



lekealder®

Nothing!

Leke Alder

Principal, Alder Consulting

A Paper presented at TREM Akoka
Youth Financial Empowerment
Seminar, Lagos

Thursday, March 19, 2009

© Leke Alder





Today, I want to discuss a very important subject matter with you. I want to discuss Nothing!

In thinking of what to say at this seminar, I could think of no other thing except Nothing. So, Congratulations! You've come to hear Nothing.

I wish to apologise to you on behalf of the organisers of this event for inviting you to listen to Nothing!

God bless you and good night!

[Leke Alder walks off the stage to his seat]

[After a full minute, he comes back on stage]

But on second thoughts maybe there's something in Nothing! Think about it. You can never learn unless you keep an open mind! The Latin phrase for that is tabula rasa. It means blank state nothing on your mind. So Nothing is good for learning. Without learning, we cannot make progress in life.



We may seem to be making progress, but without knowledge, we have uninformed progress. And so we don't know whether we are going in the right direction or not; and we cannot be certain we are doing the right thing. All because of Nothing! Nothing is a sign of humility. The man who is already something cannot become Something. When you're Nothing, you stand a good chance of becoming Something.

Oh, there are many nothings in life who think they're something. And you meet them in all walks of life... from the gateman, to the secretary, to the Church usher, to the Policeman...

All Nothings who think they're Something have one thing in common: they oppress others when vested with power, no matter how little the power. We may understand the rich oppressing the poor; but how do we explain the poor oppressing the poor?

It pays to be Nothing. It makes us humble and wise and courteous. I heard of a man in a Lagos combi commuter bus, aka Danfo. He got into a quarrel with a fellow passenger. With his veins bulging and throbbing he began to shout at the top of his lungs "Do you know who I am?!" Tell me, what can you be in



a Danfo bus?! A man who is Nothing must not boast that he's Something!

When the other passenger retorted “Who are you?”, the gentleman answered, “Let me tell you, my brother is a medical doctor at TinCan Island Port!”

As laughable as the proposition is, we ought to learn a lesson from the man's debacle what we are is determined by who we associate with! Watch your associations.

Even God cannot do anything for us unless we are Nothing! Those that are well have no need of a medical doctor, the good Lord said. When Jesus said, “I will make you fishers of men,” we ought to know that “fishers of men” is a variable. God is the maker and he can make you into anything. The moral is, no man can make you. Only God can make you. He makes Nothings Somethings. And if you want a godfather, go for the original!

But lest we lose ourselves in Nothing, let's do a summary of the lessons so far:



1. We must keep an open mind in life
2. We must seek knowledge
3. We must be humble
4. We must not be presumptuous
5. We must determine our associations
6. We must put our trust in God
7. We can become anything we want to be

All we have to be is, Nothing!

But to be Nothing does not mean we must do Nothing. The man who is Nothing must do something or he remains nothing. The problem in life is not where you start from. The problem is not doing anything about your situation. That changes the dynamics. It means you are responsible for your life! You cannot blame your parents, or your uncle (be it Uncle Sege or any other uncle); you cannot blame government, or your lecturer, or your girlfriend, or pastor... we like to blame others for our predicaments. Yet even if we can blame others, to what good is that? It changes nothing. You are responsible for your life! Quit complaining. Start doing something.



Some people are waiting for perfect conditions before they start doing something. The man who waits for perfect conditions never gets anything done. The time to act is NOW! You must have a sense of anger about your situation. By that I do not mean senseless emotional anger. I am talking about that anger that is at once a sense of righteousness and a sense of destiny. It is a positive propellant. It makes you so annoyed at being on one spot for so long that it propels you to do something! It makes you examine your potential and determine the future of that potential, and then work towards fulfilling it.

How many times have you heard someone say, "I've been looking for a job for 3 years!" How can you look for a job for 3 years?! How's that possible?! You've not been looking for work. You've been sitting at home doing nothing or visiting those who have jobs. You've been waiting for a particular type of work, and you ought to starve, according to an unpopular part of the Bible. He that does not work should not eat, the good Book says. You will never get the type of work you want if you have such an attitude. Work is not about particular jobs. Work is a measure of attitude and faithfulness. A poor man cannot be proud. You may think you're young but time is flying over your life. Before you know it you're old.



Opportunities are slits in the fabric of spacetime. Once they're gone, they're gone! There is a time for everything. If that is the case it means that when the time is past, the time is past. There is no time to waste. Go out there and do something with your life no matter how little you're paid, no matter what job it is. “Whatsoever your hand finds to do... do with all your might” is the divine injunction. Your hand must find something to do. If you don't start you can't progress. And if you don't handle small things you can't handle big things. Quit day-dreaming, get off your bed. A lazy man rolls on the bed like a door on hinges. Find something to do! If you don't you will remain Nothing!

I remember starting life and business with N17.50k (That's less than 2 Cents). That was all I had materially but that was not the totality of what I had. I had guts, I had talent, I had humility, I had patience, I had vision, I had perseverance, I had no choice... just like everyone in this auditorium.

But most importantly, I had that unique gift that all young men and women possess... I had faith! I believed in the impossible.

A young man knows no limitations. A young man knows no impossibilities.



A young man has the confidence of ignorance. I did the possible and ended up doing the impossible.

I was bold enough to put my effort in the market place. I wanted the market to decide. Not circumstances, not my pocket, not the naysayers, not the gainsayers, not the voices of discouragement. Despite what my circumstance shouted at me, I refused to listen. My circumstance was like a master-sergeant drilling me with hopelessness, shouting at the top of his voice, "It's hopeless, give up! You cannot make it."

Perhaps the master-sergeant has been drilling you too. You cannot disembark before you embark. I could not afford to give up. A young man must never give up. When he gives up he's dead. Young men see visions. That's how not to die. It is written, "Young men shall see visions and old men shall dream dreams." I not only chose to have visions, I chose to dream dreams. I appropriated both worlds. I became a young old man. I saw visions of my life and I dreamt dreams of success. I dreamt of a life beyond the soporific confines of my denudating circumstances. I dreamt of being the reference point of my family name.



I dreamt of building an institution and a legacy. I dreamt of an office in the high brow section of town. I dreamt of fine linen and knotted ties. I dreamt of Canali suits and Gucci shoes. I dreamt of a lovely home and beautiful cars. I dreamt of being a philanthropist and a giver. I dreamt of significance, and worth. I dreamt of making a difference in the lives of people and being a thought leader in my nation. I dreamt of international repute and speaking engagements like this. And I'm still dreaming. I will always be a young old man! What are you?

To be a young old man is to be creative and imaginative. It is to be determined and mature. It is to seek knowledge and counsel. It is to work hard and seek wisdom. It is being made of sterner stuff. It means having integrity, and recognising that life is a marathon, not a 100m dash. When last did you dream? When last did you see visions? What are you dreaming? What are you seeing?

I must confess that I am not unaware of realisms. The environment you're in is tough. How do you dream in a 3rd World? Genuine role models are scarce and we have basic infrastructure problems... transportation, electricity, portable water, even credit... But your environment is your laboratory.



All you need to do is to become a chemist. When you mix your dreams with your skills and your problems and the problems of others that you're concerned about, you have a business idea cooking.

These are not enough however, though they're good ingredients. You won't get income because you have dreams and problems. Everybody has dreams and problems. You need passion. I use the word technically like Humpty Dumpty. The passion I'm talking about are those things you care about how you do things. That passion to present things orderly, to make things beautiful, and to help others... these and many more are your technologies. You must energise these emotional needs and compulsions, and apply them to your problems and dreams. You need to apply these technologies to the solutions you're brewing.

This principle applies whether you're an entrepreneur or an intrapreneur. (An intrapreneur is someone creating products and value within a corporation or organization).

Then you must be creative in formulation and packaging so that you can sell the package to those who need it.



Of what good is a product that is not sellable or that is not sold? You don't have a business proposition unless it is something people will pay for.

We must however differentiate business ideas from mere notions. Everybody says they have ideas. But an idea without an implementation plan or economic model is just a notion. You must be able to put down the idea in a succinct and implementable format and build a business plan around it, such that it becomes an investable proposition. That requires intellectual discipline, rigour and knowledge. You will need help. Seek it!

But then I need to share a little secret with you. People don't invest in businesses. They invest in people. And nobody will invest in you until you've invested in yourself. You must show us your faith by your works. What have you done so far? Is it a good idea? Have you done your homework? How will it sell? Have you started? Is it making money? These and many questions are the legitimate works that accompany faith. But here's another important advice: Don't wait for the big break. Start!



But I don't have capital! No fantastic idea has capital at the beginning. Dell, Apple, Microsoft, Virgin... none of them had capital. Get creative. Use your brain. Show that you're worth your future.

Some people don't want to invest in knowledge. The question we should legitimately ask is how do you want to succeed? You can never rise above the level of your ignorance. Knowledge is not what you cram into your cranial cavity. Knowledge is what is applicable, or else you're just an encyclopedia. No one does business with, or employs an encyclopedia. Apply knowledge to your circumstances. Regurgitating a sermon for example, is so unintelligent. Applying the sermon to your circumstance is intelligent. Get creative. Use your imagination. Creative imagination is advance intelligence.

The distinction between us and animals is creative imagination. The Good Book tells us that humans were inspired at creation with what is technically referred to as "The breath of life". This "breath" is not oxygen because animals breathe and they were not recorded as having this inspirational gossamer.



The “breath of life” is a complex. It is made up of creative imagination, self awareness and God awareness, or consciousness, and ethics. These three things - consciousness as we might call it, creative imagination and ethics - are lacking in animals. Without creative imagination, we cannot have ideas and develop complexity. Without consciousness, we cannot have vision, mission or purpose. Without ethical scruples we will have no boundaries and self-destruct. We will lack shame.

It is therefore the “breath of life” that creates your future, and preserves your future. If you're not engaging your brain, or feeding it, or you lack drive or ambition, or you lack ethical boundaries and scruples, in truth you're no different from a rat, or cat, or dog, or cow. You're just an animal. Animals don't live. They exist. Animals don't create businesses. Animals don't rule. Animals cannot control the world. Animals don't create value. Animals are not role models. They are not emulated. Animals are animals. When are you going to start living?

From my analysis of the breath of life complex, you can easily see that the cheat is cheating himself. Short cuts always cut short a glorious future. This is not a moral equation, it's a vision thing. How visionary are you? Are you a young old man?



You cannot become unless you are. You become in your thinking. As you think so are you. Cogito ergo sum.

Let's get back to where we started from. Being Nothing is not nothing. It is something. It is the start of life the cradle of possibilities. From Nothing stars are born. From Nothing God made the world. God specialises in creating Something out of Nothing.

I believe in Nothing. When you're nothing, there's only one way to go up! When you're Nothing, tradition and human limitations cannot bind you. When you're nothing, you don't see nothing only possibilities. The man who sees nothing can make something out of nothing just like God. We are made in God's image and have his capabilities. The Nothings of this present time are legends of tomorrow, for how can we praise you for your accomplishments if you're already something.

So don't despair when you look around you and you see nothing. Don't despair when the somethings despise you.



You're like your Father. You can make something out of Nothing. You can make something out of yourself. Now go make something!

I bid you God's speed!

Lecture is available at www.lekealder.com