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Ebunola Anozie:

Giving New Lease of Life to Breast Cancer Survivors

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Having lost both parents to cancer, traumatised and devastated, Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Care Organisation Public Enlightenment, Mrs Ebunola Anozie, knew it was high time she began to educate people on the danger of breast cancer, the need for regular check-ups and early detection. That was exactly what she did as she began in 1995 to cater to breast cancer patients. In this interview with **MARY NNAH**, she revealed that even with so many interventions by her organisation to save lives of people suffering breast cancer especially, patients are still being denied by hospitals in Nigeria, the care and attention they require, especially in this era of COVID-19, when most of them are turned back from the hospitals

You started COPE like 25 years ago when cancer cases weren't as rampant as they are today, what particularly informed your decision to go into such field?

I used to work in the banking sector. I lost my mother to cancer in 1970. She was 35 when she died. She died in England but was flown back here. We thought we had heard the last of it until my father also had cancer of the stomach and we tried as much as possible to help out but we found out that the treatment here was nothing to write home about. So, we had to fly him to England for more treatment and the result we got from the doctors over there, really, I would say was a disgrace on the part of the medical treatment here. In fact they were so disgusted with what they saw and started afresh to treat him. For years he lived but when he came back he became very aggressive and he died in 1995. So, the trauma was very much. It was huge. It was very traumatic for the entire family and being the last of five children and my father's pet I couldn't just take it.

So, while on vacation in the United States that was when I got to know about breast cancer. I had no idea that people had breast cancer. So I did a lot of investigations in America, I went to some organisations and they were willing to help me out. I came back and started COPE just on a casual basis informing people here and there that breast cancer is dangerous and that you are supposed to check your breasts. I just started on a small level but lot of people started coming and they said I needed to be present here all the time so that they can see me each time they come and that was how I left the financial sector for COPE.

And when I started, I was able to on my own, by the grace of the Almighty God, sponsor two women for breast cancer surgery and we have been able to do quite a lot. That was how I started the organisation; it wasn't as if I really intended to stay here but situation had to force me to stay and help people. That has been the story of COPE and we probably wouldn't have been able to stand for this long if not for the support we have got so far. We have vibrant board of trustees who are very active. I am just the face. It is not a matter of owning COPE; I run COPE with the support of a formidable board of trustees. We must also thank the organisations that have been very supportive and I must mention again, Variant Advisory. They have been 100 per cent behind us.

The set of people we cater to are very brave women – the Breast Cancer Support Group members. They are all breast cancer survivors. Every third Thursday of the month is when the support group members meet while we do our screening on every third Saturday of the month for people who want to come and have their breasts screened with the ultra-sound machine at our centre.

When you talk about Breast Cancer Support Group, what exactly do you mean?



Anozie (front line middle, flanked by members of COPE Breast Cancer Support Group)

Breast Cancer Support Group is made up of women who have survived breast cancer. The aim is for them to help those who have breast cancer. It is to give them new lease of life; to reassure them and help them regain their self-confidence and be able to gain strength from one another. They term themselves as "One Nation". They are to show those battling with breast cancer that there is life after breast cancer once it is detected earlier. Some of them are about 17 years gone and they are still alive today. So, for the new ones who come, they gain strength as well from those that they see that have survived it and they are hopeful. So, they get a lot of information as we invite a lot of resource person to come and talk to them like our chairman, Emeritus professor Osato Giwa-Osagie, a consultant with Lagos University Teaching Hospital in Obstetrician and Gynaecology and Emeritus professor University of Lagos.

Most importantly, yearly, we try as much as possible to give them financial supports. We give cheques to those that need the assistance because it is not all of them that actually need these assistances but we give to those who don't have the money to continue with their treatments. We are able to do this through Variant Advisory, a financial consulting firm that provides a wide range of advisory services to corporate businesses in all major industrial sectors. They help us yearly and all those gift items we give to the women are supplied by Variant Advisory as well. The firm has been very supportive of our cause over the years. We also work with organisations that cater for their clients or member of staff who have cancer, so they pay us a million naira for example, and we provide them with cards worth that amount, which they give to their clients and staff to enable them access to our centre for screening. So when they bring those cards, the name of the organisation is written on it so that we know where the card is coming from and we know the number of people coming from a particular organisation and with this they don't pay for the N3000 charged for the screening. We charge that cheap for ultrasound because we are not a profit making organisation and we do that also to encourage women to detect breast cancer early before it is too late. So when they come, the doctors and nurses are here and they have their breast examined clinically by the nurse and then the doctor will then check with the machine.

You have been doing this for 25 years. What has been the impact like?

The impact has been massive. The most important thing is that we have been able to save many lives of people who didn't know they had lumps in their breasts and we have been able to help them out. We have been able to give financial support to quite a lot of people. And the fact that we are doing this screening at a rock-bottom price of N3000 is really huge. You can't get ultrasound scan and clinical breasts examination for that low elsewhere. This is our own way of encouraging women to get their breasts examined so that if there is anything there, you know early enough because early detection is key, once you detect it early and go for treatment early, your life would be okay and the breasts can also be saved. It is not all those who have breasts cancer that have one of their breasts cut off. Some people who have had breasts cancer have their two breasts intact because they detected it early and so it didn't spread to the extent where they would have both or one of their breasts removed. Most of the time, we give out a lot of materials from organisations abroad. We give out special bras and breasts prostheses and all that. But now we have run out of breasts prostheses at the moment. These are things you cannot buy in the markets, so we are soliciting for organisations that can also help to become partners with us.

You would agree with me that even with the rock-bottom price you do the ultrasound screening at COPE, a lot of women still don't take advantage of it probably due to lack of awareness. So what have you been doing to get information to the grassroots?

We use social media a lot to encourage women to come for screening; we use radio jingles to make sure that we get the message out there. Most importantly, you see, counselling is the key. We do counselling here every Friday where women talk to me one on one with the issues they are having; the fact that we have been able to give out those financial assistance, these are the things they come to talk to me about. And we make sure they have partners that they can relate with and we keep constantly in touch with making sure that they are comfortable. Then every year, we take them to the Spar where each of them gets a massage. Apart from pampering them, the massage is to release some of the tension they might have had

when they did the surgery; just to relief and make them more flexible. We invite dietitians, oncologists, motivational speakers and experts that lecture them on exercise. We do aromatherapy, yoga and quite a lot of things just to make sure that they feel sense of belonging and special even though they are more like any other person. So, breast cancer, I keep saying, is not a death sentence and it is not something that people should now stigmatise.

Apart the screening, does COPE do surgeries?

No, we don't do surgery. COPE is not a hospital rather, it is a nongovernmental organisation. We do everything that needs to be done and then leave the rest for the doctors to do. We can inform and educate because no doctor is going to sit down and tell them all that we tell them. We show them movies of how some people have been able to survive and then tell them what they supposed to do. We have audio-visual that we show to let them to know what they are supposed to do in case of any challenge that they go through. So basically, the support group gives them a sense of reassurance.

Like you said earlier, it is not all the women you assist financially. What determines who you give financial assistance to?

Yes, not all of them need financial assistance and there are times we tell you, okay, go ahead and do whatever you can to get money and whatever it is, we would help you out when we have it. We don't have the resources; it is someone or organisations that give the money and when they do not have, so we have to wait till when they have. So, it is a matter of you having the confidence that at least your treatment will be taken care of and you would have that ease and not worry about the expenses.

You came from the financial sector to the medical field. How were you able to acquire the skills to function in the medical field?

When you want to something successfully, you do it with all your heart. I was always going for conferences; I read books and leaflets that would help cancer survivors, patients and women to cope. I make sure that I quip myself with the necessary tools whenever the occasion arises for that. I make sure I interact with people outside the country as well and thanks to some organisations that have been very supportive.

The most important thing about this whole thing is that we should learn that women should support women and not feeling that you are better than someone else. Anybody can have a challenge any time. So, it's more of hold my hands and let me hold yours.

However, there are times we lose some of them because some of them come when it is too late. So it has not been bed of roses, there are times we have our ups and downs. And could be very sad when you have that; coming from a background where I have seen it first hand, I know how devastating it could be.

The Formula For Wealth: A Review

When Eni B (Eniola Bello), our managing director at THISDAY hinted that Otunba Femi Pedro would want me to review his book, I was curious. I did a bit of conjecture; could it be a book detailing his journey from the banking world to the political arena? I concluded that if my guess turned out accurate, I would not be the best person for the job. Even though my first and second degrees were in political science, I've not worked a day as a political scientist.

A phone call from the author a few days later resolved the puzzle. The brief was straightforward: Mr Pedro wanted me to review his recently published book where he detailed his thoughts on wealth creation, entrepreneurship and leadership. I felt relieved because wealth happens to be a terrain I am familiar with.

My simple formula for reviewing any book involves asking three basic questions.

Here's how the book fared in answering the three questions:

Signpost Question 1: What message did the author set out to pass across to the reader?

Interestingly, the author clearly articulated his reason for pushing out the book right from the onset.

Through the diverse inspiring stories, he shares in the book, the author aims to demonstrate that wealth creation follows universally applicable principles and process that anybody can apply to build wealth, irrespective of geography, race, religion, culture or gender.

Signpost Question 2: Does the book sufficiently and comprehensively address the declared purpose of writing it?

First, the simple style of presentation employed by the author is commendable. Anyone with a basic knowledge of the English language can comprehend the book's content from start to finish. The author uses storytelling (plenty of stories) to explain the key principles of wealth creation.

Hitting off quickly, in chapter one, the author weaves his first set of wealth creation principles into the well-known story of Nnamdi Ezeigbo, the founder of SLOT, who at the start of his entrepreneurship journey, parted ways with friends who wanted to lure him into the 'broadway' to wealth – laced with the vices of dishonest dealings and instant gratification – and took the 'narrow path' trodden with integrity and resilience.

Here, Mr Pedro shows that wealth creation is a matter of choice and commitment. To become wealthy, you must believe you can do it and you must take the action necessary to achieve your goal.

Chapter 2: Wealth Means Freedom

The author submits that wealth has very little to do with the accumulation of expensive material things.

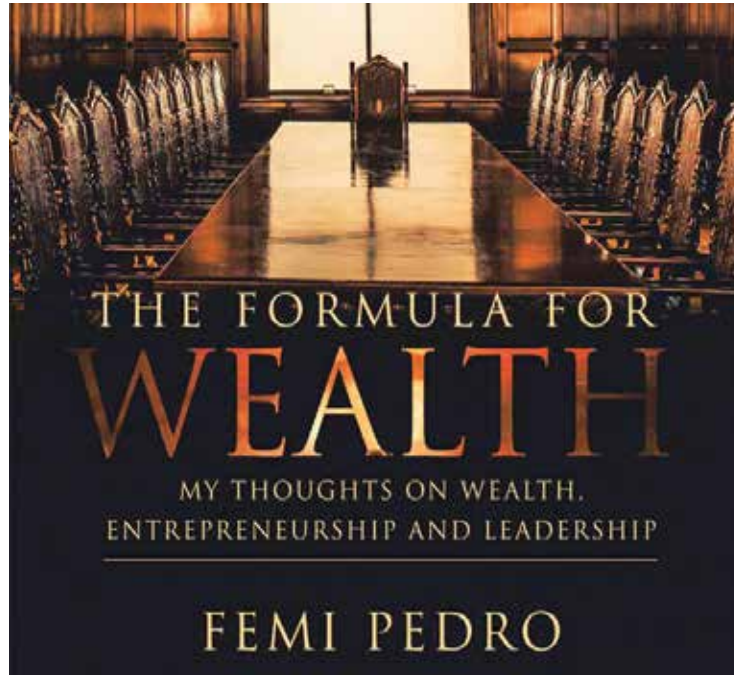
He states: "The true measure of wealth is your net worth measured by the total value of wealth instruments (stocks, real estate, private shares, private ownership of a business, rare gems, rare artworks; and anything of value that can be traded in the open market anywhere in the world) you own. Wealth instruments have a more enduring value than money. A person is wealthy if their ownership of those instruments generates enough income to provide financial security (ability to take care of the basic needs of life without stress; financial independence)."

The True Face of Poverty

In chapter 3, the author presents the stories of four individuals who thought they had found the path out of poverty (John: smart, hardworking but poor; Henry: brilliant doctor with zero business acumen; Bala: underemployed and angry banker; and Chief Aluko: astute politician and failed entrepreneur) whereas they were working against the principles of wealth creation, unknowingly.

They were Mr Pedro's customers when he was working in the banking industry. They all ran into financial troubles and he rescued three of them and set them on the path to wealth.

The story of Henry fascinates. He appeared to have business acumen. He bought a house, converted part to a hospital and the other to a residence. He used the house as collateral for a bank loan. But unknown to him, his accountant got creative with the account he presented to the bank and the bubble burst when he started defaulting in payment barely three months after accessing the loan.



Pedro

KEY STATS

Title:
The Formula for Wealth: My Thoughts on Wealth, Entrepreneurship and Leadership

Author: Femi Pedro

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No of Pages: 96 (excluding the preliminary pages)

Forward: Fola Adeola

Reviewer: Ayo Arowolo

Price: Not stated

Henry was about to lose his house when the author intervened; corrected his missteps and put him on mentoring sessions. The author advised Henry to sell the house (assisted by the bank) payoff the loans and go to the Lagos Business School to beef up his business skills. The business was rescued. Like Henry's, the stories of the others have happy endings except for Chief Aluko's. His case was irredeemable.

The Money Illusion

In this chapter, the author used the stories of four of his former staff (John, Remi, Dapo and Mike) to illustrate the lesson that professionalism, hard work, education and even productivity at work do not guarantee that you would be able to build wealth. The four friends were top hands at First Atlantic Bank, where he was the CEO.

While John, Remi and Mike lived it up, piling up expensive luxuries after expensive luxuries, sent their children to the best schools abroad, joined many expensive clubs, Dapo chose a different path. He was conservative in his expenses, saving and investing.

Then, the bubble of the Nigerian banking industry burst when Professor Charles Soludo's tsunami swept off 65 out of the 89 banks, including First Atlantic Bank, which ultimately lost its banking licence after unsuccessful mergers. Predictably, the four friends lost their jobs. Only Dapo was prepared. The others suffered different degrees of misfortunes from which they never recovered.

He sufficiently proves that money is an illusion and that wealth creation requires a strict step-by-step process and shares the steps.

The Rules of Wealth

I believe this is the icing on the cake where the author lays out methodically what could be described as the formula for wealth. The author believes wealth creation is essentially a product of habits.

He lists some of the habits of the wealthy:

1) Positive mindset: He notes that many people who are trying to build wealth have been programmed to fail through their beliefs, such as:

- Money is the root of evil
- Rich people are greedy
- Money does not grow on trees

2) Dreams and determination: The author

notes that wealthy people are often committed and determined to be wealthy. The statement by B.C Forbes, founder of Forbes, summarizes the author's point: "The men who have done big things are those who were not afraid to attempt big things and who were not afraid to risk failure to gain success."

3) Character and Integrity: According to the author, most people who have built wealth are people of integrity and strong character. He used the sterling example of Guaranty Trust Bank where he was also a top executive, who chose not to bribe anyone or give commission to third parties.

4) Personal and Financial Discipline: Self-discipline is a major distinction between people who succeed in life and those who don't.

5) Keeping Right Company: One good way to build wealth is to associate with those who build their wealth legitimately.

6) Passion: He believes that true wealth flows from discovering your passion and building a business around it.

7) Find a Mentor: The author notes that mentorship is crucial to wealth creation. A mentor is someone who sees more talent and ability within you than you can see in yourself. Mentors shorten the journey to the top.

8) Develop the Culture of Saving: George Clarson rightly suggests that wealth, like trees, grows from the practice of setting aside a part of your current earnings for future use.

9) Turn Your Idea into Valuable Business: The ability to turn your passion into a big idea and then build a successful business around it is what separates the wealthy from those who merely want to be rich.

10) Find Your Path: He believes many paths lead to wealth and those who would be wealthy should carefully choose the ones that fit their temperaments.

Here are the diets:

- Build a business enterprise
- Invest in assets and real estate
- Do a combination of entrepreneurship and investing
- Pursue a career while you invest in assets, equities and other wealth instruments.

11) Bonus Rule: Before starting your own business, the author counsels that you should serve under someone you admire what he or she is doing.

Chapter 6: The Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship

In his chapter on entrepreneurship, the author suggests that Nigeria is a country blessed with rich stories of audacious but successful entrepreneurs and failed enterprises.

To further buttress this, a survey of 500 entrepreneurs was conducted across the country and a whopping 85 per cent of people reported that they were struggling in business because of several factors including the common infrastructural problems and high-interest rates. The remaining 15 per cent of were succeeding.

The surveyed shows many were struggling due to lack of basic business skills, low level of technology adoption, substandard products and services, financial mismanagement, etc.

The successful businesses have some things working for them such as a well-written and strictly followed business plan, a motivated team among others.

Chapter 7: Money Earns Money

I must admit that I was a bit surprised by the level of disclosures made by the author in this chapter on investment. For instance, the author provides a detailed story of how a friend introduced him in 1989 to the two principal promoters of Guaranty Trust Bank who were looking for other investors to back them up in their bid to set up the bank.

The author was asked to contribute N200,000 (\$45,000 at that time) at N1 per share, an amount he confessed was more than five times his annual salary. Scrapping every penny he could find, he made the required investment before the deadline. By 1996, the bank publicly quoted with the opening share price of N8—eight times the value when he invested.

The book contains other personal investment stories.

For those who want to know how Mr Pedro transitioned from the banking hall to the government house and the politics associated with that transition should pay attention to this chapter, which also offers few lessons in leadership.

Signpost question 3: Has the author personally experienced what he sets out to teach?

Without doubt, The Wealth Formula is a personal testimonial of how the author moved from an ordinary employee to become a successful entrepreneur, a wealthy and inspiring businessman and political leader.

More than that, the author believes that what qualifies him to write the book is the broad knowledge he gained while serving both in both public and private sectors for over four decades.

"Also, I have had extensive and close relationships with some of the wealthiest people in the world and I have also observed their lifestyles. I have also read countless books on wealth creation and learned valuable lessons that I have practised in my own life. I have drawn on this to develop the blueprint," he says.

No doubt the author has lived what he is preaching.

Overall impression

Overall, The Formula for Wealth is a practical book on wealth acquisition that clearly outlines the process of gaining access to the club of the wealthy.

In a way, it can be asserted that whoever buys a copy of this book for whatever price will be buying two books for the price of one. The forward written by Fola Adeola, a successful entrepreneur, inspiring business leader and mentor, adds great value to the book.

Considering the gem of wisdom contained in the book, the author compares well with Robert Kiyosaki, Dave Ramsey, George Clarson, and our own Nimi Akinkugbe.

Without removing anything from the value of the book, it should be pointed out that there is no such thing as a formula for wealth if considered along the scientific line of producing predictable results when one combines numbers in a certain prescribed manner.

Ultimately, building wealth is a journey in experiments. And good enough, the author has provided a menu of ingredients that if carefully combined can lead to successful experiments.