Connecting the dots...

Volume 5 30 July 2021



Philip Mataranyika
Nyaradzo Group,
Chief Executive Officer

Follow us on:

NYARADZO GROUP

www.nyaradzo.co.zw

Service • Strength • Solutions

After collecting my 'O' Level results in February 1986, I shared them with friends and several relatives, who were all happy for me, seeing as I had obtained good grades. On my maternal side, I would share the results with my uncle, Timothy Nathan Chiganze, whose career was blossoming at Munich RE – a German-based Reinsurance Company, which had a strong presence in Zimbabwe at the time. Tim, as we affectionately called him, had studied law at the then University of Rhodesia in a class of about 38 students dominated mainly by whites, with a few coloureds and Indians. That class of 1979 would go on to produce some of the brightest legal minds in our Judiciary system, amongst them George Chikumbirike (now late), Justices Anne-Mary Gowora, Moses Chinhengo, (retired), Ishmael Chatikobo, now late, (MHDSRIEP), retired Magistrate Jacqueline Pratt and former Gweru Town Clerk Daniel Matawu.

Upon graduating with a Bachelor of Law degree from the country's oldest institution of higher learning, which became the University of Zimbabwe at independence in 1980, Tim joined the Judiciary Service Commission as a prosecutor, from which post he would be headhunted by Munich RE in 1981. That transition meant that he had to hit the ground running in order for him to perform at the highest level in the insurance industry, and hence had to enrol for the Insurance Institute of Zimbabwe (IIZ) diploma, writing the nine associate stage subjects in one sitting and passing them all with distinctions. The year after, he would become a fellow of the IIZ, after writing and passing all three fellowship subjects, again in one sitting and with distinctions. With all of these achievements behind him, it would be an understatement to say that Tim became my ultimate role model.

I literally worshiped the ground he walked on! By the time I collected my 'O' Level results Tim had risen through the ranks within Munich RE to the position of Country Manager with overall responsibility for the Zimbabwean operation, which meant that his diary was always packed. Without booking an appointment, I took with me my 'O' Level results slip to his office on the 6th Floor of Globe House in the central business district of Harare a few days after I had accessed them from school. On being ushered by his personal assistant into his office and breaking the news to him, Tim was excited. He promised to link me up with his associates in case there were job openings, and it really made my day. Uncle Tim had been a family icon throughout his student life and the cult-like admiration I had for him continued into our adult lives.

Tim had done his secondary education at St Augustine's High School in Penhalonga, which is about 30 kilometres west of the mountainous city of Mutare, I was doing Grade 4 at Sakubva Primary School in 1974, when he was in his lower 6th form. I still recall with nostalgia that when schools closed for the August holiday that year, Tim had come to visit his aunt, my mother, spending a week with us at our Sakubva home (No. 34 Pazororo). When he left for the village, Tim's name was always on my mother's lips. She was so proud of Tim, urging my elder brother, Johanne and I to follow his footsteps. Not wanting to disappoint my mother, I developed a keen interest in all he did, but always found his intellect a hard act to follow. Nonetheless, I took every opportunity to learn as much from him and be inspired even though I was only eleven at the time. As Tim continued to excel in his studies, the burden of expectations on us became more and more apparent. And so it was that when word filtered through that Uncle Tim had sat for his 'A' Level examinations and passed them with flying colours, my exuberant mother wasted no time in sharing the good news with us in a bid to motivate us to work even harder and be like him. We all felt proud of Uncle Tim, who had bagged an award for being the best Geography student in the Commonwealth. Then, Zimbabwe was still a member of the Commonwealth, before she pulled out of the grouping of former colonies and territories of the British Empire in 2003. In the years that followed, we kept contact with Uncle Tim whom we looked up to as young boys desperate for our own breakthroughs. We would visit their homestead in the village whenever we had an opportunity to do so, and would leave their place with sacksful of mangoes and other fruits to take home. It is against this background that I had no hesitation to call on Uncle Tim even without an appointment, more so given that I had been filled with excitement after doing well in my own 'O' Level exams.

On coming back to Harare and with nothing more than an 'O' Level results slip, I would go looking for Uncle Tim at his offices in the central business district of Harare.

Tucked somewhere in the corner on the 6th floor of Globe House, a nine-storey building along Jason Moyo Avenue, was Uncle Tim's beautiful office. The ambiance and environment was cool and welcoming which made one feel lucky and special. Tim's then personal assistant Pauline Arnold would treat me with respect and love each time I went visiting. When Pauline was promoted to become an underwriter, she would be replaced by Victoria Birdwood, another sweet and warm person who also made me feel at home each time I visited.

At Munich RE, they had a visitors' waiting area with nice and comfy chairs where I would sit while waiting for Uncle Tim to wrap up his meetings up and create ample time for us to catch up. Because I would visit him often, I came to know almost the whole team at Munich RE and they also got to know me very well. Back then, Tim was deputised by Victor Vambe who would succeed him when he left for Zimnat. Victor would later leave Munich RE in 2004 to join NewRe as General Manager.

The other senior staff members were Simon Chikumbu whom I shall talk about later and Junior John Ngulube, (affectionately known as JJ), who would later earn a promotion to the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Munich RE, Africa in 2007. Several of Tim's colleagues at Munich RE would be made redundant when the German reinsurer exited Zimbabwe at some point while others would cross the Limpopo, joining Munich RE in South Africa. Whatever the case, I have kept an interest in their professional development trajectories since they all impacted on my life to varying degrees. Suffice to say, out of that whole group, I developed a strong relationship with Simon Chikumbu who would be one of my clients, after he took out policies with me working as an Old Mutual sales representative. When Simon became one of those to cross the border to work for Munich RE in South Africa, we would always be in touch regardless of the changed geographical circumstances, even up to this day.

But that is to digress and for a good reason – that of highlighting some of the key contacts and opportunities that came my way through my frequent visits to Uncle Tim's offices!

On one of my many visits to Tim's office sometime in 1987, he would invite me to stay with them at their palatial residence in Chisipite, otherwise known as number 8 Gaynor Road. I was at first hesitant to take up the offer, not sure if I could fit in given that I was born and raised in the village and that their expectations once I had moved in may not be compatible with my strong rural background. That I had been a product of the ghetto – having stayed in the high density suburbs of Sakubva and Highfield – also contributed to my reluctance to make the life-changing move to Chisipite, which derives its name from a spring rising in a vlei within the affluent suburb. When Tim insisted that I join them, soliciting the help of his wife, Barbara, to convince me to make the move, I eventually gave in. From the hustle and bustle of

Highfield and Sakubva, I found myself on the other side of Samora Machel Avenue and had to quickly adjust to the private, classy life in what we used to refer to as “kuma yard” on account of the large stand sizes on which the properties are built.

Once I accepted their invitation, Uncle Tim and Mbuya Barbara would make sure I was comfortable in my new environment, allocating the cottage at the back of their house for my exclusive use. They must have taken a knock on their pockets, spending hundreds of dollars renovating the cottage and giving it a fresh coat of paint. By the time I moved in it looked brand new.

I moved in with them in 1988, which gave me an opportunity to come up close with the man I admired the most, Tim. Indeed, it was during the time that I stayed with Tim that I was inwardly transformed beyond my wildest imagination. Let me explain!

In 1988, they had bought a ten-hectare plot in Snake Park, next to Larvon Bird Gardens, where his wife started a thriving farming business. On one side of the plot, they built fowl runs, rearing egg-layers and broiler chickens. On the other side, they grew seasonal horticultural crops, amongst them cabbages and green veggies such as rape and covo, which were popular with customers. When tomatoes were in season, they grew them also and I was drafted in as one of their key sales persons. Because I was an 8 to 5 employee of Old Mutual, I confined my marketing efforts to colleagues within the Old Mutual family and it worked well for Mbuya Barbara who found herself with a lucrative, captive market of professionals with deep pockets. During lunch time or after hours, she would deliver a truckload of vegetables for me to distribute to my colleagues on credit. I would write down the buyers’ names and collect payment from them at the end of the month, earning a decent commission for my efforts.

During weekends, I would help Mbuya Barbara sell her wares by the roadside whereby we would park the family truck on the side of the road to attract the attention of motorists and passers-by who would buy whatever it was we had for sale. One of the most popular products that would sell like hot cakes was winter maize. Mbuya Barbara used to produce sizeable cobs that were very popular with customers who would roast or boil them. For my efforts, Mbuya was generous – rewarding me with incentives for meeting targets. I could not have asked for anything better!

Staying with the Chiganzes' was such a continuous learning experience. Just as well, the gods had smiled on them and rewarded them for their hard work. Before I had moved in to stay with them, the Chiganzes' had made history in the early eighties by becoming probably the first blacks to buy a house in Greystone Park, which they would later dispose of in order to acquire an alternative property in Chisipite. There, a whole new world unfolded right before my eyes.

Mbuya Barbara together with other women in their neighbourhood would form a social grouping, aptly naming it Women in Progress, (WiP). When I asked them what the purpose of their grouping was, they said they suddenly found themselves lonely after moving into an intimidating neighbourhood inhabited mostly by whites, they needed to support and encourage each other. They also wanted to play their part in the country's economic development given their husbands were the who's who of the country in commerce, industry and government.

Through their once a month dinner dances, to which I would be invited, they raised funds for charity, spearheading development projects at old people's and children's homes in the high density surburbs of Highfield, Mufakose, Mbare and Epworth from where some of them had been raised.

When the organisers of these events who included Mara Hativagone, Marcia Moyana (wife to late ex-Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe Governor, Dr Kombo Moyana) (MHDSRIEP), Barbara Marasha and Faith Mary Chiura (wife to former Chairman and CEO of Delta Corporation, Mr Enos Chiura) got to know that I was a photographer, they would enlist my services making me the WiP official photographer. With that assignment, my career as a lens man exploded. As WiP's photographer, I now had a permanent ticket to cover their functions which would significantly raise my profile. Through these captured events, I got to know personally most of the captains of industry and commerce of that time, including some top government officials making it easy for me to book appointments to go see them as and when the need arose. Through WiP I would have access to prominent figures such as Mr Chiura, who would become my client when I became a financial advisor with Old Mutual. Through regular contacts and discussions with him, Mr Chiura would introduce me to his two sons –Allen and Michael Munyaradzi. Allen would later leave Zimbabwe for the United States of America to study medicine and in the process distinguishing himself as a urological surgeon who

lived and practiced in America for 30 years before returning to Zimbabwe to share his knowledge with his compatriots. Munya also left the country for his own studies, graduating with a BA from Lehigh University, an MBA from the University of Phoenix and a PhD from Warren National University. As our friendship grew, Allen and Munya would sign up with me as Old Mutual clients. Over time, our relationships would grow, building on the family ties that had been developed with the Chiuras, thanks to Uncle Tim and his wife Barbara.

When Allen got married to Nozipo Maraire, one of the few neurosurgeons we have in the country, I would be invited to their wedding. Likewise, when Munyaradzi got married to his childhood sweetheart, Esther Chigumira, I would be one of the guests at their wedding.

Through WiP, I would also have access to the then Governor of the Central Bank, Dr Leonard Tsumba and his deputy, Charles Chikaura, both of whom would be my clients. Charles would subsequently play an important professional role in helping Nyaradzo get relevant approvals to enable the business to sell its products to customers in the diaspora and for that I will always be grateful.

Some of the members of WiP I worked with included, Beata Nyamupinga, Hilda Bulle, Mrs Rudo Mlambo, Dr Abigail Kangwende, Mrs Gozo, now late, (MHDSRIEP), Mrs Betty Kahari, Mrs Wynona Chitiyo, Mrs Olga Kadengu, Mrs Ruth Mpisaunga, now late, (MHDSRIEP), Mrs Stella Faranisi, Mrs Sally Mwamuka, Mrs Lydia Jokonya, Mrs Felicitas Mushore and Mrs Priscilla Mundawarara. Among the numerous lessons I learnt from WiP is the need to count one's blessings, give back to the community and to support the underprivileged.

I give credit to my uncle and aunt for being the bridge that linked me up with all these key contacts that ultimately helped broaden my horizon. Besides being the role model that he has been to me, Uncle Tim still stands out as the most influential figure in my life from the time I was a young boy to my adult life. He has been there at all the critical stages in my life, and my beautiful and unassuming wife, Mavis, has seen first-hand his great works. For example, when Mavis and I got married, Tim would provide us with his brand new blue Mercedes-Benz E230 V-Boot, whose registration number was 502-491L.

At the time, the V-Boot was a rarity on our country's roads and a preserve for government ministers and directors of blue-chip companies. It was therefore such a moment to savour when Tim took it upon himself to chauffer Mavis and I when we made that important step in our lives as newly-weds. Having taken Mavis' hand in marriage, it meant that Uncle Tim and Mbuya Barbara couldn't continue to babysit adults, so Mavis and I reasoned. Hence, after our nuptials, I would ask them to allow us to move out so we could begin our new life as husband and wife, in a different environment. Our destination would be none other than Highfield where Mavis and I would rent two rooms in New Canaan.

While I would go back to the ghetto where I came from after our marriage in 1991, my close proximity to my beloved uncle would not end. A witty, indefatigable character, Tim had changed jobs in 1988, soon after I moved in with him, joining Zimnat as Managing Director. Following the appointment of the then Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of TA Holdings Limited, Mr Ariston Chambati, as Minister of Finance in 1993, Tim would be elevated to lead the conglomerate at the age of 37, becoming arguably the youngest CEO to run one of the largest companies we had in the country. Back then, the country's commerce and industry space was dominated by four conglomerates, namely Delta Corporation, TA Holdings, Mashonaland Holdings and Anglo American Corporation.

TA Holdings had become one of the largest companies we had, employing in excess of 10,000 people having expanded from being a tobacco auction firm when it was established by Fred Cooksey in 1936, now with subsidiaries and associate companies in hotels, insurance, food, clothing, transport and manufacturing among others.

Watching my dedicated, focused uncle from when I was a young boy and seeing him succeed and rise to the apex in most of the organisations he worked, inspired me to want to do better all the time. It emboldened me to face the world with a renewed zeal and determination, which combined with character, is what I needed to start and build Nyaradzo, a product of purpose and passion.