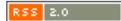


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Kenyan reads way to 'The Apprentice' fame

Written by Abbysinia Lati



Ms Joyce Mbaya

was the only woman.

18 Contestants

When the advertisement for the competition, staged in Lagos, Nigeria, first appeared in the media, her colleagues in the team urged her to apply. She first laughed the suggestion off, not taking it seriously. But as is characteristic of genuine friendship, her work colleagues lined behind her on the last day of submitting her entry form. It worked.

"I was surprised when I was called for the interview," she says, offering a peek into the hall that accommodated 18 contestants from across Africa.

Isaac Dankyi-Koranteng, 30, of Ghana emerged the apprentice. He has a Bachelor's degree in Publishing Studies and an MBA.

Ms Mbaya is an avid reader, who sometimes juggles four books on different subjects at a go. She has books on her bedside table, uses moments like lunch time to read a line or two if not socialising with friends.

"I think reading has given me a competitive edge over my peers," she says, sounding confident and hopeful.

Ms Mbaya says she can spend over three hours browsing in a bookstore and most times walks out carrying a copy. The bookstore is also the place of healing when stressed, Ms Mbaya says, adding she will buy a book depending on what she is going through emotionally.

Through reading she has stepped onto another rung of career ladder and is now a brand/project strategy consultant. She plunged into the challenge when she read Peter Cheverton's 'How Come Your Brand isn't Working Hard Enough?'

"When working on a project, I buy a book, read it for three days and this gives me more ideas as opposed to just googling," she says.

Besides reading Danielle Steel at a tender age, she says at secondary school she identified motivational, management and leadership titles.

She got inspiration from her maternal grandfather who was widely read; indeed, she is named Kathomi after the old man, meaning "the one who reads." The two were inseparable, she hastens to add.

Two weeks before his passing on, he sat her down and urged her to make good use of her talents, "the only thing people cannot take away."

"I still get teary when I think about him," she says. She changed and started taking more responsibility at home and in school. Now, because of the reality show, she has been exposed to different levels and has had a string of job offers since returning in March. She has read Stephen Coveys, Tony Buzans of this world and even John Gray's, 'Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus.'

And today, her favourite author is Dondi Scumaci, author of 'Designed for Success: The 10 Commandments for Women in the Workplace.' Ms Mbaya is involved in co-ordinating the author's two-day convention and book launch on August 8-9.

July 24, 2008: When the US Democratic candidate Barack Obama stood before the American Library Association members on June 27, 2005, he said: "[T]he moment we persuade a child, any child, to cross that threshold into a library, we've changed their lives forever, and for the better. This is an enormous force for good."

Joyce Mbaya started reading Danielle Steel in lower primary. She crossed the threshold as a child, and she recently appeared on a considerably premium reality television show series, The Apprentice Africa, changing her life for the better.

Although she was "Fired,!" in the parlance of the show in the sixth episode, Ms Mbaya attributes her success to books, reading books.

The 25-year-old and holder of a degree in Computer Science and Mathematics from the University of Central Missouri, was working for Safaricom, the local mobile phone service provider, for one year as graduate management engineer in a team of six and



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Scumaci's book has offered her tips on tackling questions and concerns of low pay, negotiation, and knowing the value of one's talent.

A woman has to be assertive, though she is viewed differently especially in a male-dominated arena. Ms Mbaya remembers her days as an intern in a bank's IT department and the head was a woman, called Mindy.

"I will never forget Mindy, she was mean at work but when I got to know her personally she was nice, had a family," she says. "It was like when she came to work she switched to be someone else. I kept thinking, "Is this what it takes to make it?"

The book shows a woman to balance; that a woman does not have to lose her femininity to be taken as an assertive individual.

Another commandment is "Managing your message from the inside out" like serving tea in an office meeting does not send the right message.

Book Club

The society and culture teaches us to be caring but we need to take control of that and project the right image at different environments.

To put more books into young Kenyan professionals, Ms Mbaya is working to start a book club and reviving her Twenty Something Club (2s), an association of young professionals. She had 100 members before she left for the show and invites people to join on her website, www.joycembaya.com.

"Reading culture depends on where it starts," she says. Her university had an excellent selection and she would go there all the time. She had mastered the library's index that the librarians offered her a job.

She gets compliments on her appearance and personality at the show, but she attributes all this to books.

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