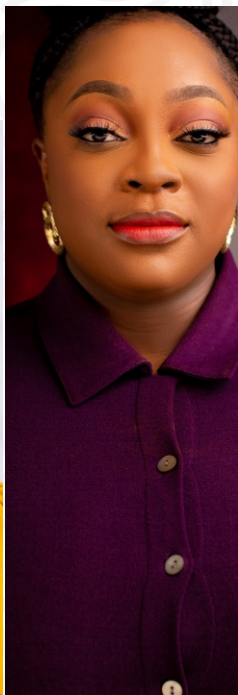




Almanac

Leadership Showcase





IMMERSE
COACHING COMPANY



Dr. Seyi Ogebulu

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey?

What lessons did you learn from it?

A recent defining moment was when I said "yes" to lead a highly ambiguous project requiring cross-functional team support. The vision was massive - we had to bring a brand new tech product to market, one that had never been done before but with so much potential to change the market perception of a large corporation. Every resource seemed stretched, and it felt like the odds were stacked against us. The good news is that we successfully launched the product. I realized that leadership is about holding the

vision even when the journey feels uncertain.

The lesson:

- Trust the process and remain steadfast in moments of ambiguity.
- Ambiguity is a gift - it is an invitation to define, build, and leverage the help of people to bring clarity and light in dark places.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

Vision must guide execution: As Coach DDK says, "When you have a vision, you don't need permission". This is a principle I live by. Every initiative I lead is anchored on a vision that

impacts the organization and the customers I serve.

Great outcomes stem from recognizing the worth of each person: I have heard it said, "You build a product for the customer, but it's the team that brings it to life." Honor and treat every team member with respect regardless of their role or rank. Success is a team sport.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

Leadership is a lifelong journey of learning, not a destination. Be willing to listen, adapt, and remain open to new ideas, perspectives, and growth opportunities. Stay curious, be humble.

Let your purpose and values be reflected in how you lead. Lead with intentionality, don't "wing" it. Ask yourself what kind of legacy you want to leave and ensure your daily actions align with that vision.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

I am blessed with wonderful career mentors but being part of the Immerse community

has exposed me to wisdom that transcends the workplace. Coaching has allowed me to "level up". Since joining the Future Forward Female™ Mastermind three years ago, the transformation has been undeniable - I lead with greater clarity and confidence. I've overcome strength shaming and pursued bold, audacious goals that once intimidated me. Additionally, the relationships and networks I've built through this community have been invaluable, opening doors to new opportunities and deepening my understanding of the power of collaboration.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

Success goes beyond achieving workplace KPIs - I measure it holistically. I was introduced to Dr Cindy Trimm's Vision Life Compass by Coach DDK. This framework emphasizes that true success is not limited to career accomplishments, but spans across 12 aspects of life, including spiritual, financial, legacy, relationships, etc. This is the framework I use to evaluate my performance and success. To me, true success as a leader is about ensuring that all dimensions of my life are flourishing, not just one.

Huseyi Tolayemi

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey?

What lessons did you learn from it?

A significant challenge I faced was when I was the Coordinator and Lead Facilitator for The Edge Series Business Sustainability Program. Balancing the diverse needs of participants while ensuring the program's objectives were met was tough. The key lesson I learned was the importance of adaptability and effective communication. By being flexible and open to feedback, I was able to tailor the program to better serve the participants' needs.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

Integrity and Compassion have been cornerstones principles of my leadership. Integrity ensures that I remain trustworthy and consistent in my actions, while compassion allows me to connect deeply with those I lead, fostering a supportive and motivating environment.



What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

My advice to aspiring leaders is to embrace continuous learning and personal development. Leadership is a journey, not a destination. The key lesson is that growth comes from being open to new experiences and learning from the old, whether successes or seeming failures.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

Mentorship has been pivotal in my leadership development. It has provided me with guidance, support, and valuable insights from experienced leaders. Coaching has played a significant role in refining my leadership skills.

On the other hand, through coaching, I have gained clarity on my vision and my goals, improved my decision-making abilities, and enhanced my capacity to lead effectively.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

I measure my success as a leader by the

growth and development of those I lead. When team members achieve their goals and reach their potential, it reflects my leadership positively.

In addition, the impact of my initiatives and programs on the community is a key indicator of success for me.



Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

A leader's journey is very personal and unique in its own way. Embrace your individuality and lead with authenticity. It is not about perfection but about progressively making a positive impact

Nguzi Divine-Basil

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

One defining moment I have faced as a leader, which has shaped my leadership approach, occurred during the management of a significant project last year.

A major part of my role involves effective project management, and I have successfully led teams to execute numerous internal projects. However, when I approached this particular project, I used the same methods I had applied in the past, without considering that this project was more ambitious, larger in scale, and required a different strategy. From my internal leadership purview and assessment, the project turned out average, which was a humbling yet defining experience for me, as I was used to excellent outcomes.

Here are 3 key lessons I learned from that experience:

1. Different projects require different approaches and styles though it must always be centered around excellent outcomes in executing the vision.



2. As a leader, you have to be humble and willing to learn no matter how much experience you have amassed on your journey. Employ a System of continuous learning, growth, and improvement!

3. You cannot put new wine in old wineskins! As the business grows, keep evolving with your team!

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

5 leadership principles that have been essential to my success as a leader will be:

1. Love as an operating system: I try to lead and live with love so that in all I do and even in my firm feedback, you see and understand my heart.
2. Excellence and Diligence: my role and responsibility within my organization is a direct reflection of my service to God and so I must carry out my duties faithfully and “as unto the Lord” (excellent and error-free).
3. Leadership is not necessarily by position or authority and thus shouldn't get into your head: Everyone is a leader and when you understand this, you first lead yourself with discipline and also lead your team with respect by placing a “10” on their heads expecting the best from each of them.
4. Growth is an essential part of leadership: To be a successful leader, you must first kill pride and acknowledge that you do not know it all and even a member of your team may have better knowledge about something than you. Also, establish a system of continuous learning and improvement to stay on top of your game.
5. The Principles of Play, Rest, and Renewal can never be overemphasized: Learn to enjoy life, enjoy the work you do, and

incorporate systems of retreat, rest, and renewal to keep your mind, body, and soul fresh.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

To any aspiring leader reading this, first of all, I'd like to say that you are already a leader. Do you know why? The fact that you're reading this shows you're interested and invested in your personal development.

Secondly, do not be in a hurry to acquire a leadership position just because of the title associated with it. We're now in a dispensation where everyone wants to be a CEO, Manager, Coach, and the like. Lots of Titles without Thought Leaders—Self-made Leaders lacking Self Leadership. Devote quality time to honing your skills and building yourself.





Lastly, have a forerunner - someone who has walked the path you're on, someone that you can look up to, who has gone ahead of you to prepare the way, someone who gives you hope, a living, breathing, walking/working version of your vision. And no, you don't have to slide into their DMs to say, "I admire you. Can you be my mentor?" Simply observing them from afar or closely being plugged into their larger community can shape and greatly impact your visionary journey.

For the key lessons, I believe my leadership principles outlined above can be used as valuable lessons for any aspiring leader.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

I cannot even downplay the importance of mentorship and coaching in my leadership journey and development.

I'd like to start by saying a big thank you to my Coach, Mentor, Forerunner, CEO, and Friend, Debola Deji-Kurunmi (my one and only DDK). I'm truly thankful for the impact her coaching and mentorship have had on me and for all the wisdom nuggets/lessons that I have gleaned from her.

I have been mentored and coached by DDK by observation; working closely with her as a senior leader within her organization, from planned coaching calls and meetings within our coaching community to very random conversations from which I pick what she's saying (and not saying) and the intentional conversations she's also had with me as my leader and a friend.

If I had to share 3 lessons I've learned directly from DDK that have impacted me the most, it would be these:

1. Let love be your operating system!
2. The counsel of God should loom larger than the voice of pain!

3. "Kikum is the sound of vision! Believe me, my heart does Kikum on a steady!"

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

I measure my success as a leader in these 4 ways:

From a positional standpoint and in my authority as GM within IMMERSE Coaching Company:

1. My own life: how well I'm able to lead myself, my level of discipline, commitment, and growth. I don't have expectations of my team that I cannot and do not keep to myself.

2. The team growth: How has the team grown? I measure Team Members' individual and collective growth using an effective feedback system, performance appraisal reviews, and also judging from assigned tasks and projects handled. The growth of the team shows the direct impact of my

leadership on individual team members and as a group.

3. Business Growth: how has the business grown under my leadership? It takes a solid leader to be able to lead the team and carry out the day-to-day operations of the business in the direction of the vision. If the business remains static or even deteriorates under my leadership, then I haven't done well.

Lastly and Generally:

4. How has my own life and leadership journey impacted someone else or the next generation? Have I made my mark on the world that cannot be erased? That is what visionary and legacy leadership is about.

Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

Keep your eyes on the prize (your vision actualized) and focus on your leadership journey. As cliché as this may sound, it will all work out in the end if you put in the work, trust and enjoy the process, and trust God (the one who gave you the vision)

If no one else has told you this, I am rooting for you and your success! See you at the top!



Abisola Kuku

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

The most defining moment in my leadership journey would have to be the time when I had to answer the question 'what type of leader do I want to be?' I was working in a team where I was truly inspired by my team lead and for the first time, I had a close-up example of the type of leader I could be. As I have started to take up leadership positions across different areas of my life, I often come back to ask myself this question. Three key lessons this defining moment taught me were:

1. You need model(s) for the type of leader you could be
2. You then need to define for yourself what type of leader you want to be
3. Start to prepare to be that leader even before the leadership position comes.

Sounds simple? Yes, but it has been truly life-changing.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

First would be authenticity. I have fought hard and will continue to fight hard to remain



authentic. It is important to me that there is a coherence between all areas of my life and my soul.

The second thing is authentic humility. The feedback I have received very often is how I have learned to disarm people with my humility. It helps me actively listen, and understand where people are coming from so I can establish common ground and better communicate my message.

The third thing would be feedback. I am an avid believer in the power of feedback and I am always deliberate about seeking as well as giving it.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

Start with self-leadership. You need to learn to lead yourself before you can effectively lead others. If you lack discipline, can't control your emotions, and are erratic, you are unlikely to make a great leader.

It is easier for people to follow you if they trust you. Make investments in gaining the trust of your team; once they trust you, they will go to battle with you without looking back.

Invest in your team and their growth. It always pays in the long run.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

Both coaching and mentorship play a significant role; they considerably shorten your journey to being a great leader, help you navigate tough situations, and ensure you are headed in the right direction.



Both have been a big part of my journey. I have closely observed great leaders, asked specific questions on individual leadership styles, and sought advice to manage situations that I am facing for the first time. It has also been very helpful when I start to doubt myself and my ability to handle a particular situation. Having people share their own journeys and challenges gives me the courage and tactical tips to keep moving.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

What does my team think? Have we delivered on our goals and ambitions? Were they clear on what needed to be done? Did they feel supported through the process, and did they grow through the process?

How do I feel? Did I remain authentic and true to myself while we were delivering on the project?

What does God say? I always have this audit session with God at the end of my projects where we basically run through the project period, and I ask Him to show me what I did well and what could be improved.

Almanac



A portrait of Orifunke Lawal, a Black woman with short, dark, curly hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a yellow top, a colorful beaded necklace, and matching earrings. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey.

Orifunke Lawal

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

One of the most defining moments I have faced in my leadership journey so far has to be making the decision to begin my organization, Lady with Balls, and moving from just masterclasses to an organization with some structure. I had led teams and initiatives before that, but it was my first time deciding to practically lead an entire organization. That decision has come with a lot of lessons and turns over the last six years. It has reshaped my idea of leadership, people-building, project execution, and relationship-forming. It is defining because six years later, most of my major life experiences have become connected to that single decision.

One of the many lessons has to be the power of launching into the deep despite the fear of failure. I had begun a community seven years prior which was also focused on women but fizzled out in a very short period, despite my passion. So, when I was beginning LWB, I was naturally scared of it failing again. Launching right into it, despite the fear, increased my confidence in myself and added to my track record of execution. Without that decision, I would not have been able to impact as many people, especially women, as I have now been able to.

Another major interesting challenge I also experienced much earlier in the journey was in the name, Lady with Balls. Many were averse to it. I know people who chose not to be associated with us because of the people in their circles they didn't want to be upset. Our members had to face a lot of queries about who we were during our earlier days. People even outrightly advised their loved ones to leave the community. We stayed. I've learned that whenever you are convinced about a problem you are solving, the opposition really does not matter. Keep doing what you have been sent to do.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

I firmly believe that if you are going to do

anything at all, do it well. If it will have my name on it, I cannot afford for it to be mediocre. I must go the extra mile. Often, this can be hectic—going the extra mile and doing something that goes beyond the ordinary comes with its burdens. However, this trait of seeking excellence across all my expressions has impacted my work greatly. A lot of the people who are attracted to the work I do are amazed by my ability to just put my head in and be extra. Many who are recipients of my work have become believers in my capacity to deliver excellence, no matter what it is I am working on or promoting at any time. Very few things can stand you apart from the crowd like excellence, so deliver it, and almost everything else will follow.

Be conscious about getting feedback and don't take it too personally. As a leader surrounded by people who genuinely love you, you have to be extra-conscious about getting feedback that helps you move forward, not the one that just sings your praises. You cannot afford to only take the great things people are saying to you and think you are doing well. You will always have room for growth, and those who work with you are a very good source of feedback. Don't just wait for a problem to arise before you pick up the lessons. Be proactive; ask

them, send out anonymous surveys, and schedule meetings. Simply let those around you know that you are always open to feedback that helps the organization move forward. It is too dangerous to be the only smart person on the team. Also, whenever you receive feedback you do not particularly like, do not take it too personally. Does the feedback truly represent the areas of growth? Then take it and fix up. If it doesn't, then dump it and keep it moving.

Develop conviction. You have to believe that what you do makes a difference, and you have to believe it like nothing else matters. Whenever I remember there is one person who is grateful to have encountered my essence across any of my platforms, it reinforces my conviction that what I do really counts. Nobody will develop your conviction for you; you will need to build it yourself. Also, the conviction will help you channel your energy to what matters. If you are not devoting yourself to your vision, then perhaps you just do not have enough conviction about it.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

If you want to lead a scalable initiative, it is

not enough to have an idea; you must be able to tie it to some data. Your understanding of the data that backs the work that you do or the people that you lead will make all the difference. Also, a problem is not a problem worth investing in if it does not have data tied to it. Why am I solving this problem? Is it really a problem, or do I just feel like it's a problem? What are the numbers saying? Always ask, always find out.

Do not personalize failure. This will help you rise fast after you fall. Sometimes, failing at something is an invitation to check it out another way that could work, not an assessment of your competence or capability. So, when you fail at something, do not beat yourself up, start questioning yourself, or decide that you are never going to try again. Take a break if you need to, but try again. Some other way. Learn the lessons. Ask the right questions. Go back to schooling or learning about the problem. Some failures are also a masterclass in how not to do certain things more than how to do them. Never personalize failure.

Do not let your identity be defined by a title. I often like to step back sometimes and let other people take the lead on some of our projects. Your entire identity cannot be that you are the "Head of" or "Lead at." What

happens when you have to move on from the vision or if it has to evolve? Wouldn't you feel like a failure then? Find your core. Commit to understanding who you are and what God has sent you to do. What is your life's purpose? You may not always have a title, but you can always be a leader. Leaders are leaders, whether they have an official title or not.

Learn how to be the first advocate of your work. We're in the digital age. Develop your storytelling and communication skills. Pay attention to your brand. Do not completely outsource advocacy of your work to other people, especially when you are just starting. Carry your work on your head. If others are always pushing for the goodness of your work more than you are, there is a problem you must fix.

Trust your instincts. Sometimes, I see a problem far off, not because I'm smart but because my brain can register that I've seen something very similar before, and it turned out to be a problem. Most times whenever I ignore it, I end up regretting it. So, while I may not always insist on my instincts, especially if I have investigated how I am feeling and can tie it to an existing personal bias, I learn to stay on my decision when I am sure. If you're at the front of a dream, there are things your antenna is just attuned to by virtue of the role you play. Never ignore your instincts.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

Let me share that one pivotal experience in my leadership development journey was getting enrolled in the Visionary Compass Accelerator Program; Debola Deji-Kurunmi's coaching methodology for high-level visionaries. It was, like I said earlier, pivotal! It completely changed how I viewed myself, my vision, and the people who partner with me across different levels. The coaching modules were a deep dive, and you just could not go through them without growing immensely. That experience has been the most impactful mentorship and coaching experience in my leadership development.

You see when you are trying to climb up the leadership ladder on your own, there is a lot you do not know, and much more you do not see. You could be making errors while thinking you're falling in the right direction. Mentors/coaches guide you. They've been where you are and they know what you're feeling and can offer you guidance. They help you conserve your mental, emotional, and physical energies by guiding you to pay attention to what matters. I just cannot overestimate the impact of relationships like this. You always need them.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

- **Personal:** I often reflect objectively on how much I'm growing or doing as a leader. What are my areas of lapses, and where do I need to grow? Where was I last year or last quarter on specific skills or areas, and how have I significantly improved? This includes key skills developed and responses to issues that arise.
- **Team:** How are my team members growing? What new roles are they taking? What are they working on beyond what we are working on? What skills did they

not have in the last year that I can see them much better at now? How are they effectively balancing their lives alongside the work we do together?

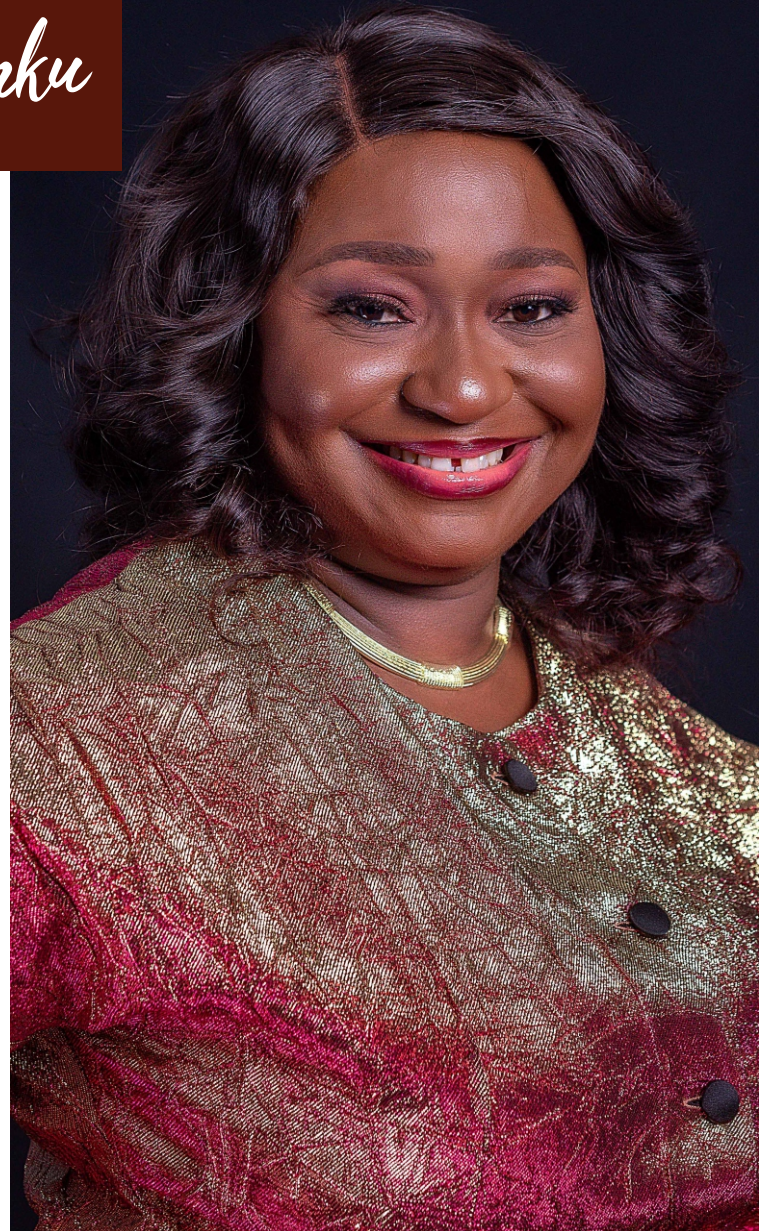
- **Organization:** How many projects are we embarking on? How relevant are these projects based on existing data? How many people are we reaching? What is the reported impact of the projects on the beneficiaries/participants?
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** I get feedback as often as possible from those I lead. This helps me know how we are doing from their outlook and what areas I also need to improve on personally.

Modupe Oluwa Mabawonku

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

One challenge that I faced on my leadership journey was when I lost all the funds that I had gathered for the launch of my Fashion Label, Omo-Oba Creations. I had a couple of months before the launch, so I thought to quickly invest the funds in another business platform that appeared promising, legitimate and would give me quick returns on my investment. Alas, it was a scam! I lost all the funds I invested and was also plunged into debt.

At that point, everything came to a standstill, and it appeared that the vision of creating my Fashion Label would be aborted. One thing I know how to do is run to God, and all I could ask was for Him to show me mercy. He did show me mercy and raised people to help me. I was able to get some funds to make an initial deposit to start the manufacturing of the perfume line. God also raised a helper of destiny who stood for me as a referee with the manufacturer, who released the full quantity of perfumes ordered with only a 40% deposit. This can only be divine favor. This taught me that there is a provision for every vision given



by God. Obstacles will come, but they can be conquered.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

Resilience, discipline, and diligence are some major qualities that have been most essential to my success.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

Clarify the vision and adopt strategic measures for execution. When the vision is clear, it's easier to run with it. Stay committed to the vision, apply due diligence, persevere, and be adaptable. The vision will speak; you must have a strong resolve that quitting is not an option.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

Mentorship and coaching play a critical role in my leadership development by providing guidance, feedback, and support. I have benefitted a great deal from mentorship and coaching in the following ways: personalized guidance, accelerated growth, building confidence, expanding perspectives, and accountability.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

Measuring success as a leader goes beyond just achieving goals or hitting targets. It involves assessing the impact you have on your team, organization, and overall mission.

Some of the metrics that I use to assess my performance include:

- Achievement of goals and vision.
- Team development and engagement.
- Adaptability and innovation.
- Decision-making and problem-solving.
- Sustainability of success.
- Continuous learning and improvement.

Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

A leader's journey is one of constant learning, adaptation, and growth. Cultivate resilience, focus on long-term vision, stay authentic, practice patience, be open to change and innovation, be accountable, and prioritize your well-being.



Oluwatoyin Ajilore-Chukwuemeka

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

Rather than specific defining moments, I will speak more about "kinds" of defining moments in my journey. One major kind of defining moment I have experienced is when I find myself at the face of a decision that would pull me into the unknown and untested. For instance, when I started my ONE Foundation, I had relatively little experience in entrepreneurial development or social entrepreneurship. I had volunteered with other social enterprises, but the transition from volunteer to founder in a field where I lacked formal academic expertise was a decision point. Another example of that kind of defining moment happened when I decided to switch from my career track in the Geoscience field to STEM Education. My initial interest in education stemmed from deep passion, driven by the belief that things could be better based on my experience as a student and as a relatively new higher educator. In both instances, I had to step away from the familiar into the unknown.

Two lessons stood out for me through these



experiences. First, I realized that courage is systematic; it is not merely a feeling. There is a dimension of courage that says, "I can do this." Then there is the puzzle-like dimension, where the pieces must be carefully fitted together. There are different pieces that make courage lasting. For example, there is the piece of clarity—understanding what

you are trying to achieve and why. There is the piece of conviction—knowing why you believe you are the one to do it. There is the piece of competence, as what we sometimes mistake for fear is simply a lack of expertise. As knowledge increases, so does comfort with the unknown. So I had to understand that courage was about systematically fitting together different pieces of clarity, conviction, competence, community, confidence, etc. So I stopped trying to "feel courageous" and knew the real work was to go find and grow the pieces.

The second lesson was that passion alone is never enough. Passion may ignite your journey, but proficiency is equally necessary. Without developing expertise, passion can become misleading, not because it is false, but because it was only meant to initiate the journey, not to solely sustain it.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

The realization that leadership is, first, a personal commitment before it becomes something that is given to others. Every aspect of leadership—such as vision, authenticity, collaboration, etc.—must first be embodied personally before it can be imparted to others. These qualities require a mindset that must be cultivated on an individual level. Attempting to lead others

without first mastering the art of self-leadership inevitably leads to challenges and complications for both the leaders and the people being led.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

My biggest advice is to recognize that, whether you are an aspiring leader or an established one, you need to understand that leadership is a continuous journey. No matter how established you have become, you will still make mistakes. No matter how aspiring you think you are, you still have a lot to give. At every stage, there is much to give and much to learn. So, it becomes imperative to approach leadership as a continuous journey, focusing on exploration rather than solely aiming for a specific destination.



What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

If you embrace the mindset of leadership as a journey, you'll recognize the need for a vehicle to carry you forward. Once you see it as a journey, you realize the experience and progress will vary depending on the vehicle you are using. Someone in an airplane will likely have an easier and faster experience than someone walking. Mentorship or coaching serves as a kind of vehicle that not only speeds up your progress but also makes the journey far less stressful. It helps you avoid unnecessary pitfalls and gives you knowledge without requiring you to learn everything through personal trial and error. Personally, mentoring and coaching have helped make my leadership journey both more fruitful and a lot easier to navigate.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

As I grow, I have come to realize that if I had to choose only one metric, it would be resilience. The reason is rooted in the understanding that success itself is a journey. That is, what success means and its realities can shift with new knowledge, circumstances, and seasons of life. Thus, the

ability to persist through changing times, cities, seasons, and results is a major metric of success for me. I'm not just asking if things are going well, but if they enable me to keep moving forward. So, if I had to choose one metric, it would be resilience, as I am learning it can form a solid foundation for everything else.

Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

My additional thought is to approach the journey of leading yourself and others with an exploratory mindset. Focus on discovering what can unfold if you continue moving in the right direction. Becoming fixated on a specific destination can limit your perspective, as life is always larger than any one goal. This "destination addiction" prevents you from appreciating what you can accomplish and who you are becoming. I believe leadership should be viewed as an exploration. Imagine being placed in a new country where anything is possible—you won't want to simply fixate on only one thing you can make possible; your instinct would be to explore and discover all that you can. Adopting this same approach to your journey will make you enjoy both where you are and where you are going.

Deana Chukwuemeka

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

One defining challenge I faced was balancing VCAP while managing the responsibilities of a new baby and two toddlers. The constant juggling of commitments truly tested my time management skills and adaptability. From this experience, I learned the importance of giving myself grace and flexibility. I discovered that it's crucial to set realistic expectations and prioritize self-care while staying focused on long-term goals. The challenge taught me resilience and the ability to adapt my plans as needed while remaining committed to my vision.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

Key qualities that have been essential to my success include resilience, adaptability, and empathy. Resilience has allowed me to persevere through challenges and stay focused on my goals. Adaptability has been crucial in adjusting my plans and routines to fit the unpredictable nature of my life. Empathy has helped me connect with others on a deeper level within the VCAP family but also with those in my life.



What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

For aspiring leaders, my advice is to stay connected to your "why." It's not always easy to stay motivated, but visualizing the end goal—whether it's transforming lives or making an impact—is crucial. Embrace the journey with flexibility, understanding that not every day will go as planned. Adaptability is key, and it's okay to adjust your approach as needed. Remember that leadership involves continuous learning and growth, so be open to feedback and invest in your development.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

Mentorship and coaching have played a significant role in my leadership development. They provide valuable perspectives, guidance, and accountability. Through mentorship, I have gained insights from experienced leaders, especially in the VCAP group, which has helped me navigate challenges and make informed decisions. Coaching has offered a structured approach to developing my skills and achieving my goals. These relationships

have been instrumental in refining my leadership style and enhancing my effectiveness as a coach.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

I measure my success through the impact I have on others and the progress toward my long-term goals. I assess my performance by reflecting on how well I maintain a balance between personal and professional responsibilities and how effectively I lead by example. Indicators have been my journaling, my consistency in vision casting, and showing up doing the work.

Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

Embrace the ups and downs with resilience, and always keep the end goal in sight. Building a supportive network of mentors and peers can provide invaluable insights and encouragement. Additionally, invest in self-care and balance to sustain your energy and effectiveness over the long term. Leadership is a continuous journey of growth and impact, so stay committed to your vision while being flexible in your approach.

A professional portrait of Oluwatimilehin (Timi) Onafeso, a Black woman with long, dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a black blazer over a white top with black polka dots, a gold chain necklace, and large gold hoop earrings. Her hands are clasped in front of her, wearing a black watch with a gold buckle and red nail polish. The background is a solid, warm brown color.

Oluwatimilehin (Timi) Onafeso

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

I set some goals that I put all my efforts and faith into, but they still didn't come to a realization. Then I realized that failure is only a stepping stone to success, so I didn't give up. I gave it another trial with better strategies, and I succeeded.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

Resilience and a growth mindset.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

Having a growth mindset is a must for every leader. No matter how low you fail or fall, let resilience be your springboard back into success.

What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

Coaching relationships effectively set the pace for me to walk upon. They made me believe that it's never too late to rise again and thrive.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

The number of people motivated for success by my resilience and spirit of excellence.

Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

Your vision is like the air you breathe; without it, you can't maximize life to its fullest.

Bodam Taiwo

What defining moment or challenge did you face during your leadership journey? What lessons did you learn from it?

I've always been a leader—right from Primary school. For some reason, I'd always be appointed to one leadership role or another. In Secondary school, I was Deputy Head Girl, President of the JETS Club, and Secretary of the Literary and Debating Society. In University, I was Secretary of the Reading University Afro-Caribbean Society in addition to my reign as a Beauty

A big moment that helped me understand the weight of leadership was in Secondary School. We were about to write our final exams, and there were many conversations about ensuring the entire class would pass well. A particular teacher asked us to bring some money and whatnot. At the time, I couldn't even conceive of going home to have that kind of conversation with my parents, so I said no, I wouldn't be partaking in that. We were about three in a class of about 30 who said no. All hell broke loose. laughs

Why was that a defining moment for me and what did I learn from it?

It underscored for me the importance of Integrity, which I have highlighted as a key leadership quality





for me. This meant I had to commit to and uphold my family values even when everyone else appeared to be doing the wrong thing.

Sometimes, the journey of a leader is a lonely one- you must have the courage, strength, and willpower to stand alone if you must. Every challenge is a building block for bigger challenges that may be in the future. Pass the test quickly.

The rewards will ultimately come through, even though it may take time.

Having a tribe that believes alongside you can make the journey easier. Build a tribe and a community that believes in you, has similar values, and can walk the journey with you.

What leadership qualities or principles have been most essential to your success?

Five leadership qualities have been most essential to my success:

- **Integrity:** Having firm values and lines I am committed to upholding and choosing to do the right thing, even when everyone else appears to be doing the wrong thing or when nobody seems to notice.
- **Communication:** The ability to pass along ideas and information, share a vision clearly and succinctly, and influence opinions.
- **Decisiveness:** The courage to make quick decisions and the agility to take the learnings and pivot where necessary in service of the broad goal.
- **Relationship Building + Stakeholder Management:** Understanding how to build relationships and manage all key stakeholders- my leadership team, peers, and associates.

- **Solution–Orientation:** Recognizing and identifying problems but leaning more toward providing solutions.

What advice would you give to aspiring leaders? What key lessons have you learned about leadership that you believe would be valuable for them to know?

I believe it was Sir Fela Durotoye who said, "The role of a leader is to look for the gold in people." That is profound. I will go a step further to say, as leaders, we have a responsibility to look for the gold in other people and to work with them to refine that gold. However, we can't look for the gold in others if we have not discovered and developed the gold in ourselves.

So, be intentional and strategic about your growth first. Seek to outgrow the last version of yourself. This is so critical. You have to be deliberate about ensuring you are evolving incrementally.

Always have an eye for other people and look for the gold in them. Very few people are all bad; most people have some good and some gold. Even if you're not in a leadership position yet, make it a duty to look for, call out, and develop the gold in others.

Be generous with your knowledge and lead

from a point of legacy—not just in the work you do but in the lives you impact.

Give solid feedback. You have to be that person who gives honest, solid, and kind feedback to those around you. Give it from a place of love and from a desire to see the other person grow. But like I say, I owe people honest feedback at least once. The way they choose to receive and respond to that feedback will determine if there will be others.

Don't always go after recognition, especially in the beginning. Think of developing the roots of leadership: excellence, great communication skills, integrity, problem-solving, strategic thinking, and so on. Put in the roots so that when the time of recognition does come, you've been established on the things that really matter.



What role does mentorship or coaching play in your leadership development? How have you benefited from mentorship or coaching relationships?

I am a BIG believer in the role of both mentorship and coaching.

I've been a member of IMMERSE since 2019, and I was in DDK's one-on-one coaching for several cycles. I don't think I would have evolved the way I have if I didn't have a coach. For me, my coach did several things: Recognized, gave language, and demonstrated the possibility to the whispers of a vision that I couldn't fully describe at the time.

Handed me frameworks, strategies, and systems that helped me rapidly evolve, radically execute, and systematically recalibrate.

Held me accountable to my next-level goals and, in some cases, challenged the goals and helped me dream bigger or think differently about how I was becoming and executing.

Gave me room to dream BIG! Helped me grow the courage to be audacious with what I've been called to do.

With regards to mentorship, especially as a

career professional, it demonstrated the possibility of leadership and helped me avoid some mistakes because those who had gone ahead of me could share some mistakes they had made with me, and I could sidestep. Mentorship also allowed me the freedom to be a certain type of leader because I had seen it demonstrated up close to me.

How do you measure your success as a leader? What metrics or indicators do you use to assess your performance?

There are three key metrics I use personally to measure my success as a leader:

People: At the heart of everything I do, I want to ensure my people are growing, becoming better at their craft, and together being a very high-performing, excellent, and



innovative team. So I measure my success as a leader on the growth of my people. Are they hitting their personal and professional goals? Are they better marketers than they were at the beginning of the year? Are they learning how to show up as leaders and manage internal and external stakeholders better? Are they showing up better in terms of physical presence, communication, and so on? That's the first key metric of success for me.

Brands: I build multinational and multi-million dollar brands for a living, so I want to ensure I am building sustainable, profitable brands that are growing each year. So I measure my success based on the success of my brands. I have brands that are doing great in their categories and growing year on year across various metrics: equity, volume value, etc. That's amazing. It shows that the strategy and roadmap I defined and led my team to execute is working. It means we're doing better today than we were yesterday and validates that I'm building a business that can stand the test of time and brands that can be resilient even in the middle of a VUCA Environment like Western Africa.

Personal Impact: This is a very personal metric of success, and it speaks to the legacy I'm consciously building. The work I do is not

just work; it is an assignment, so I measure how effective I am in that regard. How am I positively impacting my organization and my industry, and ultimately my nation? I measure my involvement in mentorship programs to raise the next level of leaders as well.

Do you have any additional thoughts that can be instrumental to a Leader's Journey?

Lead with love. You cannot truly serve and grow others if you don't love and honor the dignity and worth of the people.

So, LOVE.

Lead with LOVE.

Correct with LOVE.

Build with LOVE.

Mentor with LOVE.

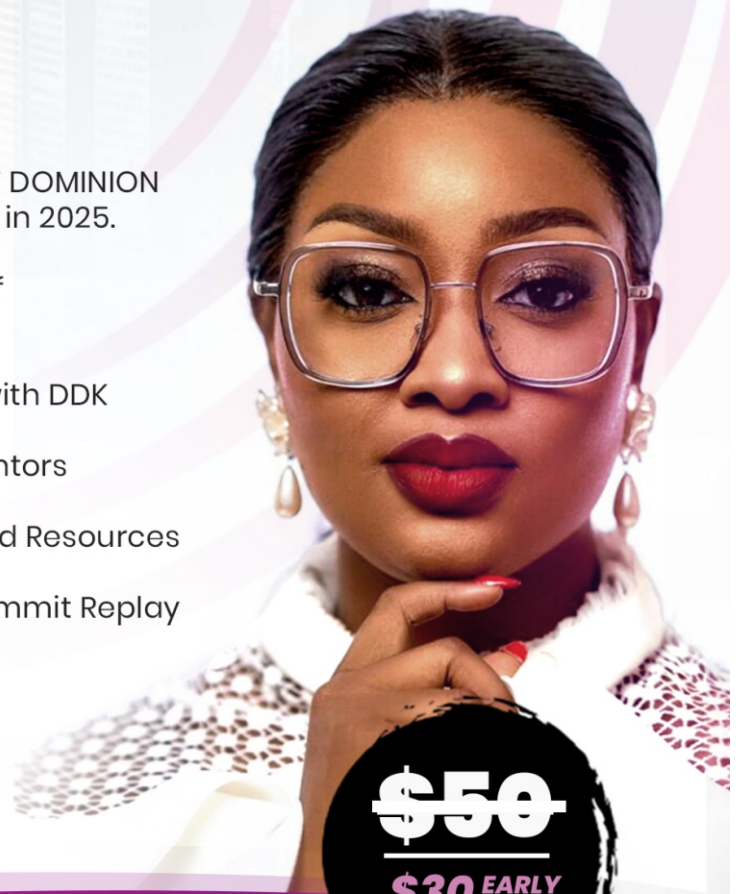




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