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A Lifestyle...Expanding Opportunities

MAY / JUNE EDITION

Ngozi
Princewill Utchay:
THE IMAGE DOCTOR



Editor's note

Wouldn't living be more blissful if we all had the tools to enable us project and optimize our social image and presence? True perhaps. While many may argue that the world would ultimately become a very boring place if everyone behaved in a certain expected way, there is no gain saying the fact that the importance of image and personal branding in both our personal lives and for corporate organisations can no longer be ignored.

And the reasons are not farfetched. Image is powerful. In fact, 93 per cent of how we look and sound is attributed to our image. These days, more and more people are getting very particular about what they want to project, how they want to be judged, the impressions they want to leave behind – all of which combines to form a professional look referred to as image perception.

This is where the services of etiquette, image and personal branding expert like Ngozi Princewill Utchay, comes in. They use their skills as a vehicle to help executives, entrepreneurs, rising professionals and high-profile individuals polish, project and optimize their corporate or social image and presence, using a sophisticated approach and global best standards.

A professional through and through is why she covers our May/June edition, not only opening up about herself, but also dissecting the intricacies of image perception as well as how it can be applied to change the current narrative of Nigeria.

Enjoy.

Nkarenji Ukonu

Etiquette, image expert, and multiple certified personal branding strategist, Ngozi Princewill Utchay is the face behind Artelier Lifestyle Consultants, one of the foremost lifestyle consulting firms founded about seven years ago.

An alumna of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Ngozi holds various certifications in personal branding, etiquette, style, colour, image, public relations and more from foremost institutions in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, the United Arab Emirates as well as Switzerland, specifically, the Institut Villa Pierrefeu, described as Switzerland's 'last traditional finishing school'.

Besides teaching at the Lagos Business School, the leading business school in West Africa, Ngozi is also a distinguished speaker. She is also a writer whose articles on corporate and social image and impressions are widely read.

Recognised as one of the Nigerian women contributing to nation building in their various spheres, Ngozi was named one of '100 Most Inspiring Women in Nigeria, 2018' by the Leading Ladies Africa and YNaija, published by The Guardian newspaper

A confident and excellent communicator, driven by the core values of authenticity, excellence and leadership, Ngozi Princewill Utchay is known to bring creativity and sophistication to her work. Little wonder her clientele reads like the who is who in the corporate and social circles. From United Bank for Africa Plc, Jackson, Etti & Edu Law Firm, Access Bank Plc, Amstel Malta, Fidelity Bank Plc, Augusto & Co., Pathcare Nigeria and a long list of very distinguished private individuals.

Ngozi Princewill Utchay has not only featured in the 'Inspire Me 2' coffee table book by the 'Women in Management, Business and Public Service' (WIMBIZ), she is also featured in the Lancôme '40 Shades' international Beauty campaign, as one of 43 inspiring women ambassadors - the first of its kind in Africa by the French brand. In September 2016, she was voted onto the 'Very Best Dressed' list of Genevieve Magazine - a leading lifestyle magazine in Nigeria.



How did your journey into image and personal branding begin?

I believe that we are all born with different gifts and anything that comes fairly effortless to one is usually a gift. It is something I have always done informally because people have always pointed it out to me. For instance, if someone wanted to do something or put together an outfit and wanted an opinion, I was usually the go-to-person. I think that is how it all started. When people hear today that this is what I do, they are truly not surprised because this is me. They say I have always had that grace and elegance. I think it's just something I was meant to do and so I transitioned from doing it informally to formally and it keeps getting more defined. You know, with greater definition comes greater fulfillment in what you do.

You studied French at the University of Ibadan and knowing how very particular French people are about their etiquette and all that, would you say that sort of contributed to your setting up image branding as a profession?

Yes I did study French with a minor in German at the University but I don't know if it's that or the other way round because I did so well at my A levels that I could have done any other course but I chose to do French particularly. In a sense, I guess it had already chosen me because I have a love for languages. Besides there was no pressure to do anything because we already had a lawyer, an engineer etc., in the family and so I could do what I wanted. My father thought I would go into diplomatic service but I sort of charted my way and gravitated towards the things that I enjoy and like doing.

What were you into before fully embracing image and personal branding as a career?

When I first got married, I joined my husband in building our hospitality business, the Prime Group, which includes the popular Prime Chinese Restaurant. But prior to that, I worked in the French embassy, that is, in the cultural department. You know like I said, I was under no pressure, I have always sort of done things that I enjoyed doing. I also worked with the Trinidad and Tobago High Commission. And so, I have always sort of gravitated towards that scene.

At the time you started, not many people were aware of what image and personal branding was all about. Did you think you would ever make a success of it?

I think that when it comes to passion, when you over think it, you may not likely start. I think you should just go with the love you have for whatever it is that you are doing. I wasn't thinking of failure when I started, there was a certain kind of assurance in me about the way it





would go and since I started, so many more people have gone into it. The more important part of this is that I blended two things that I hadn't even seen practised together. I really just want to see people discover and develop their authentic selves. And now I see more people doing etiquette and combining it with personal branding. But there is a thin line between

etiquette and image branding, most people sometimes mistake them as one and the same. From an insider point of view, they are two very different things. If you take for example, public relations with image, you are presenting yourself and so the PR aspect would be a public perception of you, but etiquette and personal branding although connected, are not traditionally

lumped together.

To a lay man who isn't aware, how would you differentiate the two; etiquette and image branding?

They are actually three - Etiquette is how you interact with other people. Image is your overall self-presentation but also how you see yourself, while branding has to do with



Mrs Ndidi Nwuneli, Uche A, NPU and FFL Group, Future First Ladies FFL 2018

perception and your reputation.

How well received was image consulting when you began to market it?

It was very well received. When I started, Genevieve Magazine made me an offer as a columnist for their magazine. Also, companies were calling me to give them proposals, so people saw the value of what I was offering and keyed into it. I have always said that if people don't understand what you offer or it is new to them, then it is a fantastic opportunity for you. It means that the field is wide open and there is so much potential for you to build on it.

Besides teaching Business and Dining Etiquette at the Lagos Business School, do you own a finishing school?

For now I run the programme once a year and so I don't know if there is any point dedicating the entire year to maintaining a finishing school. It is something that I am building up, running at my own pace, I am not under any pressure or working with anyone's timeline. But with time, I know it will crystallize. I have a vision in my head on how I want to go about it but for now, it is a school that converges annually and after the cycle, we look forward to another. It is more cost effective that way.

You are the host of 'Future First Ladies'. What is the story behind this unusual name?

I started it in 2015. A lady that I admire approached me to put together something for her daughter and some



of her friends, you know just to teach them basic things that they need to do, or know about. That is how it started. But you know what I said earlier about definition, in fact as time has gone on, it has sort of metamorphosed into a mentorship programme as well. People like to restrict that definition of first lady to wives of governors or Heads of State or even pastor's wives but this is so limiting. A definition from Collins Dictionary for instance, talks about leading ladies in a particular profession, so it's not just about the wife of a governor or pastor, our goal is more of preparing young ladies to be leaders, in a fully rounded way. So, I have had outstanding women in their different fields of endeavor be part of this highly subsidised annual finishing school which aims to 'democratise' the traditional finishing school for the benefit of the wider society while also providing mentorship. I am very interested in people being fearless about pursuing their dreams, being themselves, going out to actualize their own vision. You know being equipped for life, so to speak because when you don't know, you are likely to make mistakes. Ignorance is not bliss; it is actually quite dangerous. The annual school gives attendees as much information as possible including little things such as how to carry oneself and how to sit on a stage; like, don't cross your legs when you are wearing a short dress, you know little things that help one be graceful. For instance, someone like the chairman of First Bank, Ibukun Awosika, she has a certain persona and part of it just comes from her carriage, her interaction with people over the years etc. So obviously, it isn't just your talent or your business ability that can carry you through, if you are building a brand, there are other things, one has to be aware and conscious of. Again, for instance, how do you handle office politics, how do you handle office culture? How do you identify role models or interact with them? So, the school is more or less like a big sister giving a younger sister advice or life lessons.

Speaking of First Ladies, have you had sessions with any?

There have been opportunities, informal ones. There's always an element of discretion in this work.

Gender wise, who are your biggest clients?

I do trainings for organizations as well, so in that case it is a fusion of both sexes. However, I love to work with women so a lot of the conferences I get invited to are conferences that have to do with women empowerment, like the Women in Business (WiMBiZ). But with one on one consultations, I would say women.

Does this mean men are not particularly receptive to personal and image branding and if so, how can they be drawn to it?

I feel perhaps, people are more comfortable having one on one sessions with members of their own sex because I have a male friend who is equally doing well in this field and has quite a number of male clients



so it all boils down to who you are more comfortable sharing intimate details or what they consider embarrassing. That is what I suspect.

What has been your biggest challenge in this business? I haven't seen any biggest challenge in the sense that anything that could present itself as a challenge I have seen as an opportunity, or something that I had to find a way to resolve. Again, when you see obstacles, you have to find your way around them and not allow yourself to be discouraged. I know that there may be people who may not be well trained in this business who pull things off the internet and pass it off as theirs, I don't see them as a challenge. That happens in Nigeria with every profession. If they see there is going to be a little bit of money made from something, they jump on it immediately, whether they like it or not, certified or not and not even minding that they may be misinforming people.

With regards to weeding the chaff, is your profession regulated in Nigeria?

Not quite, it will be a lot of work to get that done. But I do think that if you are going to teach something at least be sure of what you are teaching, just have some form of integrity.

What has been the most striking feedback you got from your client since you embarked on this journey?

I really don't want to sound immodest but I have gotten very good feedback. I love speaking and what is most important to me is being able to pass knowledge or make somebody see things they couldn't see before; help open their minds to endless possibilities. I love to see people grow confident in themselves.

Nevertheless, I have had fantastic feedback from the work I do.

How do you think image perception and branding can help change the current narrative of Nigeria to the outside world? Before we start rewriting, we need to do some form of housekeeping. I am not comfortable with us just putting out a cosmetic image out there. It has to be more natural, working from the inside out. There are

some things about Nigeria that need to be put out there more; like how Nigerians are very hospitable; our creativity - we are doing so much with very little inspite of our infrastructural problems; the Nigerian spirit which is so resilient - it doesn't matter what you throw at Nigerians, they will make a joke out of it and I think that is very special. We are helping run a few other countries as well so there is something about Nigeria that



can't be ignored. Despite the fact that there are a few misguided ones who think fraud is the way out, there are still lots and lots of Nigerians who want to do the right thing. These are the facts and figures that we need to compile and put out there as well, to counteract whatever negative narrative about Nigeria that is out there and begin to project the good things about us. We need to curate our own image by compiling things that are unique about us that the world needs to hear about. We can't leave it to other people to do for us. Also, patriotism has a huge role to play in all these. We can't go out there and be insulting ourselves and pulling ourselves down, the world will help us do that more. A lot of work needs to be done but it can be done simultaneously; put out a more balanced perspective while also working on our psyche as a nation.

The younger generation seem detached from reality; they are generally not in sync with some of the things, important enough to shape their lives. How can image branding and perception help to correct this?

Image starts from within you. If everyone thinks for instance that you are good at what you do but you don't believe it, no matter how many people tell you, you will still doubt yourself until you actually begin to see and believe in yourself. My thinking is that social media has a lot to do with how detached the youths are. The cyber world influences them so much that may not even reflect reality. And so, depending on how much they have given themselves to that cyber world, they cannot detach it from reality. For me, it's quite sad and this is one of the reasons why I work with the youth. It is very important that we pass on the right values because we have seen the statistics, there

are lots of casualties. We have to stop, think and begin to equip them with the right tools needed to succeed in life. It is a huge concern and the earlier we rein it in, the better.

What would you consider your biggest achievement in life so far?

Just remaining true to myself. There is a lot I choose to walk away from because I don't think it is authentic. I want to run the race that God has given me, I don't want to run anyone's race. I want to run mine and be contented doing it.

What would you say must have significantly shaped you to be who you are today?

My faith. I am a Christian. I realize that I have a God who loves me so much and I put my hand in his and walk with him everyday. They say when you kneel before God, then you can stand before any man. So, if God's approval is most important to me, then I am going to be able to easily turn down things that God will

not approve of.

You do have a very peculiar style. You are always in navy, black, red and white. Any particular reason why you are drawn towards these colours?

Maybe because I like simplicity. That is not to say I don't admire what others wear, but for myself, I like simple clean lines and that defines me because they suit me.

What are some of the things you enjoy doing when you aren't working?

I am a tennis enthusiast, I collect African art and I am an amateur artist.

