

Mumpreneur

Griselda Kumordzie Togobo

Redefining success as a 21st century mum

Leeds-based mum Griselda Kumordzie Togobo is the founder of AWOVI Consulting Ltd.

Awovi is her middle name, but it is also, as she puts it, "a convenient acronym for 'A World of Vision & Inspiration'". Her company is devoted to supporting business owners to consistently focus on their productivity and finances in order to be profitable. How did a Cambridge University graduate, holder of a Master's degree in Engineering, and a young mum become a successful business owner? Find out and take a leaf.

The image of the powerless African woman seeking aid from charities, celebrities and western governments is all too recognisable in today's media. Although this is not the African woman I know. My mother, an African woman from very humble beginnings with no formal education, was able to create multiple businesses employing 150 people at a point and turning over an income that enabled her to provide really well for her seven children. This is the African woman I know.

The only way my mother could survive in business was by surrounding herself with a strong team of trusted people, her children. Because she had no formal education, she ensured we all did, so at an early age we all assisted in the business by writing cheques, doing basic bookkeeping, payroll, drafting letters and booking appointments on her behalf. Despite her lack of schooling, my mother was very astute when it came to business and her ability for mental arithmetic was extraordinary. She overlooked all our calculations with an eagle eye. Growing up in a large household, with each sibling vying for attention created a boisterous but chaotic household. This coupled with the uncertainties and

ups and downs of business ownership were so frustrating to a teenager like myself that I decided that entrepreneurship was not the career path for me. I decided a safe secure corporate job would guarantee a comfortable monthly wage with none of the stresses that my Mom was constantly battling with as a serial entrepreneur.

So that's exactly what I did!

After graduating from Kumasi's University of Science and Technology in Ghana, I completed a Master's (MPhil) at Cambridge University with the aim of taking the corporate world by storm. I was right on track when I was hired by the renowned global professional services giants Deloitte and trained and became a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. In Ghana, the employment market is very competitive, so I was keen to take advantage of any internal developmental opportunities that presented themselves whilst in the UK.

Whilst working for Deloitte, I transferred to Leeds from London to join my husband who had been posted there as part of his medical training programme. As an auditor and then management consultant in Deloitte, I had the privilege of

advising some great organisations on how to operate more efficiently. In Leeds I was part of a newly established but promising department that offered the opportunity for career progression and job security. However in August 2009, after four years-plus of working for Deloitte's I found myself pregnant. My perspective on life completely changed and I looked at life in a totally new way. Everyone will tell you about their maternal instincts kicking in and mine was no different. However, my maternal programming had been that of an entrepreneur and when my mother's DNA kicked in on me I was no longer happy to settle with a job that wasn't flexible enough to accommodate family.

There were fears of a double dip recession and unemployment was at an all-time high. I was terrified. I knew what I had to do, but I was too scared to make the leap. I spoke to a coach who was very helpful in clarifying my goals. A coach has the ability to look at things objectively and see the potential I was not seeing. It made me realise that following my desires was the only thing that was going to make me happy, and if I failed to listen to my inner voice, I would be a successful corporate employee, but still unfulfilled as



"The experience of being a mother simply kick-started my journey to finally pursue a lifestyle that embraces and respects the family unit whilst still enabling me to pursue my career."

I had compromised my values. I knew within myself that the time had come. I guess I was always my mother's child and the experience of being a mother simply kick-started my journey to finally pursue a lifestyle that embraces and respects the family unit whilst still enabling me to pursue my career. My 20-plus love affair with the corporate career had come to an end. And so did the years of dreaming of what would it be like to be my own boss. I had to walk my dream.

Ironically, my inspiration had nothing

to do with the high-powered corporate environment I found myself in, but to one of the greatest entrepreneurs I knew. My mother. If my mother could run several businesses by herself, have seven children, live in a developing country that at the time was far from stable, then surely with all the cushions afforded by Britain, I could do my mother proud and make a success of myself as a businesswoman too. I always wondered what my mother could have achieved if her raw business acumen was developed among the best

financial institutions in the world. Luckily I can put that to the test. Even though I would not rate myself next to my mother's ability, my experience of business in both the developed and developing world had equipped me with the insight and knowledge on how to run a successful global business. I took a major leap of faith and started AWOVI Consulting Ltd, a coaching, consulting and accounting practice that specialises in helping business owners increase their sales, profits, cash-flow and productivity. I have not looked back since. Working in the corporate world exposed me to some of the most cutting edge information that benefited the world's best businesses and I now help small businesses with this same insight. My services, previously only available to the largest companies, are exclusively offered to small and medium-sized businesses through our coaching and consulting programmes.

Within a very short time of setting up, I was getting phone calls and referrals from individuals who were interested in transforming their businesses, improving their cash position, profits or accelerating their businesses growth. I have worked with independent artists, singers, filmmakers and other creative people that your usual corporate accounting professional rarely meets. I also worked with the owner managers of small businesses that were really in need of advice to increase their business performance. I was approached by private businesses and charitable organisations to speak at their conferences or offer bespoke training programmes to their staff.

Without doubt, meeting people has been the most enjoyable part of my independent endeavours and being able to assist other mothers who wish to turn their dreams into reality and learn to juggle ambition with the natural instinct to care for their family.

I firmly believe in the African woman. If you are reading this and are one of those women who would like the independence of being your own boss, and think being a parent or an employee is holding you back, remember: all it takes it is a decision to change your world. The world has been changed consistently by our mothers and grandmothers and it's now our turn to take an equally bold step. It may not be easy, but it is possible, because nothing ever worth getting has ever been easy. But it has always been worth the effort. ■

You can contact Griselda via her company website at: www.awovi.com.