

Wole Adeniji

Education Route (53 secs)

Right, okay. I grew up in a place called Surulere in Nigeria. It's a place where predominantly you'd find middle-class families staying all the time.

It was a lovely, very peaceful, very serene neighbourhood in the '60s in Lagos. I was privately educated, so from nursery school, primary school, secondary school, privately educated, and then I went on to university in Nigeria. So I took a degree in economics, and then I started my first job as a graduate trainee with one of the top five consultancies in terms of size in Nigeria, so one of the international consultancies.

I was there for a few years before I decided to take my chances in life and leave the country.

Career Challenge (3 mins 19)

And then I started my first job as a graduate trainee with one of the top five consultancies in terms of size in Nigeria. So one of the international consultancies. I was there for a few years before I decided to take my chances in life and leave the country.

So at that time I was a part-qualified accountant. The professional exams were at three levels. So I'd done the stage one, completed the stage one. I had two levels to go. And I thought, okay, with stage one certificate in my back pocket, I could go anywhere in the world and any of the big practices will be happy to take me on. So that I didn't mind starting all over again.

And doing three stages, whenever I ended up, my choices were either the United States or the United Kingdom. But I chose to come to the United Kingdom. And yeah, so I was hoping to become a general accountant. I was hoping to do the exams at the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales. But it wasn't meant to be, that never materialised.

Can you expand on that? What happened? Back then there wasn't any internet. If you wanted to apply for a job, you'd write by hand. You'd write a letter by hand to the company. So, I had a list of the major companies, the major firms of general accountants that would hire a young graduate as a GT, a graduate trainee, and train them up. I wasn't exactly a young graduate. I had a couple of years' experience behind me. I had professional qualifications for the level one with me. So I saw that putting me at a very big advantage. I must have applied to about 100 organisations.

I only managed to get just the one interview. I did an interview with Price Waterhouse. It wasn't meant to be. I didn't get the role. So that was hugely disappointing. It was a massive setback.

It forced me to carry out a reality check that how realistic were my expectations. So I ended up working as a mini cab driver at a point because I just had to work. And over the course of the years, it dawned on me that perhaps the chartered accountancy route was not the way forward.

And luckily for me, it got to the point when the IT industry, Information Technology was just beginning to emerge. And I decided to return to university to take a master's programme in

Information Technology. And since then, I've been working in the IT area initially as a permanent employee and then for about 25 years now, I've been working as a freelance IT consultant.

Advice in Hindsight (46 secs)

I would say one should be very realistic with one's expectations. Don't think you're going to just jump across like that and that's a 23-year-old, someone's going to give you like a manager's job. It's not going to happen.

So you've got to work your way up in life. I would also advise a youngster that whatever it is you're doing, try your best to be the best, give it your best. Don't allow yourself to be discouraged.

Be persistent, be hardworking, be dedicated, be committed. Just be consistent and never give up. I think those are the key pieces of advice I would give anyone.

Chelmsford ticked boxes (59 secs)

I'm going back almost 20 years ago now, when I've got two sons, or we've got two sons, when our sons were still in primary school, and we were living in East London at the time, we were in particular looking for a part of the country that had very good schools, good secondary schools, and we had a number of options. We considered Kent, we considered Essex, we considered Chelmsford to be specific.

Chelmsford stood out because Chelmsford had, and still has, a number of grammar schools which were ranked very highly. So that was the main attraction for us. Considering the fact that we were living in East London at the time, we knew Essex fairly well, and Chelmsford wasn't too far out.

My job at the time was in the city of London, so there were lots of boxes that Chelmsford ticked, so we decided to go to Chelmsford.

Living in Chelmsford (1 min 46)

Now that's a good one. In our very early days in Chelmsford, Chelmsford was, there were very few people like me in Chelmsford. And it's strange when you think about that now because we're talking of just about twenty years ago.

Well twenty years ago in truth there were very few people like me. I would get on the bus from my house to go to the station and I'd be the only one like me on the bus. I'd be the only one like me on the train into London.

So it was a bit challenging in that respect. Most of the people that I came across in Chelmsford were not as friendly as the people I saw in London. So, it seemed as if the

London folks were more used to people like me, whereas the Chelmsford people were not that used to people like me.

On the positive side, things have changed over the last twenty years. So, there were challenges in the very early days. As time went on, then we found a church in Braintree, Braintree Essex, that we were attending, and then, we went to a number of churches actually. Then we found a church in Chelmsford just close to the town centre. Again, we went there for quite a few years.

In terms of societies, no, there wasn't anything of the sort, to be honest, until O5BM came along. And that just felt a bit strange, O5BM in Chelmsford. I would have expected to have seen that in London, not in Chelmsford.

Well, there you go. So that's how it's been so far.

New Career in IT (3 mins 43)

I was a minicab driver for quite a few years, but I knew for a fact that that wasn't my destination in life. It was just a steppingstone to something else. So I've always taken a lot of pride in anything I do.

I'm a fervent believer in the expression that whatever your hands find to do, do it with your might. Whatever you're doing, give it your best. I remember vividly one of the things that I did.

I wasn't very familiar with the roads of London. And I found out that the black cab drivers did something called the 'Knowledge'. And it took them years, it took them, I think, three years, something like that. And I thought, okay, got a copy of the A to Z for central London, which I could unfold and put it on a wall because it was that massive. So I put it on the wall in my bedroom.

And I thought, okay, people who did the Knowledge, let's see, let me give myself a challenge here. Memorise all the roads in central London, all the streets and all the one-way system. You know, I just memorised the whole of central London map, the roads, the one-way system in my head.

And I became a very, very good minicab driver. I could get around easily without even picking up the bag. That I thoroughly enjoyed, it was a challenge.

So, on a number of occasions, I'd be driving along, I'd be looking at advertising billboards. And I'd notice something at the very bottom of the advert. Normally, you'd expect to see like a phone number because again, this was pre-IT. Not many companies had websites. And I'd notice this strange writing at the bottom of the billboards, <http://www.glaxo.co.uk>. I thought, what on earth is that? So, then that was the first time it struck my mind that perhaps there would be an opportunity in the technology space.

So one evening, I made it a point of duty to always read the Evening Standard. So I bought a copy of the Evening Standard, the London Evening Standard. And I sat in my car and I was reading the paper.

And I saw that one of the universities was offering a master's degree in Information Technology, a master's degree for people who have a first degree in any field. As long as you have the passion for it, you are willing to do the hard work to learn this new discipline, they take you on.

So I took my chance. They took me on. I enrolled for the course and I started the course. So master's conversion programme for about a year and a half.

And whilst on the course, I took to it like a fish to water. I couldn't believe that. Oh, so people get paid money for this.

This is too simple. This is even simpler, easier than training to be an accountant, in my view. I mastered it. And after completing my master's programme and the dissertation, surprise, surprise, I've been trying to get a proper job all these years. I couldn't get one, surprise, surprise, after the IT degree, I got a proper job.