

AFRO-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

JULY, 2023

AFRO-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP

ISSUE 1

**LEARNING TO
LEAD4IMPACT**

Adeolu Adewumi-Zer

**THE SAFE
DISTANCE**

Sola Adebawo

**LEADERSHIP
LESSONS**

Ivy Ikpeme-Mbakwem

**LEADERSHIP &
CORPORATE
WELLNESS**

ADENRELE ONIKOSI

COVER STORY

**BUSINESS IMPERATIVE OF
MENTAL HEALTH AND
WELLNESS POLICY IN
YOUR ORGANIZATION**

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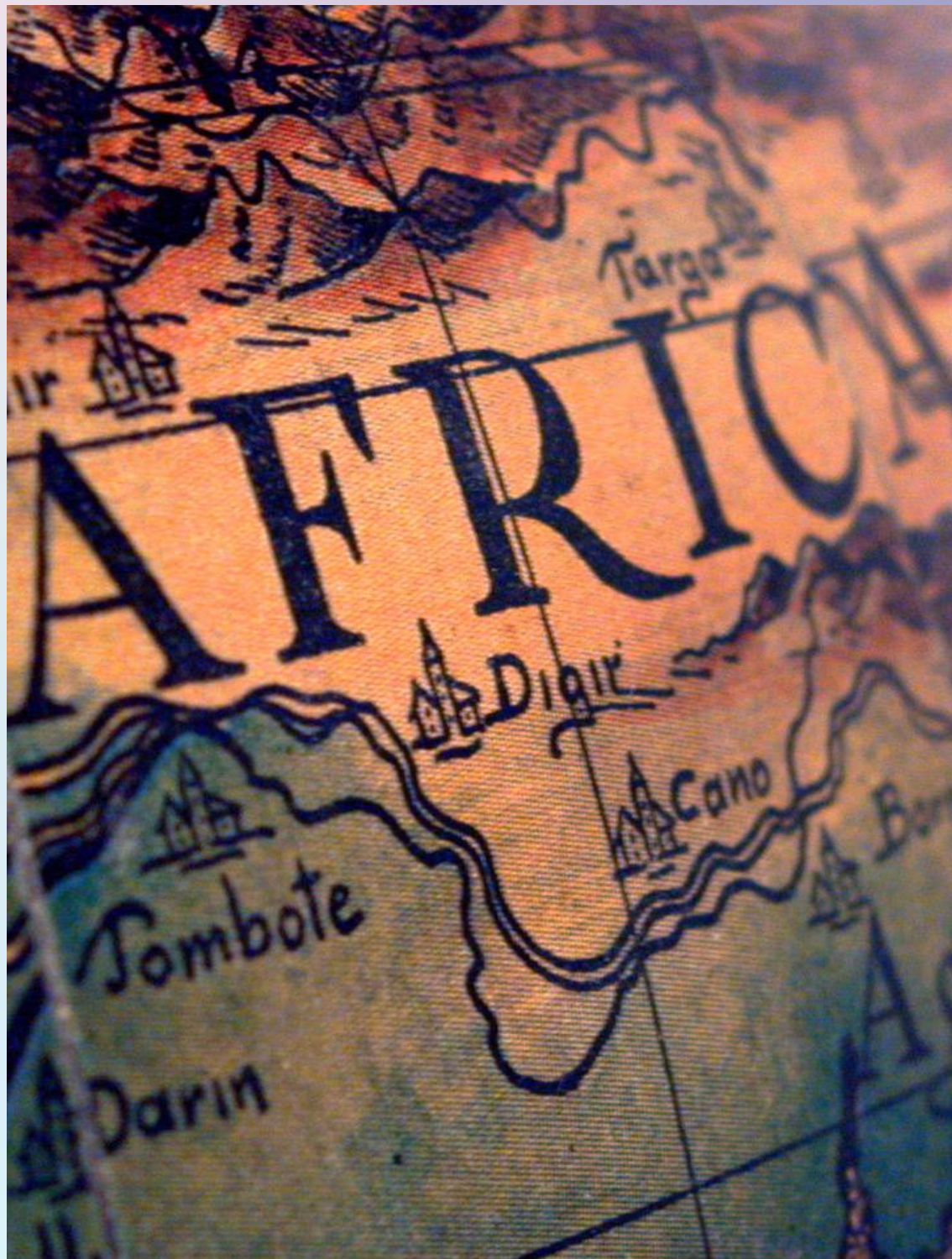
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AFRO-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP

03

PUBLISHER'S DESK

19

**LEADERSHIP &
CORPORATE
WELLNESS**

05

**BUSINESS IMPERATIVE OF MENTAL
HEALTH AND WELLNESS POLICY IN
YOUR ORGANIZATION**

08

**THE SAFE
DISTANCE**

20

**QUOTES BY FAMOUS
AFRICAN
BUSINESS LEADERS**

11

**LEARNING TO
LEAD4IMPACT**

15

**"...AND JUST LIKE
THAT" LEADERSHIP
LESSONS.**



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 **PEXELS**

CONTENTS



5 ways Black Leaders can maximize health and wellness

1. **Eat a healthy diet.** This means eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and limiting processed foods, sugary drinks, and red meat.
2. **Get regular exercise.** Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week.
3. **Get enough sleep.** Most adults need around 7-8 hours of sleep per night.
4. **Manage stress.** Stress can take a toll on your physical and mental health, so it's important to find healthy ways to manage it. Some helpful strategies include exercise, meditation, and yoga.
5. **See your doctor regularly.** Even if you feel healthy, it's important to see your doctor for regular checkups. This will help catch any health problems early on, when they're easier to treat.

AFRO-CENTRIC LEADERSHIP

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FROM THE **PUBLISHER'S** DESK



Welcome to the inaugural edition of our **Afro-Centric Leadership Magazine**, it is an exciting moment for us on the team to see a dream we conceived come to fruition.

At the heart of Leadership is having clarity about the WHY. This understanding helps to simplify the WHAT, WHO and HOW. Therefore, at **Afro-centric Leadership**, our WHY is to highlight Leadership from an African perspective, we believe that our operating environment in Africa is peculiar even though there are fundamentals in Leadership.

We want to share the stories of Leadership from an African perspective, with the sole purpose of helping leaders succeed by providing them with the resources, network and the context to succeed and become an authentic source of Leadership experience from an African perspective for decision makers around the world.

We are excited to have on board with us as contributors seasoned Leaders in Corporate Africa, who will be sharing practical and applicable leadership insights and tips with our reading audience.

WELCOME!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Afrocentric'.

THE PUBLISHER

07 LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

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WITH ADENRELE ONIKOSI

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BUSINESS IMPERATIVE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS POLICY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

ADENRELE ONIKOSI



I

n today's fast-paced and demanding work environment, prioritizing employee mental health and well-being is crucial for the success and sustainability of any organization.

By implementing a comprehensive mental health and wellness policy, companies can reap numerous benefits that enhance productivity, employee satisfaction, and overall organizational performance.

This article explores seven different ways in which an organization can benefit from having a mental health and wellness policy, without compromising the bottom line or reputation.

- **Increased Employee Productivity:**

A mental health and wellness policy promotes a positive work environment that supports employees in managing stress, maintaining work-life balance, and addressing mental health challenges. By investing in mental well-being, organizations can significantly reduce absenteeism, presenteeism (working while unwell), and burnout. Healthy and engaged employees are more productive, focused, and motivated, leading to improved performance and efficiency.

- **Enhanced Employee Retention and Recruitment:**

Organizations with a robust mental health and wellness policy demonstrate their commitment to supporting employees' overall well-being. This fosters a positive company culture and reputation, making the organization an attractive choice for top talent. Moreover, when employees feel valued, supported, and empowered in managing their mental health, they are more likely to remain loyal to the organization, reducing turnover rates and associated costs.



Adenrele Onikosi is the Publisher of the Afro-Centric Leadership Magazine and the Lead Consultant at Conegelics Consulting International Ltd, a People Transformation Company. He is a Fellow of Nigeria Institute of Training & Development (FITD), and he has a certificate in Positive Psychiatry & Mental Health, Fellow of International Management Consultants Board™ (FIMCB). He is a Business Advisory Consultant.



- **Improved Employee Engagement and Morale:**

A mental health and wellness policy sends a strong message to employees that their well-being matters to the organization. When employees feel supported, they are more engaged and motivated, leading to higher job satisfaction and morale. Engaged employees are more likely to contribute their best efforts, collaborate effectively, and provide exceptional customer service, positively impacting the organization's bottom line.

"Slow breathing is like an anchor in the midst of an emotional storm: the anchor won't make the storm go away, but it will hold you steady until it passes." — **Russ Harris**

- **Decreased Workplace Conflict and Improved Collaboration:**

A mental health and wellness policy encourages open communication, empathy, and understanding among employees. By fostering a culture that prioritizes mental well-being, organizations can reduce workplace conflicts and promote healthier relationships. Employees who feel psychologically safe and supported are more likely to collaborate, share ideas, and work harmoniously towards shared goals, enhancing team dynamics and overall productivity.

- **Enhanced Innovation and Creativity:**

Stress and mental health challenges can hinder employees' ability to think creatively and innovatively. A mental health and wellness policy provides employees with the resources, support, and tools needed to manage stress and maintain optimal mental well-being. By reducing stress levels, organizations create an environment that nurtures innovation, problem-solving, and out-of-the-box thinking, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and competitiveness.

- **Positive Employer Branding:**

Companies that prioritize mental health and wellness establish a positive employer brand. This reputation can attract potential customers, partners, and investors who value organizations with a strong commitment to employee well-being. A positive employer brand can enhance the organization's competitiveness, differentiate it from competitors, and contribute to long-term business success.

- **Compliance with Legal and Ethical Responsibilities:**

Implementing a mental health and wellness policy demonstrates an organization's commitment to fulfilling legal and ethical obligations. Laws and regulations related to workplace mental health are evolving, and organizations that proactively address these concerns are more likely to stay compliant. By adhering to ethical standards, organizations also foster trust and credibility among stakeholders, contributing to a positive reputation.

ADENRELE ONIKOSI

Adenrele Onikosi is the Lead Consultant at Conegelics Consulting International Ltd, a People Transformation Company. He is a Fellow of Nigeria Institute of Training & Development (FITD), he is Certified in Positive Psychiatry & Mental Health, an Accredited Management Consultant (AMC), Associate Member of Association of Professional Recruitment Consultants, UK (APRC), Fellow of International Management Consultants Board™ (FIMCB), a Strategic Business Development Professional (SBDP), Project Management Practitioner (PMP) UK, Learning & Development Specialist (LDS) from the LDNI (Learning & Development Network International) an affiliate of ATD, USA.

Conclusion

Implementing a mental health and wellness policy is a strategic investment that benefits both employees and organizations. By prioritizing mental well-being, organizations can experience increased productivity, enhanced employee retention and recruitment, improved engagement and morale, reduced workplace conflicts, enhanced innovation, positive employer branding, and compliance with legal and ethical responsibilities. It is crucial for organizations to recognize the importance of employee mental health and take proactive steps to create a supportive work environment that fosters well-being, without compromising the bottom line or reputation.





THE SAFE DISTANCE

***...managing familiarity with
Key stakeholders without
getting hurt***

Sola ADEBAWO

Many traffic accidents occur when the motorist does not maintain a safe distance between them and the vehicle ahead of them!

In the anthropology of stakeholder management, such accidents are common with the career of people who do not understand how to maintain a safe distance between them and important stakeholders!

When your friend becomes your boss; when an old acquaintance becomes the chief industry regulator; when your former peer becomes the CEO of the new organization you work for; when your sibling becomes the head of the family business... all of these scenarios potentially create an upset in the relationship dynamics. Discreet relationship managers must understand the need to manage the familiarity index!

It's important to allow a safe distance between you and the leader to allow them function, without you appearing like a social climber!

Give honour to the leader when he's at work... demonstrate that you acknowledge the leadership role he now plays and that you are willing to give him the honour associated with his office!



“

Do not be overfamiliar. Allow him to invite you into his space and do not invade his because of a need to show others around that he used to be your guy!

Leaders will recognize your efforts at honoring them before others and will reward you with a public acknowledgement that will bring you honour too. Always remember that *undue familiarity breeds contempt*.

SOLA ADEBAWO, is a highly experienced business leader with cutting edge Public Affairs and Reputation Management expertise and over 26 years' experience in Public Relations, issues/crisis management, brand management, corporate and strategic communication & media engagement, government relations, venture and regulatory relations, social risk management, stakeholder management, social performance, corporate responsibility & sustainability design, management and reporting and strategy execution.



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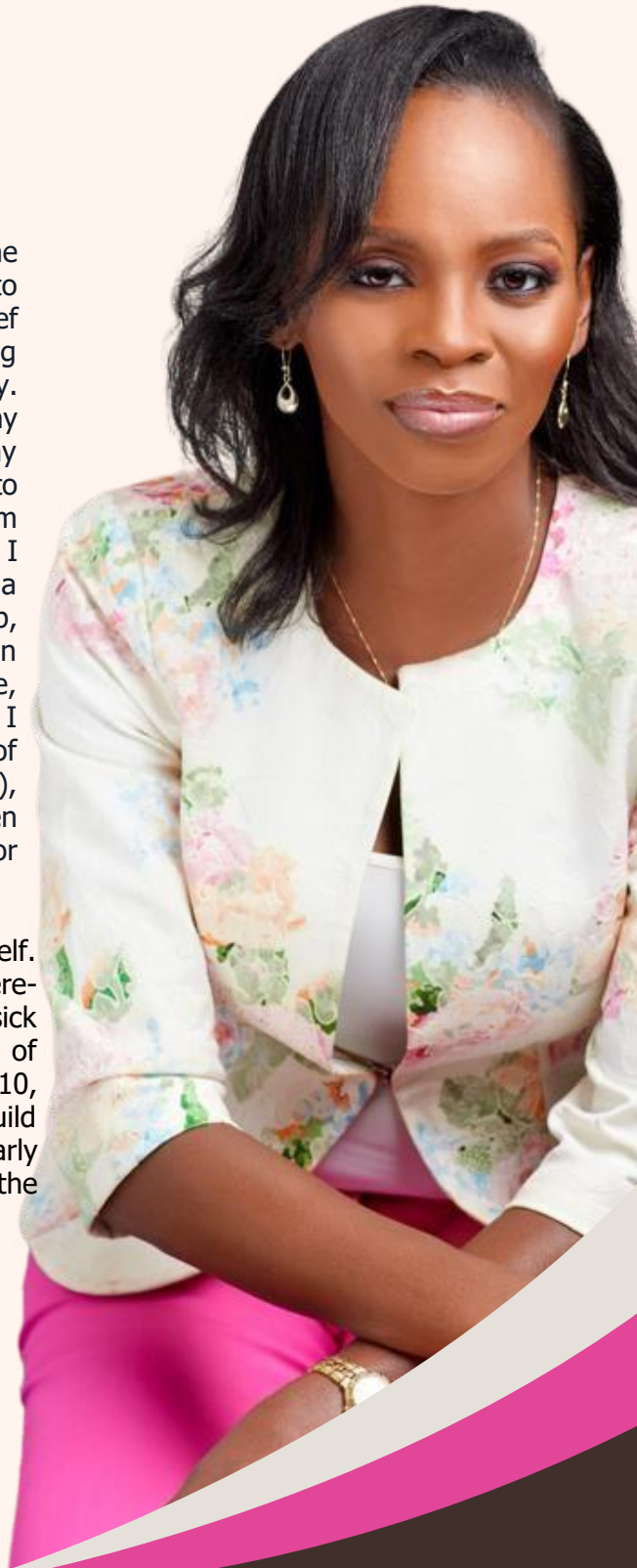
LEARNING TO LEAD4IMPACT

with ADEOLU ADEWUMI-ZER

MY LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

In the year 2020, a year that will remain quite vivid in the world's imagination for some time to come, I was called to my biggest challenge yet—to serve as a first-time chief executive in one of the most volatile markets in Africa during one of the most volatile times in recent human memory. Anyone who knows me well, knows that I am not one to shy from a challenge...but I do make sure to go all out in my preparation. My favorite mode of preparation is not to reinvent the wheel, but rather read, research, and learn from those who have trod the path before me. So, the moment I received the call, I started “binge-reading” (is that even a thing?) every book I could get my hand on about leadership, transformation and change. One of the books that left an impression on me was Rick Miller's *Be Chief: It's a Choice, not a Title*, where he describes much more eloquently what I had been saying for years...that we are all leaders. Some of us might lead entire companies (or countries, God forbid!), but many more of us lead teams, communities and even families. And one area we must all lead is ourselves, or remain forever adrift, simply moving with the tides of fate.

Therefore, I must begin my leadership journey with myself. Growing up in an immigrant family in the-middle-of-nowhere-USA, as the oldest of five children with a perennially sick mother and a tenure-tracked father, my own brand of leadership was surely molded in fire. Already at the age of 10, with no real time to waste being a kid, I had to build discipline, persistence and consistency from this rather early age, character traits that would remain my trademark over the next three-plus decades.



“Success is actually a short race—a sprint fueled by discipline just long enough for habit to kick in and take over”. - Gary Keller

My strict self-discipline has become second nature, just as Gary Keller insists will happen in *The ONE Thing: The Surprisingly Simple Truth About Extraordinary Results*, where he writes that “success is actually a short race—a sprint fueled by discipline just long enough for habit to kick in and take over”. My own brand of persistence is evidenced in me speaking my vision (of Africa!) constantly, raising my hand and grabbing every opportunity that I think will push me along this path. It is consistency however that drives me to deliver every time... or almost die trying. This deadly combination has turned into my superpower, getting stuff done.

My development as a leader did not stop at home. School, sports, and church continued to define and refine me, even after I began my career, until the various learnings and experiences all culminated in me leading my first team just a handful of years post-university—an opportunity I earned by again raising my hand and pushing for it. Leading teams in five different countries, across various continents further honed my leadership style, where I brought it all back to where I came from...family. So, like a mom, auntie or “big and bossy sister”, I coached, cajoled, pushed and supported my teams to victory.

Of course, it was not easy, I had to constantly push myself, particularly in environments where I may have not been welcome, either as a woman or as a “clueless” foreigner.



WHY DOES LEADERSHIP MATTER?

Little did I know that the biggest challenge was just around the corner. Until now, I had always had the benefit (with all its initial stress and complications) of building my own teams. Serving an already existing entity could certainly not be the same. However, I found that I could still build...a team of strong direct reports whom I could leverage to drive transformational leadership throughout the organization, where the focus would be on engaging, empowering and enabling our fellow colleagues, and where we could trigger a culture change that would outlast me.



And this is exactly why the right leadership, and, specifically developing oneself into the right leader, is so critical. Just like the right technology can transform processes, the right leadership can transform people. And you need the right people and processes to build a sustainable business—one that is built to last. Bill Gates said: “As we look ahead into the next century, leaders will be those who empower others.” Read that again—it is not about YOU or ME, it is about OTHERS.

So, as we each continue our own leadership journey, let us continue to learn as we serve. Let us equip ourselves with knowledge, as one cannot give what one does not have. Let us heed the wise words of Socrates who said, “I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing and that is that I know nothing.”

A global Nigerian and lifetime Afro-optimist, **Adeolu Adewumi-Zer** believes the growth and transformation of Africa can best be accomplished by empowering Africans to create measurable social impact and together generate shared value via purposeful growth and investment across the continent.

Adeolu is the former Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Allianz Nigeria Insurance Ltd (Allianz Nigeria), a subsidiary of the German multinational Allianz SE. Prior to this role, Adeolu served as the first and only female member of the Allianz Nigeria board as Non-Executive Director. Concurrently, she was the Regional Head of Mergers, Acquisitions and Transformation Africa for the Allianz Group.

FOUNDERS VISIONING CONCLAVE

with:
Coach Onikosi



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"...And Just Like That" Leadership Lessons. with Ivy Ikpeme-Mbakwem

The story of how I found myself as a leader on the contact center battlefield can be likened to the tale of Gideon, who had been hiding from the Midianites until an angel addressed him as the mighty man of courage. The angel informed him that God was sending him to save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. And just like that, I was brought out of hiding.

It all began in 2004 after spending two years as a call center agent with one of the largest telecom organizations at the time. The opportunity to move up to the next level presented itself. There were various specialist and supervisor roles available, but I chose a specialist role because I preferred hiding behind my computer instead of being thrust into a leadership position in front of people. To be honest, I was afraid of the frontlines and the exposure that came with being a leader.

However, I had an observant manager and leader who saw what I couldn't see. He counseled me based on feedback from my performance and growth during the two years I had been part of his team. Even as an agent, I had been given a couple of team leader opportunities in which I stepped up and performed well.

I also demonstrated self-leadership as an agent. All of these qualities did not go unnoticed. He shared my strengths with me and encouraged me to take on the supervisor role.

You see, I am an introvert who has tapped into some extrovert qualities, enabling me to face the world as if I love the spotlight. All I really wanted was to be responsible for myself at work.

I listened to him attentively and made up my mind to step up. With doubts and fear, I embraced the role and gradually grew into a competent leader overseeing several agents.

The lesson I learned during this phase of my life, which I still apply in leading teams today, revolves around what I call the Leader's 3 Es: Engagement, Empowerment, and Encouragement.

As a leader, it is crucial to have these three elements in your toolkit and use them interchangeably while leading. Let me break them down for you.

Engagement

As a leader, it is essential to be intentional about getting to know your team members. Sustainable engagement occurs through both informal and formal means. Take the time to observe your team as they work and engage with them in conversations about their work and challenges, even their personal challenges.

Show genuine interest in listening to what they say, and you will be surprised at what you can learn about them and the environment you can create for their growth. Structured check-in sessions also provide an opportunity for formal engagement and 360-degree feedback. Remember, your goal is to foster connection through effective communication.



**"WHEN LEADERS
THROUGHOUT AN
ORGANIZATION TAKE AN
ACTIVE, GENUINE INTEREST
IN THE PEOPLE THEY
MANAGE, WHEN THEY
INVEST REAL TIME TO
UNDERSTAND EMPLOYEES
AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL,
THEY CREATE A CLIMATE
FOR GREATER MORALE,
LOYALTY, AND YES,
GROWTH." - LENCIONI**



Encouragement

As a leader, your primary goal is to motivate your team members and help them believe in themselves, especially during moments of doubt. Establishing a strong connection with your team is vital for effective encouragement. Engage in one-on-one coaching or mentoring sessions to provide feedback on their progress and give them the much-needed boost of confidence.

**"LEADERS MUST BE CLOSE
ENOUGH TO RELATE TO
OTHERS, BUT FAR ENOUGH
AHEAD TO MOTIVATE THEM."
- JOHN C. MAXWELL**

So, there you have it—the Leader's 3 Es to help you thrive on the frontlines as a leader in the contact center or any other leadership role. Stay tuned for my next installment of "...And Just Like That" Leadership Lessons.

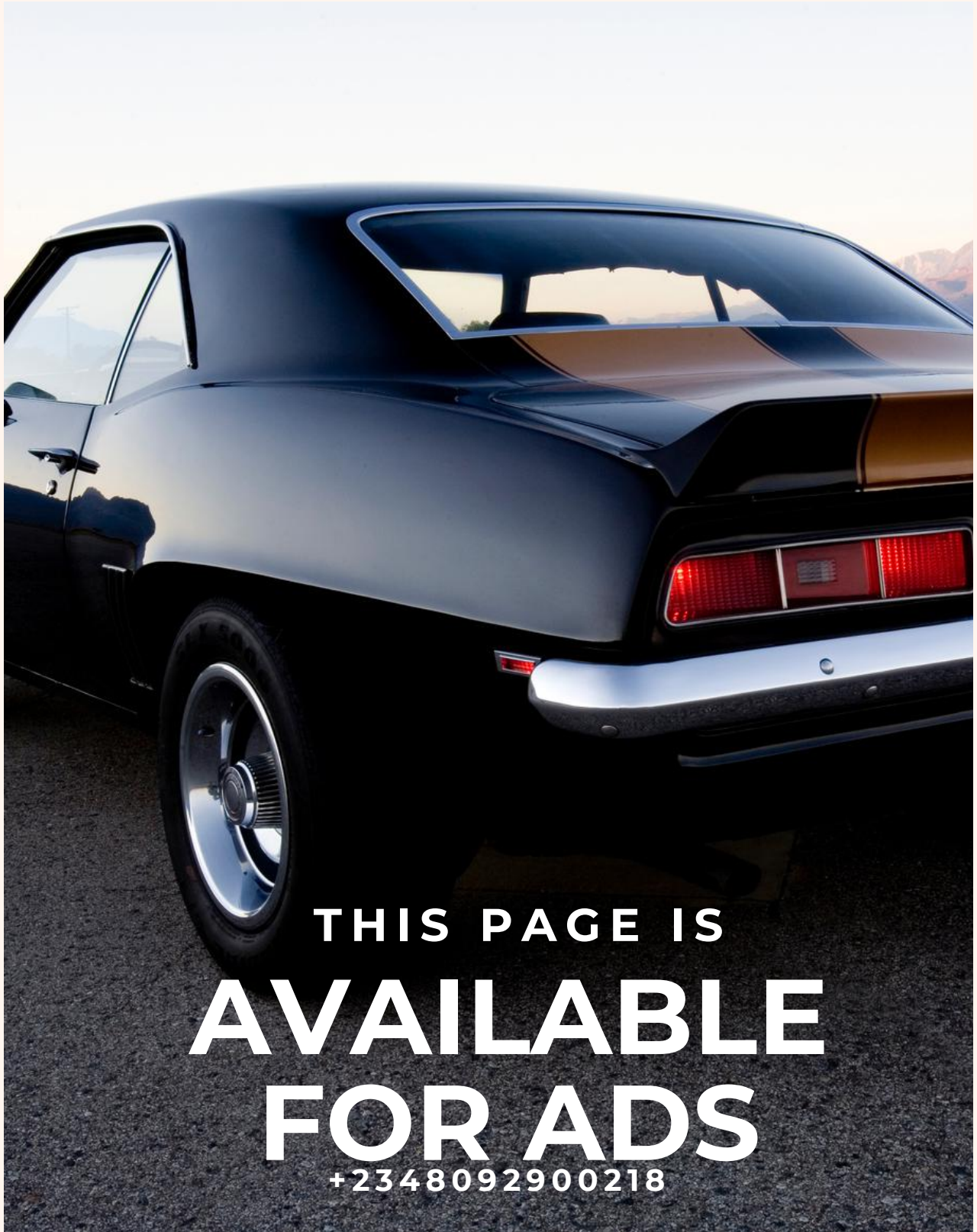
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Empowerment

As a leader, empowering your team goes beyond providing them with the tools required for their job functions. It involves helping them become consciously aware of their competencies, strengths, and areas for improvement. By expanding their tasks and responsibilities, you encourage their personal and professional growth. However, it is crucial to provide clear guidelines and be available for support when needed. Another effective way to empower them is by encouraging knowledge sharing among team members. This helps build their capacity and contributes to the overall enhancement of the team.

**"OUTSTANDING LEADERS GO
OUT OF THEIR WAY TO BOOST
THE SELF-ESTEEM OF THEIR
PERSONNEL. IF PEOPLE
BELIEVE IN THEMSELVES, IT'S
AMAZING WHAT THEY CAN
ACCOMPLISH."
- SAM WALTON**

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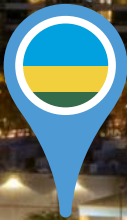
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Leadership & Corporate Wellness

ADENRELE ONIKOSI

Mental health issues in the workplace is an issue that affects everyone, from Board, to shareholders and senior management. Did you know that according to a recent study, 1 in 5 employees experience mental health issues? That's a high number, and it's something that we need to take seriously.

As someone who has consulted for several bluechip and multinational organisations for over 2 decades, I've seen firsthand how mental health issues can impact an employee's performance. When you're not feeling your best mentally, it can be hard to focus on your work and be productive. That's why it's important for the leadership of organizations and businesses to have a sound wellness plan and program in place for their employees.

A wellness plan can include things like mental health resources, counseling services, and even mindfulness practices. By having these resources available, employees can get the help they need to manage their mental health and perform their best at work.

But it's not just about having these resources available - it's also about creating a culture where mental health is prioritized. Leaders need to make it clear that it's okay to talk about mental health and seek help when needed. This can help reduce the stigma around mental health issues and make employees feel more comfortable seeking support.

So if you're a leader in your organization or business, I urge you to prioritize mental health and create a wellness plan for your employees. And if you're an employee struggling with mental health issues, know that you're not alone and there are resources available to help you. Let's work together to create a healthier, happier workplace for everyone.



Quotes by Famous African Business Leaders

"Be prepared to sacrifice, and work harder than you've ever thought possible. Be prepared to work around the clock, to be laughed at, called a dreamer, and to be told several times that your ideas will not work."

— **Nkemdilim Begho, Future Software Resources Limited, Nigeria**

"If I had worried about everything that could go wrong, I would never have started. Sometimes, you just need to take a leap of faith." — **Ken Njoroge of Cellulant, Kenya**

"To build a successful business, you must start small and dream big. In the journey of entrepreneurship, tenacity of purpose is supreme". — **Aliko Dangote, Dangote group, Nigeria**

The harder you work, the luckier you get.
— **Mike Adenuga, Nigeria**

In today's world, paradoxically, it is the boldest action that is often the safest. Remaining where you are in a world that is changing so rapidly is, in fact, the most dangerous of all places to be in.

— **Hakeem Belo-Osagie.**



A vision on its own is not enough. Hard work & dedication is required to make that vision a reality.

— **Strive Masiyiwa, Econet Wireless,, Zimbabwe**

Failure is an opportunity to learn and to do better next time. It's part of the path to greatness, which was never meant to be smooth.

— **Khanyi Dhlomo, Ndalo Media, South Africa**

"Dreaming is good. But now your dream must be profitable. For example, you cannot find investors who will put funds in your project without them seeing the potential for profitability."

— **Olivier Madiba, founder of Kiro'o Games in Cameroon**

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the fearless organization

Creating **Psychological Safety** in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth

Amy C. Edmondson
HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

WILEY

In "The Fearless Organization," Amy C. Edmondson provides invaluable insights for business owners and leaders to transform their organizations into thriving, innovative, and fearless environments. Here are seven key takeaways that you can immediately apply to improve your businesses:

Foster Psychological Safety: Cultivate an atmosphere where team members feel safe to express their ideas, voice concerns, and take risks without fear of judgment or retribution. Encourage open dialogue and create a culture of trust.

Embrace Failure as a Learning Opportunity: Encourage your team to view failures as opportunities for growth and learning. Emphasize the importance of analyzing mistakes, extracting lessons, and using that knowledge to improve processes and outcomes.

BOOK REVIEW

"THE FEARLESS ORGANIZATION"
BY AMY C. EDMONDSON

Encourage Team Collaboration: Promote collaboration across departments and encourage diverse perspectives. By fostering a collaborative environment, you can tap into the collective intelligence and creativity of your team, leading to better decision-making and innovation.

Develop a Learning Mindset: Cultivate a culture of continuous learning and improvement. Encourage employees to seek out new knowledge, share insights, and experiment with new ideas. Create opportunities for professional development and skill enhancement.

Enhance Communication Channels: Improve communication channels within your organization. Implement effective tools and platforms that facilitate information sharing, feedback, and collaboration. Regularly solicit input and ideas from team members to ensure everyone feels heard and valued.

Promote Accountability and Ownership: Foster a sense of accountability and ownership among team members. Encourage individuals to take responsibility for their actions, outcomes, and the overall success of the organization. Establish clear goals, objectives, and metrics for evaluating progress.

"The Fearless Organization" offers practical guidance and actionable strategies to transform your business into an environment where innovation thrives, employees feel empowered, and success becomes a collective endeavor.

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