**LEARNING IS OVERRATED. TRY UNLEARNING FIRST?**

**By Charles Kofi FEKPE**

If you had to build a more modern house on a piece of land where a hut currently stands, then common sense says, you need to pull down the hut to build your new mansion. Interestingly, that is a whole lot easier in construction terms than it is mentally. Here is the tough truth:

You are NOT where you want to be because you don’t have the information necessary to get you where you want to be. And as if that isn’t enough, here is another tough truth: you need to “unlearn” what is not working for you in order to learn what will move you forward.

Growing over the years, we have picked up along the way, ideologies, concepts, philosophies, traditions, dogmas, beliefs, principles etc. But with the world changing SO FAST, it is becoming clear you cannot use old techniques to solve modern problems. Or for those who are overly spiritual – you can pour old wine in new wineskins. If you are going to succeed now and in the future, your thinking has got to change; more essentially, you need to UNLEARN the old to embrace the new and here are a few things to unlearn and learn:

**EXPERIENCE IS THE BEST TEACHER:**

I have often been told I am very blunt; well, here is another me then – Experience is the teacher of fools. Yes, in the past it was difficult accessing experience about anything unless you went through it yourself, but in today’s world there is a lot of other people’s similar experiences available in books, videos, seminars, etc. Almost everything you are about to do these days has already been done and written about by somebody (or even captured on video or some other learning tool). Why then do you have to go through it, make the same mistakes, delay your success as a result, etc.? hey! I am just asking. I am not saying some experiences are not essential; personal experiences are very important are but what I am saying is that you can enjoy your own experience by drastically reducing the errors you’ll make, the pitfalls you’ll encounter and the time you’ll waste if you choose to learn from other people’s experiences and the solutions and preventions of the likely mistakes you’ll make. You may have also heard several times that you cannot achieve certain levels in your career if you don’t have certain experiences. In the modern world, it is NOT the people who have the experience who are making it big in different fields – it’s the people who can think outside the box and be innovative. Experience is overrated.

**FINISH SCHOOL, GET A JOB AND BE SUCCESSFUL**

Most of us Africans grew up being taught the stereotype approach to being successful – Go to school, learn hard, get good grades, work for a reputable organisation and then, you’ll be successful. Truth is everything is good up to the end – in the modern world you don’t necessarily need to work for someone to be successful. In the modern world, it is very possible to get people to work for you in order to be successful. Today, entrepreneurs rule the world. People who can sit down, and think solutions to problems - they win. In fact the world is so full of opportunities right now that you only need to look in your own neighbourhood and become a winner. Why do I say that? – Well, the problems springing up in the world are more than the solutions available. As a result, anybody who can sit down, think and CREATE solutions to some of these problems is a winner. So you went to school, studied hard, stayed up late nights to get good grades – and are you going to now hand over your brains to someone else to use to make their money? I can understand that in most of our schooling systems, we have not been taught to be entrepreneurial or to be on the lookout for solutions to problems, but it’s still very easy to train yourself. The next time you receive a service or buy a product that you are very unhappy with, start asking yourself how you could have made it better – it’s called, “scratching your own itch”. Let me sound this warning though. A job is absolutely necessary for some people – people who on their own, cannot be disciplined enough to wake up at 6.00 am if they are not employed. If you can be disciplined by yourself to the same degree that you are disciplined when you had a job, chances are that you will do well being an entrepreneur.

**IN THE REAL WORLD, THIS AND THAT IS THAT AND THIS**

Listen, next time you hear people say, “in the real world this, in the real world that”, you have to be very careful not to let it get into your head. Have you ever wondered what this “real world” really is? In my own experience and indeed if you have read or heard the stories of most of the world’s successful people, you will notice that when people say “you can’t do this because it won’t work in the real world or its never done this way in the real world”, blah, blah, blah, etc. Most of the time, all they mean to say is that “I don’t understand what you are saying but I can’t let you go ahead with it because I haven’t done it myself yet”. Here is a worrying truth – if you ask most of the people who tell you an idea you have won’t work in the real world whether they have tried it before, I can assure you 90% of them will say “NO.. but”. In fact, the term “in the real world” is simply an excuse for people who simply do not understand what you are doing; and if they don’t, they have no business telling you it won’t work in the real world. Next time it happens ask them “What exactly is the real world?” You’ll be sad to know, “the real world” does exist – it is the world where otherwise brilliant ideas are KILLED. Can you imagine what Mr. Kofi Annan’s friends may have told him, when he said to them he was going to become a UN secretary General someday? Or imagine Steve Job’s telling his friends (may he rest in peace) when he was still a nobody, that he was going to build a billion dollar IT business brand called “APPLE” from a garage. Or imagine one of Africa’s own billionaires, Mike Adenuga telling his childhood friends, “I have started selling sugar to the market women so that I can become a billionaire”. The “Real World” is not a world – it is an excuse for those who can’t do what you want to do.

**“THERE’S NO TIME” IS THE SAME AS “I AM VERY LAZY”**

Many of the most successful people in the world started building their business in the evenings after their 9am-5pm jobs. Let’s face it there are only 24 hours in the day for everybody in the world. So the real issue is not that some people magically conjured 79 hours in their days and others still had 24 hours, no – the real issue is what you do in the 24 hours that everybody has. You can’t sleep 6-9 hours in a day and expect to be on the same level as everybody else. “Time” is a very liquid commodity. It must always flow and continue to flow. It never stops flowing. If you don’t spend it on something, it will still be spent on something else and that’s just how it is – it must be spent. Here is the thing, until you start something you wouldn’t know whether there is time available to spend on what you’ve started or not. Before I wrote my first book, I used to think I could never make time to write it – until I started. Then after I started, I realised I could squeeze ten minutes here, another thirty minutes there, and another forty here to get my book written; then I realized it was possible. I didn’t suddenly get 40 hours in each day – No, I made time. I created more time, from the 24 hours I always had. Because you haven’t started anything of your own, you think you still have enough time to watch that favourite TV show for 1 hour, or to talk to that friend of yours for 2 hours or to just check your messages on facebook for 30 minutes, which ends up becoming 3 hours. I talked to a friend of mine recently who had returned back to Africa from England. He said to me, “Charles, you remember that business I said I would start when I return?” “Oh yes yes yes” I responded eagerly, only to be hit back “its been almost 9 months now and I haven’t been able to make time to get it off the ground”. I paused and contemplated how best to say what I really wanted to say without offending him. The rest of the conversation went like this: “how many jobs do you have now Mike?” he answered “one” I paused and then followed up “and how many jobs did you do when you were in the UK?” it was his turn to pause but be braved an answer “two, sometimes three”. I wanted to be sure so I asked “two or three jobs in a day?” he got the drift “Yes” he replied, rather reluctantly. At this point, I didn’t have to say anything further – Time is a finite commodity, but it is the only commodity that gives us the widest range of options we choose to apply it to. So, it is not the hours in a day that make it a scarce commodity, it’s what we use it for that define its sufficiency.

**HARDWORK WILL ALWAYS PAY OFF**

Yes, hardwork will always pay you off by breaking your back. How about working smarter rather than harder to achieve the same results? The working hard is not the same as being very committed. And working smart is also not the same as producing substandard results in shorter time. Working smart is about being innovative and inventive. It is about always asking the question “can this be done in a better way? Being the last to leave the office and the first to come in doesn’t make you the best – in fact it only makes you very tired and full of unnecessary mistakes. Working hard is generally an excuse not to think out new and better ways of doing things; it’s an excuse not to embrace progressive change. Working smart is the new working hard.

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