Book review: How to succeed as an entrepreneur in Africa: a practical guide and cases

by *John Kuada and Madei Mangori*
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Published by Adonis and Abbey Limited, *How to Succeed as an Entrepreneur in Africa: A Practical Guide and Cases* by John Kuada and Madei Mangori consists of three parts – the meat is in Part 1 in its 14-chapter composition. Parts 2 and 3 provide profiles of African entrepreneurs and case study businesses, respectively.

Before delving into the details of the book, it was worth highlighting the rationale for the book. As the authors point out in their acknowledgement, "the motivation for writing this book came mainly from owners of small businesses in Botswana, Ghana, South Africa, and Zimbabwe who had spoken with us during management training sessions and workshops n the past 3 decades." It reads further with emphasis on needs assessment, "they have repeatedly drawn our attention to the lack of practical guidelines that will help new business owners improve the performance of their companies and remain confident and determined in the face of adversities."

This book is intended for those business owners who cultivate such an inner desire to grow their businesses and to use the results of their efforts to make a real difference in their own lives and those of hundreds or even thousands of people within and outside Africa. It narrates the stories of those Africans who have successfully grown their businesses and have made notable contributions to society as businesspeople. It also provides guidelines that can help them succeed and offers insights into some of the challenges that they are likely to face. Going into the details across the three parts, the chapters in Part 1 start off with "Mindset as the First Key to Business Success" (see Chapter 1) and culminate in "financial health assessment" in Chapter 14. In between these, we have a range of other pertinent pros and cons of entrepreneurial success in Africa, from "Making Profits for a Purpose" (Chapter 2) to Growing Businesses (Chapter 3); Designing a Winning Strategy (Chapter 4); Managing Efficiently and Effectively (Chapter 5); Developing and Maintaining Trust with Business Partners (Chapter 6); Managing Employees Well (Chapter 7); Choosing an Appropriate Leadership Style (Chapter 8); Communicating with Maturity (Chapter 9); Engaging in Fast Learning (Chapter 10); Generating and Sustaining Positive Human Energy (Chapter 11); Managing Time Effectively (Chapter 12) and Putting Customers at the Centre of Management Decisions (Chapter 13).

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In my review, I find the opening Chapters 1 and 3 to be instructive. Starting with Chapter 1, the mindset is well-spotted as a critical success factor. In the opening of Chapter 1, seven abilities are as follows (see pp. 16–17): **Reject rejection.** He argues that successful people do not blame themselves when they fail; **View failure as temporary.** Rejection of failure means, in effect, that when people fail, they view their failures as temporary, i.e. they do not personalise their failures or see their problems as holes they are permanently stuck in; **View each failure as an isolated incident.** Seeing each failure as a temporary (rather than permanent) condition of life also means that each setback is just a small part of the whole and an opportunity to learn what not to do; **Have realistic expectations.** High achievers are constantly aware that success takes time; **Focus on strengths.** Experience has shown that high achievers focussing on leveraging and amplifying their strengths rather feel constrained by their weaknesses; **Vary approaches.** Achievers explore alternative solutions to every challenge they face and select what appears to them to be the most appropriate under given circumstances; **Bounce back.** Successful people are resilient. They learn from their mistakes and move on.

In the second chapter of interest, i.e. Chapter 3 (see pp. 27–35), a very instructive statement is made, thus "starting a new business is usually a decision that comes with excitement. However, growing a business is another story. It is often said that being an entrepreneur is a marathon activity with lots of sprints. Entrepreneurs may need to win a lot of little races, and this will provide them and their employees with momentum . . ."

The chapter provides some tips on how to stay on the growth path right from the beginning of an entrepreneurial journey. **Be Focused**; **Be Quick at Spotting Opportunities** (To be a growth-oriented entrepreneur, one need to be able to recognise an opportunity within the business environment); **Turn Problems into Opportunities**; **Maintain Clear Intentions**, **Passion and Action** and "**Pay Attention to Growth-oriented Products and Services**." The chapter also points out that the management literature offers three guidelines for building growth-oriented entrepreneurial ventures. These are popularly described as "the 3 C's of growth" – notably **Clear** Intentions; Passionate **Commitment** and **Consistent** Action. Joining the dots of these 3Cs – the chances of making it big in business are remote if business owners do not have a clear intention (i.e. awareness, aspiration, proclivity, drive and commitment). We are also cautioned that "Intention, passion and commitment may not get entrepreneurs to their goals without action. Action is, therefore, seen as the platform on which success rests" (see p. 33). In talking about "Pay Attention to Growth-oriented Products and services," the authors revert to the Boston Consulting Group matrix where they unveil the cash cows, stars, question marks and dogs drawing insights from the strategy literature. Chapter 3 wraps with a very instructive message, "the more successful the existing lines of business are, the more money the businesses will have to invest in growth-related activities as long as the owners do not spend their profits frivolously. It is also important to remember that no line of business can grow indefinitely. Businesses must, therefore, plan and be on the lookout for high growth opportunities".

Moving on to Part 2 on the Profiles of Successful African Entrepreneurs, there are seven stories told in this part, from the stories of Mr Thatayaone Dichaba, Peter Cunningham, Collen Msasanure, Davidson Norupiri, Chenjerai Tsuro, Edna Mukurazhizha, to Wendy Luhabe (the latter two being women). Again, it is laudable to see the authors provide a in a section labelled "Reflections on the Profiles" of the successful African Entrepreneurs. The case of Peter Cunningham is worth elaborating upon. As Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Hamara Group of Companies, Peter Cunningham believes his company to be "one of the most exciting groups of companies for unlocking the agricultural potential of Africa." The vision statement of the group is to "unlock the productive potential of Africa." Hamara believes that this potential is in small-scale farmers, and so "we are a company that is centred around creating value chains in chickens, poultry, dairy, nuts and tree crops where we provide inputs and we buy back products from farmers."

Finally, the case studies of best practice or success stories in Part 3, cut across insights into four firms – Farmer Business (Pty) Ltd, Waste Management Pro (Pty) Ltd., Botho Country Lodge (BCL) (Pty) Ltd. and Production Pro (Pty) Ltd.

Again, isolating **Farmer Business (Pty) Ltd., this** is located in a suburb of Gaborone (capital of Botswana), established as a broiler farm in the mid-2000s, specialising in production and processing of dressed chickens, chicken portions and by-products. The main inspiration for the establishment of the poultry enterprise was the director who had a degree in agriculture. The farmer Business start-up of a 500-chicken unit was financed from personal funds – with a grant of US$5, 156 from the government financial assistance programme early in the business.

On its part, **Waste Management Pro (Pty) Ltd.** was established in 2010, also in Gaborone, with a vision to be the champions in the waste management industry, handling hazardous and non-hazardous waste, for both private and corporate clients. Its initial business was to collect and dispose domestic and non-hazardous waste. It later ventured into renting out portable toilets and skip hire for collection of industrial waste with plans to expand into collecting and disposing hazardous and clinical waste as well as waste recycling. Its main customers were government, the retail sector and individuals.

Overall, the books provide much-needed fodder for further exploration of pragmatic case illustrations of the pros and cons of entrepreneurial development. However, like what is obtained in most other books and scholarly pieces, there is always a set of limitations, which pose a path for further research. In the case of this book, there seems to be a bit of mismatch between the seven case profiles in Part 2 and the four case firms (businesses) in Part 3. Arguably, one would have expected to see the profiles of successful individual entrepreneurs matched with the case firms ranging from farm business to waste management.

Be that as it may, this book is full of refreshing insights and worth reading for both an academic and non-academic audience. Indeed, as acknowledged by the authors, the protagonists "have repeatedly drawn our attention to the lack of practical guidelines that will help new business owners improve the performance of their companies and remain confident and determined in the face of adversities." This book has provided a compelling set of practical guidelines for its readership. I enjoyed the insights and trust that readers will do likewise.

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