your talent, and you can generate money from it.
- Don't be afraid to get out of your comfort zone and try something new every day.

I shared most of them because I believed in them and they were principles I lived by.

My BOLD Journey

My *BOLD* journey started in the university when I decided to study mass communication at Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka.

I had my fair share of culture shock with the mindset of people in my new environment. This time, I was not going to let my environment define me. Knowing that a ship can navigate its way in water as long as the water didn't get inside the ship, I was going to influence my environment for the better, and attending the LEAP Africa's youth leadership training was the first step.

It was a five-day leadership training which laid the foundation of my change project called *BOLD (Building Opinion Leaders with a Difference)*. *BOLD* was created to be a platform for young people to express themselves creatively and positively while influencing others. It was a movement which was the first of its kind on campus. After our leadership training, we were mandated to carry out a community project that would influence lives positively. *BOLD* was my project—a magazine which was positioned to disseminate information that would lead to the transformation of mindsets. It was our intention to use the proceeds to sponsor the education of school dropouts (tagged Back to School), conduct career and entrepreneurial trainings (tagged Dare to Dream). Many doubted it was possible for me to handle because I was younger then and was in my 100 level.

However, I was convinced I could. With a take-off grant of ₦15,000 from LEAP Africa, the money raised from family, my pocket money (which wasn't much, though), tough negotiations with publishers, and strategic partnership, the magazine project came alive. I was not willing to take no for an answer. To reduce cost, the first edition was designed by a good friend and computer whizz Chimezie Ukah.

He designed all thirty-two pages within forty-eight hours, which greatly reduced the initial cost. We also took the tough decision of producing 1,000 copies and reducing the size to A5 instead of A4 in order to reduce cost and make it more affordable for our target audience. We were able to keep the magazine afloat from sales of the magazine. Our goal was to publish the

first campus magazine and with the help of a solid team, *BOLD* magazine was born. We made headlines, we inspired young people, and we were living the time of our lives as the pioneer campus magazine. The inspiration came from the fact that, as big as my university was then, we did not have a campus magazine at the time. Our actions inspired a revolution in the minds of the youth in our community, and the feedback was outstanding. Our steps emboldened others to live their dreams.

We partnered with WithWorth Enterprise in conducting one of the biggest entrepreneurship conferences in the south-east. We organized the Bold and Green Awards to recognize young entrepreneurs and also organized Dare to Dream career seminars for secondary schoolchildren. We made our mark in the sands of time, and were glad we did.

The *BOLD* Team

Choosing the right team to work with is expedient in handling any project. Your team must share similar values but not similar skill sets, strengths, and weaknesses. Each person should have something unique to bring to the team, something that is different from others, making it possible to complement one another. I can never place monetary value on the intellect of the team I worked with on the project. Without them, there would have been no *BOLD*.

I wasn't completely perfect as an undergraduate. Looking back, I think I was hard on myself in the university, and well, I have no regrets because it paid off. How was I able to hold up? I surrounded myself with like minds, and we were accountable to one another. I was engaged in a lot of positive social and academic activities that I enjoyed, leaving me with little time for frivolities.

The principle of delayed gratification—doing today what others won't so that tomorrow you can be where others can never be—helped me balance out my academics. During my first year, I think my cumulative grade point assessment (CGPA) was in the league of first class, and with that, pursuing my change project didn't affect my grade negatively as it was closely related to my course of study. For anything good, there is a price. Anyone considering any venture must be willing to make sacrifices and go the extra mile for it.

As much as we have our expectations from the governments and hope that our leaders can create an enabling environment for businesses to thrive, I believe we can have a better world if we all play our parts and contribute to the development of this country in our own spheres of influence. There is a light God placed inside of us that we shouldn't allow to go down because of our society and the opinions of others. The youth, as the life force of any society, have a certain ability to dare the status quo and bring about the change we desire. You will never find the perfect time to start. Nothing ventured, nothing won.

In our time, we won! We could have done more, but we didn't stay winning. After graduating from the university, everyone went separate ways, distracted by new dreams. This brings to fore the challenge of sustainability that often plagues projects. Those coming up should plan ahead and creatively ride the tide of change without giving in to external pressures. Flexibility as well as the ability to innovate and reinvent oneself is key. In retrospect, perhaps with the large followers we had among the student community, a possible plan would have been to transition into an online portal, riding on the momentum we had gathered and how much the world has evolved.

Another key lesson would be to *mind your business*. No matter how non-profit and charitable an organization is, you must always consider the business side. Even in talent management, no matter how passionate you are about your gift of singing, acting, dancing, you must always treat it like a business. It is the value you place on your talent that will be accorded to you.

Life under Construction

Looking back, I believe maybe I could be termed as one restless child with more gifting in the arts. After we achieved our goals for *BOLD*, a new vista was opened in my life, and it was the world of make-up. I gave in to it freely, and after much consideration, I embraced it. Till this day, I've been better at it. I was even featured on TV soap operas, like M-NET's *Johnson*. At the time of sharing my story, I also have worked with brands like Wazoo Ltd as producer and content manager. I manage two online platforms DanfoTV and Wazoow. I guess all my lessons and experiences finally helped in making me better at these roles.

On the subject of marriage, let's just say that's another chapter of my life. Initially, I had my fears, but perfect love cast all fears. That's what happened when my husband, Eric Arubayi, walked into my life. He is an amazing man who loves God, and I believe God kept me for him. We are very good friends, and we support each other.

I was reluctant to share this story, but persistence from Charles made me go this far. Since the goal is to inspire the next set of game changers, I am sold in. Words are powerful. You never know what words can do to a stranger. I believe the story of my life on earth is incomplete and I am a work in progress. I feel humbled to share this part of me (Rom. 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who are called according to his purpose).

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 8

The world is a book and those who do not travel
read only one page.

St Augustine

OLUFUNBI IS THE CO-FOUNDER OF the Passion Incubator. They help entrepreneurs fulfil their dreams using the leverage of information technology. But that wasn't how Funbi started. His journey dates back with a community service project which puts him on the spotlight. A learning trip to study in Asia opens up his eyes to what he describes as the crux of social development.

My initial meeting with Funbi was orchestrated by a mutual friend Oje Ivagba. Funbi was working on a project during his NYSC days, and because I had done similar community project and introduction was made and formed then, we have been helpful to each other's journey.

Let's meet Olufunbi.

My name is Olufunbi Falayi from Lagos, Nigeria. I am a computer science and economics graduate of the Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife. I got my first job immediately after graduation (without the mandatory National Youth Service Corps) as a software analyst at Mit-Glauben Engineering Ltd after spending two years in that role; I was moved to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) department. In my capacity as the project lead in that department, I helped identify underserved public high schools in Lagos State, develop projects to help them rise and compete with their private school contemporaries, and implement the projects. Most notable of such projects were identifying those without basic information technology (IT)

infrastructure, providing them with computers, and training the students on how to use them for effectiveness.

After spending a year in that department, I decided it was time for me to use the combination of my expertise (IT) and passion in social development to create change, so I quit my job.

At that time, I wasn't still sure what exact project to embark on, but I was sure I wanted to create change. I couldn't bank on so much support, so I decided to apply to undertake the compulsory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in order to leverage on the opportunities that come with it. I decided to approach the schools I worked with while I was still at the engineering firm because I figured there were still other things I could help them with.

After getting the approval from the NYSC and the eight schools involved, I co-founded Project 4Club with my old-time friend Taiwo Ajetunmobi. The project helps students develop their leadership capabilities, human capacity, and entrepreneurship skills, therefore preparing them as change agents, future leaders, and potential business owners.

There were 320 students who participated in the project, and it was considered a success. At first I thought there was really nothing special about training people on anything. I felt that allowing them go about it hands-on, either during the training or immediately after the training, was key to measuring the impact (so I thought). After the training, we allowed the forty selected students from each of the eight schools to choose a problem in their school they would like to be solved immediately.

The idea was to allow them to take responsibility and do it themselves. We asked them to identify the problem and write a short proposal that would indicate why they wanted that problem solved and, if there were no barriers, how they would solve the problem.

In a nutshell, we funded eight superb projects implemented by the students themselves in their respective schools. Projects ranged from construction of a temporary museum, to acquisition of thirty dustbins and thirty dusters for thirty classrooms, renovation of the school library and donation of books, beautification of school compound and planting of flowers, to mention just a few.

The project was partly possible because of the support of those who believed in the cause. I remember vividly that when I drew up the budget for about a week, my co-partner and I were brainstorming on whom to approach for support.

We had our first major break when my partner mailed his boss, Ndidi Nwuneli, the founder of LEAP Africa (a non-profit organization), asking for support in the form of a leadership development curriculum. In two days, it was done! She connected us with her team (Mosun Layode, the then executive director, and Mr Oje Ovagba), who didn't hesitate in helping me improve my implementation strategy and providing us with the training and curriculum we requested for.

We worked with over thirty youth corps members in implementing the project. We also had issues on how to continually get them excited about working with us throughout the duration of the project. My close friend Dr Abiodun Awosusi had a solution. He introduced me to his mentor who was the managing director of GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) Nigeria at the time.

He was impressed with my passion and approved that several cartons of their products Lucozade Boost and Ribena given to us as support.

These items were given to the volunteer youth corps members as monthly stipends as a way to encourage them, and it worked as a motivation. At the end of my NYSC scheme, I got exposed to so many organizations. I made new allies and friends. My project was on social media: YouTube, Facebook, etc. This got me visibility.

The success of the project earned me a scholarship to undertake a short course on social entrepreneurship and innovation at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (Kanthari) in India.

My Indian experience was mind-blowing. During my first few days in India, I was asked by colleagues and mentors to talk about my project, which was at that time my bragging right as I kept amplifying every time the numbers of beneficiaries of the project. From my background, I've been made to believe numbers count. To my surprise, my mentors called me one day and asked me why we were so conscious about numbers rather than long-term impact in Africa. I was startled! What are your five-year plans for the beneficiaries of your project? If you call the 320 students you have

worked with in five years' time and ask them if they were really making an impact, what will their response be?

That was one of the many lessons I took away. I learnt that one has to show long-term impact on a controllable number of beneficiaries (primary and secondary) and then scale up, knowing fully that the implementation strategy has been mastered, rather than talking about the growing number of beneficiaries and the short-term impact. This lesson totally changed my perception of social impact.

While in India, I decided to take the opportunity to use my expertise (IT) as a tool for social change. With the experience I gathered, I came up with an idea (working with Taiwo Ajetunmobi) called Passion Incubator to help aspiring entrepreneurs launch Internet-driven businesses. I was pretty excited about learning impact sustainability early in my career, which I had carefully inculcated in the strategies of Passion Incubator.

Conclusion

One of the things I learnt in my last three years as a social development agent is that many people delve into social entrepreneurship because they see it as an alternative to unemployment. This is a very wrong mindset and should be condemned.

As an aspiring social change agent, I strongly believe that you either need to identify a problem that you are part of and want to put a stop to or solve a problem you are passionate about. These will definitely keep you going in the face of inevitable challenges.

Thank you for your time.

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 9

Every morning in Africa, a Gazelle wakes up. It runs faster than the fastest lion or it would be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up, it knows it must out run the slowest Gazelle or it would starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or Gazelle. When the sun comes up you had better be running.

African proverb

DABERECHI OKEDURUM IS A SOCIAL entrepreneur. Having been tutored by the best hands, he shares his ongoing lessons and notes from his mentors and journey. How did I meet Dabs? Okay, I remember vividly how we met. We were attending a finishing school course by Poise Nigeria, and after that, I got to know how special a breed he was.

Let's meet Dabs.

I was born the last of five children. Now this plays an important part in my story firstly most of my actions and decisions were taken based on the lessons I learnt from the experiences of my older siblings. Growing up, entrepreneurship was never a familiar name in my family. The only person who had a business was my dad's younger brother, who was into trading of building materials. I remember vividly his business name: Ray and Bros. My dad was a very committed banker, and my mum, a civil servant with the federal government. So naturally, my aspirations were tied to being a prominent professional like an engineer, banker, doctor, or lawyer. There was no room for non-professional aspirations, not even entrepreneurship.

The plan was to go to school, get good grades, make sure to pass the senior secondary exams, get my dream course, and get a good job after school.

Building a career is an adventure. The more you go, the more you discover. All you need to do is to be sensitive to the lessons that every phase presents. It is in observing these lessons that you begin a journey of self-discovery.

I had my first taste of entrepreneurship in JSS3 as an assistant at our school's tuck shop to sell snacks during breaks. This opportunity served as a background for me later in the future to understand the meaning of how value is translated into cash by meeting needs.

Having struggled with gaining admission to study law and failed three times, it was obvious that law was not for me. Interestingly, while I had struggled with studying law, on the sideline, I was already enrolled as a linguistics and communication pre-degree student; this was because I had made a decision not to remain at home after secondary school. Dream deferred, you might say, given that I never made it to studying law, which was my only dream course while in secondary school. However, today, I am very grateful to God that I never succeeded in studying law.

Owing to our kind of society that is professional-course driven, I was tempted to look down and regret my being in the department of linguistics and communication studies. As a matter of fact, my class comprised over 360 students whose dream of doing a 'bigger course' (like we call it) was crumbled by JAMB examination and Post-UTME. So being there was not a matter of choice, but it was our only alternative to be in school.

Let me plead with you here. Please be sensitive to know when a no you get out of life is serving as a direction. We often think we must get a yes all the time, but oftentimes, the no is actually a redirection. Though I am not at the very peak of fulfilling my dreams right now, the successes I have experienced to this point in my career can be traced to my lessons. I am convinced that it would not have been this phenomenal if I succeeded in being a law student.

The linguistics and communications department was the lemon life threw at me, and oh, I sucked the lemonade out of it.

Firstly, I settled in my mind to get the best out of the course and that I was never going to regret for one day. I constantly marched every course outline with the recent trend, thanks to Google. Most lecturers were in the habit of using outdated course outline to teach; this is one reason we have so many first-class graduates that are irrelevant in the marketplace.

Given the life lessons being learnt then from my older siblings, I adopted the approach of a job creator. I always reiterated to myself that I was going to graduate as a job creator and not a job seeker. This decision led me to specific activities as an undergraduate which you will find in this chapter.

And finally, you might find this different, but it helped me. I decided from day one that an intimate relationship with the opposite sex (i.e. boyfriend–girlfriend commitment) was going to be a no for me. I settled for a platonic relationship all through my stay in school. Personally, I felt it was the best vaccine to remain focused if I must succeed in the four years of *mahadum* (an Igbo word for *university*, which literally means ‘know it all’).

The university is the best platform for any young man or woman; it is a good representation of the marketplace you are to encounter after school. Therefore, to a large extent, your approach towards this environment will likely be the same when you get to the marketplace.

Opportunities present itself day in, day out, seeking your attention in the university. How do you respond to these opportunities? Among several opportunities I encountered, top of them were gaining a scholarship in my second year from Western Union to attend Fate Foundation’s aspiring entrepreneurs’ programme, a four-month entrepreneurial training for aspiring and existing small business owners. There was also the opportunity to join the Student in Free Enterprise (now Enactus) and, finally, to work closely with one of my senior colleagues who owned a graphic design/media outfit as a student. I was his first apprentice without pay. Remember, I made a decision to graduate as a job creator, so most of my efforts and opportunity search were based on this decision. Anything enterprise or entrepreneurship tickled my fancy.

Now you may ask how I managed academics and these other opportunities. My study method was this—if I had one hour to read, nothing else mattered within the one hour. I also took advantage of my study group, which helped a great deal because with a study group you

save yourself the time of covering an entire book or course outline alone. Everyone took responsibility for a particular chapter or topic and prepared to transfer such knowledge to the group. Personally, I learn fast when it comes from a fellow student who is sound. As God would have it, members of our study group all graduated with second-class upper division, just a few had 2:2.

Most students often are deceived that one must spend long hours reading. The truth is, when you assess those long hours, only a few hours were used in actually reading; the rest were spent on talking, sleeping, making calls, and thinking about your intimate relationship. These hours may be used productively, but instead, students use reading as an excuse not to engage in activities that serve as platforms to practise their course and even gain people skills, which are very relevant to the marketplace.

While I was in Fate Foundation, I was the youngest in the class amid men and women old enough to be my parents and older siblings, but the experience was massive and very much handy to this day. As was expected from every member of the class, I came in with a business idea, and a business plan was essential for graduation. This was my very first formal business training. We were taught by business owners whose businesses were renowned and thriving.

Immediately after my Fate Foundation experience, I received a call from my team leader at SIFE that I had just been appointed the leader of the team. This call came during my graduation from Fate Foundation in Lagos, so I was to proceed for the team leaders' training which was held in Lagos.

It was at this point I met a whole new set of young minds like me who were going beyond the classroom to make a tremendous impact in their lives and communities. This was a huge encouragement and driving force to fire on. At this point, I was convinced that I was not in any way taking a wrong move. These young men and women were just the right mix I needed at that point. Always look forward to being in the midst of people who challenge you. At any point you start thinking you have arrived, find a new challenge. Make new connections that will make your best achievement look so ordinary.

Getting back to the team, I was faced with the task of reviving a dead team, a team that had been split into factions with nothing standing. I had

not been in the team for up to a year, so I was very neutral. I had no idea of the internal politics or whatever that split the team. All I desired to do was get the team back on track to be like the ideal SIFE team I had seen on SIFE brochures and website.

In delivering my task as the team leader of SIFE, I worked with a few of my colleagues, and with my experience at Fate Foundation, we developed a team structure that was to see our team run as a corporate organization. This entailed carrying out fresh campaigns in school, conducting recruitment that applicants who did not meet the criteria will clearly be disqualified irrespective of whether there was going to be a low turnout. We also invested a lot in training members. (Thanks to the network of friends I made at Fate Foundation. They were willing to transfer their skills and knowledge for less.) We consciously recruited students in their early years in school so as to sustain the team, and finally, before resumption, during the holiday, every team member was to carry out a research and draft a short proposal on a project to be implemented during the new semester. Now, it all sounded easy, well-calculated, and well-articulated, but it really was not as easy as it sounded. We had difficulties with funds. We sacrificed our pocket money. There was the challenge of acceptance from the school. No big company wanted to sponsor because we did not have a track record. Internally, we had bullies from the older members. These experiences stretched me to my limits, but it proved to me that nothing was too hard when passion appears to be stronger. With our little funds, we succeeded in pulling a few projects. As a matter of fact, we went for partnership with smaller businesses; some were owned by students.

These projects directly made an impact on over 900 persons in the Niger Delta. Most outstanding was our grasscutter farm development in four Niger Delta communities; it was an idea I initiated, having read my mum's handbook on agriculture business opportunities. Seeing this initiative grow from an idea to something being implemented meant a lot to me and the team. I look forward to visiting some of those farms when I get to Rivers State.

An entire book will not be enough to write about the lessons on leadership from my SIFE experiences; I learnt so much about leadership, needs assessment, social entrepreneurship, communication, and so many things as both a member and team leader of SIFE. To crown it all, our track

record—though we did not make it to the top during SIFE competitions—earned me and my colleague a scholarship from the United States government for the Study of the United States Institute for Student Leaders on Social Entrepreneurship hosted by the University of Connecticut in Storrs. Out of the twenty students that were selected from West Africa, two were from my team; this opened another chapter of my life.

In summer of 2010, I joined twenty other young change agents from West Africa (eight were from Nigeria) for the Study of the United States Institute for Student Leaders on Social Entrepreneurship. It was there that I actually knew what social entrepreneurship was about. Interestingly, the lectures were somewhat a reflection of the work we did in SIFE. Outside the lectures, we had the opportunity of working with established non-profit organizations and had hands-on learning sessions from renowned schools and organizations like Yale University, IBM, General Electric, and Ashoka.

Social entrepreneurship is about meeting the needs that are sustaining. Now do not be deceived by the big term *social entrepreneurship*. You see, I spent some years practising social entrepreneurship and never knew it was called social entrepreneurship. The day I heard about social entrepreneurship and its definition, all I said was ‘Oh, this is what I have been doing all these years’. Same applies to project management and any other skill or profession you can think of. You already have what it takes—training, practice, and Skills. In some situations, you will have to be the one to name your skill and pioneer the industry.

The scholarship entailed that we must go back home to implement a project with social impact, working closely with Ashoka Youth Venture and our host school back in the United States. So we were made to develop our individual projects. I launched Kapture Centre for Academics, Leadership, and Business as an initiative that prepared secondary school graduates for higher education and the place of work. I decided to initiate this project positively engage the minds of thousands of young Nigerians who stayed at home, unable to gain admission into tertiary institutions. I felt a lot of students got into tertiary institutions unprepared, not having a clear understanding of what lay ahead of them and how they could take advantage of the opportunities their institutions presented, which would actually make way for them in the marketplace after graduation.

We had our first session in 2011, with ten secondary school graduates. The impact was not as good as we anticipated, but the mind shift it created for them was exciting for me. One of the students went on to engage his group in church, using our curriculum. Another student, who was aspiring to be an architect, did not only take his aspiration seriously, but he also was more committed to growing his father's bookshop business using the skills he had gathered from our session.

At this point, I had graduated from the university and got a job as a reporter prior to my National Youth Service. During my short time as a reporter, I led thirteen field reporters in gathering reports for a performance review journal for the Rivers State government in Nigeria.

I was posted to Lagos for my National Youth Service, where I continued with my non-profit practice, working as a programme assistant with a non-governmental organization that was solely into women empowerment. I always looked forward to making a tangible impact wherever I worked; I carried along an entrepreneurial mindset to the workplace.

After my service year, I was selected to be part of a research team at Lagos Business School, working in partnership with Rockefeller Foundation to develop a policy on impact investing in Nigeria. I was also managing a project for a healthcare group in providing a highly subsidized health insurance for selected urban poor and rural communities in Nigeria.

I have learned so much from these post-university experiences, but one dream that is yet to take its flight is my dream of being a job creator. I have created jobs based on my school activities, but this was on the SIFE platform. I am currently working towards doing the same on my own platform. I have a vision of working with fresh graduates in setting up 1,000 enterprises by 2029.

To be frank with you, some days, I have been tempted to go for the fast money that comes through shortcuts. Sometimes when hard moments come knocking, it appears to me as though I do not have a purpose, but then, this is where my circle of friends and the quality of information I feed myself with matter. This is because one needs courage to stand strong when towing the path of creating value. It is never going to be a smooth ride. Suspect that ride if it is smooth. The challenges are the codes for the next round of success.

If you succeed in picking only one lesson from this chapter and practise it, then I have succeeded in fulfilling this very assignment. Even if you do not, I am willing to hear from you.

It will be a total failure for me not to introduce my master strategist who has orchestrated all this. All the steps I was led to take are beginning to make sense now because he outlined it all; God has been my guide. I am actually nothing without him; I only desire to carry out his assignment here on earth.

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 10

A wise man never knows all, only fools know everything.
African proverb

THE STORY OF EUSTACE IS that of a man whose dream about life woke him up at night to beat on his craft. As time would have it, he met his dream career path only to finally get a different definition of reality when he came face to face with this dream that kept him up at night. Dunn has always been a comrade and a fearless journalist whose love for his fatherland and passion for the truth irrespective of whose ox is gored have always put him at loggerheads with his peers. However, there is one constant thing about him you can hardly ignore. Eustace knows his strength lies in his pen, and he doesn't stop using it effectively. He shares something interesting about his journalistic journey which really would serve as heads-up to anyone who wishes to follow that path, especially when it comes to the financial gains.

Let's meet him.

I am Eustace Obiajulu Dunn. I am an ardent prolific pen warrior. I love to call myself a brutal writer, owing to the fact that when I write, I attack. I show no mercy to destroyers of our society. I represent the industry that is positioned at the fourth estate of the realm and seen as the watchdog of the society. I do not call myself a journalist but a writer even though I've had few years of reporting and editing experiences in the media. I write today not because I just want to write about something but because I have something to write about. Many mighty men have put pen to paper to write. They have written; of course, I have read from them as well. Now, I feel

it's my turn to make feasible my unquenchable desire to write about things most intriguing of me.

Let's talk about how I joined this industry first. I recall a moment when I was invited for a youth conference somewhere in Delta State, Nigeria, not far from my mother's hometown. I refused. I was persuaded by a friend's elder brother to attend. The conference was meant for youths of Ndokwa communities who were undergraduate students from various universities across Nigeria. I was just a boy that just finished secondary school and awaiting my Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB) results. I was scared to attend since I was not a university student yet. I didn't want to be embarrassed, anyway. I eventually followed two guys. We were to represent Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Anambra State, which was later to be my alma mater. My attending that conference with the belief that I would be admitted in that university probably paved the miraculous way for my admission.

Something called my attention when the guest speaker Azubuike Ishiekwene (a former executive director of *The Punch* newspaper in Nigeria) was talking. He said exactly these words: 'I studied mass communication. By virtue of my being a journalist, I can enter any office in Nigeria.' I had applied for mass communication in the university. There I was with a person who had studied what I aspired for, someone who was at the helm of affairs in his media organization, a member of Nigerian Guild of Editors, Nigeria Union of Journalist, World Editors' Forum, and many others. That was the height of professionalism to me. I previously had no mentor or a role model, and here was one in front of me talking to us, standing elegantly on a podium. I was motivated to attain such feats.

Although I have always had the belief that opportunities do not come once but many times and that it is just about the ability to utilize at least one of them that matters, I vowed not to miss that opportunity to get Ishiekwene's friendship as small as I was. That was determination at work. I got his contact. Instantly. When I got admitted to study mass communication, I put a call across to him. And that was the only time we ever spoke. His words were 'Congratulations on your admission. Since you are now in the field of mass communication, locate someone that has a life that you want. Follow them by reading their works (write-ups) to see how

they write. Keep reading books and make a right choice of a role model.' I did not deviate from that admonition.

There was a day I stumbled on a quote that said, 'You may have written all you wrote but you cannot be called a writer until you are published.' I had written the little I wrote but wanted to be a published one as the quote warned. I eventually became a student reporter for a national daily newspaper (*The Nation* newspaper) in Nigeria. That little achievement gave me joy. This actually triggered the reason behind my being elected as the editor-in-chief of *UNIZIK Comet* newspaper and magazine during my university days. I resolved not to fall off the words, divulging a path that Ishiekwene had spoken to me, journalism.

My intention during my university days was basically to leave a legacy. I did the little I could, having been spurred to action by the facilitators of a youth leadership programme where I was certified as a leader under the auspices of LEAP Africa (an acronym for Leadership Effectiveness, Accountability, and Professionalism). This was the first place I got to understand the concepts of *change agent* and *change project* as constructs. This projected me to become a students' representative, a legislator in the university's students' union government (SUG).

There I stood for *rudiments of administration and rule of law*. There I made friends with those who agreed and did not agree with me. I still needed to set things right. I later became the congress speaker of mass communication department, where I did the little I could, showing the light for others to follow.

I explored all these with just one thing on my mind: the media, especially the new media. I hoped to find pleasure in rolling my fingers on computers and various gadgets as technology advanced. I also hoped to enjoy being in the classroom, discussing with younger mass communication fellows. With all these wishes, there was the fear of the unknown that gripped me as the quest for journalism as a profession began. The main journalistic voyage started when the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) posted me to Lagos State, Nigeria, for compulsory national service. This was where I felt the bigger part of journalism when I found myself in a newspaper house as a law reporter. This was the place where I saw that reporters (not all) got

motivated not by their lean remunerations but by freebies. I began to doubt the ethical standards preached to us in the classroom.

At a point, I was fortunate to have a chat with top journalists who were editors in various Nigerian media houses. I always feared that the profession would not be as lucrative as the likes of medicine and engineering, for instance. My concern has not only been about the graduates of mass communication but majorly about those who clamour and wish to study mass communication. Today, as many young people graduate from secondary schools the world over, they see the other side of life as it is rapidly unfolding with full force in confusion and chaos—primarily, due to the choices and considerations for careers, jobs, universities, and the future ahead. Some enjoy writing and would love to become journalists, but they are apprehensive, surviving through it in Nigeria. Prospective jobs in the field of journalism are very slim, and competition is high. Media houses go for experienced ones and pay little attention to the fresh upcoming ones who are supposed to come and learn on the job and later become professionals to sustain the profession.

However, people have made the big steps and have been witnesses to the progression of journalism in Nigeria and the world at large. Seeing these big guys, the names they have made over the years, and comparing with the status quo, those leaving secondary school (with the desire to study mass communication) are indecisive. Graduates are confused. They want to do what they love, but in this economy, choices like this are a big risk.

‘Even though I still love the profession, I wouldn’t encourage anybody to practise it. The reason is that a career in journalism in Nigeria is very tough and largely unrewarding. You can hardly save to invest due to non-payment of salaries and a competitive environment that will reduce one’s self-esteem.’ These were the words of a Nigerian editor.

Today, many media houses are finding it difficult to survive. Things are changing and advancing to high technologies globally. Some media houses cannot progress with trends, but they strive to help put food on people’s tables. The point is that the economy, no matter how bad it is, is not helping in any way, no doubt. But generally, it is possible to make a success out of the job in spite of the challenges involved. But this depends on your definition of success. It could be in monetary terms, a matter of

integrity or ability to just make ends meet. The choice is yours, but with integrity, devotion, commitment, hard work, and resourcefulness, you can be a successful journalist. There are those who still nurse such ambition. I would say, 'Follow your dream. Money could follow.' C. K. Webb once said that a writer doesn't dream of riches and fame, though those things are nice. A true writer longs to leave behind a piece of himself, something that withstands the test of time and is passed down for generations. This is the beauty of journalism. That is where I want to be. That is where you should be. But studying it and depending on it to fend for yourself today in Nigeria is suicidal.

Casting back my thoughts and cross-checking all those dreams, remembering all I went through during my National Youth Service as a court reporter for a newspaper house in Lagos, I don't see myself there any more. Dreams have changed. Most times it is not the dream you once had that comes to be. They say that the fears of failure are the only things that hinder dreams from being achieved. Fears are real. Where I find myself today is reality. Not because I feared but because this is what is. Reality has begun for me. As Mahatma Gandhi puts it, the future depends on what you do today. I tried many paths. I used to sneak out of the house to a cybercafé. I was curious about the computer. This interest was built from the typewriting skills my seminarian mentor once taught me. I bought pamphlets of how to use the computer. After reading, I dashed into any café to practise what I had read. It went on and on. I studied mass communication. Today, I am not a field reporter (but I have reporting experiences), I am not a broadcaster, I am not a public relations practitioner (even though I am chartered)—I am in the information and communication technology unit of one of the biggest media brands in Nigeria. It is the world of computers. Computers, which I once learned on my own while in secondary school, are now where I dwell. It is the world of *new media*. For me, that is the irony that twisted my desire.

I had dreamed to be a vibrant field journalist. I realize today that what a young lad may have hypothesized to become in the future may be negated, owing to certain circumstantial impediments. What you are now and where you are now confirm or negate your dreams of yesterday. When an old man keeps talking about the future, one keeps wondering, has he not spent his

life? The implication of his thoughts is that the future never ends. This is why we still dream dreams until we fizzle out and die. I love what I do today. Operation of computers and all sorts of gadgets is my hobby today.

My utmost fulfilment will be that day when I will get into the classroom to tell students that studying mass communication is not only to be a reporter or a broadcaster—they can as well be in the media industry, operating from another angle. The future is always uncertain, but the most important thing is that we must always draw closer to it. Pan with it the way it pans and still having control over what we do. The definition of today was actually studied yesterday. The little things I did yesterday (not even what I studied as a degree) brought me here today. Whatever you do today matters to your destination. Money may not come immediately.

Looking back upon my past, when I think about the tears I cried when hopes were dashed and the jokes I once laughed at when the going became so good, I conclude that there is one thing I will never forget: the fact that I was born. I was born not majorly because my parents wanted a son but because I was assigned on a mission on earth—a mission to let someone somewhere know the true meaning of existence. This existence is not initially by living in a wealth of gold or diamond. It is an existence that basically lets someone beside me know, in the words of Socrates, that an unexamined life is not worth living. An examined life is a life of an idol. It is a life that is seen by younger ones and taken as an exemplary life. It is a life that gives me absolute joy when I see some persons walk along the same line of life. All that matters to me is living life to the fullest, no matter what.

As the first heir of my mother and father, I grew up to learn that the life of a first child is always very challenging to be modelled. Most times, you are left to be on your own and learn on your own. That was the very moment when I realized that in life, there are times when things will not go the way you hoped. In most cases, people around you would not even help. Nothing you do gladdens any of them. You are always dissuaded from venturing when your stars seem to be glinting more than others. You are treated spitefully. You are pelted with derogatory statements. The fact is that we all have our pasts, however negative or positive. Therefore, because my past paved the way for my present, it does not mean that I will have to die

in my past. However, the future is destined. My primary focus is the present moment and how I am going to shape my own future. Mistakes from my parents' part do not mean I cannot channel my own path away from same mistakes. I do not believe in letting the predicaments affect my present moment because I have to always device a means to handle adversities.

One might say that it is easier said than done. The truth is that if you believe and do it, you will achieve it. Practice makes perfect, they say. This is how I put myself into practice over twenty years ago without actually knowing my life had begun. What my future looks like was vague when I was 10 years old. I was a lad who depended on his guardians to make his decisions on what to eat, when to eat it, where to go to, when to go there, when to sleep, and when to wake up. How would I have been able to screen my future to decipher what it looked like? I knew nothing more than go to school and make sure I competed with everyone in class to come out one of the best five at the end of each term, even though my first term in primary 1, I failed woefully with a position of 48 out of 49. With adequate drilling, I improved!

I remember days, nay! I remember moments, as days are too many to be remembered. I was never among the children who wished to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, and all of that. I cannot remember ever thinking of becoming anything. My childhood was never a rosy one. It was owing to the fact that my growing up was not under the tutelage of my biological parents. I did not enjoy what I heard them call paternal or maternal love. I lost it at age 3. I was later to live briefly with them to learn and know them from time to time. It was tedious to learn them when I became 15. It was not possible. With the presence of all these, as regards my parents being apart, I could not concentrate. The thoughts of how my parents were distanced from me at that tender age were a great pain in my throat. I was told it was for my betterment. I did nothing but agree. At age 5, friends' parents became my parents, unbeknown to them, as I secretly listened whenever my little friends were being scolded. I learned from them.

As days vanished into weeks, weeks into months, and months into years, life to me started taking shape. Getting to know more about the

tenets of life manifested when I had the acquaintance of a Roman Catholic seminarian Francis Adjakpara (now a Catholic priest). He had visited my community for a pastoral work. I was in junior secondary school (JSS3) then. I was opportune to live with them in the mission for a while. He made me know that every minute of my life ought to be tamed and timed. He was the first person I heard the saying 'If you fail to plan, you have definitely planned to fail'. I was taught how to account for every second spent on anything—for instance, reading, eating, practising music, napping. I would always defend how I spent my day, what I achieved on each day, what I failed to achieve, and why I did not achieve what I failed to achieve. All these kept me abreast of my time. Eating, drinking, sleeping, and waking up in the same room with Francis the seminarian every day of my life in the mission made me realize one thing: discovering what you are to become may not necessarily come from your parents or any family relation or peer group. Those moments made me confirm that a journey cannot be started unless there is a command saying, 'Let's go.' It could be anyone who shares the same ideals with you; it could also be just your mind. When that time begins, you do not need any soothsayer to tell you that your adventure has begun.

The later-to-be priest always taught me how to use a typewriting machine and other subjects. The first topic he taught me in mathematics was inequalities. I was asked to get the meaning of that word. To me, I was learning mathematics and not English; thus, I did not need any dictionary. It took hours to come to me that 'inequalities' was not a mathematics topic. I was looking at it from both the connotative and denotative perspectives. My vantage point was from the aspect of life and not the signs of 'less than' or 'greater than'. I simply said to him that the word means that 'we are not equal'. That actually struck a chord. To me, inequality is life out of balance. It isn't a concept but a reality that faced me the moment he asked me to get the meaning of that word. It is a natural law, just like the law of karma or the natural law of gravitation. The word revealed to me that there are the rich and poor, powerful and powerless, reputable and non-reputable, kings and slaves, etc. The question I had then was why there was the nature of imbalance. I never found that answer. I still hope that someday a concrete answer will prevail.

The scenario made me become focused, especially when the seminarian asked me to write what was to be my first poem. I obliged the gesture because I'd always appreciated poetry from primary school. No matter how badly written that piece was, at least, I was able to scribble down what was to be my first poem captioned 'Far from Home', now updated into my anthology. It passed the information about my being away from my own home, where I had my family, and then dwelling in the church with my life (as I thought) confined to absolute solitude and religiously biblical faith. Afterwards, he told me to write a joke. This I also did, but I cannot remember if that written joke ever made anyone laugh. The bottom line is that he was setting a path for me. It was a path that was never disclosed to me. It was like a puzzle given to me to solve all on my own. Those moments never divulged to me that I was being prepared for the journey ahead of me: a journey into the world of writers and the media, to be precise. This was where the journey began.

Suffice it to say that I was born without a silver spoon, but I'm determined to make mine. I did not wait for a coconut to fall; I have climbed to pluck mine. We are still moving forward with the hope that one day the sky will be our stepping stone. Thank you.

#breakingthecoconut

Chapter 11

If you educate a man, you educate an individual.
But if you educate a woman you educate a whole nation.
African proverb

THERE ARE SO MANY WAYS to start a movement, but the only way not to is by doing nothing.

Below is a story of one of Nigeria's finest on-air personalities and relationship coaches. She is called Maxy. She uses two things to make her change: her words and the space on the airwaves. As of the time of writing, her air time on radio could be considered the dead shift (1 a.m. to 5 a.m.), and only Amaka and her likes would make you trade your sleep for insights on relationships. She shares her journey to her dream career and her lessons from her journey as a relationship coach.

I had listened to Amaka inspire her listeners with her thought pattern and advice via the airwaves for long, and I was impressed by her beautiful mind. Actually, when we met, I wasn't planning to write this piece, but I had listened to her, and it was hard not to get her perspective on relationships, which happened to be her niche. So when I met with a relationship counsellor and when she agreed to lend her voice on this project, I was glad someone somewhere would be inspired by her insights.

Let's meet Maxy.

I had always seen a radio job as being the most awesome job in the world. Doing two things I loved most in the world: affecting people's lives positively through my words and also listening to good music at the same time. That had always been my dream, as well as owning my own radio station someday.

I'd always loved working on the radio when I was in the university 96.9 CoolFM was the only station I listened to. There was something about the presenters and the station's sound that resonated with my soul. Working there seemed like it was only going to be possible in my dreams. I told everyone who cared to listen that I would someday love to work there, never thinking it was ever going to become a reality. It took seven years for that dream to actually come true.

Mind you, I had no experience prior to this time. However, one thing I always did was to brush up on my speaking, reading, and vocabulary, just the way I heard my radio idols do it. I was studying geology at that time at the Federal University of Technology–Owerri in Nigeria. I knew early on that I really didn't enjoy geology. Instead, I enjoyed counselling people and listening to them. So I kept at it.

Upon graduation, I worked in an oil-and-gas company as well as an international property consultancy firm, but I never gave up my hopes or dreams of working with Cool FM.

I remember each time anyone asked me, 'If not real estate, what would you rather be doing?' my answer always was 'Working with Cool FM' without any thought.

One of my favourite quotes of all time is 'It is better to be prepared for an opportunity and not have one than to have an opportunity and not be prepared' (Whitney M. Young Jr).

As much as the opportunity to work in Cool FM hadn't presented itself yet (at that time), I kept learning, growing, and building myself. Of course, I had to learn a lot on the job, though I had the basics, which helped me scale through the audition and interview stages to bag the job.

Working in a radio house has been one of the most challenging things I've ever done in my life. I can't remember how many times I've cried on-air, both out of frustration and gratitude. I have come from a conservative background with a very closed-off mind about a lot of things, and radio exposed my weaknesses and shallow-mindedness. I had to bring myself to the point of learning from the listeners as much as I wanted them to learn from me.

I had to read a lot, research, study, and increase my knowledge of music and life in general because most people see radio personalities as their primary source of information and counsel.

It's easy to judge people especially when you can't see their faces and all you need to do is press a button in the studio and you hear voices. The studio was like my own spotlight for making a difference, and even though it was a paid job, I knew I was privileged to be trusted with people's fears, worries, and sometimes joys. Hence, I never took it for granted. I learnt not to judge callers based on their voices. Truly, there were times I misunderstood people, but experience and time made me mature on the job. Some nights on-air, it looked like I had a script I was answering questions from, but there were no scripts. I believe God put me at my spot and gave me words, and I am so grateful to be an instrument used to touch lives. I also learnt not to take things too personally because not everyone was going to agree with my opinions or even enjoy listening to me all the time. It was challenging also because every time you turn on the microphone, you don't know if anyone is listening. So you tend to speak with the hopes that at least one person was awake and listening, considering I was on the graveyard shift (1–5 a.m.).

It was also challenging in the sense that you are depended upon to make other people feel good and give succour and solutions to their many problems, irrespective of whether you have your own issues as well. You had to put your problems aside and attend to all others.

I realized that a lot of people are ignorant about a lot of things and aren't willing to do the work needed to educate themselves in these areas. I also realized that people have a hard time understanding how relationships worked and knowing what to do in that regard. Too many people get into relationships for all the wrong reasons, and because of low self-esteem and a void on the inside, they generally think being in a romantic relationship is the cure. Of course, they end up making a muck of things, giving themselves the notion that love does not exist or that every one of the opposite sex cannot be trusted. I have done this job of listening to people and helping with solutions to relationships, and here are lessons I have learnt on my journey that I wish to share with you.

Lessons I've learned during this journey:

- Only the dogged and determined get ahead in life.
- There has to be something special that sets you apart from everyone with your skill set.

- Don't stop dreaming and believing. Keep your hopes alive. Go out and grab life by the throat and get what you want out of it.
- Learn to recognize opportunities. They usually show up in the most unlikely of manners. In the meantime, keep preparing yourself in readiness for when it shows up.
- Make your life what you want it to be. No one else can do that for you.
- Every experience in life prepares you for the next stage. Embrace them, learn the lessons, and move on.
- Don't let anyone talk you out of your dreams. Believe in yourself. Build relationships that will take you to where you want to be in life.
- Keep building yourself. Read, read, and read! Hunger for knowledge and satisfy that hunger. You can never rise above the limitations in your thoughts.
- No two people are running the same race. Focus on your lane and push forward. We will all get to the finish line, albeit at different times.
- If you don't know and love yourself, you'll always get it wrong in relationships. Know yourself and love yourself first. That way, you know what you deserve.
- If you put yourself in a position for people to take advantage of, they will gladly do it without restraint, especially in relationships.
- Love has been gravely abused, and different people have given it their own meanings. Sex doesn't equate love. Money doesn't either. Not even words. The true definition of love can best be seen in actions. So if a person always hurts you intentionally, takes advantage of you, physically/verbally/emotionally assaults you, that's not love.
- Dating someone for a long time and even having a child for someone doesn't mean you *must* marry them.
- Love yourself enough to let go of any relationship that isn't doing any good for you. You don't have the power to change anyone, so quit trying. Know what is important to you and focus on that. You will *never* get 100 per cent perfection from anyone, so accept what you can and learn to overlook the excesses.

- Don't stay in any relationship that doesn't build you or encourage you to be yourself. If you find yourself constantly putting yourself down just to make the other person happy, you need to leave.
- Build your self-esteem. Learn to make yourself happy. Stop depending on other people to make you happy or to be the constant and only source of your joy.
- Don't get into a relationship to cure boredom or sexual tension. Likewise, never get married just to please family or society.
- While single, *live!* I can't overemphasize this. Travel, study, learn new skills/hobbies, etc. Don't put your life on hold just because you are waiting for Mr or Mrs Right.
- Learn to cultivate friendship before dating. Don't just look at people as potential boyfriend/girlfriend or husband/wife, and if they don't look like it, look away.
- If someone is bent on leaving the relationship, please let them go. Don't beg anybody to stay on because of pity or threaten that you will kill yourself if they break up with you. That's manipulation, and how can you even find happiness in such a one-sided relationship?
- Learn the art of communication—words and unspoken words (aka body language). Learn to listen, and ask questions if you don't understand. Don't just listen with the intent of replying or from a defensive position.
- Make an effort to build your relationship. Nothing good comes cheap or easy.
- Take a break from time to time. Have your space. Individuality helps keep you sane in the relationship.
- Involve your partner in your interests and engage in theirs as well.
- Too many people give up on relationships too easily without even trying to make things work. I've gotten loads of messages from people saying, 'My boyfriend/girlfriend hasn't called me in one week. Should I break up with him/her?' My first thought is that if the person hasn't called you, then why can't you call or visit to know if everything is okay? What if they were involved in an accident or their phone got stolen? Yet you want to break up because they didn't call you?

- Support each other. Build each other. Selfishness will get you nowhere.
- Some people are open to being helped. Some are not. Don't make it your lifelong decision to help someone who clearly refuses to be helped. In the long run, you will burn out. Some people are best helped and loved from a distance.
- Quit talking about your relationship with everybody. Not everyone you talk to is in your corner. Most people will give advice based on sentiments and their own wrapped views about relationships. Always take a sieve approach to life. Don't be a sponge and soak up everything you see or hear. Sieve through it all and take the ones you need and discard the rest.
- The true meaning of love is found in sacrifice and commitment. Love is not flimsy. It doesn't run away at the slightest imbalance. Love nurtures, builds, encourages, believes, comforts, etc.
- There's no perfect relationship. Your relationship is largely dependent on what you do while in it. Quit comparing your relationship to others; they may look like the picture-perfect couple on the outside, but you have no idea what demons they deal with on the inside.
- Never throw away the voice of your intuition. It's usually always right.
- Pick your battles in relationships. Let the petty stuff slide. You mustn't bicker about every little thing. Learn to forgive and move on.
- Don't be afraid to let go of a bad relationship for fear of being alone or not meeting someone new. There are plenty of great people out there, but you will never get the chance to meet them because you are focused on the wrong one.
- There's a difference between having standards and being unrealistic in your expectations. There is also the place of exercising flexibility in your standards. Don't be too rigid about certain unimportant criteria that you miss out on a great man or woman.
- Discuss important things at the beginning of a relationship. Quit focusing on the mundane issues. If the person doesn't seem to be going in the same direction as you, leave. Don't stay in the hopes that the person will change his or her mind one day. For

instance, someone who doesn't want children before marriage will not automatically want children after marriage.

- Give yourself time to heal and get over past hurts before going into a new relationship. Learn what went wrong on both sides so as not to repeat the said mistakes.

Thanks for taking out time to read. Wish you the best in your journey. I hope you learn from the lessons and my story helps you. Lastly, don't forget, whatever you're going through, you're not alone.

THANKS
♡

#breakingthecoconut

Epilogue

WHEN YOU GET OLDER AND look back on your life, you'll ask yourself a whole bunch of questions. Did I make a difference? Did I contribute something? Did my being here matter? Did I do something that left an imprint? The trouble is that many people get towards the end of their lives and don't like their answers. And by then, it's almost too late.

Being a change agent has got me to meet these eleven change-makers who are constantly getting started! The beauty of meeting them at different times remains in the fact that I never planned to write about them in the future. However, as we started to evolve and our lives took different paths, I figured out I had met some special breeds of humans who had possibly started a new life at the breaking of their coconut; they had special skills of leadership that were taken for granted. I believe it would be best to share their lessons and relate their experiences from their points of view.

The goal of this leadership book series is to share the lessons from change-makers who mostly worked behind the scenes. They might not make your normal headlines, but as influencers, they made a difference in their own corners of the world, and though their experiences differ, they all made the world better. Putting faces to the experiences was part of the goal to make the message hit home and make you, our reader, get the message that these are not imaginary beings but men and women who lived among us here in Africa. While sharing the thought of this book, I got a perspective from a mentor who painted one scenario that made me smile, and it goes thus: If you bring a group of students with their teacher to a new environment which is not theirs and the whole environment is littered with junks, watch the students closely and figure out what they do without the teacher's instruction. The excellent-minded students will do

their best to clean up the place, not because they were the ones who littered the environment but because they have excellent minds of service and they know for a fact that—since they are in that environment—it’s their duty to keep it clean, while the average minded students would wait for instructions.

Have you ever experienced a traffic jam while driving only to find a non-uniformed individual show up in the scene to control traffic and suddenly everyone begins to listen to his instructions? Most times, he doesn’t even drive a car. He could just be a passer-by who is not comfortable with the way the traffic is, and that’s the first rule of leadership—he must be a good servant.

For instance, when reading Maple’s story, so many things might be going through your mind. How did he pick up himself? What does his thought pattern look like? Should you ever meet him and spend some time with him in the future? You would simply get infected by his contagious personality of striving to add value. Maybe your story is worse than his. *Relax* and learn something from him. Among the lessons I learnt from him is never to let bitterness eat you up. You’ve only been promised one life, and whatever you finally do with your life is your responsibility. At some time, people would pity us for the excuses of our parents’ shortcomings, but in the end, everyone expects us to have moved on, irrespective of how bad the hurt was. That’s what I term ‘reality dot com’, so never get stuck in yesterday; rather, break away and learn from the snake that always sheds its skin for new layers. Keep reinventing.

Sara’s story was quite practical and revealing for us on so many levels. The year she shared her story to us was the same year she received several awards. Her efforts were encouraged not just by her community and people from Ghana but also people from Nigeria and the global audience. They kept watching her; hence, it became clear we weren’t the only ones watching. I believe that should serve as a note to you, should you be in your own corner of the world, making your impact. Someone is watching. Volunteering was her key message. I remember vividly while I was in college, among other responsibilities, I led the alumni body of LEAP Africa in south-eastern Nigeria. Prior to that, I was the project manager of the alumni body and led the volunteers who pioneered the first leadership programme, which was termed known as Leadership Ethics and Civics Programme. We trained

young people in legions. In the end, we carried out over seventy projects in the community with the help of volunteers who gave their priceless time and recourses.

When it was time to embark on my mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) service year, I carried out community projects by default and got a national state honours award from the NYSC. I remembered the feeling then when I shared my award with a friend and he said something in words like this: ‘Charles, I believe this award was just to reward you of all these years of volunteering in all these your youth things.’ I was taken aback because it came from someone who I didn’t know was taking stock of my activities, and the best thing that award did for me in that period was that it spurred many of my younger friends, colleagues, and buddies to keep beating their craft. It was not like they wanted an award; it was just a sign that their time and effort did count and they are co-creators. In a world where we think people who pay much time to service to humanity don’t count, Sara’s impact as a nurse who volunteers her time in Ghana shows that we have got much to achieve, irrespective of our professional callings.

Marion’s story was hard to ignore, and this is simply because we throw shades on our educational system in Africa and we are far behind in the league of educated nations. Without getting into the argument on how faulty our educational system is, we are also aware that we can hardly find a 22-year-old who chooses to become a university lecturer who loves her job genuinely and is making an impact in this part of the world. No doubt Marion’s experience challenges us in different fronts.

However, the inspiration it diffuses cannot be expressed; hence, we also see the role of our family—especially parents’ beating us to shape—as she talks about her parents. So tomorrow Marion’s complete story isn’t that she read, passed her exams, and was a lecturer at 22! Far from it. She went through some sort of apprenticeship under different platforms, and they made her better. In Africa, it is believed it takes a whole village to raise a child, so it’s everyone’s responsibility to play their roles effectively in helping to push young people around our circle of influence. One feature Marion has is that she is willing to offer herself to learning and be tutored today. She is being looked up to because of her experiences, and the story goes on.

Chinonso Ogbogu's story was typical of one whose beginning and evolving present don't match because of some decisions he took. If you are at that stage in your own life where you are probably way behind your assumed colleagues, his lengthy life synopsis would stir your thoughts. We all were born differently, but our choices still make all the difference, and most importantly, we are work in progress.

Ambrose Adole's story sheds light into the life of a young leader who never accepts what life throws at him. Even the sudden demise of his biological parents couldn't stop his very defiant spirit. He went on to serve as catalyst for change in his community. His leadership skills, leading young people in his circle of influence, got him a recognition from the blue-chip company Accenture Nigeria as the best team leader in Nigeria in 2011. As a team leader, his leadership skills were very evident in his community projects in Idah Kogi State, North Central Nigeria. Ambrose is a servant-leader, so the next time you see a leader and wish to be like them, consider their scars.

Daberechi speaks of *social entrepreneurship*, one of the new buzzwords of the twenty-first century. Beneath the words, he illuminates the light as he goes through the path of social entrepreneurship early on in life only to figure out the path isn't completely as new as he has envisaged. Social entrepreneurship has existed for a long time, but we might be on a career path which isn't as trendy as your folks perceived. Maybe you would have to do more research and ask people more questions.

Dunn Eustace's story takes a different page but sheds more light on the observations he had on the career of his dreams when a certain reality hit him. I am of the opinion that as young people we fly on the wings of our imaginations and ideals; however, it is also cool to be realistic. Being realistic in this light means asking the right people the right questions and knowing deep in our hearts what our breaking point is. When we do that, the vicissitudes we face become like a task which we must be done.

Kenechukwu's story wasn't completely about him even though it looked like a chronicle of his experiences. Prior to writing this book, I didn't completely know who the team leader of the SIFE team that represented Nigeria in the SIFE World Cup where Nigeria came out on top. I knew the FUTU team that went to the United States to represent Nigeria. It was an

image boost to the Nigerian and African youth globally, and I couldn't help but felicitated with them.

There were two team leaders close to this team, Kene Uba and Alison Opara. When I spoke with the team leader Alison I finally figured out what made his team succeed in faraway United States, he told me the success of that team was hinged on the success of his predecessor Kenechukwu, who was the team leader a year before he became responsible with the leadership. Alison said they built their success on the foundation of his predecessor's. So I finally asked Kenechukwu to tell me about the SIFE FUTO story from the outset, and his perspective made me appreciate him more. He ended up telling me it was true they laid the foundation (they included his two team executives, Precious and Okechukwu), but the shine was that of the leadership of Alison Opara and his team who represented Nigeria in the global competition, and if they did not seize the opportunity to build on it, nothing would have made any difference.

I took particular interest in this story because in the real world, we barely find people who refuse to take people's shine. A team carries out a task and wins, but because the team leader looks more charismatic or outspoken, he tries to outshine the quiet ones in their midst by taking their credit, maybe because they don't look like they wanted to be credited for it. That is wrong! Among the traits of a true leader is one who isn't scared to give credit when it is due. He accepts their shortcomings. Surprisingly, while reviewing the FUTO team with the country director of Enactus Nigeria, Mr Mike Ajayi, he categorically concurred with the view of a true leader not taking credit, especially when you have different people bringing their skill set on the team. Interestingly, Mr Ajayi monitored the FUTO team's progress at that time, and he was among the representatives of Enactus Nigeria who volunteered to take the team to the United States of America to represent Nigeria. It hit home for me that giving credit where it is necessary is one parameter we mustn't overlook when measuring outstanding leadership.

When as leaders we refuse to take away people's shine, then we would forever remain priceless! The fact that these two leaders refused to take full ownership of the victory of the SIFE FUTO team for me was one of my best parts on this piece. I admire Kenechukwu because in the end he gave credit to Alison's team. How often do we claim people's success and refuse to

give credit to them in the workplace in the real world! A great leader doesn't need to dim your shine just to be the centre of the universe; rather, a great leader celebrates you because he knows deep inside he is enough.

Funbi's story was one I could resonate with on so many levels. With the churning of young start-ups, Funbi carved a niche for making young start-up dreams come true. One basic feature of an exceptional leader is having problem-solving skills, which he does. His enterprise, which was an evolution from a selfless service during his mandatory NYSC year, turned out helping small start-ups solve their problems. The crux of Funbi's story to me remains his beginning. There is so much we can do for ourselves and community when we choose to be visible and co-create. Remember, he attracted global audience through a YouTube video.

Amaka's insights on relationship are a must-read as they shed more light on must-knows for young people. What we should know about her insights is that they were from the combination of instinct and observed patterns from her clients. I had unconsciously listened to her demystify very serious relationship issues casually and was quite pleased when she decided to share her lessons in here. If you are young and have fed yourself with garbage when it comes to relationship 'advice', then be ready to be detoxified by Maxy's realistic relationship tips.

A school of thought believe millenials have an entitlement mentality which in my view is an opinion. However, my observation is that millennials would rather work in an empowering place, where they feel they have a mission.

Some of us believe we have paid our dues, but let's be honest with ourselves, is that really true? Have we really paid the real worth of our time to all our teachers who have shared their intellect and time, irrespective of the cost. It was Albert Einstein, the renowned scientist, who once—at a gathering where he was honoured—decided to give thanks to all the scientists who had lived before him, and one thing was clear with that speech... “the power of gratitude is priceles”. His response was simple: if the scientists before him never made progress in the field, there would be little progress for him to make in his field.

News flash: you can't put a price tag on a life well-moulded, irrespective of how much we believe our society hasn't given us the best we deserve. It

is a sign of moral bankruptcy to keep asking without giving. Can we really pay our parents for all the times and sacrifice they spent on us? How much would you pay your mum for birthing you? How about your dad for the odd jobs he did to bring food on the table even when it was difficult? Let's assume our parents left us as orphans or abandoned. Don't we consider it more a privilege to be living till this day? Even if we all had privileged parents, is it not also right that we invest in the lives of other people who crave to have a kind of life we enjoyed?

The idea of giving back should never be expected to be a law; it should be well-written in the heart and must be part of the contents of our character. What makes a young person stand out in his own world still boils down to most of the factors being discussed among the featured change-makers. They were all servant-leaders at some time. They also had scars as a result of life's experiences. Over the years, I've come to believe that some qualities make us unique—one of such is our character. The next game changer must have a bit of all mentioned values in their arsenals as they embark on their paths.

Wish you the best on your journey as you go break your coconut.

Namaste.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a cursive-like flow.

#breakingthecoconut

Biographies



MAPLE DAPPA IS AN ASTUTE brands strategist and publisher. He has a flair for writing, strategic thinking, and youth enterprise development. His passion for positive change spurred him to initiate the Southern Brands Project, which aims at encouraging creative and enterprising young people while inspiring others to get productively engaged.

Maple is the principal consultant of Mapemond Resources, and he is the author of the thought-provoking book *Seeds of Greatness*.

His most recent project is Fayples Nigeria, an e-commerce brand designed to meet the peculiar clothing needs of fashion-conscious Nigerians.

Charles Umeh

Maple has devoted much of his time in mentoring young Nigerians and supporting them in starting their various initiatives and ventures. He has an unflinching belief in Nigeria and its immense potentials. He is a Christian and married to Iretiogo Dappa. You can reach him on mapledappa@gmail.com.



Sara Nana Yeboah is a lady entrepreneur with a very active life. She was born in Germany and hails from Ghana. Sara is a nurse who is passionate about preventive healthcare for girls and youth empowerment. Known around Africa as Africa's Florence Nightingale, she believes in World Health Organization's (WHO) definition of *health* as not the absence of disease or infirmity but a complete state of mental, physical, and social well-being of an individual. Sara wears different hats as a nurse, television host, caregiver, and wife among others. Her organization, Sangy Nursing Services, renders health education and health screening, including outreaches for kids, youth, and the aged across Ghana. Her contact: www.facebook.com/sarananayeboah.



Ngozi Marion Emmanuel is considered one of the youngest university lecturers in Africa in her time. At age 22, she started her teaching journey. Among other things, she is a young writer, radio broadcaster, media entrepreneur, and teacher. She is best known as the youngest lecturer in Nigeria (according to some press reports). She grew up in the Okota area of Lagos State and currently teaches at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka, Nigeria. At spare times, she does more of pep talk for young minds who look up to her. You can reach her by email: Marionngozi@yahoo.co.uk.



Chinonso Steve Ogbogu hails from Enugu State, Nigeria. ‘I was born in the village, and I grew up in the ghetto. I started out first by almost making a big mess of my life. I was an addicted gambler who almost brought shame to my entire family. I was unserious, silly, stubborn, and irresponsible, without any bearing for life. I failed my high school exams woefully because of my inability to take control of my life. Due to my failure, I lost confidence in myself, and I had my tail between my legs for a very long time. And then I got a second chance to life—a chance that placed a demand on me to do better.’

Today he is deeply into human capacity development, management consulting, and full-time writing. He has a radio programme called Success Matters that has been aired in over twelve states in Nigeria and still expanding. His website is www.successmattersng.com.



Kenechukwu Uba is a writer and teacher among other things. After graduating from the Federal University of Technology–Owerri (FUTO), he spent time in Bayelsa, where he performed his national service, as well as in Lagos. He is a keen observer of life and people’s approaches to it. His other interests include art, music, and learning. For these, he has organized reading and art workshops. As an undergraduate, he was team leader of SIFE FUTO team from 2008 to 2009 and student president of his native home Anaocha Students’ Union (FUTO chapter) from 2007 to 2008. Between 2008 and 2013, he was a volunteer with SIFE (now Enactus) Nigeria. He currently divides his time between Enugu and Lagos. His hobbies include writing, singing, and travelling. You can send him an email on haywire3p@gmail.com.



Ambrose Adole is a physics electronic graduate with a passion for environmental safety and a passionate speaker from Ipole Adoka Otukpo in Benue State, Nigeria, Ambrose is a lover of the gospel of Christ. Born on 14 December. He is a one time delegate to the Nigerian Economic summit, Member of the Internet governance forum and policy maker in the Nigerian Internet Forum.

He lives in Lagos and works as a regional manager in a fast growing international oil and engineering firm. He is also the CEO of NOBS Food venture a business sponsored by SNEPCO. You can reach him on Twitter at [@ambyboldt185](https://twitter.com/ambyboldt185)



As a model, Chinonso Arubayi won the Miss Teen Nigeria title in 2005. She studied mass communication and has been on several (print and broadcast) productions. Chinonso is a media and beauty entrepreneur and currently works as a producer at Spice Tv Africa. Chinonso is an alumnus of LEAP Africa. She is happily married to Eric Arubayi and a new mum. You can reach her on Twitter at @Nonesoo.



Olufunbi Falayi is a computer science and economics graduate of Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria. He is a co-founder of Passion Incubator, an early stage accelerator that provides innovative entrepreneurs with the most critical resources needed to launch lean start-ups, grow quickly, and institutionalize their success. He previously worked as the project lead in the CSR department of Mit-Glauben Engineering Ltd (IT section). Olufunbi has since helped launch a privately owned and managed vocational training institution Southern Business Academy in Lagos. Olufunbi is a co-founder of Project 4 (a non-profit educational organization). He is a Future Award Africa nominee in education (2013) Future Award Africa Winner In Enterprise Support (2015) and a LEAP Africa Social Innovators Programme and Award (SIPA) recipient. He is also an associate of the Nigeria Leadership Initiative (NLI) and a centre manager at IDEA. He could be reached on olufunbi.falayi@passionincubator.ng



Daberechi Okedurum is a Sidney J. Parnes Global Fellow In Creative Problem Solving. As a social entrepreneur and coach. His core is helping individuals, families, institutions, and nations to discover, use, and grow their God-given resources into an enterprise. He has over five years of experience in enterprise development and non-profit management. He earned a bachelor of arts degree in linguistics and communication studies from the University of Port Harcourt in Nigeria and certificate on social entrepreneurship from the University of Connecticut's Global Training Development Institute–Storrs in the United States. He has worked with and supported several social impact–driven organizations, some of which include the following: Lagos Business School/Rockefeller Foundation Impact Investing Policy Initiative, Idea Builders Initiative, Enactus Nigeria, and Novo Health Africa. He could be reached on Twitter at @daberechid.



Eustace Dunn is a passionate prolific writer, journalist, media researcher, social cum political commentator, poet and a chartered Public Relations Professional. He breathes and speaks journalism with the hope of making the New Media a core area of research in the field of Mass Communication. Eustace had worked as an online content administrator with TELL Communications Nigeria, publishers of TELL Magazine. Eustace currently works as a Senior Editor (Politics) with Naij.com Media Limited, a widely read Nigerian online platform. He is a proven asset to any organisation he finds himself. His contact: Eustacedunn@gmail.com.



Amaka Alusi is an award winning On air Personality who worked with one of the top radio Stations in Nigeria (CoolFm) for over 5 years. She contributed immensely in changing the face of overnight radio with her consistently high ratings for over three years. She is a graduate of Applied Geosciences and has worked in the oil and Gas industry and also as an international Property Consultant with focus on real estate in the UK, US, South Africa and UAE. She wears many hats as a Relationship Counsellor, Inspirational Speaker as well as event compere. “Maxy”, as she is fondly called, is a role model and mentor to many in her home country Nigeria. Feedback from her On air experience has shown of how she has healed broken lives and relationships and homes just by her gift of advice and listening. She shares in the dream of being part of the solution to building a better community globally. When she isn’t working, she has a keen interest in gourmet cooking, gadgets, traveling and learning new things. She can be reached via twitter @Maxyaxy or her website <http://www.maxyaxy.com>.



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