

# NUGGETS OF WISDOM FOR WOMEN IN BUSINESS

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- Let me start by making a small confession to the effect that I did not volunteer to speak today. A colleague not only put my name up but put a specific topic for me to speak on. So if you find that what I speak on is not particularly helpful, do remember that I have the duress defence.
- Thank you very much to the ZWLA secretariat. It is an absolute honour to be asked not only to speak to the women but an august room of brilliant, smart and engaging women.

- I am aware that we do have ZWLA friends with us today who may not be female, but as I indicated I have been directed by the topic to speak from the point of view of women in business.

- A further foot note to this presentation is that as a lawyer that is not engaged in any other business, I will generally spring board from the law career and law firm business.
- However the principles that apply to “our” law businesses are applicable to other businesses or career that colleagues and friends may be in or want to get involved in.

- These are general principles meant to be applicable regardless of the type, size or quality of the business.

The list is of course not exhaustive. It is meant to prod us so that we can then have a conversation.

# 1. STRATEGIC PLAN

- For me personally there can never be any success without planning. A strategy has been described as a plan of action intended and designed to achieve a longterm or overall goal.

- A plan will help one to focus on the actions, steps, time and resources that are necessary for one to achieve an intended objective.

- Right from the beginning of your career or business it is extremely important to have a plan of where you want your career or business to take you.
- In general one must have short term, medium term and long term plans. Short term plans will span 2-5 years, medium term plans 6-10 years, and long term plans 10-25 years.

- These plans will feed into each other and enable one to assess whether or not progress is being made as expected and goals are being achieved.

- Once the plan has been made the following will also be important:
  - a) regular assessment and evaluation of achievement of key result areas.
  - b) assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats and appropriate adjustments.

For example when we completed our degrees my colleagues and I's plans were premised on the local economy performing well.

- However after a while that changed and a S.W.O.T analysis led to many of my colleagues having to review their plans and make adjustments. Many of them moved overseas, or to other countries in Africa.

- Similarly unexpected opportunities may arise .

These would then be considered in the context of  
one's general plan and strategy.

## 2. KNOW WHAT SUCCESS MEANS TO YOU AND DO NOT BE AFRAID TO CLAIM IT

- If I had a choice as to which generation to be born in I would without a doubt choose exactly when I was born. As women today we busk in the glory of choice. Our grandmothers' generation and perhaps even our mothers did not enjoy this privilege.

- While admittedly what has been achieved falls short of the mark as some women still do not enjoy the right to choose, we must appreciate the fact that choice now exists for a large number of women. USE IT!

- The point I seek to make is that if you make your plan, you will of necessity know what success will look like for you. It is crucial that you know what colour the success that you want takes.
- With the right to choose women can now choose to scale the ladder of their careers and businesses right to the very top.

- Currently there aren't enough women occupying decision making positions or heading entrepreneurial enterprises. There are therefore many opportunities for women to do so.

### 3. BE A COMPETENT BUSINESS PERSON

- While opportunities for success abound, women still face barriers to success. One of these is the myth that women are less competent than their male counterparts.
- In the business of law, men have the advantage for instance of being endowed with stronger, more aggressive-sounding vocal cords. By virtue thereof it is easier for them to put their points across and to hold a judge's attention in court.

- They have the advantage that they do not get pregnant, have to breastfeed, and are generally not expected to spend nights nursing sick children and then still have to appear in court to argue a matter.

- Be that as it may be, in my view, despite the challenges, women have already proved that they are just as capable. Many women have successfully run enduring businesses and many women lawyers have achieved career heights in their own right.

- Whatever it is you choose to do in this career, however;
  - i) Do not underestimate the need for preparation. Know your case, know your client, know your business,
  - ii) Learn what strengths you possess, sharpen your skills, and carve out a niche for yourself as a 21<sup>st</sup> century lawyer or business woman.

iii) read, read, read, and keep learning. You can never know too much.

iv) Seek out opportunities to improve yourself whether, through further studies or gaining experience not only in the law but in the running of a business.

iv) Work hard and be the kind of lawyer you would hire and  
be the kind of business person you would give business to.

**BE A COMPETENT LAWYER AND BURST THE MYTH!** The myth  
will not just disappear, we have to work to change it.

## 4. CREATE AND KNOW THE VALUE OF YOUR NETWORK

- Perhaps by virtue of how we are wired as women this area is often challenging for us. We place barriers that prevent or hinder our professional interaction with colleagues or other professionals or business persons.

(examples : religion, tribalism, marital status, fashion sense, first impressions, jealousy).

- I am not advocating for a situation in which lawyers contrary to the calling of our ethics will be found improperly fraternise with one another. In any considered opinion however, what we ought to do as women lawyers and business people is to:

- i) Know what strengths women and men colleagues possess so that we can draw on these.
- ii) Socialise in an organised way that allows us to find it easier to carry on our practice. (For example club dinners or lunches on Fridays).

iii) Organise activities with other professions with whom we interface in our work to create networks for our businesses.

➤ For example insurance practitioners, medical practitioners, bankers, (Activities similar to the lawyers – accountants dinner).

iv) Create contacts with other women lawyers organisations internationally and thereby creating international networks.

As a general rule, remind yourself that you should be open and speak to everyone. You could get a million dollar idea for someone when you least expect it.

## 5. KNOW YOUR WEAKNESSES AND TURN THEM INTO STRENGTHS

- We all have flaws in our characters and at times these are quite fundamental. These may be inhibiting your success as a business person or career lawyer.
- The only way however to turn them into strengths is to first confront them.

- A successful business woman in America once said that she attributed her million dollar empire to the fact that when she was growing up her father would require her to tell him in what she had failed every single day. Try new things and challenging ways of doing things.
- William Shakespeare says,  
“TO DO A GREAT RIGHT, DO A LITTLE WRONG”.

- Force yourself to face your weaknesses. If nothing else it will help you be aware of what they are and to try to reduce their impact on your business and at most you may actually discover huge strengths live in the perceived weaknesses.

## 6. REMEMBER THAT A LAW FIRM IS BUSINESS

- It is crucial to have commercial awareness. Many lawyers tend to concentrate only on being great lawyers and forget that they run businesses which rely on clients for their survival and success.

- Lawyers must possess knowledge of current developments in local, national and world business, particularly those that may have an immediate impact on their business or clients

- Deadlines are now increasingly becoming crucial as the client becomes king. When I first started practice I recall that my boss could be unavailable to see a client for over 2 weeks and the client would patiently wait.

- That is no longer the case as commerce now thrives on the mantra “time is money” and as there are now many lawyers and law firms to choose from.
- Remember also that you are competing with corrupt lawyers and law firms that are prepared to cut corners. You must therefore provide a better service than they do.

- Run your business with the following in mind;

- Commercial awareness

- Attention to detail and accuracy,

- Organisation and time management,

- Professionalism and ethics,
- Value the customer,
- Communicate effectively with the customer,
- Create a brand for your business,
- Be patient and do not take short cuts.

## 7. FIND AND MAINTAIN BALANCE

- ***“All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”.***
- Before I talk about the balance between work and play  
however, let me speak a little about the balance between all  
our different responsibilities and roles as women.

- We are not only women lawyers but many of us are biological mothers, “surrogate” mothers, sisters, daughters, friends, girlfriends and/or wives.
- While it is important for us to be successful in our careers we must also carry out our other responsibilities.

- Exactly what that balance means will be different for each and every woman and rightly so as we are all unique and have unique circumstances.
- Each and every woman has a right to make decisions that will give her balance and happiness regardless of what other women may or may not be doing.

- Make decisions with which you will be content.
- Now for the fun part: you do not have to be serious 24/7 for you to be a successful lawyer or business person.
- Explore yourself and find those activities that will bring balance into your life.

- Some of these are:
  - i) Exercise – creates “me time” for you and helps you release endorphins – “feel good hormones”
  - ii) Social interaction – church, family, friends

- Travel – gives you a chance to forget about your life and see how others live. It has very little to do with cost as opposed to the will to do it. If it is important to for you and you understand that it give you balance you will save for it. Furthermore not all travel is expensive. (E.g a group bus ride to the Namibian coast would cost very little.)

- iv) Rest – get a good night's sleep as often as you can.
- v) Tuning off - once in a while switch your cellphone off,  
no wifi, no whatsapp, no Instagram, no facebook  
nothing and just do something genuinely relaxing.

iv) Drink, dance, and Laugh – drink what rocks and floats your boat and let loose. (just do not do it as a shebeen!)

Do remember all successful business people work extremely hard and play even harder!