

#Be *in* Business



Ayo Shote

Engineer and Business Consultant

How did you get into business?

I was working in Nigeria as an engineer for one of the top three International Oil and Gas service companies.

At the same time, I was building an artisanal bakery with my salary and a loan.

By the time I was done, I didn't have enough money for baking materials. I went to the market, got materials on credit, and then started. I did a lot of study: I designed the entire bakery myself, designed the layout, experimented, designed recipes, and decided where I was going to depart from what the rest of the baking industry was doing.

Why did you study business?

After three months of running the bakery, I realised I was losing money. I did a lot of reading, and took some training to help turn things around, then it dawned on me: 'I need to understand business properly. I've got to get an MBA.'

I ended up with the University of Liverpool doing an online MBA whilst working in Nigeria. It was tough, but I was learning something new every day. As I was learning, I was able to apply it to my job at the same time. Because I was now bringing a completely different perspective to my everyday interactions at work, I became the first Operations Manager in Nigeria for my company. The things I was learning projected me as a leader. The organisation decided I had leadership potential and classified me as high potential. Today I don't think like an engineer anymore, I think as a strategic business leader.

What can we do to make business more inclusive?

We've got to see everybody as a human being and understand what they bring to the team; the efficiency that inclusivity brings to the business.

What do you love about business?

There is something new daily to contend with. I have run massive organisations; the biggest being an organisation of 1,060 people across nine countries in Western Central Africa. When I wake up every morning, I am having to deal with a totally different issue from that of the previous day. It's exciting!

The other thing I love about business is exposure to people. When you become a business leader you realise that people are a critical piece of your entire organisation. You've got to see people as your primary asset. If your focus is on your equipment, on policies, on procedures, and you lose focus on the people part – you lose that ability to connect with your people – then you are going to fail in the long-run.

Why is business important?

Business has showed me that with the right financial acumen, the right strategic agility and with the ability to craft a vision and to present that vision to your people, you can take different elements – operations, engineering, manufacturing, supply chain, human resources, finance – and then pull them all back into a single whole.

You can be an engineer, but you won't be able to make money if you don't have the ability to pull different bits and pieces together. Business makes you a well-rounded leader.

What does success mean to you?

Professionally, success to me is about having the ability to put together a team. To focus the team on the achievement of a vision that we have jointly crafted, get diverse interests in the team on that project, and achieve the stated results that we set out for ourselves.

Personally, I want to leave every place better than I found it. Leave everybody I meet better than I met them. When I keep doing that, when I keep achieving that every day, it does not matter how much I have in my bank account, it does not matter how much I have in my pocket, I consider myself to be successful.

Why being in business is *everyone's* business