



Life

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She plans to leave her man for me...

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Group Life Editor

Thoughts for the day

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If You Were Tom Freston ...?

Tom Freston, 63, served Viacom that owns the popular MTV in America, with over 1,500 employees for 19 years as chief executive officer before he was removed from office. The experience left him with shock, embarrassment and anger before he was able to get over it.

Having been fired under a controversial circumstance by his former boss, several other doors opened as many people and organizations sought his service. One of such open doors came from American's television top host Oprah Winfrey.

According to Oprah, she used a softer persuasive strategy to get him play a leading role in creating her new media project called OWN - The Oprah Winfrey Network in US, plus several other offerings, to engage him.

Freston was described by Fortune as "a talent magnet, who had built MTV and Nickelodeon into two of the most widely distributed cable networks on earth."

Dear reader, nothing can take the place of a good character or a good name. He left Viacom not only with the goodwill and confidence people had in him, but also with a whopping sum of \$60 million in severance settlement, which he invested and it tremendously improved his life.

After Viacom, he maintained no desire to work for any organization until when he signed on as a consultant to Oprah Winfrey Network, a new cable network about the Oprah ethics of living a meaningful life.

"When I got fired," Freston tells Fortune, "I had a feeling of loss. But I quickly got my balance back..."

How about setbacks? He advises, "Not to worry. The skill you acquire can always be effectively redeployed. You will look back on setbacks and be grateful for the catalyst that came not a moment too soon."

If you read that advise again, you will discover that the key word there is skill. According to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe "Identify your highest skill and devote your time to performing it." Remember, unused talents give you no advantage over someone who has no talents at all.

Now that you know...

African Proverbs

A child who knows how to wash his hands, dines with elders.

Our educational system needs total overhaul, says Otu

Let's get to meet you and what you have been into so far?

I am Uwem Robert Otu, from Akwa Ibom State. I had a call for leadership when I was young. I remember that my dad was a politician and in these early days around 1979 when they go for campaigns, I could sing all the political party's songs. When I got to primary and secondary school, I was a prefect, and when I got to the University of Uyo, I was the first Speaker of Students' Union Government. I was in National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) too. Thereafter, I decided to pursue a career in banking but didn't work. I left for my master's degree in Environmental Biochemistry and got back and started an environmental outfit. So, I had this initiative to run a workshop where I met one professor who came from Sweden and changed my entire perspective.

In 2002, we launched our organisation. I was living in Denmark then it was then called African Youth Movement on Environment. Nobody was willing to run it. All the African countries were reluctant to do so. So, I took up the initiative. They selected me and got me all the powers I needed for six years concurrently. Therefore, from March 2002, I have been involved in this youth initiative and right now, I'm trying to disengage because I am no more a youth. But I am trying to nurture them. Since then, I have done volunteerism and I have no other life and it has been interesting. Generally, it is good to serve humanity.

Therefore, what is your assessment of the WISE summit?

What we see here is amazing. They are using their resources to develop their people through learning. I had a panel with two white professors and I kept asking them why spend this huge amount of resources just for a conference? But they told me 1922, this country (Qatar) was stroke by poverty and when they got out of it they promise themselves never to experience such poverty again. They used to sell pearls then, the Japanese came up with artificial pearls and crashed the market. So 80 percent of the people left to other countries to become migrant workers. So when the oil was discovered in the early 50s they told themselves never would they live in a society that is not knowledge-based. So what you are seeing is knowledge-based initiative. They are using their learning to develop themselves so it is awesome, it is amazing to see incredible numbers of people, experts, and professionals from all fields come together to discuss how we can change society through education.

During the plenary sessions, access to education, innovation, and resources were major issues, how do you relate these to Nigeria situation?

I think we are on the right path. The decay we are seeing now is something that has started way back and I see government trying to put things in place but the magic will not come in a day. But the challenge is we need to put emphasis on science education. How many

Uwem Robert Otu is the President of African Youth Movement, a non-governmental organisation, who was also invited as the only Nigerian to deliver a paper at the recently concluded third edition of World Innovation Summit for Education (WISE) in Doha, Qatar, by Qatar Foundation. Senior Correspondent, Goddie Ofese, who was at the summit in Doha, engaged the environmental specialist on issues affecting Nigeria's NGOs, education and environment. Excerpts.



Otu

of our youths read sciences. It has dropped, only 30 percent of students are interested in sciences; the bulk of them want to be lawyers, bankers, and philosophers. When you take a look at the core sciences and looking at the last WAEC also, 80 percent of the students failed in the sciences. It is a challenge.

Government is on the right track with these 6 new geo-political based universities of science and I think the struggle for a better education cannot be left into the hands of professionals alone. It is a collective responsibility. We need to join hands. The values we had when we were young have been eroded. Kids are more interested in using science or computers tools for entertainment rather than studies. If you buy your kids computers, do they use it to do arithmetic or sciences? They rather use it to play games. It is a moral responsibility for everybody. We need to reawaken the consciousness of our kids to start learning. It is a must. Whether there are schools or not, the kids that want to achieve something will do it. The president went to school without shoes even in the midst of professors and wealthy kids. But today he stood out because he is determined to make a difference. We owe ourselves a collective responsibility to entrench learning from our homes.

We are here because of a foundation, but in Nigeria, our NGOs are far from the people they suppose to project. Why are the Nigeria NGOs not impacting life in the rural areas?

One of the challenges Non-

Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have in working with rural community is trust. There seems to be a disparity between community representatives, NGOs and local authority. For instance if you go to a community to implement a project, they feel it is about money, you want to approach community leaders, local authorities, and government to give you permission, they think we are critical, that is one of the challenges. We are fighting to create an enabling environment to allow NGOs to work and lot of NGOs are doing marvelously work in rural community in Nigeria but the problem is that most of them are not being heard. We have worked with over 3000 young people in rural communities teaching them on disasters, but nobody has heard us. We have a challenge communicating our message except there are some people that are interested in listening to you. I believe NGOs are trying but they are not getting their message across. We need to create real time awareness on disasters now so that in the event of disasters, how do people react? So that is why we said to ourselves we must educate the kids, we must educate everybody we can educate in the rural communities on what to do to avoid disaster. It is a challenge to us to sustain this awareness especially among young people. We need to educate them at home, church, mosque and everywhere and I think it is a collective responsibility we all have to make our

country a better place to live.

How have you been funding your organisation since it is non-governmental outfit?

We are not funded by anyone, most of the times we do these things from our pockets. We fund our projects from our pockets and that means that it is from the dues we pay and that is one of the biggest challenges we face running an NGO in this country. Also, we have challenge engaging the government, they are not willing to listen most times, the Land Ministry does not want to listen to you. I have written several letters to Ministry of Education on this project. I think engagement with policymakers is a challenge. Funding is a challenge as well as willingness on the path of policymakers to listen. Also most of our funds come from overseas because we have networks across the world and these networks also come to our aid in executing and implementing some key projects just like the one we did in Akwa Ibom, which has been replicated in Benue and Niger States.

At this conference emphasis on education is on quality not quantity. However, back home, we have government establishing new universities while the old ones are ill equipped. As an expert, does Nigeria education system need a reform or complete transformation?

It needs a total transformation. The system has failed. We

need a complete and total overhaul. We need to retrain our teachers. For instance in the sciences and I am particular about the sciences because that is the basis of our development. Infact I support what the president is doing. I don't want to know whether we have 100 universities just create new institutions, create a new mechanism and make a dynamic system that reawakens science education. The challenge we have here is do we have the capacity to deliver the right teaching and that is where we need the reform. Do we have the infrastructure to deliver appropriate teaching we need the reform? Now, do we have the right academic environment, and financial environment to deliver the right teaching because sometimes you may have these schools but the fees are far too up for the masses? Check the trend the best schools in our country today are the private schools because they have taken measures to restructure their schools to fit learning environment but their fees hit the ceiling, poor students can't attend.

So, I kind of keying into the president's view. Why can't we create schools and raise the bar if it is expensive, and you've these schools free for all but for you to be able to attend a school with less school fees you must show terminable achievement in the qualifying exams. I think we need a total overhaul of our educational system; it is not just reform and reform in what sense. Teachers are going on strike every month extending the duration of graduation for students because they are not being properly paid. So, if you take a reform to maybe in teachers' enrolment what about the academic environment do students have the facilities to learn? Are the teachers even capable of engaging them? If you've done sciences you need to be updated, it is an ever-changing field. So we need transformation and not reform in the educational system. I am not saying we need a new system maybe 3-3-6 or 4-3-3-6 but I am saying the system as it is needs total transformation.

What is the level of corporate support to Nigeria NGOs?

What is the responsibility of these companies on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)? Most NGOs may be fraudulent. It's possible. But there is something called CSR for all the oil companies and multinationals? Are they doing it? Did you see the report on Shell and Ogoni? They alleged that Shell paid money to hoodlums to attack Saro Wiwa. Shell was sponsoring most of the problems in the Ogoni community. The money they lost to PR is more than what they lose to NGOs. So how will Shell tell you that NGOs are good? If they want to get credible NGOs, they know because the United Nations now have a database on the NGOs they are working with. At least not everybody is good but you must have a level of credibility. If these multinationals want to do a good work, why can't they go to? They have not done enough; they need to do more.