Connecting the dots...

Volume 41

08 APRIL 2022



Philip Mataranyika
Nyaradzo Group, CEO

Follow us on:

NYARADZO GROUP

www.nyaradzo.co.zw

Service • Strength • Solutions

Early days of my entrepreneurial journey...

.....inspired by the Zeitgeist

As I got exposed to the finer things in life whilst working at Old Mutual, I soon realised that I could not stretch my earnings to cater for the changing tastes if I stayed with the company and continued to earn a salary or commission. Isn't it time I moved on so I could create space for growth, I thought!

Being a high-flying sales representative at Old Mutual, whose job required rubbing shoulders with the who's who in a city whose literal translation is "one who doesn't sleep", selling insurance policies, I needed to be dressed on point at all times, be clean-shaven and smell good, which all came at a huge cost. With my commission earnings, I was able to meet most of these costs, which gave me a feel-good effect, but even when I earned more money than members of the Old Mutual executive team, including the GM, I always felt I was worth more. This was a theory that needed testing.

With my network of friends and associates growing with each passing day, so did my exposure to individuals who had started on their entrepreneurial journey earlier than me and were doing well. The grass must surely have been greener outside of Old Mutual.

A few years after I had joined Old Mutual, working in their employee benefits division, I married my childhood sweetheart Mavis Muchineuta. A year later, we were blessed with our first child, Nigel Gutsikanai Mataranyika. His middle name translated, being a suggestion that one must be satisfied in life, but somehow, I couldn't find satisfaction even when I earned a decent commission-based income.

We had bought a house in the suburbs, we had two brand new cars, a Nissan Double Cab for my wife Mavis and a Mazda 626 for myself, after having disposed of my Mercedes Benz C220, itself, the same as the one driven by our boss the Assistant General Manager Marketing. I was not poor by any standards, given where I had come from.

What I sought was growth in all aspects of my life. I felt it in my bones that I could do more. I had always wanted to be my own boss, and I thought there was no better time to explore and exploit my full potential than when I had reached the apex of the sales and marketing ladder at Old Mutual. I was a financial advisor at FAZ, the top marketing arm of the Old Mutual Group, and the top dog there, year in year out.

As I mulled over my next steps, the entrepreneurial spirit in me - which had taken leave of absence after I completed my "O" Levels at Rukweza Secondary School in 1985 - would be reawakened.

While I may not have known or understood the word entrepreneurship while growing up in the many places that my parents took me to, the many hustlers that I hobnobbed with at different times in my life journey inspired me and subconsciously ignited the flame.

On my paternal side, my uncle Tongai Mataranyika always had something going on the side whilst working as a bus driver at Matambanadzo Bus Service. For his side hustle, he would either buy empty drums from the Central African Pharmaceutical Services, now CAPS Pharmaceuticals, for resale at his destination in Chirumanzu, or green-mealies that he sold on his stopover at Chivhu, just over one-hundred-and-forty-six kilometres south of Harare. From his savings, he had established an eating-house in Chivhu and eventually resigned from his job after another of his businesses, a retail outlet at Maworesa Shopping Centre in Rukweza became firmly established.

Also on my father's side, Cyril Mufandaedza, who was married to my cousin, Chipo Charity Mataranyika, had made us proud of his achievements after building a flourishing enterprise with interests in restaurants, farming and industrial products. He had partnered with his cousin, Paul Mazikana, to establish Green Light Trading (Private) Limited, with one of their greatest achievements being when they imported industrial machinery to manufacture nails. They had built and developed a modern nail making factory in Marondera, whose official opening had been presided over by none other than the Head of State and Government at the time, His Excellency President Robert Gabriel Mugabe.

From my maternal side, I had seen how Leonard Basiyawo had built his timber business from scratch under the brand name LB Timbers (Private) Limited, moulding it into a formidable enterprise that would compete with established brands such as Johnson and Fletcher, DS Timber and McDonald Timbers, among others.

With the benefit of hindsight, signs of entrepreneurship had started to manifest in me from an early age. I had been a fruit vendor as a young boy, carrying out errands for my step-mother in Egypt, Highfield, and later on assisting my mother with her catering business when Johanne, Thomas and I moved to stay with her in Chitungwiza. Upon our relocation to the village in Chifuri, I took up a job as a cattle herder for the Chikudos, which occupation ended abruptly after I injured my left leg while moulding bricks for my employer.

Thereafter, I would come face-to-face with the real world of hustling when I moved back to the capital city where I helped my uncle Samson Musasa at his workshop at Mbare Musika. When he moved his workshop to Mhondoro communal lands following the attainment of independence in 1980, I had decided that life in the village was not for me. Consequently, I had retraced my footsteps back to Egypt, Highfield, where I secured a day job at John Sisk and Son while studying towards my Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) through night schooling at Nyandoro Primary School.

On completing my ZJC, I went back to formal school for my "O" Levels at Rukweza senior school, passing seven subjects with good grades and thereby paving the way for my applying for and getting decent job opportunities. Earlier in my life, I had tried without success to get a job as a cab driver so I could learn about running taxis, which I thought would lay the groundwork for me to one day operate my own fleet of taxis.

I had hoped to get an opening for an apprenticeship to train as a motor mechanic, believing it would unlock the door for me to start and run my own workshop where I would make a lot of money from fixing cars. Again, this had not worked out!

When I finally landed a job at Old Mutual, the country's oldest insurer, I thought I had arrived, but when no apprenticeship training was forthcoming a few years into working for the company, I changed course, having realised I was barking up the wrong tree. I then turned my guns towards studying marketing with the Institute of Marketing Management of South Africa, otherwise known as IMM, thinking this would do the trick.

As my needs and wants grew, I realised that I was chasing a mirage and that I only had myself to blame for not unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit that lay dormant in me. I had started out on a hobby that became one of my first business ventures, that of taking pictures - photography. Having observed that people wanted a record of how they looked at some point in time, I hit it big! When times were good and I criss-crossed the country, taking pictures at various functions, I imagined myself to be as successful as the professional photographers of the time.

Back in the day, there were the likes of Bester Kanyama, John Mauluka and a few others, whom I looked up to, who were the doyens in the field.

Without doubt one of the most iconic names in the history of Zimbabwean photography, Bester, was like an enigma. Stories are told of him having started from humble beginnings in Shamva when he was given his first camera in 1947 as a birthday present from his father who was a post office worker. It is said that Bester eventually opened his small studio, which he later moved to Chitomborwizi, just outside Chinhoyi, where his father had acquired a small-scale commercial farm.

Bester would cycle to Kadoma from his father's farm to buy film, photographic paper and chemicals for his studio and it was there that he met Canaan Buchanan who was running a Kodak shop in the mining town. Buchanan employed him as a darkroom assistant. After years of being trained in the background by Buchanan, Bester started filing photos for the Daily News, which at the time was the mouthpiece of rising nationalism in the country.

He later joined the Daily News full-time, which meant he had to move from Kadoma to Highfield, Harare, where he established his own photography studio at Machipisa Shopping Centre, from which he did photoshoots. He also did outdoor or location shoots on clients' requests.

It was during the heady days at the Daily News that Bester made some of his adventurous forays. Of note was his long drive to Sango Border Post, near the Mozambique border, where Gonakudzingwa, a detention camp for political detainees established by the Smith regime was located, to meet one of the iconic leaders of the nationalist movements, Joshua Nkomo, of ZAPU. He also visited Hwahwa, another detention camp for black nationalists.

Some of his great work earned him fourth position in the prestigious Asahi Pentax International Photo Contest in 1965, whilst working for Parade Magazine. In the 1980s, when he was chief photographer in the Ministry of Information, he would accompany the then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe on international trips. So successful was Bester's career that he attained the financial means to leave Highfield and buy a house in Southerton in 1978, which was no mean achievement at the time.

Apart from the 1965 Asahi Pentax honour, in 1983, he scooped second prize in the then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, (USSR), International Fellowship photo contest and was awarded an Excellence in Visual Arts gong by the National Gallery of Zimbabwe for his Baringa Exhibition in 1987.

Another photographic legend at the time was John Mauluka, who also earned a good amount of money doing freelance work for magazines and newspapers and won photo contests or awards, which helped take his career to another level.

Born in Harare in 1932, John learnt photography when he started working for the photographer Aubrey Urbach. After a few years, he joined the Daily News while continuing to work as a freelance commercial photographer for several studios. John would later become the Daily News' chief photographer and facilitated the emergence of young photographers such as Tsvangirai Mukwazhi, who is now recognised as a leading photojournalist in Zimbabwe.

In 1983, John was named best photographer of the Commonwealth, allowing him to make a trip to India where he created a documentary of black and white photographs.

Having taken up photography as a side hustle, I knew it would be a big mountain to climb, if I were to fill the big shoes of John or Bester, who were full-time professional photographers. All I needed was a bit of fun and a chance to make extra cash on the side whenever I got the time. To capitalise on the emerging opportunities for photographic services, I bought myself a camera from my savings. Before long, I was off on an exciting journey, taking pictures of both individual and corporate clients, helping them freeze time and commemorate special moments in their lives.

I rarely had time for my wife Mavis and son Nigel during the weekends as I was always on the go, chasing the elusive dollar, taking pictures at birthday parties, weddings, anniversaries, family portraits, general headshots for passports, and real estate photos, all of which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Some of the prominent people who enlisted my services for their nuptials include former Deputy Prime Minister, Arthur Guseni Oliver Mutambara and his wife Jackie, Webster Shamu and his wife Constance and medical doctors Jabu and Ophelia Moyo, to name a few. I was also hired as the official photographer at corporate functions, which led me to invest in equipment that improved the quality of my work. One of my proudest moments was when I was introduced to the management of Tedco's Marketing Department, who were looking for a photographer to take pictures of their furniture products for their brochures. When they saw the quality of my work, they immediately signed me up and I would take pictures of their furniture during the weekends.

I also took pictures of graduates at the University of Zimbabwe during their graduation ceremonies. After being capped, many of them would invite me to take pictures of themselves and their families at their graduation parties and I never disappointed, capturing these priceless moments in print.

My passion for photography has lived with me ever since. Given an opportunity, I can still take award-winning pictures that can tell a story of a thousand words. It certainly helps that technology has since evolved from the fifth century when a camera was as big as a microwave and couldn't be carried around. In today's world, anyone with a smartphone or a tablet is a photographer in their own right as these gadgets have built in state-of-the-art cameras that can take amazing pictures.

Unlike yesteryear when photographers had to take their film for processing in dark rooms, modern technology instantly captures images at the touch of a button. Things have changed significantly, for a craft that began on the African continent, where ancient monuments in Egypt depict an adjunct to a flourishing European tradition of orientalist art.

A clear testament that Africa has come of age in the field of photography are at least ten amateur photographs in European libraries taken between 1844 and 1864, illustrating Egyptian antiquities and views. Commercial studios were established in Egypt in the 1860s and there were at least ten such studios by the 1880s.

In the 1850s and 1860s, there were also studios in Algiers, with South Africa establishing its studios in the Cape in the late 1840s and 1850s. From then on, the industry expanded in all directions with the growth of white settlements.

While it is not clear when the industry took root in Zimbabwe, there are fascinating pictures taken between 1896 and 1900 by photographer W. Rausch when Cecil John Rhodes was establishing British control of Zimbabwe during the "scramble for Africa," when European nations were vying for control of the continent and its resources. There are also photographs of miners in Rhodesia dating back to the late 1800s.

In Europe, the first development of photographs can be traced back to France in the late 1830s. By the 1850s, photography had evolved from just being an art form and capturing important moments for the elite to commercial photography that also included advertising, with photographs being printed in newspapers and small social magazines of the day.

In the old days, cameras were bulky but they have since evolved, especially with George Eastman's Kodak Company breakthrough in the 1890s that enabled regular folks to use a camera.

In Zimbabwe, the industry has seen many players coming and going, with Kodak, Goldprint and a few others being among the enduring local brands. Kodak's history can be traced to the United States of America where it was formed in 1888 by George Eastman, a school dropout who became fascinated by the camera after he had bought one when he was going on vacation and wanted to take pictures of the scenery. With the camera being as big and as heavy as a microwave oven, it took time to assemble and simply did not make any sense to carry it around. Although he ended up not going on vacation, he became obsessed with the need to make the camera more portable and user friendly and that was the birth of Kodak's pay-off line in the earlier days, "you press the button we do the rest."

Kodak started off in the 19th century in New Jersey as the Eastman Kodak Company, being incorporated in 1888 by its founder. At its formation, George dubbed his company, "Eastman Kodak", with his only criteria in choosing the name Kodak being that it should be short, easy to pronounce, and not bear any resemblance to names that already existed. Like most international companies, Kodak branched into Southern Africa and opened its doors in Salisbury (now Harare). In no time, they were popular for their postcards, which allowed a photographer to directly print his or her photographs onto them.

Goldprint is also one of the earliest establishments in the industry. Today, it is one of Harare-based photographic companies specialising in photo-printing, photo-editing, photo-restoration and graphic designing.

So it was that photography became my first go to hustle, even as I was getting awards as the top financial advisor at Old Mutual. As my career as a photographer was blossoming, I always felt I could do more, to boost my earnings, as a result, I started looking at other ways of making additional income and in time, this would take me to discovering and getting to know about customs rummage sales.

Acknowledgements:

https://www.sundaymail.co.zw/rewinding-the-film

http://www.ken-art.com/blog/post/62/african-photography-photojournalism-part-4