

## Leader Interview:

For the purpose of week 3 assignment, I interviewed Senator Daisy Danjuma, Executive Chairman of May & Baker Nigeria Pls, a leading pharmaceutical company in Nigeria which specializes in the production of drugs and vaccines with over 20,000 people under its employment. Daisy Danjuma is also Chairman at Lagos Public Interest Law Partnership and also sits on the board of South Atlantic Petroleum Ltd Lagos, Nigeria as Executive Vice-Chairman. She is a Member of the International Federation of Women Lawyers and Member of the International Bar Association.

I interviewed her on what it takes to lead through these very complex and challenging times.

She began by saying that she had come this far in life simply because she is pioneering and adventurous, willing to go where others feared to go, touch what others feared to touch and do what others feared to do. She said she has always had a very strong belief in herself which translated to high levels of self confidence and determination to stand up for her beliefs regardless of the challenges along the way. Through the journey, she said, she has been privileged to meet people from various cultures varying from socio, economic, educational, political and religious backgrounds and her relations which each regardless of the diversity has constantly been based on compassion, care, charity and empathy.

She said she had cultivated high interpersonal skills over time which enables her to read situations with some degree of accuracy and take information from all sides. She is then able to rally others around her point of view because she genuinely understands and cares about where they are coming from. This enables the people she is leading to feel more understood, supported and valued.

Her style she says, is an inclusive team building leadership style of problem solving and decision making and she has over the years, learnt to handle rejection and adversity. She says she more persuasive and assertive and is now more likely to ignore rules and take risks.

On the challenges of leading during this pandemic, she responded, that when the lock downs became imminent, she encouraged her teams to come up with suggestions on how to handle the company operations, and suggestions poured in at various levels, thus enabling them have various scenarios and options to consider. She said due to their operational models, her organization had invested heavily in technology over the years, and in retrospect, it seemed like they were preparing for such a time as this. They had always been set up to work both virtually and in-office for a couple of years now, and this enabled them to seamlessly adapt to fully working virtually. She said they had existing business continuity models in place to cope during unanticipated periods of crises which included the establishment of a financial reserve account which is funded with a lump sum annually from the company's profits. She said the accumulated reserves is sufficient to last for over 24 months without any disruptions or exigency needs to reduce salaries or make workers redundant.

She said this is a time more than ever before, to lead, as people are looking up to their leaders as visionary. She said even when she does not know what direction to take or what decisions would be right, she still exudes confidence before her people as that's the only way they can continue to follow in these

uncertain times. She says she tries to act as swiftly as is reasonably possible as taking too long to make a decision can be catastrophic. She said she has what she calls “her situational leadership tool-kit” and has learnt to pull out the relevant tool for each occasion. She said her tool kit includes tools such as, assessing the situation, listening to the people and what they need, updating them with information on a continuous and transparent basis regardless of whether it’s good or not so good news, conveying assurance and remaining positive.

She said she constantly updates the teams on the new risks and opportunities and what needs to be done differently. This she said, makes her teams feel empowered and she encourages them by making them see the importance of the health care industry in which they have chosen to play and the wisdom in choosing this career path, as the world is looking to them for a solution to the pandemic. People are now reading and listening to what it takes to develop a vaccine, the risks / costs and why adequate research and development is needed before putting a drug or vaccine in the market.

I wanted to know her forecast on what the residual impact of the pandemic would be on their businesses, workplace, people and culture, and in responding, she said, no one can accurately predict how far reaching the ultimate effects may be but that she is positive that the resilience of the human spirit would help us through these tough times as we all learn to adapt to the new world order. She said the experience so far, has shown that they can have a virtual workforce which has significantly driven down operational costs, as there is less travel and less out of station accommodation and local travel costs. There are emerging opportunities for business improvements particularly in the area of technological investment in the rural areas, to create and improve bandwidth and internet access, to create opportunities that will allow people who don’t live in big cities to still work for big companies.

She said that while resources may be leaner at this time, they had continued to put the welfare needs of their people first in a bid to mitigate the impact of the economic realities. In this vein, they had put some incentives in place to make life easier for staff working from home as well as for the few who still come into the office, as the past three months have been quite tough on the economy with attendant ripple effects on life for both adults and children. She said they now have a new appreciation for crises management, planning and how to cope with the impact of unforeseen events. She also expressed excitement at the adaptability to meeting apps such as zoom, Microsoft’s teams which has made video conferencing meetings very dynamic.

On her thoughts on how this might change the world for women in leadership roles, she said leadership skills that are traditionally viewed as more feminine, like empathy, nurturing, listening are now coming to the spotlight as evidenced by the countries with the most successful outcomes in the fight against covid which are mostly led by women. She predicts that companies will gradually begin to increase the values they place on the skills associated with women and we may begin to see men seeking out more women to mentor and help them develop these skills.

On her final words, she said she views her role more as leading through change rather than managing through change and this has led her to source and read news, articles and posts from various sources in a bid to stay updated and learn

new ways to lead in a way that ensures people continue to follow willingly and enthusiastically. She said attention is now moving away from the initial reaction to the corona virus pandemic towards developing plans to strengthen and lengthen recovery of the economic losses suffered during this period. She said available reports suggests that covid 19 will negatively impact businesses for a long while, hence the need for a sustainability plan and that they have developed contingency plans for each of their businesses and regularly carry out business impact analyses.

The leadership qualities demonstrated by Senator Daisy Danjuma in the interview attest to the fact that she is indeed a 21st century leader who has meticulously developed her leadership skills and capabilities over time, to the extent where she is able to lead a willing set of followers successfully and effectively. Her leadership style encompasses the 10 Truths about leadership and even more. The step by step actions and solutions she deploys to each set of circumstances shows:

- [ ] She makes a difference: The belief in her abilities, capabilities and potential to lead her teams through such unprecedented times as this.

- [ ] Leadership founded on the principles of credibility: This makes her un-afraid to update her teams with timely and transparent information.

- [ ] Her values are the driving force in her commitment to walk and carry her people through this period while taking bold steps to venture into terrains in the new order that were previously uncharted.

- [ ] Focusing on the future has clearly set her on a successful path: Being forward thinking led her to annually retain a part of the company earnings in a contingency funds account to ensure business continuity in unprecedented times such as this. Their fund reserves is able to sustain them for two while years without any disruptions to operational costs or the need to cut down on staff and salaries. This has set her apart from other company leaders whose first response was to reduce staff strength and remunerations as the only means to survive.

- [ ] She understood that she could not achieve the task alone: Thus, she continuously sought suggestions and inputs from her team on how to handle their operations in these times. Their overall success so far is as a result of the dedication of her team who feel empowered to be a part of the process and are therefore committed to achieving collective success through this period.

- [ ] Trust rules everything she does. The transparency and credibility she continues to exhibit directly translates into the levels of support she continues to receive from her teams as more trust equals better results and higher motivation from followers.

- [ ] Challenge: she clearly understands that challenge is the crucible to greatness which is why she ensures she does not leave any stone unturned on the various challenges that continue to show up as they grapple through these unprecedented times.

- [ ] She models the way: Understanding that she must lead by example or not lead at all. Her performance shows others how to feel, think and act. leaders earn credibility by living out the essence of correct behaviors. People watch their

leaders carefully to check that their actions align with their words as this is the true measure of integrity.

- [ ] The best leaders are the best learners. She alluded to the fact that she is continuously seeking out new information and knowledge as more issues emerge on the pandemic and how best to react to the disruptions caused. Leaders attain success by learning and practicing the requisite skills required to lead in various circumstances. Leadership requires hard work with constant enthusiastic learning

- [ ] Leadership is an affair of the heart. Senator Daisy Danjuma works with passion, compassion and puts her emotions into what she does. She is concerned and optimistic with a great deal for the organization, their purpose and her people.

Overall, my time with her on the interview was quality time very well spent as her insights was for me, a practical demonstration of what I learnt academically from the book “ The Truth About Leadership”