

An Interview with Mr. Norman MUSENGIMANA from Rwanda

Written by: Diane Sarah Bégin, BA, CMC, CHRP

During my assignment in Rwanda in early 2007, I met a vibrant young public servant who left me absolutely speechless by his clarity of thought and his inspiring values and beliefs. I feel very fortunate to be able to share this interview. It was held in the morning of April 14th over a cup of African tea served in the patio area of the Novotel Kigali UMUBANO.



Mr. Norman MUSENGIMANA April, 2007

1. Could you tell us a bit about yourself Norman: where you live, your interests, your family, and your occupation?

I was born in 1979 in Rwanda where I attended primary school. My high school and University were completed in Kenya where I obtained in 2004 a Bachelor of Commerce degree with a major in

marketing management. I was naturally drawn to leadership roles throughout my student life, being the leader of professional clubs and union associations, for example.

Throughout my university I worked part time in various jobs and was able to find employment within one week from graduation with Corporate Africa Limited. This short term position involved the delivery of marketing services for corporate members of the Kenyan Business Community to attend a corporate leadership seminar.

Immediately after this short term job, I applied for a job in the [Rwanda Private Sector Federation](#) (RPSF) as the Business Development Centre Director for the Southern Province (BDS). The southern BDS is located in the heart of Huye District and the Southern Province comprises the districts of HUYE, RUHANGO, MUHANGA, KAMONYI, GISAGARA, NYAMAGABE, NYANZA and NYARUGURU. Nine (9) months into the job I accepted a job offer as the Personal Assistant to the Minister in the [Ministry of Public Service and Labour](#),

My family members are dispersed in several continents including the U.S., Europe and Africa. My father remarried once so I have 8 siblings with one mother and 9 with the other for a total of 20 members in the family: 17 children and 3 parents. I am the first born from my father's second marriage.

My interests include travelling. I dearly hope to visit Canada, Japan and the United States one day. I also enjoy having conversations with people where we can share knowledge and mutually learn from each other. I especially like to talk about my country, express my thoughts and perspectives.

I regularly read magazines and professional books, play pool, lawn tennis and ping pong and scan the internet to check out my favourite soccer club's standing. Oh.. and I am also very interested in car racing. Perhaps one day I will race cars.

2. You graduated in 2004. What were the biggest thrills of your first year after graduation? What were the most difficult moments?

My biggest thrill is when I was provided the opportunity to head the marketing team with Corporate Africa Limited because I was given the authority to hire some of my fellow graduates and lead them in the course of executing a short assignment.

My most difficult moment was when I realized that my expectations about my future following graduation were not fairing as I had earlier anticipated. I had expected to be sought after for jobs by preferred major employers like The Royal Dutch Petroleum Company (Shell), Mobil Kenya, PriceWaterHouse etc. As it turned out, I realized that there were better people than I who got jobs in certain interview sittings that I attended during that particular time, but this did not leave me without a lesson of course.

I find that my career has chosen me to date– but I would like to be able to choose my career so that I may clearly define the course of my future.

3. What do you think it takes to have a successful career start in Rwanda?

Skills are important. Understanding the environment in which you find yourself – both at the national level and at the workplace level is equally important for planning a career. Lastly, dedication and feeling passionate for what you are doing, I mean being able to feel your job within yourself is paramount to setting one's career. Being driven, wanting to contribute, your love for the Nation and having a positive attitude are all important factors that help a person have a good career start. Recognizing opportunities and knowing how to capitalize on them is very important to a person entering the job market equally for career nurturing.

4. Have you ever been afraid to make a change?

I don't fear change. In fact I love change and I love challenges. The accumulation of changes in your life is what allows you to perform as best as you can in whatever you are doing; it shouts out the diversity in you and hence the accumulation of wisdom. My

most difficult change was to make the transition from private sector to government, but I have succeeded and am proud of this transition.

5. Do you have any regrets in your career, or things you would go back and change if you could?

I have no regrets but if I was given the opportunity to change one thing I would have wanted to have had a better knowledge of the difficult challenges and a full picture of the realities facing new graduates in their job search. I would have liked to have been better informed and better prepared. My expectations should have been brought to a fair level and my decisions couched with several other options. My goals upon graduation should have been placed within reach. All this would have helped me tremendously following graduation.

6. What goal do you have for your future?

One goal that is important to me: I want to create jobs not look for one. I realize that the journey to achieve this is a long one but I am willing to wait. Patience pays.



Youth in Butare, Rwanda. March, 2007

7. What are some of the factors that have contributed to your decision to live in Rwanda?

Visionary leadership is definitely number one. The leaders in Rwanda are inspirational. They not only love what they are doing but they also feel it. By their actions these leaders are giving us a guarantee that the country and everyone in it is moving towards a brighter future. And by the way; we all see this future coming including you 'Diane'; by simply looking back in 1994 to date, the sky is the limit.

This belief in our future is contagious and stretches into a regional optimism that makes people want to stay and be part of this phenomenon. It fills us with confidence. People are willing to give their best irrespective of what they went through during the genocide.

This belief placed in our hands by the leaders of this country makes us feel great. We feel like we are in the driver's seat. It makes us want to participate; it makes us fall in love with our country, and it makes us want to contribute to building Rwanda's future. We have different decision makers and different targets. A new Rwanda is already emerging.

Most young people want to live in America or somewhere abroad because they think there are more opportunities and life is easy. They believe life is easier there because there are more money making possibilities. I see it differently. For sure, there are greater opportunities but there is a price to pay.

For instance, if I want to live in Europe there are many kinds of jobs available. They may be well paid in comparison but they will not be stable in nature. They may not be long term or they may require unusually long hours of work. There is no connection between these jobs and a greater purpose like what we have in Rwanda. So you switch jobs trying to find purpose and balance. There is no time for the self – there is no time to reflect. Life passes you by without a greater purpose.



A view from the top of the Parc national des volcans, Rwanda. November, 2006

8. What advice would you like to offer up and coming professionals living in Rwanda?

I suppose you can divide the factors into two broad categories: individual and environmental or Controllable and uncontrollable factors.

In the individual category, young people first need to know their strengths and how to capitalize on them. This is really the only way to be the best at what you do. Building your career from a winning set of skills will bring greater success. Up and coming professionals have to fully understand what they want and what they feel in order to bring about a high rated performance.

Young people should have more than one option to their future. If the selected direction forward starts to tremble it is comforting to know that there is a back up position that you can put into motion if need be i.E. there should be Plan A, B, C so that if plan A fails one jumps onto Plan B.

Up and coming professionals must be true to themselves. Whatever career option is selected it must come from the individual. A person should not be influenced by peer pressure or the glamour of an actor or actress on TV shows and the like. Instead young professionals should scan leaders around them, select those that are getting things right, and try to learn from them.

Young people should seek the advice of someone they trust and understands them. Building a career step-by-step with someone to guide you will nurture confidence and lead to the realization of larger goals.

The second category of factors pertains to the environment. For example, a SWOT analysis will help individuals understand what it takes to make a career decision successful. A good knowledge of your **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities and **T**hreats will provide a full picture of what it takes to make environmental factors work for you and your career. Building from a position of strength in the right “set of Opportunities” will require less effort and will lead to the desired output timely if well executed. While on the other hand knowing your weak points and understanding the potential threat surrounding you; will enable you to clearly strategize on how you will overcome them and hence lead your way forward. I strongly believe that this SWOT analysis is the foundation to making good decisions about one’s career. ▼

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Mr. Normand MUSENGIMANA for taking the time to share his thoughts with me. His insights and advice are sure to be an inspiration to up and coming professionals in Rwanda.



Ms. Bégin is an accomplished human resources consultant and strategist with over 25 years of public sector experience in human resources management, workforce management, strategic planning, evaluation and organizational development. In private practice, she has worked in Canada, Asia, Africa and the Middle-East, facilitating practical action plans for the modernization and strengthening of civil service management.

dsbegin@hrsbconcepts.com

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