

AN IHA MENTORS EDITION

# Notes from Your Big Sisters

THIS IS NOT ADVICE, BUT YOU MIGHT  
NEED IT



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*Notes From Your Big Sisters*

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Published by Inspire Her Afrika

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# Dedication

This book is dedicated to every woman who had to figure things out the hard way.

To the ones who wished someone had said, *“I’ve been there, let me help you.”*

May these pages remind you that you’re not behind, you’re not alone, you’re doing better than you think.

# Acknowledgement

We are deeply grateful to every Inspire Her Afrika mentor who poured their time, truth, and experience into these pages. Your stories remind us that growth is rarely linear and that having people who've "been there" makes all the difference.

To the Inspire Her Afrika community, thank you for trusting this vision and walking alongside us. This book is because of you, for you, and for every moment when you thought, "*I wish someone had told me this earlier.*"

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# Introduction

Welcome to *Notes from Your Big Sisters*.

If you picked up this book expecting a manual on “10 Steps to Career Success” or “How to Be Perfect in Life,” pause right there. That’s not what this book is. Instead, it’s honest, heartfelt, and sometimes funny—just like the journeys that brought us here.

At Inspire Her Afrika, we believe mentorship isn’t about long lectures and rigid checklists. It’s about stories. Real, unfiltered stories of women who have tried, doubted themselves at times, laughed at chaos, and still found a way to rise.

Think of this book as a group chat with your big sisters. — the ones who have gone ahead of you and turned back to say, “Come, let me show you.” The ones who will hype you up, correct you when needed, and remind you that setbacks are not shameful. They are part of the journey, not the end of it.

Each chapter is a reminder that you're not walking this journey alone. The truth is, behind every polished LinkedIn profile is a backstory, courage, and lessons learned. Every confident woman you admire has had her fair share of moments that didn't make it into the bio.

So, grab a cup of tea (or malt, or zobo—no judgment here), get comfortable, and dive in. Laugh with us, roll your eyes with us, and take what you need from these pages.

This isn't advice — but you might need it.

Chidinma Oli,

Founder and Executive Director, *Inspire Her Afrika*

*If you ever doubt yourself, remember: this isn't the end. Detours are part of the journey.*

# Chapter 1

## *I Like My 9–5*

*The truth? I LIKE my 9-5*

I know saying that out loud feels almost like a crime today, where everyone seems to have a “side hustle,” or an Instagram business. Apparently, if you don’t have three side hustles, a TikTok shop, and a podcast, you’re not ambitious. And hey, if that’s your passion, that’s absolutely fantastic and you should own it!

But me? I love having a routine—clocking in, doing the work, and clocking out. Some days, work looks like sitting at my desk, quietly writing and thinking for hours. If that makes sense to you, you’re my people.

Still, for a while, there was constant pressure to “just start small—sell something. After all, everybody should have a side hustle.” Meanwhile, deep inside, I wanted to scream “Why can’t I just be a corporate girly?”

I'll be honest, there was a period when I almost bought into it. Nigeria can pressure you into anything. Bills don't wait for passion.

So I started a cake business while waiting for an internship. I told myself it was temporary—just a small side hustle to hold me down until something more “serious” came through. I baked small cupcakes, carefully wrapped with love, and took them to Mama Emeka's shop a few kilometres from my house.

Because of the relationship she had with my mother, she agreed to display them in her shop. By 5 or 6 p.m., I returned to collect the proceeds from my *premium* cakes. There was nothing. Days passed. I think only one person bought a cupcake. Lol.

She told me “*Nne, why not try egg rolls, all these labourers won't eat cake after working, it won't hold their stomach.*” I was annoyed. But she wasn't wrong. And deep down, I knew it.

I took my cakes and went home to eat it. I even tried again because I know what you, business tycoon, are thinking: “One attempt isn’t enough.” Lol. But honestly? It still didn’t work out. And somewhere between, I realized something important. I wasn’t failing at business. I was forcing myself into a lane that wasn’t mine.

I realized I could make quieter financial decisions without building another business from scratch. For me, liking the stability and structure my “9–5” brings doesn’t mean thinking small—it means choosing a different kind of power.

The irony? Saying “I like my 9-5” sometimes feels like rebellion. People are quick to ask how anyone plans to become a millionaire that way, as if ambition is only rewarded in one form. Entrepreneurship is heavily romanticized, but the reality often looks like early mornings chasing suppliers, working around NEPA failures (a very Nigerian problem), and waiting politely for customers to pay. *Have you dealt with Lagos delivery men before?*

As for me, I choose a different path. I want the structure of a 9–5 role, clear responsibilities, and mentorship from seasoned colleagues.

### ***Inspire Her Tip***

If you've ever felt guilty for wanting a 9–5, pause and breathe. You are not lazy. You are not unambitious. And you are not failing.

Wanting to thrive in science, research, or corporate spaces is valid. If your heart beats for the lab, the office, or the boardroom, own it fully. Don't let anyone shame you into chasing a hustle that doesn't fit your season or your strengths.

Success isn't one-size-fits-all. It's about doing work that aligns with who you are and allows you to grow.

*Written By:*

 *Chidinma Oli*

## Chapter 2

### *Entrepreneurship is Wild, and Maybe I'm That Girl*

Hey sis, pull up a chair! Ever had one of those moments where the stars just align, the universe winks at you, and you suddenly realize, "Oh, *this* is it."

That feeling when you realize every late night, every rejection, every single ounce of sweat you poured into a dream was leading to this? That's when you know. That's the moment I knew *I was that girl entrepreneur*.

It was August 2009, and I had courageously launched my sustainable interior and furniture design business. Sounds fancy now, but it was a very humble beginning.

I had quit my 9-5, trading the security of a paycheck for the exhilarating, terrifying, and utterly boundless freedom of entrepreneurship. *Spoiler*: tread carefully here and make sure you understand the profound shift in mindset this entails.

Starting as a bootstrapped entrepreneur wasn't glamorous. It was working from a corner of my bedroom, and going around, pitching ideas to anyone who would listen – and often, to people who wouldn't.

There were more "no"s than I can count. More closed doors. More times, I wondered if I was completely insane to leave a “steady” path for this wild, unpredictable dream.

But my belief that I was pursuing something that truly ignited my spirit, along with the understanding that persistent effort is deeply intertwined with genuine passion, fueled my progress through every obstacle.

My days were a relentless cycle of designing, sourcing, building relationships, and trying to convince the world that sustainable, beautifully crafted design wasn't just a niche, but the future. I faced skepticism, underestimation, and the constant financial tightrope walk that only a bootstrapped founder truly understands.

There were days my 'office' was a noisy Alaba shop (a massive Lagos market renowned for its furniture offerings)

My 'team' was just me and my laptop, and my 'marketing budget' was essentially zero. But every single day, I showed up. I refined my craft, honed my pitches, leaned on trusted friends, mentors, and stubbornly refused to let doubt win.

Then came the project. An American oil and gas company had just relocated to Nigeria and required furniture and an interior makeover for their commercial space and staff residences – a dream client, honestly.

One that felt almost too big for my small, determined operation. I'd spent weeks, probably months if you count all the background work, meticulously preparing every detail; the unique sustainable materials, the innovative design concepts, the detailed budget, the execution plan.

I poured my soul into that proposal, visualizing every corner, every texture, every happy client who would experience my work.

The pitch itself felt surreal. I walked into that room, probably still smelling faintly of sawdust and ambition, and presented. I spoke not just about design, but about

purpose, about the story behind every piece, about the impact we could make together. And then, the questions came. Sharp and challenging.

But because I had been so consistent, so resilient in learning from every setback, and so incredibly prepared, I had an answer for everything. I wasn't just faking it till I made it; I had made it through sheer grit.

When the call came a few days later, "We want to go with you. Your vision aligned perfectly..." – it wasn't a shout of joy. It was a deep, quiet, profoundly powerful knowing. A rush of pure validation.

In that moment, looking back at all the sleepless nights, the sacrifices, the unwavering belief when others scoffed, I knew. I was that girl. The one who dared to dream big, who built from nothing, and who, through pure force of will, consistency, and an unshakeable belief, landed her impossible break.

## *Lesson Learned*

Your "big break" isn't random luck; it's the intersection of consistent hard work, fierce resilience in the face of setbacks, meticulous preparation, and an unwavering belief in your dream.

That girl Entrepreneur isn't someone born with everything; she's someone who earns it, piece by painful, glorious piece. It's about building an inner fortress of conviction that makes you immune to external doubts.

## *Inspire Her Tip*

- 1. Embrace the "No"s as "Not Yets":** Every rejection is a data point, not a verdict. Learn from it, refine your approach, and keep going. Your consistency is your competitive edge.
- 2. Over-Prepare, Always:** The more you know, the more confident you'll be. Dive deep into your craft, your market, and your vision. Confidence isn't just a feeling; it's a byproduct of genuine preparation.
- 3. Your Belief is Your Fuel:** On the days, when your

bank account is low and the doubts are high, your absolute belief in your dream is the only thing that will keep you going. Nurture it fiercely.

### **Quote**

"It always seems impossible until it's done." - Nelson Mandela. *And darling, you're doing it.*

*Written by:*

 *Tolulope Olalekan*

## Chapter 3

### *Dreams Took a Detour, But I'm Still That Girl*

When I first got into university, I thought I had it all figured out. I imagined myself as a big-shot medical professional, wearing a white coat, saving lives, and being that “oh-so-accomplished” graduate everyone would admire. But then, life had a plot twist for me.

You see, I didn't hit the cutoff mark for my dream course. So instead, I settled for Health Records and Information Management. At first, I felt like I was wearing shoes two sizes too small—uncomfortable, confusing, and definitely not what I had pictured for myself.

People around me didn't help either. “Why would you choose that course?” they asked. “You'll never get a good job.” Ouch, right? But I made peace with it and focused on the bigger picture: a degree is still a degree, and it could open doors—even if they weren't the ones I originally imagined.

In my final year, I discovered ALX Africa, enrolled for their

Virtual Assistant program and completed it, with hopes that it would give me an edge and add some sparkle to my CV.

Graduation came, and I was ready—or so I thought. I had my life all mapped out: get a job, move out, start my “big girl” life. And then, nothing. Months passed. Applications vanished into black holes. Rejection emails stacked up. I watched my classmates—some married, some working dream jobs, some on exciting vacations—and I began talking to myself in a low voice, “What’s wrong with me?”

But then I shifted my perspective. I turned this “waiting period” into a time to really know myself: to discover my potentials, my weaknesses, the parts of me that needed healing, and the things I truly love.

Slowly, life began to unfold in beautiful ways. Opportunities started appearing that I hadn’t even imagined. Things didn’t make sense immediately, but later on, I saw the bigger picture.

## *Lesson Learned*

Expectations are good. Dreams are necessary. It's good to picture yourself in bigger places. But when things don't go as planned, look for the silver lining.

Don't waste the pause resenting yourself or comparing yourself with others, use that time for something else. It could be discovering who you are, healing old wounds, learning a new skill, or exploring what truly lights you up. Patience matters—be patient with yourself.

Extend grace. Remember: your timing isn't my timing, and it isn't God's timing either. Take your time, lovelies.

## *Inspire Her Tip*

- 1. Trust your journey:** Your path may twist, but it's shaping you for something greater.
- 2. Invest in yourself:** Take courses, know yourself, explore skills, and embrace growth during “waiting periods.”
- 3. Be gentle with yourself:** Getting to your dream season takes time; show yourself grace along the way.

## *Quote*

"Patience with yourself is the first step toward uncovering your greatness."

*Written by:*

 *Irene Magdaline Awuor*

## Chapter 4

### *Nobody Told Me This, So I'm Telling You Now*

You know how everyone says, “*Just follow your dreams and everything will fall into place*”? Well, nobody told me that sometimes, “falling into place” actually feels like falling apart first.

When I finished high school, I was convinced I'd study a Bachelor of Commerce. I could already picture myself in crisp suits working in a bank, walking into meetings with a confident smile like I owned the world. Then came my university admission letter: *Bachelor of Environmental Studies*.

I blinked twice. I even checked to see if they had sent the wrong name. But no, it was mine. I didn't know it then, but that detour was exactly where my purpose quietly began.

After graduation, I expected things to flow. Spoiler alert? they didn't. I sent out applications, crossed my fingers, and waited but nothing came through. So, I decided to start somewhere, anywhere.

I opened a hairmaking business, then tried a cleaning business. I was experimenting and learning as I went. It wasn't glamorous, but it was real. Those experiences taught me the value of resilience, humility, and creativity.

When I finally landed my first formal job, I was over the moon! That first paycheck? I celebrated it like it was an award. It felt like a huge milestone. It was then that I decided to move out of my home to rent a place in a far, quiet town. I felt like a little Miss Independent! Haha.

That little space represented growth and a new chapter. I'd cook my own meals, pay my own bills, and sometimes just sit in the stillness thinking, "Wow... I'm actually doing this." That job shaped me in ways I didn't expect. It taught me professionalism, discipline, and confidence.

It gave me mentors, lessons, and the courage to dream bigger. Every experience built a piece of who I am today and just when I thought I'd finally found my rhythm, life threw me another curveball.

A few years later, another role I held was made redundant.

That one hit hard. Overnight, everything I had worked for seemed uncertain. But that experience became one of my greatest teachers. It showed me that sometimes endings are the very push you need to evolve.

That lesson has stayed with me, especially now, as a mentor. There are times I join mentorship sessions feeling like I have nothing new or profound to offer. But I've learned to show up anyway.

And funny enough, it's often those sessions, the ones I feel least ready for, that turn out to be the most powerful. Because that's the beauty of authenticity: when you show up as your real, imperfect self, people connect to that. You don't have to be perfect to make an impact.

Now, as I continue to grow my consultancy firm, I face uncertainties. Some days, I'm full of excitement and ideas; other days, it's confusing, and I catch myself wondering if I'm really doing enough.

But I've learned that waiting to be perfect only delays progress. You learn by doing. You grow by showing up.

You perfect it along the way. And somewhere along that journey of showing up, learning, and failing forward, I was recognized as one of the *Most Influential Women in Mobility 2025* by Vulog — a beautiful reminder that every small step, every risk, and every late-night self pep talk was truly worth it.

So here I am, embracing each season of my life: the exciting ones, the quiet ones, and the confusing learning to give myself grace, to trust my journey, and to keep my faith steady. Because life isn't about having it all figured out. It's about becoming — step by step, lesson by lesson, faith by faith.

### *Inspire Her Tip*

- 1. Embrace the plot twists:** Detours aren't delays — they're direction.
- 2. Start before you're ready:** You'll never feel fully prepared, and that's perfectly okay.
- 3. Keep your faith:** Every season, even the confusing ones, carries purpose and hidden growth.

## *Quote*

“Even when the flower isn’t blooming, the roots are still growing.”

*Written by:*

 *Evelyn Gathua*

## Chapter 5

### *One Mistake I Made (and What It Taught Me)*

Have you ever thought you were some kind of emotional superhero flying into people's lives, cape flapping dramatically, ready to rescue them from every situation?

Yeah, that was me, certified empath extraordinaire with a dash of delulu. I thought I was out here saving souls. Turns out, I was just burning myself out while trying to be everyone's emotional first responder.

I've always been that friend who feels everything like they really feel it. If you cried, I cried. If you were upset, I was upset for you, with you, and sometimes instead of you (hahah).

My empathy levels were off the charts, and honestly, I wore that badge proudly. I thought it made me a better person, a more loving friend (joke's on me).

Then came this one friendship that changed me. Nike was magnetic in character and a walking storm of emotions.

She had this way of pulling people into her orbit, and I, being the emotional superhero I thought I was, dove right in.

At first, I felt needed, wanted, even special. She'd pour out her heart, and I'd listen for hours. When she had problems, I'd show up emotionally, mentally, and physically like I was her personal therapist on speed dial.

But over time, something started to shift. Her problems became my problems. Her moods became my moods. I started carrying emotional loads that weren't mine to bear. When she was upset, I couldn't rest until she was okay, even if it meant neglecting my own peace.

Slowly, I began to blur the lines between being supportive and being self-sacrificial.

Here's the funny (well, not-so-funny) part, I didn't even realize how drained I was becoming. I convinced myself that this was what good friends did. I thought my empathy made me strong and kind. But in reality, I was burning out.

My “superpowers” weren’t saving anyone, they were suffocating me.

Eventually, it hit me. After one particularly exhausting emotional marathon with Nike giving various motivational speeches and encouragement, I found myself upset not because of her, but because of how genuinely drained I felt.

I had lost sight of where she ended and I began. That’s when I realized, I wasn’t helping her, and I certainly wasn’t helping myself.

We eventually drifted apart not in some dramatic explosion, but more like a quiet letting go. And though I felt a twinge of guilt at first, what followed was clarity. I learned that being empathetic doesn’t mean being a martyr.

### ***Lesson Learned***

You can’t save everyone. Some people don’t need rescuing they need accountability, space, or their own journey to self-awareness. Empathy is beautiful, but when it turns into over-functioning, it becomes a burden, not a blessing.

I also learned that boundaries aren't walls, they're fences with gates you can let love in without letting chaos take over. Most importantly, I learned that not every friendship is meant to last forever. Some exist to teach us lessons about ourselves, our limits, and our worth.

### *Inspire Her Tip*

- 1. Check your emotional battery** - If you leave every interaction feeling drained instead of uplifted, it's time to reevaluate that connection.
- 2. Empathy ≠ Responsibility** - You can feel for someone without fixing them. Their healing isn't your homework.
- 3. Boundaries are self-love in action** - Set them early, communicate them clearly, and honor them consistently.

### *Quote*

“You can't pour from an empty cup and you definitely can't save the world if you're drowning in someone else's ocean.”

*Written by:*

 *Mercy Uhuka*

## Chapter 6

*I used to think life was linear, but now I know better*

I used to think life is linear, that it has to follow a straight line. I am one of those people who believe in structures and steps. First you do this, then that, and only then do you arrive at the next point.

So, fast forward to graduating from university, I had my plan all figured out. I would work in an agriculture-focused NGO for at least two years, then go for my master's afterwards. That was the dream. And believe me, I am not saying you cannot or that other people do not follow this pattern. But in my case, things turned out differently.

After my internship in an agriculture-focused NGO, I did not get the job there as I had thought. I was sad, because in my mind that was the "next step." But before then, after a normal meeting, I remember sitting with Madame Maimuna while we were planning a Men's Day video content. She used that moment to advise me on different career paths I could explore, which are not limited to

whichever industry I found myself in and communication was one of them.

At the same time, I was applying for jobs, and trust me after the interview I had with *Inspire Her Afrika*, when I found out it was a volunteering role, I almost did not accept the offer. But then again, I had Madame Suebat who nudged me to take it. And that, I must say, has been the turning point.

I started volunteering with Inspire Her Afrika, and that opened doors I never expected. Right after my internship, I got a job. Funny thing? I always thought nothing could take me outside Abuja. But my first job took me all the way to Benin City.

### ***Lesson Learned***

Life is not linear. It can take different shapes and directions, and that is not a bad thing.

### ***Inspire Her Tip***

1. Do not hold on too tightly to a single path.

2. Be open to advice and redirection. They can lead to your turning point.
3. Sometimes the path you never imagined becomes the one that fits you best.

### *Quote*

“Life is not linear and that is okay. Sometimes the bends in the road lead you exactly where you are meant to be”

*Written by:*

 *Precious Chukwudi*

## Chapter 7

### *When Your Job Becomes the Weapon*

*Just like you, I thought my first “big girl” job would be everything I dreamed of and more.*

What they didn't tell me was that sometimes the dream can turn into the nightmare you didn't order.

Girl, let's just say the same job that boosted my ego on LinkedIn ended up feeling like the weapon fashioned against me. And the person holding the weapon? My own boss.

I came in ready—hair laid, outfits ironed crisp, ambition polished like new shoes. I walked into that office determined to prove myself.

The salary was “adult money,” so in my mind, I had finally arrived at what I really deserved. But what no one prepared me for was that workplace bullies don't always look like the villain in Nollywood movies.

Sometimes, they're your boss with a charming smile and an unrealistic request.

"Make us trend on CNN."

"With what budget?" I'd ask.

"Budget? What do you mean? You're supposed to be innovative!"

I'd spend hours crafting realistic strategies, only for them to be dismissed as "unambitious." And on the days I actually pulled off miracles, I'd be promised promotions or opportunities that never materialized. Slowly, the excitement of my first "real" job started feeling like a cage.

Then came the real blow. After finally getting another opportunity and resigning (because, hello, growth is allowed), my boss turned vindictive. The salary I had already worked for was suddenly withheld. And when I asked for it? Humiliation. I'll spare you the long, messy court story (and no, I won't name names), but here's the headline: I won.

I'm not saying everyone should run to court whenever their employer misbehaves. What I am saying is this: bullies exist in the workplace too, and as women, we often get gaslit into thinking it's our fault or that we should just be "grateful." Don't fall for that trap.

### ***Lesson Learned***

What did I learn from that interesting experience? A workplace bully can wear the mask of a mentor, but don't confuse manipulation for guidance.

### ***Inspire Her Tip***

Your worth is never defined by one job, no matter how much they try to make you feel trapped. Stand tall, document your wins, and never be afraid to walk away when a place is draining your growth or peace of mind. And if it ever comes to defending yourself, whether in a boardroom or a courtroom, remember that your voice and your rights matter.

*Written by:*

 [Bolanle Onilogbo](#)

## Chapter 8

### *How I Almost Gave Up (But Didn't)*

I always thought I'd be a pediatrician. From the time I was little, I imagined myself in a white coat, working with children, just like the doctors I admired growing up. But life had other plans for me.

When I finished matric, I had passed with really high points, but somehow I still didn't qualify for medicine. I got offers from Cavendish University in Zambia and Moscow University in Russia, but my mom wouldn't let me move so far away. Instead, I had to "upgrade" two subjects.

That year, 2017, broke me in ways I didn't expect. My friends were heading off to university, excited to start new lives, while I was stuck behind, redoing subjects I thought I had already conquered.

I remember waking up some mornings and asking myself, What's wrong with me? Why not me? I felt like a failure, like I was already behind in life before it had even started. Even though my friends were in the same town, I avoided

them. Seeing them talk about university, lectures and hostel life, was too painful. I smiled when people asked how I was doing, but inside I was sinking. That year, depression sat on my shoulders like a heavy blanket, and more than once, I thought of giving up.

In 2018, I finally passed the upgraded subjects and felt hope again. Surely this time medicine would work out? But it didn't. Instead, the university referred me to study Public Health at the University of Namibia in Oshakati.

I had never heard of that course, never been to that town, and knew no one there. I cried throughout the entire drive, sitting in the back seat with my headphones in, blasting my sad playlist, making myself cry harder (honestly, why was I torturing myself like that? lol).

My plan was simple: do this "Public Health thing" for one year, then reapply to medicine. No friends, no attachments.

But God had other plans.

Those four years turned out to be some of the most beautiful years of my life. I met amazing people who became family. I grew close to my niece who worked in Oshakati. And most importantly, during my first year, I discovered the love of my life. Lol, not a man — I mean Epidemiology!

Fast forward to 2022: I graduated top of my class and top of my campus (Oshakati Campus). And now in 2025, I'm in South Africa, pursuing my master's in Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of Cape Town. Something I wouldn't be doing if I had forced medicine or given up on myself.

Growing up with my mom, a nurse, I saw her serve her community with dedication. That was always my dream—to serve. And now, through Epidemiology, I don't just serve children, I serve entire communities.

### ***Lesson Learned***

Rejection is sometimes redirection. Life won't always follow your plan, but it will take you where you're meant to be.

## *Inspire Her Tip*

1. Don't confuse delay with denial.
2. Stay open to redirection—it may lead to purpose.
3. Never give up on yourself.

## *Quote*

“Rejection isn't the end; sometimes it's God's way of rerouting you to a better story.”

*Written by:*

 *Memory Mabuku*

## Chapter 9

### *The Moment I Knew I Was That Girl*

You know that moment when you look around and think, “Wait a minute, this is me, I did this”? That was the moment I knew I was that girl. And trust me, it wasn’t when things were smooth or when life gave me everything on a platter. It was after a whole lot of zig-zagging, tears, bold moves, and faith.

Growing up in Nigeria, my friends used to call me Joseph the Dreamer. I always had big, bold dreams, the kind that made people laugh and shake their heads. I admired women like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and fantasized about standing on global stages, making an impact beyond borders. But in my little corner of Nigeria, it felt almost impossible.

After NYSC, I started working as a sales consultant in Lagos. On paper, it was a good job, but in reality? My heart wasn’t in it. I wanted more. So, I tried my hand at business. I launched a fragrance line and even a logistics company. Business was moving, the money was okay, but

guess what? I still felt empty. Imagine hustling, sweating, and still lying in bed at night asking, “Is this really it?” To push myself further, I even went for an entrepreneurship reality show but I didn’t win.

I came out depressed and honestly questioned everything. But deep down, I knew something: business was in me, yes, but not yet. I was chasing satisfaction in the wrong place and the wrong time.

My mom once suggested I do a Master’s in Nigeria, but I boldly told her, “*Mummy, I’ll never do my Master’s in Nigeria.*” Not because Nigerian schools aren’t good, but because I knew I needed a different kind of exposure.

I wanted to challenge myself, to sit in classrooms with people from different parts of the world, to see things from a bigger lens. So I researched, applied to schools myself, and handled my entire visa process solo—Google was literally my immigration consultant.

And by God’s grace, I got my admission and visa to Poland on the first try. Here’s the funny twist, I had always loved

writing as well. For 15 years, I carried a little diary everywhere. Still, I never saw myself as an “author.” It felt like too big a word.

But, before leaving Nigeria, I finally took the leap and published my first book, *Against the Tides*, on Amazon. A whole me, an author! That was a personal win that gave me courage.

When I landed, people kept saying, “*It’s hard to get office jobs here, you’ll probably have to do petty jobs.*” But I knew what I wanted. I kept applying until I landed my first job that same month as a KYC Analyst. It was okay, but I wasn’t satisfied, it didn’t align with the future I envisioned.

So I kept applying. And guess what? I got a job as a Finance Analyst. Not just that—after only a few months, I advanced to an Account Lead for the entire EMEA region (Europe, the Middle East, and Africa). Imagine me, a young Nigerian woman, leading accounts across three continents! My manager trusted me so much that whenever other account leads went on leave, I was the first call.

That was the day it hit me. *I am that girl*. The one who refused to shrink, the one who carved out her own path, the one who dared to dream even when it looked impossible. And the beautiful part? This is still just the beginning.

I'm still aiming higher—towards the United Nations, towards spaces like the WTO (World Trade Organization) where my role model, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, stands tall.

### ***Lesson Learned***

Being “*that girl*” doesn't mean having it all figured out at once. It means refusing to settle, preparing yourself for opportunities, and staying committed even when people think you're unrealistic. Dreams look crazy until they happen.

### ***Inspire Her Tip***

- 1. Believe in yourself first:** If you don't, no one else truly will.
- 2. Prepare before the spotlight:** Take courses, volunteer, learn skills—even when no one is watching. That's what makes you ready when doors open.

**3. Don't settle for comfort:** If you're not fulfilled, it's okay to pivot. Growth often requires moving into uncomfortable, unfamiliar spaces.

### *Quote*

“You have to believe you are that girl long before the world agrees with you.”

*Written By:*

 *Ojinma Chiwendu Lynda*

# Chapter 10

## *I Am Not Just A Pretty Face*

I will be honest with you, sis; being pretty is not what people think it is, coming from someone who is considered beautiful by all standards ( colour, skin, height). Growing up, I lost count of how many times I heard, “*You’re so beautiful,*” before I ever heard, “*You’re so smart,*” or “*You’re so intelligent.*”

Here is what having a pretty face has taught me about myself.

As a child, my love for books and reading began at a young age (I think around 6 or 7), which sparked my creative side. However, nothing and nobody had prepared me for the struggles I would face as I became an adult, thanks to my beauty.

I didn't grow up with the kind of love that affirmed my self-worth. Instead, I had to piece my worth together from the scraps of what people said about me, and unfortunately, all they ever seemed to notice was my looks.

Imagine being told you're beautiful but feeling completely invisible inside. That was me. My beauty attracted admiration, but more often than not, it attracted bullying, envy, and unnecessary hate, as not a few people enjoyed seeing me humbled.

What they didn't know was that behind that pretty face was a girl who loved books, had big dreams, and was intelligent. I muted myself for so long; I was shrinking myself in friendships and even relationships because I didn't know my worth.

In my 30s, I had an "epiphany" that changed my whole mindset about life. As I began my journey of self-discovery, I realized I was a late bloomer, not because I wasn't capable, but because I had been trapped in the box others put me in. When I finally chose to love myself, everything changed.

The day I started to love myself was the day I discovered the woman beyond the pretty face: intelligent, self-aware, resilient, and multi-talented. I remember when I applied and won a fully funded fellowship in 2023; it was very

competitive, but it made me believe more in myself and my abilities.

Now, when people say, “*You’re so beautiful,*” I smile and think, “*I already know that, but I am more than just a pretty face*”.

### ***Lesson Learned***

Over the years, I have learned that people, intentionally or unintentionally, have put me on a pedestal and held me to higher standards just because I’m pretty. However, instead of deterring me, it has helped solidify the claim that I am more than a pretty face.

I now walk into rooms with my head up high like the confident woman that I am. I stand out in every room I enter, and I can assure you that if there is a competition, I’m participating in it and I am winning. All I have achieved till date (education, skills, jobs, awards, recognitions) speaks to the fact that I am not just beautiful, but I also have brains.

## *Inspire Her Tip*

- 1. Don't shrink yourself:** Speak up, stand tall, and let your talents shine loudly.
- 2. Beauty is a currency:** But your mind, aura and purpose are the real assets.
- 3. Most importantly, self-love is the foundation:** Once you rebuild your confidence, no amount of bullying, envy, or jealousy can tear it down.

## *Quote*

“Be a master of loving yourself, and people will follow”.

*Written by:*

 [Anu Odubanjo](#)

# Chapter 11

## *The Best/Worst Advice I Ever Got*

Sometimes, it's not validation from others that you need, but the quiet strength of your inner voice and the inner God within you. That, more than anything, can become your saving grace.

I still remember walking into my department in my first year during my bachelor's degree and noticing only two other ladies. You might wonder why that mattered—it was because we were in a male-dominated field. At first, it felt exciting to be one of only three females in a space known for being “all men.” I was eager, curious, and ready to learn the ropes.

One day, a few of us walked past the Faculty Hall of Fame, a wall of the best graduating students. As I looked closely, I realized nearly every face on that wall was male. I turned to my classmates and said, “Oh wow, only two female students and just one with a first class? That's surprising.”

Before I could finish, my then course representative turned

to me and said, “It’s not possible for you to get there and I hope you’re not envisioning that. No girl in this department has ever gotten first class, and you won’t be the first. No girl has ever been the best graduating student; so, kill that dream if you have it.”

That was the worst advice I ever received. I felt crushed. I was too timid to respond, and the silence of the other male students around me seemed to agree with him. I went home that day feeling small, defeated, and doubtful. For a while, I even started to believe his words.

But then something changed.

A memory from Sunday school came back to me, something my teacher once said: “Daniel dared to be different.”

That was the spark I needed. If Daniel could stand firm in a strange land, then Mary could dare to be different, too. I kept repeating it to myself until it became my truth. I trusted God, worked hard, and did everything I needed to do. And guess what?

Five years later, I graduated with a first class, one out of three students that year. The first female in my department to ever do so.

I'll never forget walking back a year later and seeing my picture on the departmental Hall of Fame, the only female among all the male names. That moment reminded me: it didn't happen overnight.

It happened because I chose not to believe a different voice and the people who reaffirmed my strength along the way. Those two male classmates who also earned first-class degrees would often say, "Mary, we need to be three first-class students. I hope you're still doing your part." Their encouragement became another voice that mattered.

### ***Lesson Learned***

Not everyone who speaks to you speaks the truth. The only truth that matters is the one you believe in and live by. The best advice is the one that stirs something in you, the one that aligns with your purpose and propels you toward success.

## *Inspire Her Tip*

**1. Filter the voices:** Not everyone's opinion deserves a place in your mind. There will always be many voices, some affirming, some discouraging. But you must learn to filter them.

**2. Feed your faith:** Remind yourself daily of your strength and purpose. "If Daniel could dare to be different, if Mary could, then so can you."

**3. Find your allies:** Surround yourself with people who speak life into your journey.

## *Quote*

"When you believe that you can do something that's when you can do it." Joseph Gordon-Levitt

*Written by*

 *Mary\_Ifeoma Nwanua.*

*You don't need to have everything figured out to move forward.*

*Clarity often meets us on the road, not at the starting point.*

## *About Us*

**Inspire Her Afrika** is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting African women as they navigate education, leadership, and career transitions.

Through mentorship, community, and shared learning, we create spaces where women can grow with clarity, confidence, and support — without having to figure everything out alone.

At **IHA**, we believe in the power of guidance, honest conversations, and women helping women move forward, one season at a time.

# Partner with us!

## Inspire Her Afrika



[www.inspireherafrika.com](http://www.inspireherafrika.com)



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We are open to partnerships and receiving donations.

We are currently looking to provide our mentees with long- or short-term internship opportunities and will be happy to collaborate with you to secure a slot or more. Please consider affording a young African Woman the opportunity to develop real-life on-demand skills and acquire valuable work experience.

# Connect with us!

## On Social Media

Please follow, like and share our content so that we can reach a wider audience and continue to provide this life-changing experience to every young lady who needs this.



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