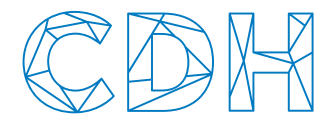
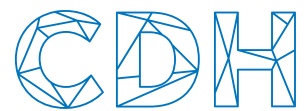




DREAM
BIG FOR
HER



DREAM
BIG FOR
HER



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CDH - Author

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INTRODUCTION

Dream Big for Her is a blueprint, a manifesto, a love letter from one woman to another. It is the wisdom passed down in boardrooms and living rooms, across kitchen tables and over shared meals, on morning runs and evening walks. It is a call to action, an invitation to step beyond hesitation and into possibility.

What we have created here is powerful, deep, and profoundly moving. A collection of thought-provoking, poetic, and intelligent narratives that speak to the essence of what it means to dream big for her. Each piece stands on its own, yet together, they form a masterful tapestry of wisdom, resilience, foresight, and empowerment. We have blended personal storytelling, poetic reflection, and cultural depth to create something

that feels alive, universal, and timeless. This is the kind of writing that moves people. That makes women pause, reflect, and see themselves in the words. That plants seeds of action in the minds of those who read it.

To every woman who picks up this book—this is for you. May these words meet you where you are, but not leave you there. May they call you higher. May they remind you that you are not alone. And may they give you permission to dream bigger, to move boldly, and to act without hesitation.

Because this is how we accelerate action.

FOREWORD

THE TEAM

This project is the brainchild of CDH Kenya (Kieti Law LLP), created in celebration of International Women's Day 2025 under the theme *Accelerate Action for Women's Equality*. This is more than just a collection of stories and reflections. It is a movement in literary form, a testament to the power of women's voices when they come together with purpose, and to the men who stand alongside them amplifying the call for action, equality, and lasting change.

Every page in this book holds wisdom, resilience, and a shared dream for a future where women do not just aspire, but achieve without limits. In these pages, strength is not just in triumph, but in the courage to be seen fully, to model vulnerability as a pathway to true empowerment. This book is a gift, not just to the contributors, but to every woman who will see herself reflected in the pieces. It is true that when we speak, when we write, when we dare to dream big for her, we accelerate the change we wish to see.

As part of our commitment to pushing this conversation beyond words and into real change, copies of this book will be distributed at the Kenya School of Law as part of our Corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative, ensuring to place this book in the hands of the next generation of women that will shape industries, lead institutions, and redefine what is possible.



Njeri Wagacha

Clarice Wambua



Lena Onyango

Lydia Owuor



Martha Mbugua

Stella Situma



THE INNER CRITIC



“

The loudest voices
that hold us back are
often the ones in our
own heads. **You must
confront its source
and silence the
doubt.**



PAT NYOKABI MBUGUA

Pat Mbugua is the Head, Legal, Client Coverage, Corporate and Investment Banking, East Africa at Standard Chartered Bank Kenya Limited. With over 20 years' post-qualification experience, including previous roles at East African Development Bank, Bank of Africa Kenya Limited and Walker Kontos Advocates, Pat has been recognised as a strategic business enabler and enterprise leader in the financial services industry. She represented Standard Chartered (SC) globally in the Institute of International Finance Future Leaders Class of 2021.

Pat has received several accolades including: Employee of the Year 2007 at Walker Kontos; GC Powerlist Africa 2015 and GC Powerlist East Africa 2024, with her team at SC recognised in GC Powerlist Africa Teams 2018, by Legal 500; Distinguished In-House Counsel Service Award 2023 by East Africa Law Society; Mentorship Excellence Award at African Corporate and Government

Counsel (ACGC) Forum's Community Choice Awards 2023; In-house Practitioner of the Year as well as 1st Runner Up Lawyer of the Year 2022 and Top 50 Women Lawyers 2024 by Law Society of Kenya's (LSK) Nairobi Legal Awards Trust. Pat is passionate about community impact, inclusion initiatives and mentorship. She was an SC representative in the Advisory Committee of the Financial Resilience Economic Empowerment (FREE) Fund managed by Women Win, to support sustainable economic ventures for adolescent girls and young women and is SC's Global Diversity and Inclusion Council Secretary for 2024-2025. Pat serves in the LSK In-house Counsel Committee and is spearheading the inaugural in-house counsel mentorship program. She sits on the Advisory Board of ACGC.

Pat holds a Master of Laws degree in Banking and Finance, and Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate in Corporate and Commercial Law and Intellectual Property Law respectively from the University of London. She undertook her undergraduate studies at the University of Nairobi and is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya. Outside her professional pursuits, Pat sings in the Twakutukuza Choir to raise support for cancer patients and is a certified mental health first aider with Mental Health First Aid England.

The Frenemy Within

My precocious inner child is on a path to healing from a most unhealthy relationship with failure, both real and perceived.

It is December 1992 and the results for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) are out. My parents are super-elated! This high achiever is utterly deflated and inconsolable. Why, you ask? My sisters are equally baffled. I expected to do 'better'. During the 1996 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE), my target to attain a straight 'A' proved elusive. I am crushed, again. I switch my undergraduate degree choices to pursue Law over Medicine. A feeling of settling for second best set in, and I was filled with trepidation over what the future held for this introverted lawyer-to-be.

In 1997, while in college studying 'computers' awaiting university admission. They say third time's a charm. In my case, the IT paper I had to re-sit with the international London-based examining body just felt like a confirmation that I was simply not good enough. My mother had a front row seat to my silent struggle with self-perfectionism, but without the benefit of helpful concepts like 'growth mindset' and modern-day tools and resources we are now privileged to access. It was way past time for an intervention. As her 19-year-old daughter broke down in defeat, mother spoke these timeless words: *"Nyokabi,*

failure keeps you humble". That simple phrase has stuck with me. Recognising that it really is not all about me in the end, was life-changing—that my utmost is for God's highest, the true source of my strength, fulfilment and purpose. The moments of doubt still creep in, but with increased self-awareness, I am reframing my response to disappointments. Disappointments such as mirage dream jobs, being on the receiving end of scathing stakeholder feedback, costly mistakes and painful setbacks faced over the course of my career—and seeing it all working out for good.

In my 'arsenal' is the skillset to manage that loud inner critic. She has her place in keeping egos in check as my mother alluded but can be self-destructive if left to roam wild and rent-free in my head—my very own Trojan horse.

I recognise the tremendous value of taking useful lessons from each experience, good or bad. Role modelling vulnerability, authenticity and resilience as both leader, and mother to two precious high achiever children.

I recently shared all my transcripts and certificates in a spur of the moment burst of inspiration (and I dare say desperation in equal measure!!) with my kids ahead of nerve-wracking milestone exams for one of them. They both had to wrap their minds around how their award-winning mother could have such varied "A-B-C-D" grades—my musical daughter comically sang that out loud—as I took in their wide-eyed surprise. That was one of the best decisions I have ever made. They got to see their "Superhero" mother with her cape off and her heart and scars completely bared, leading to newfound mutual respect, relatability and a core memory we all cherish. A simple unplanned gesture turned into an unexpected affirmation of their unique personalities and capabili-

ties. A deep appreciation of their academic and personal hurdles and that those "lows" do not define their worth. The lesson that I am keen to continuously reinforce is that if we extend ourselves some much-needed grace, "failures" build fortitude and constitute an integral part of success.

Against that glimpse into the Pat many may not know about, I leave you with these life-lessons to encourage and spur you forward this International Women's Day, and EVERY DAY:

"Accept genuine compliments and embrace intelligent failures. Be self-compassionate. Take a moment to soak in and celebrate each and every milestone, big or small! Advocate for yourself. Show value and make yourself memorable. Gain the reputation of being change agents and out of the box thinkers and problem solvers, whatever your job description—that will certainly get you noticed. Growth and opportunities come from stepping out of your comfort zone.

Build your social capital. If you are an introvert like me, pursue 1:1 authentic interaction—that is your superpower. Surround yourself with people who will stretch, affirm and challenge you constructively. Ignore the "noise".

Lead with heart, integrity and purpose. Pay it forward by lifting others."



RITA MWANGI

Rita is a seasoned professional with over 25 years of expertise in Legal, Risk, Compliance, and Corporate Governance. She has played a pivotal role in transforming organizations at the Board level, offering strategic insights across diverse sectors, including telecommunications, manufacturing, automation, financial services, real estate, and hospitality. Rita is highly regarded for steering complex corporate restructurings, strategic planning, and guiding Boards

on legal and regulatory matters. Her expertise also includes conducting risk assessments and developing compliance management strategies.

Passionate about establishing effective governance systems, Rita fosters high-performing organizational cultures that enhance the bottom line. She is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya and a member of several professional bodies, including the Law Society of Kenya, East Africa Law Society and the Middle East & Africa Compliance Association.

Currently serving as the Chief Legal and People Officer at Simba Corporation, a pan-African corporation, Rita drives transformative initiatives and promotes a people-centric approach in the corporate landscape. Her leadership, expertise, and commitment to excellence have earned her respect and recognition in the field of corporate governance.

Blind Sided - The Leadership Lesson I Never Saw Coming

"Ms. Rita, I need to talk to you. Just a heads up...you will not be happy with me."

Those were the words from my then Head of Legal and Human Resources sometime in 2023. I had no idea that the conversation that was to follow would mark the beginning of one of the most challenging seasons in my leadership journey.

At the time, I was sure I had 'arrived' as a leader. I was in my safe space where I could get things done with my eyes closed, literally! I had built a strong, capable team—one that knew me inside and out, quirks and all. They understood that performance was my middle name and that excellence was non-negotiable. Behind my back, and many times to my face they would talk about my "tone of the day". My team knew my expectations—we deliver as a Team—always, without fail! We were like a well-oiled machine, working seamlessly. I even had my succession plan down pat! One never knows what opportunities lie just around the next corner...right?

I knew I had it figured out; that my leadership was the force behind our success; that I was ready to elevate, to move on to the next big thing, whatever that might be.

"I'm leaving, Ms Rita."

"You mean for the day...? To attend to an errand?"

"No. I've been offered a new role."

Just like that, with this one conversation, the ground beneath me shifted.

Over the next few weeks, my entire team was to resign one after the other. They had found new opportunities, opportunities that meant new challenges, new responsibilities... growth.

In a matter of weeks, I found myself in a space I was sure I had long outgrown. I was back to square one... with no team. The team that I was so passionate about, that I had invested so much in, the one I had envisioned and counted on to carry the organisation for the next five to ten years no longer was. How did this happen? I kept asking myself. How did I get here?

The Doubt and the Struggle

The self-doubt was crippling. *Was I really the leader I had always believed myself to be? Had I failed them? How did I not see it coming? Was the investment in developing others really worth it?*

The days that followed were dark. I wrestled with feelings of inadequacy and shame. I felt humiliated, abandoned, and—if I am being honest—angry. Yes, my ego was terrible bruised. I had poured my energy, my expertise, my heart into this team. Yet, they had each made choices to move on regardless of how it would impact me.

I simply could not shake the thought: Was I a fraud? Had I been posturing as a leader all these years, presenting myself as something I was not? Was I fit to lead myself, others... anyone?

The fear of what my peers, the rest of my team, the organisation thought of me weighed heavily on my mind. I felt like I had lost credibility. After all, what kind of leader loses an entire team in that span of time, and one in the people management space at that?

The Shift in Perspective

It took some time but eventually, I found the courage to ask the hard questions. What lessons was this experience trying to teach me? How could I emerge from it stronger? And most importantly, what next? It was a humbling encounter with my own vulnerabilities, a season of deep reflection on beliefs about myself, my leadership, my team and my organisation.

Out of all my tough, honest conversations with my mentors, peers, and trusted advisors, one conversation in particular stood out:

"Which roles has your team transitioned into? Are they lateral positions?"

"No," I admitted. "They took on bigger roles."

"So, they have grown? They advanced?"

"Yes."

"Then shouldn't you take pride in knowing that you played a significant role in developing a team that was ready to step into bigger responsibilities? Isn't that what leadership is all about—lifting others as you rise and widening the circle of impact?"

That conversation changed everything.

I had been so focused on my loss that I failed to see the bigger picture. The very thing that had made me feel like a failure was actually proof of my success. The investment I had made, in my team, in my leadership, had not been in vain. It had prepared the team, allowed them to stretch themselves and grab better opportunities. While they were no longer part of my team, my influence on their careers was undeniable.

This is what I came to realise: leadership is not about building a team for oneself. It is about nurturing and allowing them the room to step into the next role with confidence. When they do, celebrate them and yourself for the value you have added in their lives.

Rebuilding and Redefining Leadership

With that clarity, I set out to rebuild. However, this time, I sought to do things differently. I have stopped trying to replicate what was and I am intentionally embracing what is—the strengths, unique talents, aspirations and areas of growth of new team, my collaborators. Instead

of expecting them to fit into the mould of the past, I am allowing them to bring fresh perspectives and approaches.

I am learning to be patient with both myself and my team. I had spent years leading a high-performing team and had forgotten what it was like to nurture and develop from scratch. This experience forced me to rediscover that skill, to return to the fundamentals of leadership. It has been hard, uncomfortable, and at times frustrating, but absolutely necessary. In it all, I have grown! Perhaps the most humbling lesson of all? Leadership is not about me. It is about impact. Influence. Legacy. It is about raising others, knowing that their success is a reflection of my own growth, and success.

For every woman navigating their leadership journey, especially when faced with unexpected challenges, remember this: The setbacks are often setups and step-ups for the next level of growth.

When you find yourself questioning your abilities, wondering if you are enough, doubting if the work you put in is worth it...pause. Reflect. Look for the lessons. In those lessons, you will find your strength and sharpen your focus.

When you feel like you are starting over when you least expected to, know that it is not an ending—it is a new beginning.

Growth is uncomfortable. Transitions are painful. However, every great leader has faced moments that tested them, refined them, and ultimately prepared them for even greater impact. That, ladies, is the journey of leadership.



MARYANNE OCHOLA

Maryanne started her career in commercial banking, managing a distressed portfolio for one of Kenya's largest banks by assets.

A pivot to impact investing was informed by her passion for social impact alongside financial returns and this led to her managing a technical assistance facility across twelve countries in sub-Saharan Africa targeting businesses in agriculture, manufacturing and renewable energy. This work laid bare the nascency of the regions' entrepreneurial ecosystems, and she advanced this work by leading the Aspen Institute's ANDE program in East Africa. Through ANDE, Maryanne connected stakeholders supporting emerging businesses in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia and Tanzania, unlocking capital, networks and markets for businesses in the re-

gion. Today, as the Managing Director of Endeavor Kenya, Maryanne leads a network of high-growth tech founders in East Africa, connecting them to global venture capital, market access and networks while building a community of founders that will pay it forward to the next generation.

A passionate advocate for Africa's economic agency and opportunity, Maryanne believes in the power of relationships, multidisciplinary partnerships, thought leadership and global connectivity to change the prevailing narratives. She holds an MBA from IE Business School and is a trained financial journalist.

Maryanne is a mother of two teens, a golfer and an avid chorister.

Discover Your Inner Voice, Tune Into It, And Dance To Your Own Music

I was a young woman with a plan.

I aimed to be among the best in school, to participate in and win every debate. I envisioned attending university, becoming a famous lawyer, and winning cases just like they did on television. I dreamed of getting married, having beautiful children, buying a car, possibly a house, and living happily ever after.

But I missed law school by one point. I had the audacity to ask my civil servant parents if they would pay for a private program to help me achieve my dreams. I call it audacity because I knew I was pushing my luck. As the first of four children, my father had made it clear that the goal was simply to attend university, not necessarily to become a lawyer. So, I settled for the course I qualified for. At the age of twenty-four, armed with a degree in social sciences, I graduated into a booming economy—a privilege I now recognise—and secured a job at a bank. Shortly after, I found myself pregnant and, against the teachings of my faith, unmarried. Once again, I went to my parents' house to break the news. No one explicitly told me I had to marry the child's father, but in my mind, that was the expectation. So, I did.

By thirty-four, I was unhappy both at work and at home. From the outside, it looked like I was living the dream I

had envisioned. I worked for a blue-chip company, had a husband and two children, drove to work, and had a mortgage. Isn't that what success is supposed to look like? This was the plan, so why was I dissatisfied?

I wanted more. I pursued an MBA abroad, left the bank, switched to an entirely new sector, and eventually walked out of my marriage too. While these changes brought a tremendous amount of grief, deep down, I knew I was course-correcting toward a plan that was less about the expectations of others and more about reconnecting with myself. With personal growth comes inevitable grief. While this is certainly a condensed version of that phase of my life, it offers key lessons that I wish my younger self had understood.

My late father often reminded me that *"life is what happens when you're busy making other plans"*. I had a plan, but life intervened. The most important skill one can develop is the ability to remain open to the curveballs that life will inevitably throw your way and to seek out the new opportunities that will arise. I wanted to be a lawyer; now I have a fulfilling career in venture capital. I did not fully consider my decision to get married at twenty-five, and looking back, I realise this was perhaps

the most significant choice I would make. I should have treated it as such. I held strong beliefs about gender equality and understood that my career was a vital part of my identity. Choosing a partner who was not aligned with those values was a form of self-sabotage.

Our dreams can either be limited or expanded by our environment. When we read stories from our mothers' youth, we see that they aspired to be secretaries or nurses, as that was considered the pinnacle of success for young women at the time. Today, we have women breaking boundaries in science, politics, and beyond. We now understand that our lives can be multifaceted, and we can achieve our highest potential while still raising families if we choose to do so. As a young, ambitious woman, my twenties were filled with self-doubt. I sought validation and permission for choices as personal as whether to wear dreadlocks or not. In a world that continues to pay lip service to gender equality, it's crucial for women to share their personal stories, to humanise ourselves, and to dispel the notion that we must be perfect to be loved, hired, or accepted.

The world will always have a plan for you. It is your job to find your inner voice, tune into it, and dance to your own music. Your tribe will find you.



SEASONS OF LIFE

“

Every chapter of your life serves a purpose—some to teach, some to heal, some to push you forward. **Do not rush through the seasons; each one prepares you for what's next.**



JUNE A. OPIYO

June A. Opiyo is an accomplished Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, Commissioner for Oaths and Notary Public with over 20 years' experience in navigating complex legal landscapes as a corporate lawyer (her longest stint being with Stanbic Bank Kenya Ltd, part of the Standard Bank Group). Over the years she has developed expertise in dispute resolution, contract negotiation, risk management and legal operations management, coupled with a comprehensive understanding of corporate laws, employment law, international trade law, and litigation procedures. In 2024, June's achievements in driving corporate business forward were recognized and she was included in The Legal 500 GC Powerlist: East Africa 2024.

June remains a member of the Women Lawyers in Finance, an organization founded in 2023 to champion opportunities for legal professionals in the Kenyan financial sector, where she led the Mentorship and Coaching committee in 2024.

June is also a Charter member of the Rotary Club of Kabete, where she holds various roles, including being the current President Nominee (2026/2027). In Rotary she has found a diverse group of professionals who share her drive to give back to society.

June is currently enjoying her career break. Having completed an uninterrupted 30-day stint of Bikram yoga in January 2025, she is now learning the butterfly swimming stroke.

Crutches

Five thousand eight hundred and fifty-four (5,854) days, or one hundred and ninety-two (192) months—that was how long I worked for my last employer. I loved it, too. Unbeknownst to me, I had allowed my job to define who I was. Work-life balance was a myth for me; I kid you not, if you look up my contact information, the Truecaller App identifies me as 'June Opiyo – Employer'.

In July 2024, I made what many considered an illogical decision: I parted ways with my employer after sixteen years filled with incredible learning, growth, accomplishments, experiences, and memories. Contrary to what most of my former colleagues believed, I did not have a cushy new job lined up. I wasn't setting out to establish a law firm either. Instead, I decided to go home to... well, pasture.

People often ask what triggered this move, and I do not have a specific answer. It could have been an early onset of a midlife crisis or the inevitable burnout that often accompanies a corporate environment. Perhaps it was the realisation that I had worked continuously for over half my life, with my last real break being the gap between completing my Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams in 1996 and enrolling in university years later. It might have been all of the above. Once that seed was planted, there was no turning back.

Now, I am thriving in this new season as I rediscover the part of myself that is not 'June Opiyo – Employer'. I can prioritise my well-being through exercise, relaxation, and healthier lifestyle choices. Every day, I learn new lessons that could have changed the course of my life had I known them earlier:

1. I was trained from an early age to be independent, to study hard, and to achieve good grades that would guarantee me gainful employment to pay my bills. This cycle was meant to repeat until retirement and then death.
Now I understand that I was not born to work—or more specifically, I was not born to work, pay bills, and eventually die.
2. Success was defined by achievements. We all have that one parent who reminded us they were always number one in class (until we exchanged notes with friends and realised they could not all have been number one at the same time!). Life became a race for the highest grades, the next promotion, and the next pay raise to build a bigger home, buy a newer car, enroll our children in private school, and yes, pay the bills before eventually dying.
Now I know that success is what I define it to be; I have the power to change my circumstances and create a reality that is better for me.
3. Hardworking people, as modeled by previous generations, were those who toiled into their sixties, retiring to the shamba with a wheelbarrow in hand, and yes, eventually dying.
Now I understand that 'sabbatical' is not a

dirty word. I am not lazy (or, God forbid, suffering from a mental breakdown) just because I have taken a break. If machines need regular servicing to perform optimally, why should not humans? A sabbatical is a welcome opportunity for relaxation, exploration, rejuvenation, and personal growth. I will only emerge stronger for it.

4. Life's journey seemed cast in stone: achieve good grades, secure a well-paying job or start a successful business (while simultaneously starting a family), work hard, pay bills, and die.
Now I know it is never too late to change course. While the best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago, the second-best time is now.

So, what do crutches have to do with all this, you ask? My crutches were the apprehension over change, financial concerns, and the fear of letting down my family and friends. I feared introducing myself at networking events as simply 'June Opiyo, period!' But I took the leap, and the sky has not fallen.

If you are questioning your life's purpose, identify your crutches, throw them away, and take that leap.



LENA ONYANGO

Lena Onyango is 38 years old and loves the colours black and red.

Lena has a passion for the practice of law and for the past thirteen years, she has gained tremendous experience in handling both domestic and international tax matters. Lena has a strong penchant for Tax disputes resolution.

Lena learnt the value of discipline, dedication, focus and resilience as a young girl growing up as the fourth of five children. Her mother (a teacher) and father (a doctor) continue to inspire her to always work harder and not to give

up, values that Lena not only applies to her work but to her family. She enjoys spending time with her husband and her three beautiful girls all of whom are a constant reminder of God's grace upon her life.

Lena enjoys lifting weights and has recently taken up outdoor running. She hopes to participate in next year's Kili-manjaro Marathon. In her spare time, Lena enjoys some 'Netflix and chill' and trying out new recipes.

Roar

You were born thirty-eight years ago on the foothills of Iveti Hills, Machakos District, one beautiful April evening hence the name, Adhiambo. To crown it all, your mother saw it fit to name you after her own mother. I guess at the bare minimum, you were to be an embodiment of her strength. You see, Dana (your late grandmother) was a strong woman, a matriarch, not just in her family but the great village of Ahono. Her strength was evident in her children, your mother and her sisters carry her legacy to date. So, you may wonder, what does it actually mean to be a strong woman?

Adhiambo, a strong woman is one that knows when to walk away. As women we are brought up with the expectation that it is your role as a woman to 'chunga ndoa yako'. Literally put, it is you, the woman, who keeps your marriage together. However, what if that same marriage is the very thing that seeks to destroy who you are—your dreams, your peace of mind, your joy. Your health, both mental and physical are put in jeopardy? What if it is evidently the very thing that will ultimately destroy you? Or could be that relationship that seems to just take from you, never building you? Sometimes, you just might have to put yourself first and walk away.

Just as you need to be strong enough to walk away, you should be strong enough to fearlessly start over. Sunsets are beautiful, but nothing compares to the hope that

comes with a new dawn. With every fresh start, you get an opportunity to not only learn from your mistakes but also the reassurance that you deserve every good thing in life. Do not be afraid to love again, do not shy away from opportunities that will give you visibility or learning experiences. More often than not, starting over may mean taking a step back, especially in your career, but it might just be the setup for a step up.

Adhiambo, all you need to do is keep fighting. That takes strength. Fight for what you believe in, your dreams, your goals, your family, your career, your well being. Fight the negativity, fight the self doubt, fight the procrastination, fight the indiscipline and inconsistency.

Sometimes you will have to fight yourself as you are your biggest competitor. Strong women fight, mostly on their knees.

Do not be afraid to stir the waters, rock the boat, ruffle feathers, it takes strength to speak up. You will find yourself in situations that require you to stop biting your tongue and actually express yourself. It might not be what people want to hear, but it could be what they need to hear. It could be the very thing that shifts or changes situations for you and others.

Sometimes, you would much rather speak out than resent people or places silently. In equal measure, it also takes strength to keep quiet in certain situations. Pick your battles, do not choose to fight the wind. As your mum always reminds you, "sometimes you win by acting the fool."

Adhiambo, you will grow up in a society that drives the narrative that women are always against each other. This may not be entirely true as you will meet other women along the way who will uplift you. As a woman, it takes strength and courage to appreciate and encourage others, especially women. With every opportunity you get, give other women their flowers, extend kindness, acknowledge and appreciate their work, speak life into those around you.

Adhiambo, just as the woman you are named after, Dana, you are strong. As you grow older your strength will become evident in how you show up.

Choose to **ROAR** -
Remain resolute,
Own up to your mistakes and learn from them,
Appreciate yourself and others; and
Reach out for help.

That, to me, is a woman's strength.



LORNA B. NYATOME

Lorna is a wellness curator, psychotherapist and accountability coach dedicated to inspiring people to lead healthier, more fulfilling lives. With a passion for movement, discipline and self-commitment, she has dedicated her time and effort to nurture a thriving fitness community that empowers individuals to embrace consistency in their wellness journeys.

As the Founder of the popular Lorna B November Women Challenge, Lorna has guided hundreds through structured wellness programmes that prioritise sustainability over quick fixes. Her expertise in counselling psychology allows her to take a holistic approach to wellness, focusing not only on physical health but also on mental resilience and emotional balance.

A seasoned runner, Lorna successfully completed a 200km ultra-marathon, proving that endurance is both a physical and mental game. She believes in showing up on a daily basis, embracing the journey and leading by example. Her impact extends beyond fitness, as she is also an advocate for community wellness, organising challenges that encourage women to step into their strength, both physically and mentally. At fifty-three, Lorna embodies vitality, balance and purpose, proving that age is just a number. Through her unwavering dedication, she continues to inspire many to move, thrive and live well.

No Maps, Just Faith

My life has been a cinematic mix of *Sex and the City* (1998), *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979), and *Eat Pray Love* (2010). Sometimes, you meet someone, and everything just flows. Sometimes, that someone is yourself. Sometimes, that flow takes you with *no maps, just faith*, to a place you never planned to be.

A Chance Meeting

In 2006, at the age of thirty-four, a chance encounter at a local restaurant felt like fate. The connection was instant – the kind that sweeps you up before you even have time to question it. Three months later, caught in the whirlwind, I made the life-changing choice to have a child. Two years later, another. Three years after that, a third. Parenthood became my greatest adventure—one that brought me immense joy, purpose, and a love deeper than I had ever known. My children are my greatest blessing—bright, kind, and full of life. Watching them grow has been a gift.

Meeting Myself

Years passed. The routine of motherhood settled in, and so did a restlessness that I could not ignore. When my youngest joined primary school, I seized the moment to advance my education. I enrolled in a counselling psychology programme, expecting to learn about others.

Instead, I started unravelling the patterns in my own life. I finally saw my reality for what it was, not the life I had envisioned, but a version I had been trying to make work. My spark was gone. I no longer recognised myself. I felt stagnant yet knew that I was made for more. That realisation was a turning point. I stepped fully into my own life. In that moment, I let go of the illusion I had clung to. No money. No plan. It was not just about choosing a new path; it was about reclaiming myself.

Flow Does Not Always Mean Smooth

The move triggered tensions, pushing me into a period of struggle, transition and adjustment. It was messy, painful, and terrifying. But there was no turning back. I realised just how much I had been holding together. Self-awareness is not a single moment of clarity but a relentless journey, demanding courage, resilience and an unyielding commitment to growth. That phase of my life taught me some of my toughest yet most valuable lessons—embracing the present and learning to navigate the unfamiliar.

No Maps, Just Faith

Through it all, a revelation unfolded—you can never know everything about what lies ahead before making a lifelong choice. You simply learn as much as you can, decide and stand by it without regret. One thing became clear in this season—my success is directly connected to my obedience. It is no longer, my will be done, but His. Anything gained outside the will of God must be maintained outside His will. The most challenging choice I ever made was prioritising my children's stability by choosing the environment that offered them greater financial security. It was an intentional decision,

one that many would not understand. But it was not an act of surrender; it was an act of love. I trusted that the foundation I had laid in them would give them the strength to adapt to this change.

Courageously Ploughing Forward

Clarity demands action, however gut-wrenching. I now allow myself the freedom to pivot or change my mind when the need arises. I do not believe in ownership; nothing truly belongs to me. My life is about experiences, not about possessing things or people, not even my children. They are their own individuals, walking their own paths. My role is to support them without trying to control or own them.

Heading into my mid-fifties, I embrace this next chapter with openness, reminding myself: “*You will always be okay.*” If you are reading this, maybe this is your sign. Perhaps you have been waiting, hesitating, questioning. Sometimes, the answer is not in waiting, it is in taking action. Take the step. Make the leap. Trust the speed of your own becoming. Sometimes it means holding on, other times, it means letting go. Strive to find peace in the two. I may not know every turn ahead or what plot twists life has in store, but one thing is certain, it will not be boring. I will take every shot and always, always dream big.



REV. DR. EMILY
OBWAKA

Rev. Dr. Emily Obwaka is seasoned inter-generational servant leader with a passion to inspire transformation and synergy between generations. She believes that TOGETHER EVERYONE ACCOMPLISHES MORE under God's leadership!

Dr. Obwaka is a public health specialist with over 25 years working experience in the government, local and international NGO sectors. Among the organizations she has served are:

- ▶ Teen Challenge Kenya (TCK), a Christian rehabilitation program as the Executive Director, Deputy Director for East Africa Region and Women's Regional Director for Africa - Global Teen Challenge.
- ▶ Pan African Christian Women's Alliance (PACWA) of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa

- ▶ (AEA) as the Continental Coordinator for Africa. The Johns Hopkins University/Center for Communication Programs (JHU/CCP) based in Kenya including as the Regional Technical Advisor working in communication and advocacy;
- ▶ Hello Doctor, South Africa and Dactari Health under Dhanush from India in the areas of tele-health and tele-medicine respectively.
- ▶ Life in Abundance (LIA Kenya), a Christian NGO that focuses on holistic transformational development as Country Director and now as the Kenya Board Chair and representative on the LIA International Board.
- ▶ BIBLICA East Africa Board as Vice-Chairperson.
- ▶ African Forum for Religion and Government (AFReG) global board as a member.

Dr. Obwaka is an ordained minister with Christ is the Answer Ministries (CITAM).

Life Originates From God: To My Younger Self

Beginning life from wherever we do, is an enigma. For me, although I was born in a good home where I had loving parents and a steady upbringing, I always wondered what life was about. As the second born of four children, I knew I was cherished by my parents as the first daughter after my elder brother. The pattern continued as my younger brother was born a couple of years later and our last born, a girl, four years after him. We were such a model family—the envy of many.

Yet coming into my high school days, the question of why I lived tagged at my mind. I was unsettled. Then at the age of nineteen, the year after I finished high school, I invited Jesus Christ into my life to save me from the condemnation the Bible speaks about, for everyone separated from God because of sin—that is everyone, including me. That day, a flood of peace came into my being and I knew I was a new creation! There was great assurance in my heart that I was a child of God. It would have been happily ever after had I learnt the lesson; I am about to share associated with this. It took me several years to learn that we are spirit beings who have souls and are housed in bodies. This truth might appear pretty obvious, but when I came into it, it changed a lot of things in my life.

First, I realised that I was to seriously nurture my spirit-being because it is the ‘forever’ part of me. Since it is what connects me with God, it must be what I seek to grow and live out of. Persuaded that God must then take pre-eminence over all my existence, I developed disciplines that ensured I learnt how to hear His voice and follow His instruction. With this as my bottom line and motivation for life, I changed how I made choices and set my priorities. In addition, since life is beyond the physical life we live—eternity, as it is often referred to, we must take account of it in this present life. This makes a difference to what we do on a daily basis; what we say yes or no to. For instance, asking myself questions like—what will this look like 100 years from now? In the grand scheme of things, what will be gained or lost if I do this or that?

My realisation that we are spirit beings and the need to connect with God above everything else, led to life becoming easier for me. I realised that I did not need to drum up a script for my life but that God, who made me, already had a script for it. Mine was to trust Him totally and not rely on my own understanding, or go with how I saw things. I was to acknowledge Him—very intentionally reference Him in everything so that He could direct my steps. It was a relief to know that there was nothing

that could ever come to me or at me that did not have His express permission. This gave me confidence to face every day with joyous expectation. I wish my younger self had known life is not such a mystery after all if we are led by the One who holds and directs all of life.

Living out of my spiritual connection with God, I have been able to persevere through the difficult seasons of my life. The challenges a difficult marriage and raising children brought was enough to take hope out of my life. But you know, the surety that came with God’s real help garrisoned my soul and spirit and helped me surmount the challenges. In fact, the challenges literally became fuel for fortifying my soul and spirit and opening my eyes to God’s purpose in my life. The solutions and strategies through the difficulties become tools that I get to use to help others along my path of life.

To the woman reading this essay, the lesson I learned that changed my life and that I wish I had known in my earlier years is that life is one and it originates from God. We are spirit beings who have soul and are housed in bodies. Our orientation of who we are and how we see life determines how we show up in life; our motivation and actions.



ALEX KANYI

Alex is a father and a husband. In his free time, Alex loves to listen to good music, travelling the world, watching football and sometimes playing the drum set. He is best known for providing tax solutions for his clients and engaging the media and the public on emerging tax topics. He is a mentor and is passionate about raising the next generation of responsible leaders. In this article, Alex reflects on the journey of being raised by his mother and the values that have been inculcated in him. Alex finishes the article with an appreciation to women for the sacrifice they make to raise a family and pursue a career.

Raising Boys:

An Appreciation to Mothers

"Honour her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate." - Proverbs 31:31 (NIV)

Raising boys is not the easiest job for a single mother. She must play the role of both father and mother, which is a unique challenge. This is the successful and yet challenging story of my mother. She had a simple yet fulfilling career and managed to balance this with family life while instilling values that my brother and I hold dear to this day.

The Career

My mother started her career as a civil servant and continued until her retirement. Her loyalty to her employer of over thirty years is something to admire, especially for millennials and Gen Z. She rose through the ranks over the years, and her employment was her main and side hustle. Before starting her job in the Ministry of Housing, she was called to join nursing school but chose to start earning from the government immediately. She sometimes jokes about how her life might have been different had she chosen nursing.

Raising Children

As the firstborn, I can say that my mother's style of raising us was special. At the age of seven, she decided we

would no longer have a house help, which meant we had to quickly learn to prepare meals, wash clothes, and take care of ourselves. In terms of discipline, a simple look from her would convey everything. She rarely caned us but would occasionally pinch us, which was enough to deter misbehaviour. When our father left us in December 2004, she took up the disciplinarian role, transitioning to counselling as we grew older. She has played the dual role of mother and father from 2004 to date, advising us on everything from relationships to investments and spiritual growth.

Her House

My mother built her own house with the money she earned as a civil servant. Considering her modest salary, the house she built is a testament to her sacrifice. She did this after my father passed away, while also dealing with school fees and other family needs. She put the family first and ensured we had a permanent home.

The Values

When you see my brother or me, you see my mother. Any positive values we have are thanks to her. Values such as integrity, excellence, hard work, discipline, sobriety, and dependence on God were all taught by this amazing woman. We give her flowers while she is still alive because we are who we are because of who she is.

Conclusion

Mothers and women, in general, play an especially important role in raising boys, with or without their husband's support. My mother is an example of someone who has done it and continues to do it well. For single mothers raising boys, I hope this story motivates you to keep doing what you are doing. It takes a huge sacrifice to balance career, investments, spiritual life, the full weight of parenting alone and more, but the fruits will speak for you. The boys may not always turn out as you wish, but the most important thing is that you do your part with God's guidance.

Even in saying this, it is not lost on me that we often praise single mothers for their strength but rarely ask why they had to be strong in the first place. To the women who carry entire worlds on their backs, we see you. We see the quiet strength that holds families together, the unseen sacrifices woven in every dream nurtured at the expense of your own. We honour you, not just with words, but with the recognition that your strength builds generations. It is time to move beyond admiration to action. If we are serious about accelerating action toward equality, we must break the cultural and structural barriers that make an already demanding role of raising children alone even harder.



GEORGE ODO

George Odo is the MD of AfricInvest East & Southern Africa out of Nairobi, Kenya and a Senior partner with the firm. George has been with AfricInvest for 16 years and is a member of its Executive committee.

Since 2009, when George set up the AfricInvest operations in Kenya, the firm has deployed over USD 500 million across the region using different strategies including Private Equity, Private Credit, Venture Capital and through specialist investment vehicles. Prior to joining AfricInvest, George spent a decade of his career with CARE International, where he started as a Project Manager in Kenya and left as Regional Director for East & Southern Africa. George has extensive board experience with vari-

ous organizations with a few examples being Abacus Pharmaceuticals, Old Mutual Holdings, UAP Group, Family Bank, Mayfair Bank, Brookhouse International School, Britam Holdings and Danish Refugee Council.

George has been involved in transactions across various sectors including Agribusiness, Microfinance, Banking, Insurance, Education, FMCG, Plastics Packaging, Pharmaceutical and Auto services.

Having had the privilege of being educated across 4 continents, George holds an executive MBA, B Com and PBAS among other qualifications as part of his continuous training including in Audit, PE, ESG, HR and IT.

Celebrating Rosa!

A few individuals have played a key role in shaping who I have become as an individual and a professional. One of the most impactful influencers, and I am not talking about in the digital space, was my late mother, Mrs Rosemary Okoth (fondly referred to as 'Rosa' by her peers and 'mummy' by my siblings and I). Unfortunately, we lost her, to a rare strain of melanoma (skin cancer) soon after I graduated from university.

My mother was an optimist even during the toughest of times. She was also extremely hardworking, respectful of others irrespective of their status and was highly disciplined. However, her most endearing trait, was her warmth, which she passed on to us in the form of teaching us to care for others.

About two and a half decades ago, I joined CARE International, one of the leading global aid agencies, and was posted to work in a small rural town, in eastern part of Kenya as an agri business project manager. My objective was to use a commercial model to improve the livelihoods of the smallholder horticulture farmers and free them from dependency on perpetual aid.

Most of the population lived on less than USD\$2 per day, placing them below the poverty line. The farmers did not have consistent access to markets, depended on inconsistent rainfall for production, and battled with quality issues, among other challenges.

I led a team that worked on a pilot project that was able to eventually resolve the challenges using a business aggregating entity. This, on behalf of the farmers, locked in forward market contracts, aggregated the production, procured inputs in bulk and provided technical know-how while spreading the cost among them. All this allowed them to benefit from economies of scale like the larger farmers. This allowed them to improve the quality, the quantities, and consistency of supply to the market, and to get better prices, which resulted in improved incomes. We funded this through grants structured as patient capital through a revolving fund which when repaid, was recycled to fund future harvests and other farmers. Their incomes increased between five to ten-fold reducing the community's dependency on food aid.

This was replicated in other parts of the country in horticulture but also other products such as beef livestock and cotton. Later this was scaled under our team then rebranded as CARE Enterprise Partners (CEP) in Latin America and Africa. Some of CEP activities in Africa included working with; cotton farmers supplying the local market in Tanzania, sesame farmers in Uganda exporting to Turkey, women in Zimbabwe exporting their craft and wares, etc. In addition, CEP managed two Micro Finance Institutions, one in Kenya and another in Zambia, that provided micro group and MSME loans. Some of these enterprises succeeded and were exited to the Private sector while others fell by the wayside. This experi-

ence greatly influenced who I have become today and laid the foundation for my career. My success was because my mother taught to me to care.

Some valuable business lessons that I picked in rural Kenya that I still apply include, 'start with the market and work backwards', and 'for sustainability, there must be profitability'.

Some other life lessons I learned from my mother that helped me succeed when thrust into rural Kenya as a younger George that still apply today include; hard work pays, always treat others with respect, and remain disciplined while appreciating life.

I believe that if Rosa my mother, was still around, she would be proud, as she taught me to do my part to change the world. My wife, also called Rosemary, or Rosie as we fondly refer to her, has been my pillar and reinforced the values I learned from my mother. I trust that these invaluable life lessons have been passed on to our children Michelle and Michael, so they can also bring about positive change.

I am honored to share this intimate story with women, so they can appreciate their power to influence a child, a family, a community, a society and to change the world. Women are powerful, because they care and I 'Dream Big for Her'!



LAURE PAUGAM

Laure Paugam has been the Executive Director of the French Chamber of Commerce in Kenya (FCCK) since September 2020. The FCCK is a networking and advocacy platform which aims to foster bilateral trade between France and Kenya, as well as help French companies successfully set up locally. Under Laure's leadership, the French Chamber has become one of the most dynamic private sector organizations in Kenya, and has significantly increased its membership and reach. The organization now brings together 230 corporate members, French and Kenyan, from entrepreneurs to multinationals, operating in 15+ business sectors. Over the past years, Laure has organized and moderated more than 200 networking and high-level events. She has also developed new business services and advocacy strategies, and has implemented impactful CSR projects.

Before moving to Kenya, Laure was the Managing Director of Archipress & Associés, a Paris-based publishing company specializing in architecture, urban planning, and design. She started her career in marketing & communications, working for global leaders such as Moët-Hennessy (LVMH Group) and Estée Lauder Companies.

Laure holds a Master's degree in Management of Cultural and Media Industries from Sciences Po Paris, and a second Master's degree in Marketing & Communications from ESCP Europe Business School.

The Power of Reinventing Yourself

From a young age, I learned that life rarely takes a straight line. Life surprises us in ways we never anticipated. If I could share one piece of wisdom with my younger self, it would be this: accept change, trust your adaptability, and never underestimate the power of nurturing meaningful relationships. Life is full of opportunities—embrace them!

I was born in Brittany, in Western France. My parents were both teachers. I literally grew up in a school in a small French village, where my dad was the Headmaster. We lived in a flat just above the school. Life was easy, revolving around a tiny geographical perimeter with friends and family close to home.

Change No. 1 came when I was nine years old. My parents decided they were too young to be bored in life and moved to Casablanca, Morocco. We spent six years there before Change No. 2. We moved to Beirut, Lebanon. I remember having to learn the value of resilience, and curiosity. Being immersed in a melting pot of cultures shaped my identity and gave me a deep appreciation for diversity.

These values guided me as I embarked on Change No. 3 at 17. I pursued my studies in Paris and London, where I opened my mind to new perspectives and strengthened an inner feeling that everything is possible as long as you work hard for it. I was lucky enough to be supported by

my parents but also had to take side jobs. I worked as a salesperson and a tutor for younger children—experiences that grounded me and gave me a sense of humility.

I then started my career in the world of cosmetics marketing in Paris. It was a fast-paced, dynamic industry. I thrived in this environment, but over time, I felt a pull towards something different. I did not know what that ‘something’ was, but I knew I wanted to explore beyond the familiar. Then came Change No. 4! I decided to pivot, thanks to an unexpected opportunity—leading a publishing house that specialised in architecture. The transition was far from seamless, but I realised that many of the skills I had honed in marketing—storytelling, branding, and strategic vision—were just as valuable in publishing. Women often minimise their own abilities, assuming they are confined to a single field, when in reality, they are transferable across industries.

After ten years, it was time for Change No. 5, or ‘Radical Shift No. 1’. In 2020, I moved to Kenya to take on the role of Executive Director at the French Chamber of Commerce. A new country, a totally new professional landscape, and definitely, a new challenge awaited me. Starting afresh required humility—to admit what I did not know, to ask questions, and to learn from those around me. It also required confidence—to recognise my ability to contribute, lead, and build something meaningful.

Throughout my journey, I have learned that reinvention is not about discarding the past but rather about integrating your experiences in new ways. People, networks and meaningful connections have played a crucial role in every transition I have made. Opportunities often come from conversations, from people who see potential in you that you may not even see in yourself. Building genuine relationships, remaining open to learning, and staying optimistic can create bridges where none seemed to exist.

As I am about to embark on another new professional journey, I feel that life is full of possibilities for those willing to step beyond their comfort zones. Reinventing yourself is not about jumping into the unknown; it is about trusting that you have what it takes to navigate the unknown. It’s about knowing that with every challenge, you grow stronger, and more capable. It’s about admitting that you don’t know and accepting the need to ask for help. Vulnerability is a super power.

To the young women reading this: take the leap, don’t be afraid. Your journey will not be linear, and that, in itself, is exciting! Life’s richest experiences often come from the unexpected. Believe that you are capable of shaping your own path, again and again. Always reinvent yourself.



BALANCE

“

Balance is not about doing everything at once; it's about knowing what deserves your energy at any given moment.

**Choose what matters,
and let the rest wait.**



MAKHULO NYANGATE

With a dynamic career spanning almost 20 years in the construction industry, Nyang'ate Makhulo is the founder and Managing Director of Midas Development Limited. This leading project management, construction, and development company operates across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, and Rwanda, in industrial, commercial, hospitality, residential and retail sectors having overseen construction projects worth USD 260 million.

Nyang'ate's expertise is underpinned by a Bachelor's degree in Building Economics from the University of Nairobi and an MBA in International Finance from Richmond College, London. Her

career commenced in the banking industry, where she gained 13 years of experience working for Standard Chartered, Barclays Bank, and African Trade Insurance Agency in various regions including Singapore, the UK, Kenya, and across nine African countries.

Nyang'ate has been married for the past 27 years and has 4 adult children, triplets who are 25 years old and a son who is 19 years old. She enjoys reading books of all genres, listening to music, hiking, swimming and road trips.

Embracing the Power of the Morning: My Ritual for Balance and Purpose

As a mother of four, wife, daughter, daughter-in-law, sister, sister-in-law, niece, and cousin, my days are often filled to the brim. Adding my entrepreneurial journey, construction, and my latest venture, a family business in Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and hospitality, managing everything can feel like a daily tight-rope walk. However, one sacred ritual grounds me, helps me stay balanced, and supports my mindset through the chaos—the power of a well-established morning routine. I came across the concept of SAVERS in ‘The Miracle Morning’ by Hal Elrod, and it instantly clicked. It is a simple, yet profound method: Silence, Affirmations, Visualisation, Exercise, Reading, and Scribing. I have adopted and adapted these principles into my morning routine, and over time, they have become my anchor.

Silence and Intentional Start

Before the world fully wakes up and before motherhood, business, and caregiving demand my attention, I take the first five to 10 minutes for quiet reflection. I do not rush into my day, but pause to centre myself. This is my time to set the tone for the day—listening to a guided meditation or soothing sounds through YouTube. On busy days, I will segment my day, visualising each role I will play and task I need to accomplish. I set an intention for how I want the day to unfold. This time to breathe, reconnect with myself, and calm my mind is invaluable for my well-being.

Visualisation and the Power of Seeing Completion

After silence, I dive into visualisation. I am a firm believer in the power of mental rehearsal. I walk mentally through my projects, visualising them as though completed. As I ‘move’ through each completed project, I note how I feel—fulfilment, pride, peace. This is not just a fleeting daydream; it keeps me focused on my end goals and empowers and motivates me, especially when juggling many hats.

Movement to Energise

Next comes my walk. Whether I have 20 minutes or a couple of hours, I move my body. This is non-negotiable for me. Walking clears my mind, boosts my energy, and gives me a fresh perspective. I listen to something that feeds my soul, whether it is an audiobook on health and wellness or a business podcast. Nourishing my mind and body simultaneously, walking becomes my way of recalibrating for the day ahead.

Scribing and the Practice of Gratitude

One of the most important components of my morning ritual is journaling. Taking five to 15 minutes to reflect on my day, goals, and intentions helps organise my thoughts and clear mental clutter. I begin with an affirmation for the day, reminding myself of my strength and resilience. I then practice gratitude, writing three things I am grateful for from the previous day, three things I appreciate

about my business, and three things I am thankful for about myself. It is a simple practice but grounds me in positivity, crucial when balancing family, career, and self. Finally, I write down my prayer list and the things I need to do that day—some personal, others work-related. I ask for guidance, recognising that I cannot do everything alone. Releasing the weight of responsibility and trusting in divine assistance supports me in handling each task with grace.

A Moment of Clarity Before the Day Begins

By the time I finish my morning ritual, I feel centred, energised, and ready for the day. Whether meeting a client, spending time with my children, or navigating family business intricacies, I ensure my mindset is strong and clear. This morning ritual is not just a routine; it is a lifeline. It is how I show up for myself so I can show up for my family, business, and community. As a woman, mother, wife, and entrepreneur, it is easy to get caught up in responsibilities. By carving out this time each morning, I am reminded that self-care is a necessity. Through silence, intention, movement, and reflection, I move through my day with purpose, balance, and gratitude.

On this Women’s Day, I celebrate the power of embracing our daily rituals, those quiet moments of reflection, and the strength to juggle the many roles we take on. Here is to all the women who rise every day with purpose and intention, doing the quiet, unseen work to make the world better for those they love.



LOUISE MAKENA

Makena Muturia is a highly skilled and dedicated Geomatic Engineer with extensive expertise in surveying, mapping, and geospatial technologies. With a strong academic background, Makena holds a Bachelor of Science in Geomatic Engineering and Geospatial Information Systems from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Environment, and Natural Resources Law at the University of Nairobi. Her academic pursuits reflect her commitment to integrating engineering precision with environmental sustainability.

Since 2016, Makena has served as the Managing Director and Project Director at Geosurveys & Geospatial Information Limited, a consulting firm specializing in surveying and mapping services across Kenya and East Africa. Under her leadership, the firm has grown significantly, offering a wide range of services, including cadastral and

engineering surveys, GIS & Remote sensing Urban and Regional planning and environmental consulting.

Makena has successfully led numerous high-impact projects, such as cadastral surveying and titling of multiple parcels of land all over Kenya, sectional surveys and titling, engineering surveys such as topographical and levelling surveys for design of utilities. Makena is a registered full member of the Institution of Surveyors of Kenya and is recognized for her technical proficiency, leadership, and innovative approach to geospatial solutions. Her work has involved collaboration with government ministries, international organizations, and private sector clients, contributing to sustainable development and efficient land management.

Makena's passion for precision and her ability to steer project delivery makes her a respected professional in her field.

Accelerating Up The Hill

I was always bound to have spatial awareness, going by the geographical space that I grew up in—the rolling green hills of Nyambene (Meru) with a real-life forest as backdrop. It seems to me that my childhood memories always have me walking up a steep hill from my parents' place to the space where my grandparents lived. I was a favourite of my granny.

My name 'Makena' means 'happy'! Was I happy? I was certainly a bright child, starting school when I was only three years old.

My parents were peasants, and could not afford the fees for Kenya High School where I was selected to study. Nonetheless, I went on to *Bishop Gatimu Girls' school*. I was exceptionally good at Geography and Mathematics—not exactly a favourite combo for many young women—and was called to Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) to take a degree in Geospatial Engineering and GIS (Geographical Information Systems).

What do we geospatial engineers do?

We collect, analyse and manage spatial data, create maps and models, utilising technologies like GPS (Global Satellite Positioning) to perform our work, which we do in conjunction with professional partners.

We work in land surveying with lawyers, mapping with urban planners, infrastructure development with architects, contractors and civil engineers, and natural resource development with the State/investors.

Louise after College

In college, other than the grind of study, I got involved in student leadership, which would prove extremely useful to me after university. My first job was in Nyeri, when just twenty years old. Even as I worked diligently, I also began dabbling in consultancy work, as I had a vision to accelerate my professional growth. So that, at just twenty-two years old, I opened my own *Geosurvey & Geospatial* firm, because you have to be brave enough to take risks to move in life.

My five years in student leadership had given me networks, so never underestimate what social capital you can build up whilst in college. '*Your network is your networth*' is not just a cliché. Neither is 'where there's a will there's a way' (although a lawyer may say 'where there's a will there's a wayward relation trying to get a share of the inheritance.'). I leveraged on my portfolio to get my first ever client who not only gave me instructions, but a cheque, and that was the takeoff point ...

I had their personal trust, and I am a person of great quality control, who always delivers. People want results. With that, you build a solid reputation, and even as you look for opportunities outside, you also have a lot of prospects being referred to your practice by happy clients. *Ten Commandments that I wish to pass on to GEN Z women and others*

I am now thirty years old, but happy that my twenties have not been trite.

First, in life, align yourself to what you should be doing; and where you feel your strengths are best. Second, learn to be in the right rooms, speak up for yourself, and act immediately when given the chance. Third, have mastery of your craft or profession, and put all your skill sets into play as you get into the game. Fourth, learn the power of being resilient!

Fifth, do not fear failure or competition. Competition is a good thing, so embrace it, go for it, enjoy coming out on top of your projects. Sixth, look for opportunities everywhere. If you build the better rat trap, do not wait for the world to beat a path to your door. Look for mice-infested fields, sell it to the residents. Seventh, as part of resilience, I do not take no for an answer.

I try to find out what I could do better, what gap I can fill to get the client to go from 'no' to 'yes', *alafu tunasonga mbele pamoja* (then we move forward together).

Eighth, have the right professional circle and social support network.

Ninth, have faith in yourself, that you have the ability to deliver.

But, more so, I have faith in God.

Lastly, as much as you '*jiamini* (believe in yourself),' empower others – train them, capacitate them, trust them, delegate; otherwise, career life will be an *uphill* battle.



ANNE MURUKA

Anne Muruka is a seasoned legal professional with over 15 years of experience. Born and raised in Nairobi, she is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, as well as a member of both the Law Society of Kenya and the East African Law Society. Anne holds a Master of Laws (LLM) from The University of Queensland (Australia) and a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) from The University of Nairobi.

Before assuming her current role, Anne worked with several law firms in Kenya, gaining extensive expertise in various areas of law. Her most recent role was at Anjarwalla & Khanna, where she specialized in banking, finance, and insolvency. In this capacity, she provided legal counsel and contributed to a range of complex cases.

Currently, Anne works with M-KOPA, where she plays a vital role in supporting the legal team and collaborating with key business stakeholders. She utilizes her vast legal experience to navigate and address the company's diverse legal needs, ensuring smooth operations and compliance.

Outside her professional life, Anne dons her superhero cape as a mother who masterfully juggles the art of cooking and savoring a well-earned glass of wine.

Balancing Responsibility And Self-Care: A Note To My Younger Self

Dear younger Anne,

Growing up as the firstborn in our large family, you quickly learned that taking on responsibility became second nature. Taking care of everyone around you, often at the expense of your own well-being, became the norm. Many firstborns, caregivers, and those with this 'natural gift of service' can relate to this experience. As your network of family, friends, colleagues, and even in-laws grew, so did your sense of responsibility. Being a pillar of strength and guidance for everyone can be overwhelming at times.

Do not get me wrong, you have no regret in caring for others or showing empathy—it is a beautiful aspect of who you are. However, you must consciously remember to save some care and compassion for yourself. Prioritise your own well-being, my dear!

Career growth, what a journey! Let me tell you, it is not for the faint-hearted. It involves persevering through challenges and disappointments, almost like navigating a minefield while juggling flaming torches. Despite the challenging projects, long hours (and occasionally difficult colleagues who seem to have been sent to test your patience), your dedication and hard work will not fail you. As you traverse this rollercoaster ride, you might miss out on precious moments with loved ones. Just remember that every step forward counts—even if you trip, stumble, and fall along the way. Hey, it is all part of the adventure but amidst the chaos, do not forget to be gentle with yourself! Many times, your dedication and hard work

will feel like a burden, no longer exciting or fulfilling. Your sense of responsibility may fail you. During those moments, it is okay to stop, step back and breathe. Find the strength to walk away from what no longer speaks to your soul or positively contributes to your happiness. Believe in yourself—spread your wings and soar into the skies—you will be amazed at what you can achieve out here. You are a pillar of strength, even for yourself!

In this journey of life, it is important to acknowledge with deep gratitude and sincere appreciation all those who have supported and guided you. The individuals who shared their time, knowledge, expertise, and wisdom with you have played a vital role in shaping your growth and success. Their contributions have been invaluable and have made you who you are today. Gratitude is a powerful force, reflecting on these guiding lights, take a moment, thank them for their generosity and belief in your potential. Their encouragement and mentorship, a cornerstone of your accomplishments. As you continue on your path, remember to always pay it forward!

Now, with your own family, you give them everything, one hundred and ten per cent of your love, energy... heart. They are an amazing bunch, and as Bryan Adams famously sang, "Everything I do, I do it for you..." epitome of your being—it is like this guy had you in mind when he penned those words! It is wonderful to give your all to them and watch them growing both life and career. However, amidst the joy and fulfilment, you must not for-

get to show yourself some grace. Love yourself, too. Take moments to step back from the whirlwind of activities. Embrace the beauty of life's simple pleasures, and don't let the constant motion blur your vision. Take time for yourself, a quiet moment to recharge. You deserve it!

So, if you need reassurance: well, done! You have achieved so much already! Keep moving forward while always remembering one crucial thing: take care of yourself too!

In essence:

- ▶ **Cultivate self-care:** Amidst caring for others, prioritise your own well-being.
- ▶ **Believe in change:** Know when it's time for something new and embrace it.
- ▶ **Express gratitude:** Thank those who have helped shape your path and contribute to your growth.
- ▶ Pay it forward: Support others as they grow and succeed.
- ▶ **Balance love:** Show kindness both outwardly to others and inwardly to yourself.

You are strong enough not just for everyone else but also for yourself. Embrace your journey with an open heart and a resilient spirit. Remember, self-care is not selfish—it is essential. Take care of you!

With love and wisdom, *Your Future Anne*



GRACE GITAU

My name is Grace Gitau. I am an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya. I've been practicing for about 6 years now. I currently work at Tatu City as Legal Counsel. I specialize in corporate, commercial, data protection, real estate and finance.

Born and raised in Mombasa, I enjoy cooking. Lately, I've been adventurous in the kitchen by trying out international cuisines. In my free time, I like to work out. This could involve a 30 minutes to an hour daily walk, a hike or home workout. I also enjoy spending time with my loved ones, reading and being surrounded by nature. The ocean soothes me owing to the calming and peaceful feeling that it exudes.

I'm an optimist. My driving force every day is to leave the world a better place than I found it.

Lessons From Practicing as an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya

I recently started a new exciting role as Legal Counsel at Tatu City and this role has come with so many reminders and new lessons on life and career. I have always been a life-long learner and I can comfortably say that I am living in exciting times as I pursue this new role and continue to keep an open mind on the possibilities that will come.

In my six years of practice as an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya, I have had to break certain habits that were holding me back and adopt new habits that have helped me grow at a personal and professional level.

Love and obey God

The first and greatest commandment is that we should love the LORD our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds. When you begin to love God sincerely and understand His intentions for you, you learn to see yourself the way God does. Valuable, worth far more than rubies and the child of the Most-High God. How amazing is that? God's love is unconditional. Always having this at the back of my mind reminds me to love myself more, be kinder to myself and extend grace to myself which you know is not easy for those of you who are perfectionists like me. Our profession demands excellence. When you are kind to yourself when you fault which is inevita-

ble because we are human, you release the rigidity that comes with perfectionism. This allows you to flow with life with a bit more ease.

Self-love and self-respect

Since childhood, I have always been a people pleaser. I prioritised others before me, sometimes took the blame for things, all in an effort to avoid ruffling feathers or sweep things under the carpet. When I was in my late twenties, I got weary of people pleasing. I realised that people pleasing was a sign of lack of personal boundaries among other downsides of it.

It is important for women to love themselves. Pour into yourself. After God, make yourself a priority. Treat yourself well. You radiate when you love and take good care of yourself.

Remember that you are a brand. Represent yourself to the best of your ability.

Being a lawyer has taught me a lot about branding. People treat you the way you treat and carry yourself. Like a number of us, when I started working after school, I was green in the professional world—inexperienced on the rules of etiquette at a workplace. Learn how to carry yourself in a professional manner at work and client events. Having good manners never goes out of style.

Use your voice and use it for good. If even one person can hear you speak, you are in a privileged position

I was a shy child growing up. Seeing myself now speaking in meetings or any platform I get, I sometimes ask myself, 'who is that bold woman?' haha. It has been a journey of learning and growing my confidence and I am extremely proud of myself.

Joshua 1:9, 'Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.'

Do not limit yourself

At IKM Advocates, I practiced as a real estate and finance lawyer for about five years. My new role at Tatu City allows me to diversify my areas of practice. I needed to adopt an open mind to grow myself at a personal and professional level which is important for anyone keen on positive growth. Currently, I also advise on corporate, commercial and data protection matters. When you limit yourself, you cut yourself short.

Move your body

Exercise is important. If you can, work out every day. It can be as simple as taking a walk in your neighbourhood. Our profession involves sitting for long hours. We still need our backs to serve us well into our old age. Take good care of your body. As cliché as it sounds, eat healthy, drink at least two litres of water every day, reduce or avoid alcohol. Your body and skin will thank you.



ANGELA OCHUMBA

Angela Ochumba is currently Senior Legal Counsel, Americas, at Standard Chartered Bank and is based in New York City.

She previously held regional positions at Standard Chartered Bank as Senior Legal Counsel, Corporate and Investment Banking, Africa and Middle East; Legal Counsel, Transaction Banking Africa and Middle East; and Legal Manager, Transaction Banking Africa; all based in Nairobi.

Angela has expertise covering cross border financing, commercial real estate, leveraged and acquisition financing, sovereign lending, syndications, corporate finance, project and export finance, sustainable finance as well as in transaction banking products.

She has over 15 years post-qualification experience and is admitted to practice law in the state of New York and Kenya.

Angela holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Nairobi, and Master of Laws degrees in Global Business Law from New York University and Corporate and Financial Services Law from the National University of Singapore. She is a 2021 laureate of the French African Foundation Young Leaders Program.

Angela is passionate about women's participation in sport and is a masters swimmer and PADI certified diver and trained lifeguard. She also loves art, the outdoors and travel.

Looking Deeper Within To Gain A Balance

My father passed away when I was just ten years old, at a time when it was uncommon for girls my age to grow up without their dads. On the eve of his funeral, I remember slouching over his coffin, peeking inside, too young to fully grasp that my life as I knew it had irrevocably changed.

One of my most vivid childhood memories with my dad is from when I was nine years old and would accompany him on a boat. As a marine biologist, he often needed to collect samples of plant and marine life from Lake Victoria, which was near his primary workstation. Although he never let me near the water, he felt confident that, since I could swim well, it was safe to take me out on the boat with him.

After collecting specimens, he would carry them in an icebox to his office in the laboratory, where he would have me sketch them for his academic writing and research projects. He began to nurture my artistic talent after my Geography teacher praised me for drawing an almost perfect map of Africa during class.

I cherished those moments, especially when he laid out some of the catch on a laboratory table and watched intently as I sketched.

I pursued art and excelled at it, taking on commissions and winning several accolades and contests. In 2016, my artwork titled 'To Be a Woman' was showcased during the 21st session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. I could not have been prouder of myself.

For some reason, I stopped swimming after my dad's death. It could have been grief-related trauma—the feel of water reminded me of him—or perhaps the loss of one parent necessitated a shift in my priorities. Being one of my mother's two older children may have meant that my childhood and everything associated with it had come to an end.

I did not swim again until twenty-one years later, when, as a busy finance lawyer, I needed to manage the work-related stress that came with the high-pressure nature of my job. I also felt compelled to implement a lifestyle change after a close colleague suffered a blood clot and was later diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis. This diagnosis forced her to leave her demanding role for a position that would allow her to focus on her health.

Returning to swimming took much more effort than I anticipated. Swimming is a technical sport that requires

goal-setting, hard work, regular practice—either alone or with a swim team or coach—dry-land training, proper breathing techniques, consistent core work, and correct body positioning to regain one's feel for the water. It took me five years to get back into swimming shape, during which time I delved into competitive swimming and trained as a lifeguard at the local Young Men Christian Association (YMCA) in Nairobi.

Swimming has provided both physical and mental health benefits. It has instilled in me the importance of focus, consistency, resilience, and adaptability. I trust my instincts more and appreciate that my career path is uniquely mine. More importantly, I have fully embraced the memories of my father that swimming evokes. Water has become my source of tranquility and my happy place.

My experiences with swimming and art have taught me the importance of self-care and doing what you love, whether at work or in life in general. Engaging in activities that genuinely bring you joy and satisfaction fosters a sense of contentment. This, in turn, makes the less enjoyable aspects of life more bearable—those tasks that will likely occupy a significant portion of your time. Additionally, pursuing what you love leads to improved emotional well-being, increased productivity, resilience, and agility. These are aspects of overall well-being that I wish I had taken more seriously when I was younger.



**FEARLESS
PURSUIT OF
AMBITIONS**

“

A woman who dares to chase her ambitions is unstoppable—not because she has no fear, but because she moves forward despite it. **Fear is not a stop sign; it's proof that you're onto something bigger than yourself.**



KAHUMBYA BASHIGE

Kahumbya is a distinguished Fellow of the Institute of Directors, UK (IoD), and a Chartered Director—an elite qualification held by fewer than 2,500 professionals worldwide. She is a recognized expert in governance and leadership.

She serves as an elected member of the Council of the IoD, providing strategic oversight and advisory support to ensure the achievement of the Institute's objectives. Additionally, she is an Independent Board Member and Chairperson of the Audit Committee for CRDB Bank Burundi S.A. and contributes her expertise to the Advisory Board of SESDCorp.

Her executive career includes leadership roles in multinational organizations such

as Citibank, Deloitte & Touche, the African Development Bank, and Shelter Afrique, equipping her with a truly global perspective.

Kahumbya's exceptional contributions to the Finance and Banking industry have earned her recognition as one of the Angaza 2024 Honorees and a spot among the top 10 women to watch in the Industry.

Passionate about knowledge-sharing, Kahumbya actively mentors emerging leaders and contributes thought leadership through articles on governance and leadership. Beyond her professional commitments, she is a wife and mother of two. She also finds joy in music and is a dedicated member of her church choir.

The Power Of Pivoting:

Embracing Change For Growth

Growth begins with a conscious decision to move beyond your current reality in pursuit of something greater. It often requires challenging yourself and strategically pivoting your career to unlock your full potential. Embracing this mindset fuelled my journey into board directorship, ultimately becoming a chartered director (CDir), a milestone I achieved in just three years.

This qualification, awarded by the Institute of Directors UK (IoD), is the gold standard in director accreditation. Achieving the CDir status consists of three stages: the certificate, diploma, and qualification. Globally, fewer than 2,500 individuals hold this prestigious title. In Africa, fewer than 100 have earned it, with fewer than ten being women, underlining the rigorous nature of the process. When I made the distinctive qualification, I was only the fourth woman in Africa.

So, what inspired my pivot? I began my career as a mid-level manager at an international bank right after completing my master's degree. From there, I transitioned to an international consulting firm before moving on to various managerial roles at two different Development Finance Institutions. When I entered the workforce, I believed that hard work and diligence would naturally propel me towards my leadership goals. With clear and measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) in my roles, I assumed my leadership journey would be straightforward, but I quickly learned that growth is never linear. Challenges and setbacks are inevitable. I re-

alised that exceeding targets and being innovative were not enough to effectively accelerate my growth. To reach higher leadership levels, grit and risk-taking were fundamentally essential. This led me to a period of deep self-reflection, during which I identified two key insights that reshaped my approach. First, I had not actively pursued further learning or upskilling since earning my master's degree nearly two decades earlier. Second, I had placed my leadership aspirations solely within the confines of my employer, limiting my growth potential. In the current dynamic world, career diversity and continuous learning are crucial for broadening one's experience and opportunities.

I tackled these challenges strategically, step by step. At forty, I applied for a board position at CRDB Bank Burundi, my age notwithstanding. My determination paid off! I was appointed an Independent Director, later chairing the Audit and Risk Committee, and eventually the Audit Committee when the two committees were split. Encouraged by the Board Chair, I explored the IoD Chartered Director training, saw its value, and enrolled. Balancing my full-time job, board roles, and family life (as a wife and mother of two) made the journey far from easy. However, I remained determined, disciplined, and focused, drawing strength from God. This perseverance allowed me to achieve the qualification in just three years, and I was honoured to receive an IoD Fellowship soon after. The qualification has made me a better director, equipping me with the right skills to contribute

confidently, think differently and speak with authority in a boardroom. It has also given me access to a network of professionals from different industries and backgrounds whom I can turn to for professional advice and leverage.

Shortly after qualifying as a chartered director, I was honoured with an invitation to join the IoD Council, becoming the first African female to hold this position. I have since received offers for independent board and advisory board roles. Additionally, I enjoy sharing my leadership expertise and experience through blogs as well as a mentorship role with the IoD mentorship programme. My journey to becoming a board director and a chartered director has been one of resilience, continuous learning, and bold decision-making. Looking back, every challenge I faced was an opportunity to grow, and every risk I took brought me closer to my goals. This experience has reinforced my conviction in the importance of stepping out of one's comfort zone, embracing lifelong learning and seeking opportunities beyond traditional career paths.

As I continue to serve in leadership and mentorship roles, I hope to inspire others, especially women, to pursue their ambitions fearlessly, invest in their growth, and break barriers in leadership. Taking on a new role or qualification may seem daunting, but the key is getting started.

With your unique experience and approach, you can achieve it!



NJERI WAGACHA

Njeri is a dual qualified and bilingual Partner at CDH Kenya. If Njeri is anywhere in her spare time, she is likely travelling, cooking and hosting her cooking show @njericooks or hosting her podcast @njeritalks. Njeri is meticulous in her work and is best known for her drive for excellence in the boardroom and out of it. Mentoring young lawyers is one of Njeri's passions and she is dedicated to ensuring young lawyers have the best opportunity to succeed in what can be a tough legal environment. In this article, Njeri reflects on her final interview for the training contract at Orrick Herrington & Sutcliffe. She was successful but it is a keen reminder to all that behind every win is a lot of hard work and the sacrifices of all the women who came before us to get us to this point. For this reason alone, we must continue the fight. Fight on, Fight on.

The Interview

When the email asking me to interview at a top law firm in London came into my inbox, I was excited but anxious. Finally, I had the opportunity to be a trainee solicitor, finally I would qualify as a lawyer, finally all my dreams would come true. Finally, it dawned on me, I had exactly one week to prepare.

Becoming a solicitor is a daunting task. Not only do you have to obtain a law degree at a high level, but you are required to spend two years with a law firm under a training contract. The training contract is an enormous mountain of difficulty not only to obtain but then to retain. I set about the task with the discipline of a Special Air Service (SAS) soldier. I printed out 101 questions for law interviews, I read about the firm, the Partners who would interview me, I dissected every line of my curriculum vitae, I read my university dissertation, I memorised and timed the route to the firm, I prayed but did not tell a soul.

All week I took my notes with me wherever I went. Crucial to this was the application of the STAR method. For every answer I was to describe the Situation, the Task, the Action taken and the Result. Seemed simple enough... when I faced a difficult situation (bullying at school), I wanted it to end (the task) so I took action and punched the boy in question and got my result ... end of. Would

that answer get me the job? I mean... it met the brief, as unbelievable as it was. I decided that no, I would look for suitable answers that made me look like the type of person anyone would want to hire.

By interview day, my nerves were at an all-time high. The initial positivity and confidence had given way to the usual imposter syndrome that somehow always creeps in when you are at your best. I had already convinced myself that the job was not mine and that I would attend the interview really, just to see the towering skyscraper offices sat on 35th floor of Tower 42. As I sat for a coffee an hour early and round the corner from the firm, I watched endless streams of suited and booted Londoners walking fast paced to their offices, speaking quickly on mobiles, and emanating the word: business. I thought of all who had come before me. My grandmothers had no idea that one day their little granddaughter, the one with the lazy eye would have the opportunity to work in London. What prayers have covered me over the years, what wishes have been granted so that I could fulfil this dream. The magnitude of the moment meant that any preparation I had done was for them. In honour of them and in respect for the hard work they did toiling on tea plantations, in raising my parents in sacrificing so that one day, we could succeed.

I had read that whenever you go for an interview, you must treat everyone you meet with the utmost respect so that they remember you for all the right reasons. I stepped into the building and said hello to the security guard who looked slightly bemused and then warmly greeted the receptionist. She was kind but insisted that my name was not on the list and left to check. I panicked and thought the error was on my end (of course) and after what seemed like an eternity she returned and apologised; my name had been incorrectly captured – ok first hurdle crossed.

As she ushered me into the interview room, I took a seat, facing gigantic glass windows that looked over the whole of London. Could I see my flat—no, but I could see all the famous buildings, the London Eye, Big Ben etc... It was a beautiful summer's day when London was showing off. With no notes to read and a sip from a glass of water, I inhaled and thought long about the STAR ahead. I had overprepared, I had done my best and now all I could do was keep calm. Just as I did, the door creaked open. The interview was set to begin.



DAISY AJIMA

Daisy Ajima is a highly accomplished legal professional with over 20 years of experience. She has been recognized by The Legal 500, as one of the top inhouse General Counsels in East Africa in their prestigious GC Powerlist: East Africa 2024. She has consistently provided strategic legal leadership, excelling in corporate governance, intellectual property management, and legal risk mitigation.

Her legal journey spans both the private and public sectors. She has held notable senior legal roles such as Director of Legal at the Special Economic Zones Authority (SEZA), Head of Legal at Bidco Africa and Sidian Bank Limited. She has previously held roles in NCBA Bank and DTB Bank. Daisy's expertise in navigating cross-border

legal frameworks saw her contributions as part of the team of expert of harmonisation and ratification of EAC-SEZ regulations. She was also instrumental as an inhouse legal lead in the development of M-Shwari, a ground-breaking mobile banking product. She also played a key role in the complex takeover of shareholding at K-Rep Bank.

Daisy Holds Bachelor and Master Degree in Law from the University of Nairobi, a Certified Governance Auditor, a Certified Public Secretary and is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya. Beyond her legal achievements, Daisy is passionate about running, having completed several marathons, including three prestigious international Abbott World Major Marathons.

Empower, Elevate, Accelerate – Conversation With Younger Me

Having a candid meeting with my younger self, poised to face the future. As a young African girl, performing excellently in school, the dream was to become a ‘doctor’. Reflecting on the path I have taken, one lesson echoes in my heart, is it the intended path? I want to tell the younger me, and all the young women of tomorrow, that the road ahead will not be smooth or predictable, but the dreams you dare to dream will be worth every detour, stumble, and triumph.

I now write this, with twenty years of experience under my belt, extensive experience as a lawyer, advocate, governance expert, banker, and in government. I have also had the privilege of being recognised as one of the best in-house general counsels in East Africa by Legal 500 – GC Power List in 2023.

The Crucible of Growth: My Professional Story

At the start of my career, I stepped into the Banking industry/sector, which ended up as a fifteen-year journey. Come 2020, I felt that it is time to step out and diversify. It was a scary journey. The plan was to travel the world and think of the next step. As fate would have it, the world shut down due to COVID 19, being a major setback. Fast forward, the best decision I ever made was leaving the familiar sector after fifteen years. That leap of faith has propelled my life in ways I could not have predicted. During this time, I have ventured into new industries, embraced roles that challenge and inspire me, and applied my legal expertise to diverse sectors. I have been to pri-

vate law practice, corporate governance, manufacturing, pharmaceutical and intellectual property. The cherry on the cake is the privilege of being part of the team of experts representing my country in trade negotiations at an international/regional front. Each step has reinforced my belief in the power of strategic risk-taking, and I have grown not just professionally but personally, accelerating towards a fulfilling future.

Turning prejudice and bias to Triumph

In my 20 years of practice, I have learned that accelerating action is not just about implementing change—it is about navigating resistance. An example that stands out in the recent past is my role of implementing governance standards to enhance operational efficiency. Despite the clear benefits to customers and the organisation, I encountered resistance from a male colleague who seemed more willing to inconvenience clients than follow guidelines led by a woman. Nevertheless, I remained steadfast, because the stakes were too high and the impact of governance too essential to be stalled by outdated perceptions. In this scenario, this particular male colleague made all efforts to improve his governance standards just to avoid receiving guidance from a woman. I do consider this as one of the wins of my career to improve governance despite this bias.

Woman-to-Woman: Insights to Live By

As women, we often carry the weight of other people's expectations on our shoulders. I am here to tell you; you

don't need anyone's permission to live the life you want. Trust your instincts. Speak your truth, take up space, unapologetically. Remember, you are allowed to fail. Failure is not a reflection of your worth, but rather a necessary stop on the way to success. Embrace your failures as opportunities to learn and grow.

Why Life Is to Be Savoured – seize the day, run the world, drink good coffee, be you

While chasing dreams is essential, life is also meant to be savoured. I picked up running one point in my life. A couple of years later, and over 10 marathons, including three international Abbott World Major Marathons (WMM), several international half marathons. I have learned that success does not just come from the milestones we achieve. It comes from finding meaning in the everyday moments — the laughter with family and friends, the quiet cup of coffee and the solitude of an early morning run.

Dream Big, Act, and Pass It On

In conclusion, as we ‘Dream Big’, let us remember that we do not walk this path alone. No matter your faith, trust in God or your higher power, for leaning on something greater than ourselves provides us with the strength we need. For me, I trust in Jesus Christ, who said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Doing it alone can be hard, but with faith, we can push through the challenges and achieve the extraordinary. To the younger me, and to the women of the next generation: dream big for the girl who is watching, who feels like she does not belong, who is afraid to speak up!



RUTH OKAL

A seasoned real estate investment professional with over two decades of experience in the real estate and asset management sectors. Ruth has consistently demonstrated exceptional leadership and results-driven approach in portfolio construction, asset allocation, and asset management of high-value property assets across East Africa. Currently serving as the Assistant General Manager of ILAM Fahari I-REIT at ICEA Lion Asset Management Ltd, Ruth has been at the forefront of pioneering initiatives

within the region's real estate market, such as the transformation of East Africa's first listed Income Real Estate Investment Trust (I-REIT) and the groundbreaking restructuring of the REIT into a restricted structure, a first in East Africa.

Ruth was a Gazetted Board Member and immediate past Vice Chairperson of the Valuers Registration Board. She also serves as Chairperson of the Policy, Research & Publications Committee of the REIT Association of Kenya. With a passion for shaping policy and advocating for industry advancement, Ruth is a strategic leader committed to fostering growth and innovation in real estate investment across East Africa.

Ruth holds a Masters in Valuation, Property Management from the University of Nairobi, a Bachelor's degree in Land Economics from the University of Nairobi, Diploma in Valuation & Property Management, Chartered Institute of Securities (CISI) level 2, Certified Financial Analyst – Level 3 on-going, a CDI Diploma in Professional Coaching among other certifications.

Carving Your Path In Real Estate And Beyond

Breaking Barriers and Pioneering Change

Ruth is a name that resonates with innovation and leadership in East Africa's real estate landscape. As the Assistant General Manager of ILAM Fahari I-REIT, she has spent two decades redefining asset management and valuation. More than just a seasoned professional, she is a trailblazer—instrumental in transforming East Africa's first listed Income Real Estate Investment Trust and spearheading its groundbreaking restructuring.

This chapter is a roadmap for ambitious women ready to accelerate action in pursuit of their dreams. Inspired by the International Women's Day, it is a call to break barriers, embrace ambition, and chart a bold course for success.

Ambition is Strength: Own Your Power

Growing up in a village, raised by a resilient grandmother, ambition often felt like a forbidden word. In a culture where children, especially girls, were expected to be seen and not heard, dreaming big was almost revolutionary.

The stigma of coming from a single-parent household added another layer of challenge. But through it all, I discovered that ambition is not a flaw; it is a force, a driving engine for growth, success, and transformation.

My childhood dream was simple yet audacious: to break free from the limitations of my environment and create a future beyond what I had known. Education became my passport, and I pursued it relentlessly, earning a place at the University of Nairobi. That persistent drive led me to a fully funded Master's degree, a nine-year tenure at a prestigious global real estate firm, and a seat at the table at the National REIT Association of the United States (NA-REIT) conference in New York City.

To every woman reading this: identify your strengths, amplify them, and never apologise for your aspirations. Whether it's academic excellence, artistic creativity, or leadership potential; lean into what makes you unique. Because when you know where you are going, the world steps aside to let you through.

The Power of Resilience: Turning Setbacks into Springboards

Life will test you. Not once, not twice, but constantly. The question is: will you rise?

Despite excelling in primary school and securing a place in a top high school, financial constraints forced me to repeat a year. It was a defining moment; one that could have shattered my resolve. Instead, I chose perseverance. I attended a local "harambee" day school, walking long distances daily because I refused to accept defeat. Doubt whispered that my dreams were too big. But I si-

lenced those doubts with action. That same resilience became my superpower in my career. I learned early that the worst anyone can say is "No." But regret? That lingers forever. So, I spoke up, asked for bigger roles, chased promotions, and backed my ambitions with results.

When Kenya introduced REIT regulations in 2013, I saw an opportunity to be part of something historic. Transitioning from agency and valuation to investment management was uncharted territory, but I embraced the challenge. My boss, an 'iron lady', gifted me a Maasai elephant artifact with a card that read: *"This elephant is big, but we shall slice it piece by piece"*. Those words fueled me through sleepless nights, intense learning, and tireless dedication. And on September 30, 2015, history was made; Kenya's first I-REIT was authorised by the Capital Markets Authority.

That moment was not just a milestone; it was a testament to the power of resilience. If it does not break you, it will build you. And if you let it, it will make you unstoppable.

Build Strong Support Networks: Your Net Worth is Your Network

"Us girls gotta stick together" is not just a phrase; it is a survival strategy.

The real estate industry can be an intimidating space for women. I have sat in boardrooms as the only woman, been mistaken for the tea server, and had my expertise questioned simply because of my gender. One client even asked if I had ever personally accumulated a million shillings; his way of dismissing my financial insights.

Here is the truth: you do not need validation from those who underestimate you. You need a network that believes in you.

Find mentors who uplift you. Build relationships based on trust and respect. Surround yourself with people who challenge and support your growth. Because success is never a solo journey; it is a collective effort, a network of women empowering each other to rise beyond what they could ever imagine.

Dream Big, Take Action, and Pay It Forward

This chapter is not just about personal ambition; it is about creating a ripple effect. Every woman who dares to dream big and take action inspires another to do the same.

As we accelerate toward our goals, let's commit to three things:

- ▶ Embracing ambition—without guilt, fear, or apology.
- ▶ Cultivating resilience—seeing setbacks as setups for success.
- ▶ Building strong networks—because empowered women empower everyone.

When we lift each other, we do not just dream big, we make big dreams inevitable.



BETTY NGARE

BETTY NGARE is a tax professional based in Nairobi, Kenya. She has over a decade experience in tax practice. She is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya and holds a Masters of Arts in Law and Diplomacy from Tufts University, Boston, Massachusetts and a Bachelor of Laws degree from Moi University. She also holds an accounting qualification from the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA).

Betty currently works at Nestlé as the Head of Tax for the Eastern and Southern Africa Region, comprising twenty-three African countries. In her current role, she is responsible for the tax function across the region. She provides key strategic tax advice and ensures that the organisation, systems

and processes are compliant with tax legislation. She manages any tax disputes and enjoys tax advocacy and participates in several associations across the region. Betty was recently awarded Employee of the Year, 2024, a recognition of her efforts in bringing significant impact in the organisation. She takes great joy in mentoring and training younger professionals within and outside the organisation. In 2024 she participated in the Strathmore Roundtable discussion on recent tax changes.

Her mantra for the year is 'plus ultra', there is 'more beyond'.

Embrace The Journey – Take It All In Stride!

One Friday afternoon, as I drove down the surprisingly clear Olenguruone Road located within a bustling Nairobi suburb, I found myself reflecting on the advice I would offer to younger women professionals—those who, like me several years ago, are navigating their paths and questioning whether they are on the right track. They are filled with excitement about life and the opportunities ahead, brimming with ideas and ambition, yet often grappling with a sense of nervous uncertainty about the future. Here are my thoughts:

First, whatever task you undertake, pour your heart into it. Always strive to give your best, regardless of how small the task may seem. The little things, when done well, accumulate and do not go unnoticed. Resist the temptation to settle for mediocrity; excellence in the small things will pave the way for greater opportunities. A skilled individual will stand before kings, not obscure figures. Bring your A-game every day and to every task.

Second, embrace creativity. Take the time to think through various challenges and devise solutions that add value in your role. This not only addresses problems but also infuses your daily routine with enjoyment and satisfaction. In this age of AI and technology, numerous resources are available to help you differentiate yourself, your business, or your organisation. Think outside the box and make a meaningful impact.

As I continued my drive down that relatively quiet road, I pondered whether it is true that women require extra support to succeed in the professional world. Do we genuinely need mentors and seminars to advance our careers? Is this just a lot of hullabaloo about nothing? The other gender does not seem to make as much fuss about this; they appear to have it all figured out. Perhaps this is why Men's International Day often goes unnoticed, while our own is celebrated with much pomp and colour. I have come to firmly believe that, yes, we do need that extra guidance—someone to share wisdom and knowledge, provide opportunities, and challenge us to step outside our comfort zones. In truth, everyone needs support; no one is an island.

I feel incredibly fortunate to work for an organisation that values women and makes conscious effort to rally around them. It emphasises building the soft and professional skills essential for a successful career. I have also had the privilege of being mentored by accomplished men and women who recognised my potential and encouraged me to grow. Some I sought out intentionally, while others came into my life organically. It is crucial for younger women (and those who are older) to seek mentorship and guidance from senior leaders. There is so much to learn beyond the classroom.

Third, embrace challenges head-on. You can do it! As women, we often want to have all our ducks in row, only pursuing opportunities we are certain we can conquer. This mindset can lead to missed opportunities. When presented with a chance for growth and advancement, consider it carefully, but be cautious of falling into analysis paralysis. Take the leap; you will learn to navigate the journey as you go. Banish the imposter syndrome—remember, you are capable and deserving of the opportunities that come your way. Your future self will thank you for it.

Fourth, learn to collaborate both internally and externally. While some individuals may find this easier than others, it is essential to engage meaningfully with people at all levels. This collaboration is vital for your growth. By working together, you gain invaluable insights and increase your visibility for future opportunities.

Finally, as you ascend in your career or business, remember to extend a hand to someone else and help them rise alongside you. There is great fulfillment in lifting others as you climb.



MJENI MWATSAMA NJUE

MJENI MWATSAMA, is a girl who loves and tries to live life to the fullest. An Advocate of the High Court of Kenya with 16 years post admission experience. She runs and manages the firm of Messrs Mjeni Mwatsama & Co. Advocates. Her area of practice being Family Law, Commercial Law and Insurance Law. She is a certified Mediator.

Mjeni holds an LLB Degree from the University of London and Post Graduate Diploma from the Kenya School of Law. She holds a Diploma in Management from Kenya Institute of Management (KIM) and is currently pursuing her Masters Degree in Peace and Conflict from St Paul University.

She is currently serving her second term as the Deputy Chairperson of the Cooperative Tribunal which has made her become an

ambassador of the cooperative sector and hopes to ensure everyone appreciates the value of the co-operatives.

She serves in the board of Kenya Institute of Primate Research Institute – Institutional Scientific & Ethical Review Committee giving legal advice.

Mjeni is passionate about making a positive impact and ensuring any organisation is all rounded and understands the legal framework around it.

Know Your Worth And Hold Your Head High!

When I was tasked with writing this article, I wondered where I would find the content. RRNM whispered, “*Oh, you are the content*”.

The next hurdle was finding the time. RRNM reminded me that a day has 24 hours, and as women, we are ingenious; we create more hours to fit everything that needs to be done.

Challenges and Wins of a Rabai girl

As a young girl in primary school, I looked up to my dear mother, RRNM. She was a secretary in the private sector who knew her worth, and the community admired her. What more could a girl ask for?

So, when asked about my ambitions at that age, my response was simple and unwavering: I wanted to be a secretary. However, some frowned upon my dream of following in RRNM’s footsteps.

Did it really matter? RRNM was the real deal. This was the first hurdle I had to overcome—the societal perception that my dreams were inferior. In the 1990s, there was a surge of encouragement for children to pursue careers in medicine, law, and engineering. Why would I want to become a mere secretary?

High school was a game changer. I rediscovered another part of myself that led me toward what society deemed

‘good careers’. Here I am today, an advocate, having been swayed by societal expectations. I dare say that sometimes we need that influence—whether positive or negative—to push us out of our comfort zones.

My grades in high school were not the best, and I was just going through the motions. I am grateful for RRNM, who believed in my dreams even when my grades were failing. She supported me and dared to dream big alongside me. The secretary she was got me enrolled in university, where I pursued my Bachelor’s Degree in Law.

Fast forward to today, I have seventeen years of experience in legal practice. RRNM helped me transition from a place of doubt to navigating the rough terrains that built my resilience in this male-dominated field.

Why a Man’s World?

As a young advocate, when asked where I worked, I would casually say I was in a law firm. Many interpreted this to mean I was a secretary, which upset me. I chose not to correct them because I wanted to highlight that even secretaries are human and deserve respect, especially for RRNM’s profession.

Society did not expect me to be in active litigation practice; it perceived that we belonged in corporate environments, where things were cool, calm, and collected. Dream, my dear ones! As long as you have the knowl-

edge and skills, you can succeed even in areas perceived as ‘not female-friendly’—whatever that means.

Of Minority Groups?

The Government of Kenya, in its bid to be inclusive, creates opportunities for minority groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, and religion. It can be a double tragedy to be both a woman and from a minority ethnic group.

Should it matter?

I am currently serving my second term as Deputy Chairperson at the Cooperative Tribunal, a competitive position. When I first reported to the office, I was met with skeptical looks, as if they thought I must come from an affluent background or know the right people. Their interest in me waned when they realised I could not assist them in the big offices. Then came the insinuation that I was in my position solely because of my ethnicity.

Whether minority or majority, what truly matters is that the work gets done. This often comes with the burden of having to do more than others to minimise criticism and avoid giving them fodder for fault-finding.

Despite the insinuations from those around me, I choose peace.

Know your worth, hold your head high, and keep your eyes open for the snakes ready to bite—**CRUSH THEIR HEADS!!!!!!!**



PAULA OCHANGO

Paula Ochango Otechi is a seasoned legal professional with over eight years of experience in infrastructure project development and finance across Africa. She is part of the Business Development Department at Mota-Engil Africa and Latin America, where she plays a key role in the preparation, structuring, and management of infrastructure projects from inception to financial close.

Her expertise spans contract negotiation, risk assessment, and securing project financing, with a strong focus on structuring bankable projects that attract investment. Paula has contributed to major transport and energy projects, including the Lobito Railway Corridor PPP in Angola and the Kenya Roads Annuity Programme. She has also developed procurement step plans for Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) across multiple African markets, streamlining project execution.

With a deep understanding of the legal and commercial challenges that hinder infrastructure development, Paula brings practical insights into mitigating feasibility-stage failures. She is passionate about creating sustainable infrastructure solutions that drive economic growth and is committed to advancing bankable project structures in Africa.

There Is No One Way To Do This Life, But There Is Only One Way To Be You

A Five-Minute Conversation with a Legendary Icon

In just five minutes, a conversation with a legendary icon altered the course of my career. Early last year (2024), I met Judy Thongori, and in our brief exchange, she shared a truth I had wrestled with for years: *“Paula, never be afraid to show up as the most authentic version of yourself.”* She reminded me that while the message I carried as a lawyer was important, its power lay in the integrity of the vessel delivering it. That simple yet profound statement shifted something within me. In that moment, I felt seen—not just as a legal professional, but as a person with layers, passions, and a vision beyond traditional expectations.

Judy Thongori (c. 1965 – 14 January 2025) was a remarkable Kenyan lawyer and rights activist. She was a fierce advocate for women’s rights, known for successfully su-

ing the Kenyan government for failing to implement the constitutional requirement of 30% representation for women. Throughout her career, she championed justice and mentored many young lawyers, leaving a legacy that will not be forgotten.

That conversation sparked a transformation. It was not just a moment of clarity; it was the start of a journey. With the guidance of my mentor, Coach Ann Njogu, through her transformational Becoming Limitless Programme, I finally discovered my purpose—something I once dismissed as a mere buzzword.

Living Authentically to Achieve your Purpose

The legal profession often comes with an unspoken rule-book or rather, a very real one that dictates how to dress, act, and even think. The perception that credibility is tied to conformity is deeply ingrained. But I have learned that there is no single way to be a lawyer, no one-size-fits-all mould to fit into. The same is true for how we live, pursue our purpose, and contribute to our world. While it's essential to respect professional rules and standards, authenticity should never be sacrificed.

My purpose has always been intertwined with Africa's growth and development. I chose to specialise in infrastructure law because I believe infrastructure projects are not just legal transactions; they are the backbone of Africa's future. I have spent years negotiating, structuring, and advising on projects that shape economies and improve lives.

When I was in university, I wanted to be a human rights lawyer. It felt like the only way to make a real impact. I remember applying for an internship at a well-known human rights NGO, only to be rejected because I "didn't have enough experience". At that moment, I felt lost, like my dream of making a difference had slipped away. But what I did not realise then was that advocacy is not limited to one path.

Activism is not one-size-fits-all. It is in the courtroom, on the streets, in mentorship, and in shaping policies that impact millions. I may not be a human rights lawyer in the traditional sense, but my work still contributes to justice and transformation. Before meeting Coach Ann, I did not fully understand my purpose, but I always knew it was linked to advocacy, it just did not have to be through the conventional route of human rights law.

Breaking Stereotypes: A Lawyer, A Woman, A Runner, A Nurturer

I have always believed in living fully, without unnecessary limitations. I am a lawyer, but I am also a woman who loves tattoos, a marathon runner, a nurturer of both people and plants. My love for nature is inked onto my skin, each tattoo a reflection of the same awe and care I give to the living things around me. Every piece tells a story, just as every infrastructure project I work on is a story of transformation. Yet, there is often an expectation that we must choose one identity and conform. That strength and softness cannot coexist. That ambition and warmth are opposites. That professionalism and self-expression are at odds. But I reject these notions.

Tattoos do not make me any less credible as a legal professional. Running marathons does not make me any less intellectual. Loving plants and nurturing life does not make me any less ambitious. Working in the corporate world does not diminish my advocacy work. I am all these things at once, and I do not have to choose between them. Neither does anyone else.

No One Way of Doing It

If I could tell my younger self one thing, it would be this: there is no single blueprint for success. You do not have to follow a rigid path to be respected in your field. You do not have to shrink parts of yourself to fit in. You do not have to choose between passion and professionalism, between strength and softness, between structure and creativity.

We need more lawyers who are passionate about Africa's development. More people willing to think beyond convention, use their skills to shape the future, and do so authentically. So, whether your self-expression comes in the form of tattoos, art, storytelling, running, or mentorship embrace it. There is no one way to do this life, but there is only one way to be you.

What parts of yourself have you been holding back? It is time to bring them forward.



**FIND YOUR
PURPOSE**



“

Your purpose is not something you find—it's something you build.

With every step, every challenge, and every risk, you are shaping the reason you were put here.



NASRA NANDA

Nasra is a passionate lawyer by training, and an Honourable Member of County Assembly, in Nairobi, and the CEO & ESG Lead at the Kenya Green Building Society, and Chairperson of the Africa Regional Network of the World Green Building Council. Nasra is driven by the relentless pursuit of making a positive impact, providing practical solutions, in an ever-changing world.

With a strong background in policy advocacy, stakeholder engagement, and ESG, Nasra has been instrumental in advancing the built environment voice as a key player in the climate and development agenda for Africa.

Through Nasra's efforts, KGBS was a partner at the Africa Climate Summit, Kenya's built environment commitments COP28.

Her vision is to redefine sustainability for the Global South, ensuring contextual, inclusive, and impactful approaches that align with Africa's people, challenges, and opportunities. She also brings vast experience in corporate law, real estate, and environmental governance, shaping policies that drive systemic change.

A Journey of Learning, Unlearning, Passion, Purpose, And Impact

I have always believed that the best careers are those that align with passion and purpose. For me, the journey into law, sustainability, and leadership has been more than just a profession—it has been a calling. Each day, I wake up with a sense of responsibility, purpose and excitement, knowing that my work has the power to serve communities, policies, and the future of our built environment.

A Legal Mind with a Green Heart

As a lawyer by training, my early years in the legal profession sharpened my ability to analyse, advocate, and influence. I found immense satisfaction in problem-solving, and offering solutions to clients. However, my perspective changed when I realised that the law, particularly the aspects of the law, that affected people, environment and governance, was more than just contracts and compliance—it was about reshaping our world, and leaving it better. I started looking for this everywhere.

This realisation led me to develop a passion in matters sustainability with a focus on Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) where, I would later realise that my legal skills became the foundation for policy-making, advocacy, and innovation in Kenya's built environment. My role as the CEO and ESG Lead at the Kenya Green Building Society (KGBS) and Chairperson of the Africa Regional Network of the World Green Building Council has allowed me to merge law, leadership, and sustainability in

ways I never imagined, and as a sub-national legislator, at the Nairobi City County Assembly, seeing it translate to how it affects people's lives is humbling.

From Legal Frameworks to Global Climate Action

My career has given me a front-row seat in global climate action, from advancing Kenya's built environment agenda, to shaping Africa's sustainability agenda on international platforms like COP28. Through KGBS, we have influenced policies, trained numerous individuals in sustainability, and helped build the environment. Players embrace the understanding that the built environment is an ecosystem of opportunity, that is a platform for dignity for communities, prosperity for businesses and legacy for government.

One of my most fulfilling moments was certifying the Nairobi Governor's Office, as Africa's first IFC EDGE Green government office, and seeing Nairobi's Climate Change Act come to life. Initiatives I contributed to by ensuring the built environment were recognised as a key driver for urban climate resilience. Seeing policies transition from paper to impact fuels my passion daily.

A Career Rooted in Africa's Future

Beyond the technical aspects of my work, what keeps me motivated is the people—learning from and serving communities, mentoring young professionals, and working with forward-thinking leaders. Africa's cities are

evolving rapidly, and I love that my work directly influences how we build, live, and thrive in a changing climate.

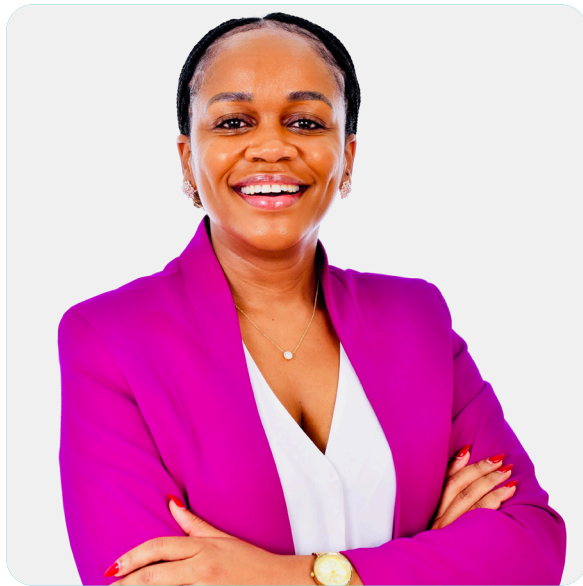
I am committed to showcasing Africa's potential on the global stage, proving that sustainability is not just a western concept but a necessity tailored to our realities. This career allows me to advocate for inclusive, practical, and transformative solutions that recognise our journey, challenges, and unique strengths.

The Future is Green, and I am Just Getting Started

Every day, I get to serve people, influence leaders, shape policies, lead conversations, and drive impact that goes beyond me. My career has given me a purpose far greater than a title—it has become a movement for change.

For anyone seeking fulfilment, my advice is simple: Find work that aligns with your values, challenges you, and leaves the world better than you found it.

For me, I found that at the nexus of strategy, relationships, law, and sustainability, and the platform for that now, is the built environment—and I would not have it any other way.



MARGARET NJERU

Margaret Njeru is a passionate advocate of law, policy and governance, with a keen focus on societal transformation. She holds a Bachelor's in Law from The Catholic University of Eastern Africa and a Master's in International Law with International Relations from the University of Kent, United Kingdom. She is committed to shaping policies that create lasting impact.

Beyond the boardrooms and legal frameworks, she wears many hats as a wife, mother, daughter and fierce champion for women. She believes in the power of women to nurture, build and transform: *Give a woman anything and she will make the best out of it.* For her, making space for women is not just an idea—it is a responsibility.

Her life is a beautiful blend of ambition and family. She cherishes the joy of motherhood, the strength of partnership and the deep bonds that shape her world. Driven by a love for meaningful experiences, travel and the beautiful moments that make life extraordinary. Whether navigating complex legal landscapes or creating cherished moments with her loved ones, she approaches it all with purpose and passion.

At her core, Margaret is a believer in change—leading it, embracing it and inspiring others to do the same.

The Career I Did Not Know I Needed

I never wanted to be a lawyer. In fact, it never once crossed my mind as a young girl. Growing up, I was the shy, introverted girl who would rather devour books in the corner of a library than argue a case in front of a room full of people. Courtrooms? Cross-examinations? That was an absolute no. Dentistry was my dream—a quiet profession where I could focus on dental care, not legal briefs.

But life, as it often does, had other plans. Or should I say, my father did.

As soon as I finished high school, I had my sights set on dental school. Applications sent, dreams in motion. Until one day, my father suggested I accompany him to drop my sister off at her college. It seemed like a harmless outing. When we arrived, I was handed a student ID, my student ID, for law school. My father beamed and said, *“Welcome to law school, my dear”*. It was not an argument I could win, so off I went, clutching my new identity as a law student. The truth? I did not enjoy law school. But I powered through. I finished my bachelor's degree and, unsure of what else to do, went on to get a Masters of Law (LLM). Still, I felt lost in a world of statutes and legalese.

After completing my LLM, I secured a job, and life took a different trajectory. A year into working and just a month before my wedding, I found out I was pregnant with my first child. After giving birth, I made the bold (and slightly

questionable) decision to join Kenya School of Law with a three-week-old baby. Picture me: sleep-deprived, pulling all-nighters not just to study but also to manage night feeds and soothe a colicky baby, juggling textbooks in one hand and a bottle in the other. It was chaotic, to say the least. Once I finished law school, I took a break to raise my baby. It felt like I finally had some peace and quiet after the whirlwind I had experienced.

Returning to work after the sabbatical felt daunting. I vividly remember sitting in a waiting room for an interview, listening to other candidates share their impressive fifteen years resumes. I had barely started my career. Yet, against all odds, I got the job. That moment was a turning point. It reminded me of the value of showing up and believing in my abilities, even when self-doubt loomed large.

It was not until I embraced a shift in mindset that things truly began to change. I stopped viewing law as an obligation and started seeing it as an opportunity. With the support of my family and a renewed sense of purpose, I found my groove. I discovered that my voice did matter and began carving out my niche in corporate commercial law. The courtroom still is not my stage (thankfully!), but I have found my purpose in boardrooms, drafting deals, negotiating contracts and shaping policies. My passion, however, goes far beyond contracts and negotiations. It lies in inspiring young girls to dream big. I want them to know that the boardroom is not out of

reach, that they can make an impact, and that they can change the narrative. We can balance it all: career, family, motherhood and ambition. It's not about following someone else's path but about boldly forging your own.

Looking back, I realise that being thrust into law school was not the end of my dreams but the beginning of a journey I did not know I needed. Yes, my father's 'surprise enrolment' still makes for a hilarious story at family gatherings, but it also taught me resilience and adaptability.

To the next generation of women: your journey will have twists and turns, moments where you feel lost or uncertain and it is okay. Growth often comes in the chaos. Do not be afraid to step into spaces that challenge you or make you uncomfortable. That is where transformation happens.

Motherhood taught me patience, marriage taught me partnership and my career taught me perseverance. Together, they have shaped a life that, while not perfect, is rich with purpose and meaning. If there is one thing I have learnt, it is that success is not linear. It is about defining what it means to you and having the courage to chase it on your own terms.

As for dentistry? The thought of wielding a drill, navigating cavities – hard pass. I may not have chosen law, but it chose me and I would not have it any other way.



LIZ LENJO

Liz Lenjo is the Founder and Managing Consultant of MyIP Legal Studio. She specializes in Intellectual Property, Entertainment, Media, and Fashion Law. Liz is the Chairperson of the Copyright Tribunal. She also serves as a Board Member of the Nuclear Power and Energy Agency. Liz is also the Interim Chairperson of the Kenya Fashion Council and Head of Legal, Policy, and Intellectual Property.

She is an adjunct faculty member at the Strathmore University Law School where she teaches Media and Entertainment Law. She is also part of a team that is currently curating an Executive Fashion Law Program for African Fashion Entrepreneurs at the Law School. Liz is also a tutor with CopyrightX by HarvardX- Kenya which is under the GoDown Arts Center. She is a volunteer with the Kenya Bureau of Standards as the Chairperson of the Intellectual Property Technical Committee.

Liz has been recognized for her efforts in the legal field and is a nominee of the prestigious Business Daily Top 40 under 40 Women 2018. Liz is recognized as one of the Shining Lights, 2021 by WIPRDiversity, a listing of „the best and brightest Influential Women in IP globally“. She has also been recently recognized as one of the Top 25 Women in Digital - Kenya for her IP advocacy in the online space.

In 2022, Liz was recognized by WIPRDiversity as a Beacon of Light for being persistent and indomitable to make the IP profession more inclusive. Her consultancy has also been feted for Most Adaptive Use of Technology by the inaugural D.E.A.R Awards 2022 by Kaya-na which celebrates women in business in Kenya. Liz was also feted as IP Lawyer of the Year 2022 by the Africa Legal Innovation Awards. She has also been feted as one of the Top 100 Women in Intellectual Property 2025, Women's World IP Ranking, and World Trade-mark Review 1000 in 2024 and 2025, Bronze award.

Life Reflections

Lately, social media has been buzzing with millennial women sharing coffee conversations with their younger selves. As I observed their reflections, I found myself reminiscing about my own journey as a budding lawyer—a young dreamer navigating a world that once seemed constant and predictable. As I delved deeper into my undergraduate studies, I soon realised that reality was far more complex than I had imagined.

Initially, I was torn between family law and international law. Yet, I could not ignore the sheer number of young lawyers pursuing the same path. How was I going to stand out? Was there room to branch out? These questions lingered, urging me to think beyond traditional legal paths.

Beyond law, I had a deep love for the arts and entertainment. I moonlighted as a writer and model, immersing myself in creative spaces. I fondly recall evenings at the Homeboyz Radio lounge with my bandmates, waiting for our studio slot. Some nights, we would leave at 5 a.m., only for me to rush home, take a quick shower, and head straight to my classes. I made every interaction meaningful, building friendships and connections along the way.

I was full of energy and an insatiable curiosity for life. I fumbled, took risks, and learned. After all, what is life without trial and error? Then, I had my Aha! moment—why not merge my love for the arts with my passion for

law? That was when I set my sights on becoming an entertainment lawyer.

I was not sure what success in that field would look like, but I hit the ground running. I wrote for True Love magazine, chasing celebrity interviews, turning industry figures into friends, and translating their experiences into insights for Kenya's budding entertainment scene. I took on pro bono work, honed my craft, and participated in a game-changing project with Footprints Press. As a writer for their ground breaking coffee table book titled, *Life Journeys: Seeking Destiny*, I had the privilege of interviewing trailblazing women across law and the arts. Their openness about their lives, struggles, and triumphs reshaped my understanding of success.

In the early days, I equated success with financial wealth and luxury cars. But over time, my definition evolved. Today, success means leaving a legacy and inspiring the next generation.

When I look in the mirror, I admire my younger self—the girl who dared to be different despite doubts and jokes about becoming a broke lawyer in a struggling industry. I persevered, volunteering, investing in my growth, and embracing uncertainty. The journey was not without setbacks—failed auditions, cancelled interviews, rejection from top-tier law firms, and even struggling to afford remark fees for my bar exams. There were moments of deep frustration when I contemplated walking away from the legal path altogether. Little did I know that one day, I would be a business owner, board member, and chairperson in various institutions, with my crowning achievement being appointed the Chairperson of the Copyright Tribunal by the Chief Justice of Kenya. The first

woman to head the Tribunal, and at the time of my appointment, I was the youngest lawyer to be appointed a chairperson of a tribunal. Life is full of unexpected possibilities.

Through it all, I have an incredible support system. Friends, mentors, and kind acquaintances who remind me of my purpose. Some of my mentors have become lifelong friends, people I still meet for coffee and call for guidance. We share dreams, challenges, and debates that push us to grow. Some of those conversations have even shaped my speaking engagements and interviews, and they continue to.

Life—and a legal career—is a journey. Embrace it with flexibility and an open heart. Mistakes are not failures; they're lessons that hold the key to growth. True success is not about wealth or status. It is about sustainability, consistency, and most importantly, a good name.

Fear will creep in, it is normal, but do not let it paralyse you. Instead, transform it into an opportunity to become the best version of yourself. Seek out women ahead of you, learn from their experiences, and build on their wisdom. Our mistakes are there to guide you—not to be repeated, but to be leveraged for your advancement.

Pray for discernment, knowing when an opportunity aligns with your purpose. Every interaction, setback, and triumph, is a lesson. Be present. Be open. The journey is yours to write.



STELLA MUTAI

Stella Mutai Head of Mortgage Business at HFC, has vast experience in Real Estate lending, Green Financing, Diaspora Banking, Mortgage Product Development & Management. She holds an MBA in Strategic Management and undergraduate Degree in Bachelor of Arts – Communications from Daystar University. Certificate in Housing Finance Course for South Saharan Africa University of Cape town, and other Real Estate & Marketing courses. She is responsible for Building a profitable Mortgage and Commercial property book at HFC that offers the best solution in the market to Corporate, Retail and Businesses Banking Customers.

Stella is a Board member at Nyumba Regulated Non –WDT SACCO, and Kenya Property Developers Association (KPDA). She is a member of Women in Real Estate (WIRE), and Women on Board Network (WOBN). She is a Retirement Benefits Authority (RBA) Certified Trustee, HFC REITS Trustee and Registered Estate Agent with (EARB). Honored as the Best Woman in Real Estate in Africa at the 8th Africa Property Investment (API) awards 2024, the leading events and thought leadership platform in African Real Estate.

From A Countryside Girl To A Property Banker

Born and raised in the slopes of the lush green tea plantations in Meru County. I am still the girl that grew up in Meru County surrounded by tea plantations. I grew up watching seedlings budding to full grown tea leaves, picked the leaves and then delivered them to a nearby tea factory. All this is nostalgic.

Though I grew up in the countryside, my parents were big on affirmation. My father, in particular, affirmed me at an early age. I grew up seeing my hardworking parents giving their everything to ensure that we had a comfortable life and the best education. They believed that the best gift they could give us was a good education hence they sacrificed to take us to the best schools and colleges.

Raised in a household where I observed my father read daily newspapers while my mother read the Parents Magazine, I naturally became an avid reader at young age. Other than the academic knowledge, I soaked myself with diverse knowledge on world affairs, current news. This is what set me apart from most children. We did not have much distraction hence I could focus on my academics, story books and novels that I either bought or exchanged with my neighbours. I thought I would one day become a lawyer from reading all Jeffrey Archer's novels.

I joined a boarding school when I was ten years old. We had to clean the school compound, classes and our own clothes. Being away from home for the better part of

my early school years, I became independent and could make decisions without consulting anyone. This has been of great help in my life journey because I can think on my feet and make informed decisions expeditiously. Being away from home also taught me perseverance and taking responsibility of whatever role or duty was placed in my hands. My parents believed in hard work, a value that was instilled in us at an early age. We did all the house chores including cooking, and cleaning—all in a day's work. These tasks taught me resilience, time management, and hard work.

On money management, I was in charge of processing payments for the casual workers at my parent's tea farm, by counting the number of tea seedlings or kilograms harvested, recording and making payments. At this early age my parents trusted me with the responsibility of paying the casuals and ensuring that the records were balanced. I believe this is how my relationship with money was developed. While in college I had minimal interactions with the city life, choosing instead to focus on my studies. I pursued communication, got to work in the college newspaper as a reporter and later as a features editor.

Joining the job market, I started working as an intern, in one of the communications office of a children's home. I briefly worked in a media agency, but had to quit because the owner of the firm looked down upon me. She even had the audacity to puff smoke in my face. She

thought I was naïve, and desperate. Through this experience, I learnt never to look down upon people and respecting all cadre of people. I have values that I hold onto such as respect and honour. It is always important to respect people, what they bring on board and who they are since they have different personalities, and have different worldviews.

In my career, there are people that I have looked up to and still admire what they do. I have had mentors that have walked with me at various stages of life. You will always need them. You may ask if I have ever doubted myself? Or if I have had an imposter syndrome? Yes, but in all these I have anchored my believe and hope in God, and living one day at a time without carrying any baggage. I have taught myself to travel easy and light.

I believe in sitting at the table when presented with an opportunity and ultimately in God. Trust the process...things will never come on a silver platter or microwaved. My crowning came in September 2024 when I was honoured as the Best Woman in Real Estate in Africa during the 8th Africa Property Investment (API) awards, the leading events and thought leadership platform in African Real Estate.

On my life priorities I have learnt to live a harmonised life. Just like in a choir where there are different sounds and instruments and they all bring out the best tune so is my life; I try to live a harmonious life.



JOY WACHIRA-MONTET

Joy Wachira serves as the Programme Lead for Green Affordable Housing Finance (GAHF) in Kenya with Reall. Before joining Reall, she built a 10+ year career in banking within the corporate division across several top tier banks in Kenya, where her roles focused on managing relationships cutting across various thematic sectors. Joy holds a BA in Economics (Honors) from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and an MBA from the University of Nairobi. She has also achieved certification as an IFC-EDGE Expert and completed the Housing Finance for Sub-Saharan (HFSSA) program by the University of Cape Town. Outside of work, Joy enjoys spending time with her family and discovering new destinations through hiking and immersive travel experiences.

Beautiful Chaos

Dear younger me,

I see you, overtly reserved yet innately curious with a knack for subtle adventure. Perhaps the latter is best evidenced by your unconventional career journey. What you do not realize is that this oxymoron is a blessing in disguise, a skillset to master. Not necessarily because it will always guarantee success, far from it, rather for the sheer joy of living fully.

Your career presents a blank canvass, embrace it as a tapestry of seasons, remain open. Create your own masterpiece, embrace the soaring highs that send you into a joyful whimsy and the inevitable lows. Embrace the shifting seasons by remembering to pace yourself, not forgetting to pick your lessons fast, do not mull over the transitions too long. Anticipate that different paths will unfold and consequently unravel varied outcomes. Detach yourself from assigning meaning to each outcome and instead apply yourself to the “now.” In the process, life will happen—brace yourself and amass courage, you will need loads of it. These moments will prove to be the glue that binds it all. Opportunities in disguise, eventually becoming catalysts for authenticity and growth.

There is no permanence, everything is fluid. The jars with neat labels defining who and what you should be are a decoy, ideals that limit capacity for growth, an il-

lusion that serves for convenient benchmarking. Reinvent yourself whenever it feels right and do so with reckless abandon keeping in mind that the season you are in at that point in time may require that version of you and that is perfectly fine. Give yourself permission, often. Evaluate your decisions and accept risks and uncertainty. Failure too is a perceived notion and is bound to happen at some point; you will need a healthy dose of self-awareness to anchor yourself in who you are in those seasons. Do the hard work of anchoring yourself before the fact. Similarly, in those defining moments when you are scaling the heights, remember to stay humble.

Persistence will pay particularly when called to embrace the less glamorous seasons. Such instances often come in the most inconvenient moments in the form of arduous tasks, seemingly unjustified, often handed to you on a whim, exuding no glitz or glamor. The reward may not be apparent in the immediate with little room for choice, the impulsive knack will react through resistance, resist the urge to react and pause to reflect

The gift of choice is God-given, exercise it with caution as it comes with great responsibility of consequence. Master the art of making unpopular choices only if it sits well with your conscience. Hindsight is indeed 20/20; embrace learning and unlearning opportunities in equal

measure. Actively engage in your area of interest, deepening knowledge through continuous professional development whenever you can commit to it. Take time to reflect on the lessons and apply them.

When opportunities to pivot come knocking, pray, adapt and arise to the occasion. Try not to miss out on those once rare opportunities to take the unconventional route, shake things up a little and keep the adrenaline flowing. It does however take deep conviction and mastering discomfort which comes with a myriad of emotions, these too will pass. You will need to make sacrifices at some point or another, weighing the opportunity cost, whatever this may mean to you.

Relationships will be a critical ball to balance, cultivating meaningful ones will require deliberate effort. Whenever possible, appoint a personal sounding board of trusted allies, who exude qualities you respect and believe in your potential -this is a lifeline you will need to call up and pay forward often. The journey continues, more questions linger than answers. Anchor yourself in your values, those non negotiables that will outlive the ever-shifting marketplace landscape, remembering to stay true to your purpose and consistent in what you are known for. Do not take yourself too seriously while at it! It is, after all, a noisy world.



EMILY CHEPKOR

Emily Chepkor is a lawyer, ten-time marathon runner, and community builder. While still navigating her legal path, she found an unexpected passion in running—one that led her to create We Run Nairobi (WRN), Nairobi's largest and most inclusive running community.

What started as casual Saturday runs with a few friends has since grown into a community with over 20,000 members, bringing together runners of all levels. WRN is built on the principle that running should be for everyone, regardless of experience or pace, and has created a thriving space for connection, motivation, and shared achievement.

As a ten-time marathoner, Emily has competed in the Boston Marathon, the Berlin Marathon, the Chicago Marathon, among others and is currently pursuing the 7 World Marathon Majors. Beyond running, she enjoys tennis and exploring the intersection of law, sports, and community building.

Her journey is a testament to the power of taking the first step, embracing change, and creating impact. Through both law and running, she continues to push boundaries, foster growth, and inspire others to do the same.

The Power Of Taking The First Step

I am a lawyer that has found herself in unlikely paths.

If you had told me that I would establish and lead the largest running community in Nairobi, I would not have believed you. At the time, I was navigating a different kind of endurance test—my legal career. I started in international law, a field that I was deeply drawn to, but as time went on, I felt the pull to transition into domestic law, a more traditional legal practice. It was a slow and often uncertain, requiring me to retrain, requalify, and rethink the trajectory I had once envisioned for myself. It meant starting over in many ways, stepping into a space where I felt behind my peers, and dealing with the uncertainty of whether I had made the right choice.

During this transition, I found an unexpected source of stability—running. What began as a personal habit quickly became a space where I could think, reset, and process the challenges of my career. But beyond that, running gave me something else: a sense of community. I noticed how powerful it was to run alongside others, to share in the struggle of a hard workout or the triumph of a strong finish. This feeling was not just mine alone, but rang true for others too.

That is how We Run Nairobi (WRN) was born. What started as casual runs with a few friends steadily gained momentum. People kept coming back. The more we

showed up, the more others did too. People found camaraderie, accountability, and motivation in a group that expected nothing from them but their presence. WRN became more than a running club; it became a community, a testament that you did not need to be an elite athlete to be a runner. A space where showing up was enough—where consistency, not speed, defined success.

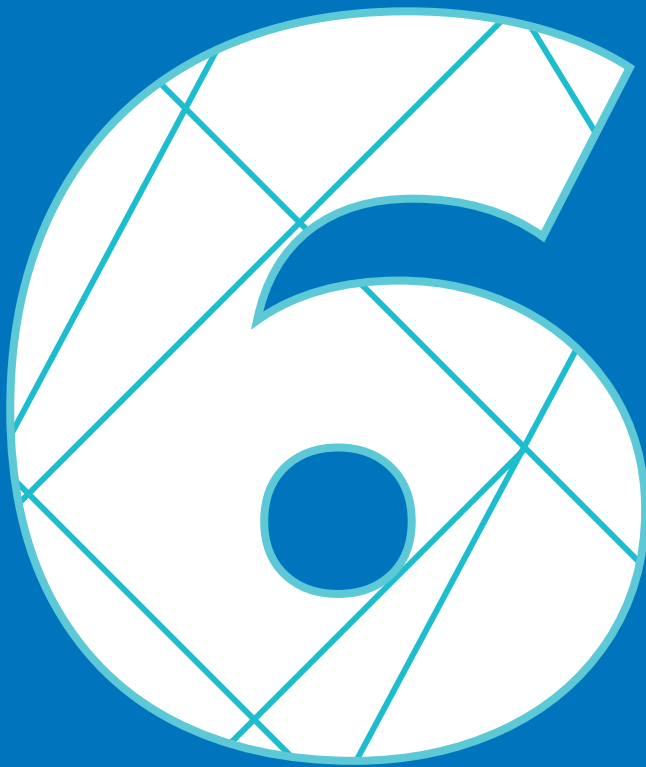
Looking back, my legal career and my journey with WRN have been shaped by the same lesson: progress is not always linear. Action: consistent, intentional action—creates change. I did not have all the answers when I pivoted to the traditional legal path, just as I did not have a grand blueprint when WRN started. But I took the first step, and then the next, and then another. Taking action, even when one feels unprepared, that action—repeated over time—creates momentum. That is how careers are built. That is how communities grow.

This is the lesson I want to pass on, especially to young women stepping into their careers. Whether you are entering the legal profession or pursuing a personal passion, you don't have to wait until you have everything figured out and neither do you need to feel fully ready. The truth is, no one ever does. Progress comes from doing, from taking steps even when you are unsure where they will lead.

In law, it is easy to feel like you are falling behind if your path does not look like everyone else's. The pressure to have a perfect career trajectory can be overwhelming. However, careers, like life, are rarely linear. If you find yourself questioning your direction, know that it is okay to pivot, to start fresh, or to take a route that looks different from what you once imagined. What matters is that you do not stay stuck.

The same applies to personal passions. WRN started because I loved running and wanted to share it with others. I did not set out to build a 20,000-member community. I simply wanted to create a space where people could run together. That small action—inviting a few people to join me—set off something much bigger than I ever anticipated.

So, to the young women reading this, especially those in law: you do not have to have it all figured out before you begin. The first step is enough. Whether in law, business, or even a hobby that unexpectedly turns into something bigger, *accelerate action* by simply starting. The path will unfold as you move forward, and along the way, you may just build something greater than you ever imagined.



LEADERSHIP

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True leadership is not about titles or power; it's about the impact you leave on others. **The best leaders are not those who demand a following, but those who create space for others to rise.**



RITA NJORA

Rita Njora is an Advocate with 18+ years of experience in Banking and Financial Services, working with Pan-African and Kenyan banks across corporate, retail, and microfinance markets. She has expertise in syndicated transactions, risk management, litigation, and corporate governance, providing strategic legal counsel that drives business growth.

Beyond her profession, she is passionate about mentoring girls and young women through the Girls for Girls Program, helping them develop the courage, vision, and skills for leadership. She is an avid reader, honing her skills in professional writing, and advocates for personal development as a key to transformation.

Her faith in God is her foundation. Through the gifts of teaching and counsel, she is committed to empowering women to see their true worth and fulfill their God-given purpose. Seeing them walk in their calling brings her immense joy.

My Transformative Journey As A Lawyer in Banking and Finance

My journey as a lawyer in banking and finance is a testament to the power of purpose, faith, and authenticity. From the outset, I believed my path was divinely guided. Every challenge has fostered resilience, and each opportunity has expanded my horizons, affirming that I am where I am meant to be. I am naturally introspective and analytical. While I may not be the loudest in the room, I have learnt that true influence lies in clarity, conviction, and courage. It is not about speaking the most but ensuring that when I do, my words resonate and inspire.

Faith, Emotional Intelligence, and Authentic Leadership
In the high-pressure world of banking and finance, my faith serves as my anchor, offering wisdom and patience. When faced with difficult decisions, I turn to my core values of truth, justice, and empathy. My identity in God profoundly shapes my work approach, providing me with purpose and clarity.

Emotional intelligence is equally essential, allowing me to recognise unspoken concerns, manage conflicts with empathy, and navigate complex negotiations. Leadership, to me, is about influencing through strategy and respect rather than mere authority.

Authenticity holds significant power in an industry that often values rigidity over relatability. By embracing both my strengths and vulnerabilities, I forge deeper connections. Whether mentoring young lawyers or advising executives, I have discovered that honesty fosters trust far more effectively than authority ever could.

‘Dream Big for Her’ represents more than just ambition; it is a call to action for women to step into under-represented spaces. It advocates for leadership rooted in integrity and a commitment to uplifting others. True success is not solely defined by personal achievements but by the impact we have on culture and the legacy we leave behind.

The Power of Mentorship, Allies, and Strategic Relationships

Success is seldom a solitary endeavour. Throughout my career, mentors, allies, and strategic relationships have played pivotal roles. Seasoned leaders have guided me, and peers have challenged and supported me along the way. Allies, both men and women, are instrumental in advocating for equity and unlocking opportunities. A single recommendation from the right person can change a career, which is why I actively seek mentorship and strive to pay it forward. The relationships I have built with external collaborators have evolved into lifelong friendships. Cultivating genuine connections across organisations and jurisdictions is essential for successfully navigating complex transactions.

Overcoming Impostor Syndrome

At times, I grappled with self-doubt, questioning whether I truly belonged, was qualified, experienced, or capable enough. Impostor syndrome can undermine even the most accomplished individuals. However, I have come to realise that true competence is about action—stepping up, showing up, and proving to myself and others that I am capable.

Defining moments arose when I stood firm against opposition. My legal positions were challenged not due to lack of merit, but because of who I was. In those moments, I relied on my preparation, expertise, and faith, forging resilience by refusing to be intimidated.

Advocating for People in the Workplace

Leadership is about advocacy—not just for clients but for colleagues and teams. I leverage my influence to champion fairness, inclusivity, and ethical practices.

One defining moment for me was advocating for a junior colleague who was facing reassignment due to misaligned roles. Recognising their potential, I proposed a stronger legal framework instead. Despite facing resistance, I presented my case to the CEO and secured approval. This experience reinforced my belief that advocating for others is crucial. Empowering my team ensures our legal function remains effective, even in the face of challenges.

As a woman in leadership, I understand that advocating for others is integral to my mission. It is about ensuring that talent is recognised, voices are heard, and workplaces foster respect, where individuals feel valued.

Lifelong Learning and Strategic Friendships

I am a lifelong learner who passionately believes in continuous learning, relearning, and unlearning. The legal landscape is constantly evolving, making it imperative to stay informed. The insights I have gained from individuals at all stages have been invaluable; wisdom is not solely a product of experience but also emerges from fresh perspectives.

Strategic friendships have been instrumental in my journey. Friends who share similar values serve as sounding boards, offering both encouragement and tough love. They help refine my perspectives, challenge my thinking, and keep me grounded. Learning from people of all ages has enriched my approach, reinforcing that growth is a continuous journey.

Living your Purpose Daily

My journey has been shaped by purpose. Every role I have held, every challenge I have faced, and every person I have encountered has contributed to a greater calling. Purpose is not a destination; it is something we live out daily in how we work, lead, and impact those around us.

For the next generation of women stepping into law, finance, or leadership, my message is simple: Know who you are, embrace lifelong learning, build meaningful relationships, stand firm in your values, and live your purpose boldly.



STELLA KINGORI

Stella Nyawira Kingori is the Head of Legal for Personal & Private Banking, Business & Commercial Banking, and Insurance & Asset Management at a Tier 1 Bank in Kenya. In this capacity, she provides comprehensive legal advice, ensuring that strategic business objectives, initiatives, and projects adhere to all relevant laws and regulations, minimizing legal risks for the business.

Prior to her current role, Stella served as a Collateral Preparation Officer within the Credit Risk department of the same institution, where she was responsible for the preparation, maintenance, recording, and safekeeping of security documentation. Her commitment to continuous growth and professional excellence has enabled her to navigate complex challenges while leveraging on the expertise of her colleagues.

Stella also contributes to her community as a Board Member of a public high school in Nyeri County, where she mentors students and gives back to the community where she was raised.

She holds a Bachelor of Laws (LL. B) from the University of Nairobi, a Postgraduate Diploma from the Kenya School of Law, and a Master of Laws (LL.M) from Liverpool John Moores University.

A defining principle in Stella's life is her impeccable sense of time—she is renowned for her punctuality and time-consciousness, earning her the endearing title of “the human clock.”

Baptism By Fire

Have you ever faced a moment that thrust you into the deep end, forcing you to sink or swim? That is what the phrase 'baptism by fire' evokes—an intense initiation through challenges that demand quick thinking and resilience. While its roots trace back to the Gospel of Matthew 3:11 *"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."*, in the fast-paced corporate world, it signifies those defining moments when you are tested beyond your limits.

My own baptism by fire came unexpectedly, just two weeks before completing my pupillage at the Kenya School of Law. An intriguing job advert from a leading financial institution, shared by my elder sister, sparked my curiosity. Without hesitation, I applied and interviewed. On June 18, 2012, I leapt from the familiar halls of legal training at a law firm—where I was finalising my post-graduate diploma after earning my LLB from the University of Nairobi—into the dynamic whirlwind of corporate law. Little did I know, this leap would ignite a transformative journey that shaped not just my career, but my entire outlook on leadership and growth.

I started in the credit department within the collateral, securities, and documentation division as a collateral preparation officer, responsible for drafting facility agreements upon receiving credit approvals. Three months into the role, my line manager left the organisa-

tion. One Friday afternoon, the Head of Credit called me into a meeting and informed me that I would take on additional responsibilities, stepping into my line manager's shoes in an acting capacity. I paused, tempted to say no. I had barely mastered drafting facility agreements, and now I was being asked to lead a team of eight experienced, highly driven professionals. I thanked the Head of Credit and returned to my desk, overwhelmed.

That weekend, I wrestled with self-doubt and fear of failure. Ultimately, I chose to lean into the challenge, determined to learn and deliver. This marked the beginning of my baptism by fire. The following months were grueling—I juggled numerous tasks, and inevitably, some fell through.

At one point, overwhelmed and on the verge of giving up, I sought out a senior woman leader in the department. I confided in her that I wanted to relinquish the leadership role and return to my initial position. Her response was simple but profound: "Soldier on." Those two words became my mantra. She took me under her wing, becoming my mentor, guide, and pillar of support. Her encouragement, direction, and unwavering belief in my potential inspired me to persevere.

Under her mentorship, I not only survived but thrived. I grew from a collateral preparation officer to a team leader, and eventually to my current position as Head of Legal for Personal and Private Banking, Business and

Commercial Banking, and Insurance and Asset Management at a Tier 1 Bank. This journey has taught me invaluable lessons about resilience, leadership, and the importance of mentorship and coaching.

Throughout my career, I have embraced challenges as opportunities for growth. My husband and our two wonderful children have been my steadfast support system, cheering me on through every triumph and setback. I am also fortunate to work with inspiring teams and colleagues who continuously motivate me to strive for excellence.

My journey is a testament to the power of perseverance, the importance of mentorship, coaching and the belief that no challenge is insurmountable. Success is built on taking that first, often daunting step, making consistent improvements each day, and surrounding oneself with people who inspire and uplift. As Nelson Mandela aptly said, *"The brave man (or woman) is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."* My baptism by fire taught me that courage is not the absence of fear but the triumph over it and for that I am grateful every day for this invaluable lesson.



STELLA SITUMA

Stella is a duly admitted Advocate of the High Court of Kenya with over thirteen years of post-qualification experience. Her areas of specialization include Finance and Banking and Real Estate.

Stella has had the privilege of working with top firms in the country and has acquired immense knowledge and experience which has helped her navigate her legal career and also contributed to her being ranked in global directories such as Legal 500.

Stella is a Partner in the Finance and Banking Department at Kieti Law LLP.

Diminished? Distinguished!

Meet Her!

A young lawyer. She has just graduated from one of the country's prestigious law schools. She then joins a top tier law firm to undertake her pupillage supervised by a well renowned senior counsel, oh the joys of life. During practice, she becomes a formidable litigator having learnt the art of persuasion and drafting concise pleadings.

Litigation is all she knows and breathes. She cannot imagine practicing any other area of law. Then life throws her a curve ball. A departmental shift forces her to hang up her 'litigation boots'. Deflated, she takes up her new role as a real estate and banking practitioner, hoping to catch on by learning how to handle real estate transactions. Having never practised in this area, everything feels foreign. Even the simplest concepts seem impossibly complex.

She soldiers on hoping to become the best she can be because, as the saying goes, when life gives you lemons, a lemonade is your only option. She hangs on to every word that two senior colleagues, with whom she has good rapport, say. With constant reassurance, she upskills and perfects her art.

One of the senior colleagues, however, has a habit of making unsavoury remarks – likening her temperament to that of a domestic help. Undeterred, she masters the art, earning clients' confidence and trust in the process.

Since she believes in herself, she takes a bold step by applying for a senior role at another top tier firm. She aces the interview and just before she departs for her new role, she is met with another scathing attack—perhaps one last one for the road—being reminded that she cannot amount to much, and that she does not have many options.

At the new firm, she outdoes herself so much so, that the senior partner has great confidence in her. Her work ethic is unmatched, and clients love working with her. In less than two years, she rises to partner.

Elated, she expands her scope by delving into new areas of law. She excels in those areas and becomes a reference point. The senior partner and her head of department do not hesitate to introduce her to high profile clients by tagging her along to meetings. They task her with complex transactions which she initially thought were for the chosen few. She begins to receive recognition and ranking in international directories, and it only gets better.

Just as she grows accustomed to the accolades, the script flips as the senior partner announces his retirement. Since he was her mentor, they have lengthy discussions on the way forward. While at it, a top tier firm reaches out to her seeking to recruit her in the position of partner. Her senior partner, now mentor, recommends that she take up the offer as the opportunities for growth are immense. Without hesitation, she accepts

the role and leaves her former position, though this time around, the departure is amiable. Today, with thirteen years of practice behind her, she reflects on the journey. She has learnt that believing in yourself is a necessity, not a luxury. She has also learned something just as important: *The way we lead matters.*

There will always be those who make you question your place at the table. She has sat across from them. She has heard the words meant to shrink her, but she has also been lifted by leaders who saw her potential before she did, who gave her space to grow, who showed her that real power is not in exclusion but in elevation. So, as she continues to grow, she chooses to be the kind of leader who pulls others up, not one who puts them down. The real measure of leadership is not just how high you rise, but how many others you bring with you.

To the woman reading this: never let anyone tell you that you are not enough. If you are ever in a position to lead, be the one who opens the door, not the one who bars it shut.

I, too, resonate with the words of Paulo Coelho: *"When you say 'yes' to others, make sure you aren't saying 'no' to yourself."* Let me take it one step further: When you say 'yes' to yourself, make sure you are not saying 'no' to another woman's dream. There is enough room at the top for all of us.



FAITH ODHIAMBO

Faith is a distinguished advocate with 13 years of experience, practicing as a partner at Ombok & Owuor Advocates LLP. Beyond her legal practice, Faith is a committed educator, serving as a lecturer at the University of Nairobi. Her academic contributions have been instrumental in shaping future legal professionals.

Her leadership capabilities and dedication to the legal community are evident in her tenure as a council member and board secretary for FIDA-Kenya, as well as her impactful service as the Nairobi Representative and Vice President of the Law Society of Kenya.

Currently, Faith serves as the 51st President of the Law Society of Kenya—only the second woman in the Society's long history to hold this office. She is also pursuing a PhD at the University of Nairobi, and serving as patron of the Law Students Association. Her noteworthy contributions to the dis-

pensation of justice and practice of law in Kenya have earned her several honors, including:

1. Listed as one of the Top 50 Women in Law in Kenya in 2024
2. Second Runner-Up for Legal Trailblazer of the Year (2024), awarded by East Africa Women of Excellence
3. Honored by Nation Media Group as one of the Top 40 Under 40 Women
4. Katiba Roll of Honor 2024—awarded in recognition of her dedication to championing the Constitution of Kenya
5. EALS- Shujaa Award 2024
6. APSEA- Professionalism Award 2024
7. SIGAND NYI NAM Association - Bravery Award 2024

Dream Big For Her

Lessons

Leadership is not for the faint-hearted; it pushes you beyond your limits, tests your character, and can cause self-doubt. Yet, fulfilment arises from the power of leadership to transform. You must have the courage to lead in a way that inspires others to follow you. Imposter syndrome may creep in but remember this—courage is fear that has been well prayed over. My leadership path has been one of formidable obstacles, exhilarating breakthroughs and defining moments. To the young woman standing at the threshold of her future, uncertain yet determined, I offer these reflections: lessons carved from experience, resilience, and the relentless pursuit of justice and leadership.

Lesson 1: Lead Without Permission

Leadership, especially in male-dominated fields, is often seen as a privilege rather than a right. Early on, I realised that waiting for validation only delays the inevitable. The legal profession, like many others, is hierarchical, and young women's voices can be lost to inertia. As a young female candidate for the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) presidency, I weathered the storm of doubt regarding my readiness and capability. Gender is not an agenda, I determined. True leadership requires only vision, action, courage, and responsibility. Regardless of what the cynics say or the detractors do, these qualities transcend

age, gender, experience, or approval. You do not need permission to lead; you just need the opportunity. Step forward, take your space, and shape the story.

Lesson 2: Integrity—Your Greatest Currency

In power, where influence is bought and principles are compromised, integrity is most valuable. The LSK presidency is not just an office—it is a symbol of accountability. Upholding the rule of law often means making unpopular choices. I have stood against political meddling, advocated for judicial independence, and challenged unconstitutional acts of the powers that be. Every decision was guided by an unwavering commitment to what is right. Your values will be tested and your human folly tempted, but true character emerges when you remain firm to your integrity. Compromise offers short-term wins, but integrity ensures lasting legacy.

Lesson 3: Build, Elevate, Pass the Torch

Success is not just personal achievements, but the impact we leave. I have been mentored by many before me and I continue to mentor many. The space I enjoy was created by the sacrifices of many great women and I acknowledge my duty to blaze the trail for gender equity. Being a professional is demanding but we owe it to society to break the barriers for those coming after us. Greatness isn't solitary: network, elevate, and when the time comes, pass the torch proudly. Dare to send the lift downstairs.

Lesson 4: Grow from Hardships

The most challenging experiences shape us most. Early on, I realised resilience and adaptability are critical to the rigours of being a female professional. Moments of exhaustion and doubt were innumerable, but the adversity shapes and moulds as gold through fire. Always think fast, be resourceful, and be prepared. Embrace every challenge, because your greatest strength lies in your toughest struggle.

Lesson 5: Purpose Fuels Passion

I love my career because it lets me catalyse change. Law is not just statutes; it is about people, justice, and societal impact. Each case, policy, and young lawyer I mentor reminds me why I chose this profession. There is fulfilment knowing my work creates a more just, equitable society. To those seeking a fulfilling career: find what ignites your passion. Work aligned with purpose will always be rewarding.

Lesson 6: Life Is to Be Savoured

Beyond the courtroom and the boardroom, life is about experiences. It is about laughter, friendships, and the moments that make life worth living. I have learned to balance my demanding career with personal joys—through hobbies, interests, adventure and love. Savour the little moments, celebrate your wins, and do not let the pursuit of success rob you of the joy of living.

Conclusion: Dare to Dream, Dare to Act

The path of leadership is not linear. It is challenging, yet illuminated by purpose. To my younger self: dream audaciously, act decisively, never doubt your worth. The world may resist non-conforming women, but it will be shaped by those who dare to challenge it. To young women reading this: dream big, for yourselves, for those looking up to you. Break barriers, and leave the world better than you found it.

Change is constant and you can never plan for the future but if God is the keeper of your dreams then you can rest assured that He will constantly guide you.



NATASHA KIMANI

Natasha is the Regional Director for Futurelect. A lawyer by profession, Natasha has over 15 years of experience in public policy, constitution implementation, devolution, and governance in East Africa. Natasha has drafted gender-responsive legislation and policies in Kenya, including the gender policy and regulations for the National Police Service and the Kenya Defence Forces, and led the development of gender-responsive budgeting guidelines for County governments.

She holds a Master's degree in Public Economics, Law, and Politics and a Bachelor's in Law (LLB). Before this, she was the Head of Partnerships and Research at Africa No Filter, where she spearheaded partnerships with the African Union, Mastercard Foundation, GIZ, and other organisations. She has also been an Academy Fellow at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International

Affairs, where she focused on gender-responsive devolution in Kenya.

She has also held senior positions at the Kenya Law Reform Commission and the Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution and worked closely with the National Treasury of Kenya and various County Governments. Whether in legal, policy, or programme management-centred roles, Natasha is passionate about gender-responsive approaches to politics, governance and development that reflect the lived realities of those directly impacted by it.

No Country For Women

For as long as I can remember, I have been passionate about politics and public leadership. After I returned home from studying for my Master's in Public Economics, Law, and Politics in Germany, I began my career in the Government. I supported the drafting of national and county legislation and policies to be fully implemented in the 2010 Kenyan Constitution. During this period, it was imperative to ensure public participation in drafting legislation and policy. This meant engaging with many stakeholders and communities from different parts of the country. Nothing prepared me for the profound marginalisation and political exclusion of women in Kenya.

They rarely attended stakeholder forums or public meetings, but even when they did, they seldom gave their input or shared their perspectives or political views. This became increasingly worrying to me. In a country where half of the population are women, how was it that they were not fully involved in political conversations or the development of their country? How was it that in a country where women were considered fantastic mobilisers, planners and visionaries in churches, self-help groups and communities, they were othered in politics and public management?

Between 2017 and 2018, I was an Academic fellow at the Royal Institute for International Affairs. I sought to review the budgeting process of County Governments, whether

they were gender responsive and represented the needs of women, men, youth and marginalised communities. My research found that most County government budgets failed to address the systematic gendered implications of decision-making and budgeting. National or County policies, plans and legislation cannot be gender-neutral. Yet, both levels of government fail to consider the socio-economic effects they will have on the lives of men and women. If, for example, on average, a woman has to walk six kilometres to the nearest health facility to give birth, what does that mean for our maternal health outcomes?

In general, our perceptions of politicians and public servants are often negative, and it is even worse for women who actively choose to be involved in politics. African women have historically been disadvantaged in participating in politics, with the number of women in elective and appointed positions remaining relatively small. Despite their pivotal role in political mobilisation, women are too often confined to the role of voters rather than elected officials.

I have actively supported women in running for political office in the 2017 and 2022 general elections and can confirm that the campaign trail is exceptionally brutal towards women. If it is not gendered sexual violence, it is targeted online abuse and smear campaigns. This discourages women from participating in politics in any shape or form. Let us not forget the high cost of elections in Kenya. In Kenya, an average of US\$140,000 is spent on a parliamentary campaign and because many parties often lack funding systems, it is almost impossible for those without the financial muscle to run for political office. Women incur more costs than men to break the patriarchal barriers and effectively mobilise their support bases. It is easy to throw our hands up in the air in frustration and walk away, but that would be ignoring the significant strides we have made despite

the many challenges. The 2022 general elections saw a positive shift in political participation and representation of women. One of the successes of this general election was a 16% increase in women-held elective seats. Women won seats for multiple tiers of government. Kenyan voters elected seven female governors, twenty-nine members of parliament (MPs) out of two hundred and ninety and three senators out of forty-seven. However, our representation in Parliament is only at 21.4%, which still leaves Kenya trailing behind her peers within the East African Community.

These numbers, although low, clearly show that there are endless possibilities ahead for us as women. There is a need and room for us to reclaim the word politician and prove that we can and deserve to hold political leadership roles. We must encourage more young women to participate in electoral and political processes politically and to run for office. The best way to do this as women is to put our money where our mouths are: invest your time and resources in supporting women to run for political office. Show up to their meetings, rally support both financial and in-kind. Have difficult conversations with family and friends on why and how we should get more women elected to political office.

These days, all I think about is legacy. What legacy do I want to leave behind, and what impact do I want to have? I want young women in Kenya to believe they are capable and ready to take up political roles in this country. I hope that in my lifetime, Kenya will finally become a country for women.



LEAN IN

“

The room will never be fully ready for you. The door will not always swing open. **Walk in anyway. Speak anyway. Take up the space that was always meant for you.**



SAMMY NDOLO

Sammy manages the Kenyan firm of CDH and, along with his team, has expanded it from its inception in 2017 to a prominent business law firm. He is an expert in corporate law, mergers and acquisitions, and banking and finance. Leading international legal directories recommend him as one of the top lawyers in Kenya. Sammy is also a father and a brother to five sisters. He enjoys jogging during his spare time, and when inspired, he is known for his exceptional cooking skills. Recognized for his impatience for results, he prefers a heart-centered approach over a mind-centered one. He takes pleasure in problem-solving and putting together complex puzzles. Despite maintaining a low profile, he has achieved remarkable success. Sammy is also known for his proactive support of emerging professionals, adopting a steward-like approach to mentorship.

Leaning In

As we celebrate International Women's Day 2025, I am honoured to contribute to our co-authored book, "Dream Big For Her," under the theme "Accelerate Action". Reflecting on my journey, I wish to share some insights and life lessons that have shaped me as a leader and can, I hope, inspire you as you navigate your own paths.

Embrace Opportunities Fearlessly

One of the most important lessons I have learned is the value of seizing opportunities. You miss all the chances that you do not take, and in the pursuit of perfection, you may overlook opportunities for growth. Do not shy away from stepping into the unknown. Embrace challenges, for it is through trying, failing, and trying again that we move closer to our goals. Remember, courage is not the absence of fear but the determination to move forward despite it.

Throughout my journey, I have encountered many moments where fear could have held me back. However, by choosing to embrace opportunities fearlessly, I have achieved personal and professional growth that I once thought was beyond my reach.

Embracing opportunities without fear also means being open to new ideas and perspectives. Actively seek out diverse experiences and learn from them. This approach broadens our horizons and fosters a more well-rounded

understanding of the world. This mindset has been instrumental in my growth, allowing me to continuously learn and adapt in an ever-changing environment. I encourage you to seize every opportunity that comes your way, no matter how daunting it may seem. It is through these experiences that we truly grow and evolve.

Invest Early in your Future

Start investing as soon as you begin earning. Bonds, property, and stocks are not just financial instruments; they are the building blocks of your future security and freedom. Time moves swiftly, and the decisions you make today will provide you with the capital and flexibility you need as you climb the career ladder. When you invest at a young age, you benefit from the power of compounding, allowing your investments to grow over the years and ultimately leading to greater wealth accumulation. By securing your financial foundation, you can make career decisions based on your passions and aspirations rather than necessity.

A strong financial foundation enables you to pursue what truly excites and motivates you, rather than being driven solely by the need for financial security. This freedom allows you to take risks, explore new opportunities, and achieve greater fulfillment in your professional life. Additionally, early investments can provide a safety net during uncertain times, giving you the peace of mind to navigate challenges with confidence.

Seek Guidance Without Shame

No one achieves greatness in isolation. Seeking help from those who have successfully walked the path before you is not a sign of weakness but of wisdom. Their

experiences and insights can illuminate your way, while your journey remains uniquely yours. Use their guidance to inform your decisions, but carve your own path with confidence and determination.

By seeking guidance, I have learned from the experiences of others and avoided common pitfalls, ultimately accelerating my own growth and development. It's not just about receiving advice; it's also about building meaningful relationships and networks. When you approach others for guidance, you demonstrate humility and a willingness to learn. This openness fosters trust and respect, creating a supportive environment where knowledge and experiences can be shared freely. These relationships can serve as a source of inspiration and motivation, encouraging you to strive for excellence and continuously improve.

Remember, seeking guidance does not mean relinquishing control over your own journey. While the insights and advice of others can be incredibly valuable, it is ultimately up to you to chart your own course. Use the guidance you receive as a tool to inform your decisions, but always stay true to your own values and aspirations. By doing so, you can navigate your journey with confidence and resilience, achieving your goals with determination.



LYDIA A. OWUOR

Lydia is a practicing advocate admitted to the bar in October 2009, with a specialization in real estate and securities documentation. Lydia's love for writing is as layered as her personality—she shows up differently depending on the story she needs to tell. Whether as Lydia the Poet, Lydia the Opinionated, Lydia the Corporate Girl, or Lydia the Lawyer, her voice remains authentic, evocative, and deeply impactful. Writing, for her, is more than a craft—it is a way to mine the depths of our minds, connect, reflect, and inspire.

The Myth of Learning The Hard Way

I remain deeply connected to my own experiences, using them as a lens to reflect profound truths and inspire action. That being said, there is a truth I wish every woman could hear loud enough to drown out the noise of her doubts: *You are above your circumstances*. Not beside them. Not beneath them. Not confined by them. Above them.

But life has a way of convincing us otherwise, does it not? We wear our circumstances like a second skin, letting them dictate how far we think we can go, how much we believe we deserve, and how boldly we dare to dream.

I am a woman who sees the big picture but never loses sight of the details that make it meaningful. To me, storytelling is a powerful catalyst, one that ignites journeys, builds bridges, and brings visions to life. That is why I boldly offered to write this piece to stretch our imagination as women and provide the emotional energy that fuels informed, intentional steps to accelerate action for women's equality.

I find myself reflecting on what it truly means to prepare a woman for a world filled with boundless opportunities

and inevitable challenges. At the same time, I consider what truly hinders women from realising their dreams. If we want her to dream big and achieve even bigger, we must equip her with every tool she needs.

While societal barriers and systemic inequalities remain pervasive, there is another, quieter force at play: *The myth of learning the hard way*.

Growing up in an African setting, stories of resilience are deeply woven into our identities. We celebrate the grandmother who walked miles to fetch water before heading to school or the father who endured years of menial labour to fund his education. These stories inspire us to push through life's difficulties, but somewhere along the way, we started to glorify hardship itself as though it were a necessary rite of passage. We began to believe that the only way to achieve success was to suffer for it. That struggle was the price of respect.

When it came time for the next generation to learn, the lessons were harsh. The girl carrying heavy water buckets was told it would "build her character." The woman balancing the impossible demands of family and work was told, "it's just what we do."

The irony is that in corporate spaces, no one asks how much you struggled to get the job done. They ask whether you delivered results. There is no reward for inefficiency, no recognition for unnecessary struggle. And yet, many women enter these spaces carrying the weight of lessons learned the hard way, only to find that they are swimming upstream in a world that values working smart.

The hard way is not inherently wrong, but it is not always necessary. Challenges will find her, regardless of how prepared she is. What matters is how equipped she is to face them. If we want her to dream big, we must teach her to work smart. Not to glorify struggle but to embrace strategy.

If we continue to insist that she learn the hard way, we risk limiting her potential. We risk teaching her to see hardship as a virtue instead of a challenge to overcome. We risk setting her up to survive rather than thrive. Dreaming big for her means freeing her from the weight of unnecessary strain. It means teaching her that her time, energy, and talents are too valuable to be wasted on paths that lead nowhere.

There is no glory in making her climb a mountain blindfolded when she could take the path you have already cleared. The lessons you have learned, the wisdom you have gained—they are gifts, not secrets. Share them with the girls and women who come after us. Teach them to think strategically and to embrace efficiency as a form of empowerment.

To the woman reading this, there is wisdom in seeing this as tact. Embrace systems that free you from unnecessary toil, knowing that efficiency is not a shortcut but a mark of mastery. Success is not the sum of your struggles, nor the weight of what you have endured. It is the legacy of your choices, the clarity of your vision, and the impact you leave behind.



SHEILA KIKI MAINA

Sheila Kiki Maina, is a multi-disciplinary advocate with over 7 years post-qualification experience in corporate and commercial law, specializing in deal structuring, corporate finance, capital markets, project finance, and governance & regulatory compliance.

Sheila has held key positions, including Senior Manager Legal at Acorn Holdings Limited, Sub-Saharan Africa's largest provider of purpose-built student accommodation. She previously served as Legal Officer at Shelter Afrique Development Bank, Africa's pre-eminent affordable housing finance provider, and as a Pupil at DLA Piper Africa (Iseme, Kamau & Maema Advocates), a Tier-1 law firm in Kenya.

Notable achievements in Sheila's career include leading the negotiation and structuring of a USD 180 million project finance

facility from the US International Development Finance Corporation. She played a key role in the early redemption of a USD 50 million green bond, cross-listed on the NSE and the LSE, and contributed to USD 300 million in debt restructuring agreements. Sheila has also led cross-border structuring for affordable housing projects in East Africa, Southern Africa and Anglophone West Africa. She helped establish a 100MW wind farm in Kenya with a focus on ESG principles.

Sheila is a strong believer in fostering a collaborative work environment where women come together to win.

A Love Letter For Every Woman Who Dares To Dream

Dear Woman,

Let me say this loud and clear: You are enough. Yes, you with all your big dreams and ambition that sometimes feels like it is just too much. The world is not just ready for your energy, your brilliance, and your voice—it needs it (even if you're still figuring out how to use it like a pro). I know it feels like you are not where you should be, but trust me, you are exactly where you need to be. Every setback, every rejection, every closed door, every 'no' is just the universe's way of pushing you toward your next big 'yes'. So do not rush the process. Each step—no matter how small—is part of your glorious growth.

You are not too much. The world may try to tell you that you are too loud, too ambitious, too bold. Here is the real deal: the world simply is not used to women owning their space with unapologetic confidence. Take Michelle Obama, for example—she was told to 'tone it down', yet she kept showing up, unapologetically herself, and became a global symbol of strength and inspiration. That same power is inside you. So, never shrink. Own your space.

And yes, there will be times when you will be overlooked, underestimated, or dismissed. Do not let anyone make you feel small. Every rock thrown your way? Use it to build your castle. You are multifaceted—smart, beautiful, creative, strong, and compassionate. Do not let anyone convince you otherwise. Own it.

Let us talk about your dreams. Believe in them, even when the road's a damn mountain. Every legend you look up to? They have stumbled, fallen, and faced failure head-on. Do not fear failure—it is just the universe giving you a sign that you are on the brink of something massive. So, push through it. Even then, there will be moments when you will want to throw in the towel. The climb will feel like a beast. Guess what? You are stronger than you know. You have got a fire in you that nothing can extinguish. Keep charging forward. Your best work? It is still coming for the world.

On the days when it feels like everyone else is ahead or you are moving at a slower pace, remember this: your only competition is the best version of you. Comparison is a trap—do not fall for it. Look at Hillary Clinton, who faced obstacle after obstacle and was relentlessly scrutinised, yet she never quit. She kept her eyes on her own path. Your journey is not meant to look like anyone else's, and it is not for anyone to judge but you. Celebrate the authenticity of your efforts and every bit of progress. There is no race but the one you're running to become the best version of yourself.

Here is some advice to save you a lot of stress: Do not stay in spaces that drain you. If the people around you do not see your worth or the environment is stifling your potential—leave. You are not defined by your title or paycheck, but by your peace and happiness. Do not settle. Sheryl Sandberg says it best in *Lean In*—create spaces that help

you thrive. You deserve to be in environments that nurture you.

Here is the golden nugget: Do not seek validation from others. I know it is tempting to want to be seen and appreciated, but the only validation you need is from yourself. Confidence is not about being perfect—it is about owning who you are, flaws and all. As Maya Angelou said, "You alone are enough."

While we are talking about confidence, let us get real about leadership: True leadership is not about climbing to the top alone. It is about lifting others as you rise. Ruth Bader Ginsburg spent her life fighting not just for herself but for others. When you help others shine, you shine brighter. Support the women around you, collaborate, and share knowledge. Together, we rise.

Another truth: You do not need to sleep your way to the top or throw your colleague under the bus. Be patient. Trust that you are capable of earning success through your hard work and talent, just like the women who came before you—Sheryl Sandberg, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and others. Your seat at the table will be the one you have earned.

So, to my younger self, and to every woman who has ever doubted her strength, her worth, or her dreams—you are enough. You are capable, beautiful, and powerful. Never forget it.

With all my love,

Sheila Kiki Maina



JANE KAMAU

Honourable Jane Kamau is a Principal Magistrate currently serving at the Kajiado Court. Before her assignment in Kajiado, she worked at the Milimani Criminal Division, Kibera Law Courts, Tononoka Children's Court, and the Mombasa Law Courts, where she began her judicial career in 2013.

She earned an LLB degree from the University of South Africa and holds a master's degree in International Conflict Management from the University of Nairobi.

Honourable Kamau is deeply passionate about advocating for vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. Additionally, she is a prominent advocate for the Alternative Justice System (AJS) in Kajiado County and her dedication was recently recognized by Maasai AJS elders, who bestowed upon her the Maasai name "Na-

lepo," meaning "a river that never dries." Due to this engagement, she was also awarded the prestigious Nairobi Legal awards as the Judicial Officer of the year 2024.

Since 2021, she has served as the elected Vice Secretary of the Association of Women Judges, Kenya Chapter and is also a member of several associations, including the International Women Judges and Magistrates Association, the Kenya Magistrates and Judges Association, the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association, the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and the Law Society of Kenya

Since 2015, she has served on the Boards of Management of two girls' high schools in Gatanga, Muranga County. Outside her judicial duties, Honourable Kamau is actively involved in charitable work and is the patron of the Weka Smile Foundation, a group of young leaders dedicated to supporting the needy through fun activities, games, and charity. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking, traveling, and gardening.

Savouring Justice, The Delight of A Legal Mind

As the warm rays of the sun filtered through the curtains of my small bedroom in our two-bedroom house in Makongeni Estate, nestled in the dusty suburbs of Thika, my eighteen year old self stood at the threshold of an uncertain future after completing my O levels. One evening, about a month after high school, I found myself in a heated conversation with my father, whose sharp, piercing gaze fixed on me as I fumbled to explain why I wanted to become an air hostess. His response was swift and unwavering—he redirected the conversation with a firm hand and, the next day, returned with a receipt for my tuition fees at the University of South Africa (UNISA), where I begrudgingly embarked on a law degree.

During school breaks, I worked as a waitress in a hotel which doubled as a cybercafé, where I learned the basics of computing and made connections that would later guide my path. It was through these unexpected interactions that I was introduced to the law firm of Jesse Kariuki Advocates in Thika, where I gained hands-on experience in the practical workings of law. After months of clerical work, I moved to Nairobi to join the law firm of Harit Sheth Advocates, where I spent four years as a pupil while completing my postgraduate studies at the Kenya School of Law.

It was there that I learned many invaluable lessons, the most poignant being: ‘When a lion is ahead of you, do not fear. Stay still, and the storm will pass.’ My pupillage

was filled with the passion of the law. It offered me opportunities to engage with clients, lead teams in the family division, and take on the role of office administrator, where I gained my drafting and typing skills of legal documents. Momentarily my admiration for the courtroom grew and I can indeed confirm my belief that your legal personality is shaped by the experiences and mentorship you receive from your pupil masters.

After four years in practice, I sought to diversify my skills by joining Viva Africa Tax Consulting, where I was introduced to the world of corporate jargon, tax challenges, and boardroom negotiations. The corporate world, while glamorous with its perfectly tailored suits, is not for the faint-hearted. The long hours became a test of endurance, and I quickly learned to balance the weight of work with the need to stay sharp. I remember the sight of myself carrying a laptop even to my rural hometown, ensuring that I never missed an email—proof that dedication knows no boundaries. By the grace of God, I crossed paths with my supportive, wise and cheeky husband, who encouraged me to step up and embrace a larger role in the courtroom. With the support of my mother, I accepted the challenge and became a magistrate in 2013.

From my early days as a resident magistrate to my current role as a principal magistrate and deputy registrar, the journey has taught me many lessons. One of the

most important being: when faced with a steep mountain, it is not the mountain that needs to change, but your shoes. I’ve also learned the value of first impressions—oil your face daily and wear well-fitted suits. Consult your colleagues often, for there’s no need to reinvent the wheel. The value of hard work cannot be overstated, as the public always watches from the shadows. Yes, there have been days when I have neglected the “work-life balance,” guilty of carrying files home to wake up in the early hours, writing judgments—but even then, working smart is key.

In my current role at Kajiado Court, my team and I have learned the power of collaboration with Maasai elders, promoting out-of-court settlements that reduce the need for litigation. This approach, known as the Alternative Justice System (AJS), has been instrumental in fostering peaceful resolutions. My dedication to advocating for AJS earned me the prestigious ‘Judicial Officer of the Year 2024’ Award from the Law Society of Kenya (LSK) Nairobi Branch.

Looking back, I am grateful for how far I have come. By God’s grace, I may be ahead of some of my peers, but I know that all I have achieved is by divine guidance, the support of my family, friends, and colleagues, and my deep humility in pursuing justice. It is a journey I savour every day.



JANET LAVUNA

Janet Lavuna is an Advocate of the High Court of Kenya and a member of the LSK Tax Committee. She is the Vice-Chair person of the Tax Users Committee that represents various stakeholders that are users of the Tax Appeals Tribunal.

She is an Associate Director at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) specializing in tax disputes resolution. Prior to joining PwC, Janet worked with the Kenya Revenue Authority ("KRA") as a Manager in the Legal Services & Board Coordination Department where she acquired extensive experience in tax administration.

She is a certified arbitrator and has successfully negotiated settlement of tax disputes under the Tax Procedures Act's Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) framework. Her active participation in the tax legislative making process has made her a great influence in the tax policy space.

Avoid The Middleman

Dear younger self,

I wish to advise you on how to handle personal finances. You will desire to make more money, whether you are employed or self-employed. If you are in employment, passive income investments should be the preferred option, however, for managing passive income, these are the lessons I have learned along the way;

- (a) Money is lost in the hands of people who act as the go-betweens to our investments or financial obligations.
- (b) Do not invest in things that you cannot monitor. Yes, you know this advice but you are likely to be persuaded by people with vested interests that you can trust them to take care of your business. Unfortunately, the truth is that even though honest people do exist, finding them is a feat of luck. People you hire may take advantage of the fact that you are not present and that you are running the business from your phone.
- (c) If the deal sounds too good, consult first then consult again before you are persuaded. Make sure that you evidence in writing the transactions made and keep the records safely.

- (d) If a payment has to be made, make the payment directly to the receiving authority. E.g., If it is to KRA, pay to directly to a KRA account, do not trust an agent no matter what. If it is insurance, pay directly to the insurance company. Agents can issue fake insurance stickers once they receive your money. If it is managing your estate service providers, avoid hiring a middleman agent because they could put you in a loop between alleging that a tenant has not paid and misleading the tenant that they have forwarded the funds to the landlord.
- (e) If someone claims there is an emergency and there is need to send money urgently and that they will pay later, only give money that you are willing to lose. This is especially if that person has skipped many people closer to him/her that they could have asked first before asking you."

A successful financial coach once referred me to Matthew 6:19-21 which says;


19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves trea-

asures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In this case, the lesson was not so much that you should avoid storing up treasures on earth (the advisor had stored up plenty on earth himself), but rather, he warned us that as long as you aspire to have treasures here on earth, you must work hard to guard against the 'moths', 'vermin', 'rust' thieves etc. The deeper lesson was that, these moths, vermin and the likes are to be expected. Once you are prepared to expect them, you can see them from a mile away and avoid their paths.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An abstract geometric pattern consisting of several white lines of varying lengths and orientations, creating a series of overlapping triangles and polygons. The pattern is located on the right side of the page, set against a solid teal background.

To the extraordinary women and men who have contributed their voices, their wisdom, and their truths to this book, thank you. You did not just write; you poured, you built, you gave. You understood that this was not about you alone but about the next girl, the next woman, the next sister, the next daughter, the next leader who will walk further because you dared to share.

And to every reader, thank you for showing up. For engaging. For taking this book not as an end, but as a beginning. May you turn these pages not just with curiosity, but with urgency. May you see yourself in these stories. May you dream big but more than that, may you act boldly.



Lydia Owuor



Rita Mwangi



Alex Kanyi



Grace Gitau



Janet Lavuna



Mjeni Mwatsama



Maryanne Ochola



Paula Ochango



June Opiyo



Natasha Kimani



Kahumbya Bashige



George Odo



Angela Ochumba



Betty Ngare



Laure Paugam



Anne Muruka



Patricia Mbugua



Lena Onyango



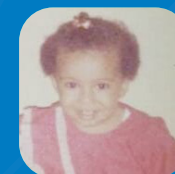
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Lorna B



Daisy Ajima



Nasra Nanda



Stella Mutai



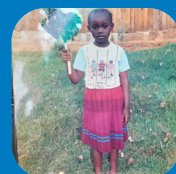
Emily Chepkor



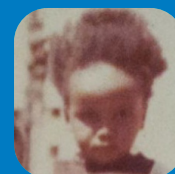
Njeri Wagacha



Sheila Kiki Maina



Jane Kamau



Margaret Njeru



Liz Lenjo



Joy Wachira



Louise Makena



Stella Situma



Emily Obwaka



Rita Njora



Makhulo Nyangate



Ruth Okal



Faith Odhiambo



Stella Kingori

