



David
BAGENDA



David Bagenda is an Executive Coach and the Group Strategy & Performance Director at East African Breweries Limited (EABL).

As a graduate of our AoEC Practitioner Diploma in Executive Coaching, we asked David about his leadership journey and diploma experience.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOUR LEADERSHIP JOURNEY

It's been a tale of different halves in my life. I started straight out of university, and joined British American Tobacco (BAT) as a management trainee. I did the two years, and from then on, it was a reasonably accelerated growth path. By age 34, I was the Finance Director. Prior to that, I travelled and worked extensively, mainly in Africa - in Kenya, twice in Mozambique, Congo, Uganda (my home country), UK, then finally back to Uganda.

That's just leading up to becoming the Finance Director. I refer to that period as significant because it molded my own leadership of other people. All through that period, people were passionate about my growth and my potential, more often than not, more so than myself. That has had a significant impact of my own belief system in people. I strongly believe that with the right environment and the right resourcing, most, if not everyone, is resourceful.

My first sessions were in Uganda (with EABL), with Zia, through the Amazing Line Manager series, though previously I had experienced team coaching at BAT. It resonated quite well with me. My value set has been designed to believe in people and to know that I can take a team that is struggling, and make it a working team. That's something I take pride in.

WHAT IS YOUR LEADERSHIP PURPOSE?

My purpose in life is to leave everybody and everything I touch, better than I found it. When you come to actual leadership, it's more to enrich the people so that they can enrich the business.

It's creating the strength of the business out of the people. As a Finance person, I always have ways I can enrich the P&L balance sheet by initiatives I can put in place, and the numbers will get right.

I know how to do that, and I've done that in many cases. But, over the years, when I look back, what seems to resonate with me is the impact I have on the people. I'm always cognisant of "Am I preparing them for the future?"

We are solving today, but am I preparing them for the future?

I like to see us working differently as a business, or as a people, from the way we were working last year. Therefore, that for me is a big leadership goal. So I'm a bit of a "continuous improvement freak", in that way, because I'm always looking to change things.

Yes, some people do get frustrated because even when it's good, I want us to go to the next level. So, in terms of my leadership calling, it's to get people in a frame of mind where they are seeking to continuously improve themselves and improve the organization.

HOW DID TAKING THIS DIPLOMA FIT IN YOU ACHIEVEING YOUR LEADERSHIP PURPOSE?

My change agenda was looking at two main points. First, that I had a logical, rational, tell-it-like-it-is approach and needed to work on emotional leadership. Second, almost 'aggressive authenticity' which was a strength, but needed to be made more palatable or toned down a bit. I think that Change Agenda was reinforced in the second coaching sessions that I had with Madeleine, and it came through that...

...it was about leveraging my strength, which was authenticity, but now doing it with skill. But also, on the other side, grow my emotional antennae, my emotional leadership.

So, while we were closing the coaching sessions, and I asked her, "This has helped me, it's progressed me, it's brought my awareness - heightened awareness, how do I continue this journey to increase my awareness of myself and my journey?" That's when she proposed the coaching diploma. It was one of those things, where I knew "I want to do this!"

For my own leadership today, I still do a lot of "coaching moments". Rather than tell, I will seek to create awareness for them. It's been very telling for me and very revealing to realise that when someone's awareness is heightened, they're able to make their decisions. You don't even know what their solution is, you've just created an environment for them to get a different perspective and a different

angle, and to see things in a different light. That has helped them to be more confident about the decision they're going to make. But the decision is still theirs.

I think my coaching model is heavily built in extracting as much awareness as possible in the session. Therefore, it's very much based on me lifting up that 'mirror' as much as possible, a very big, wide mirror. So, for me, holding up the mirror for the person, during the coaching sessions, so that I really get the highest level of awareness I can bring to them, about their situation, and then to creating that environment where their left side and their right side are brought together. If I can achieve these two things in a coaching session, I'm a very happy person.

When it comes to that point where you realise that this is actually profound, the scientist in me is like, "wait a minute, let me go back and exactly understand how this works". That's when you start asking more questions.

One of the reasons why I'm very committed to doing this on an ongoing basis is that learning process that you go through. It just shows you how as a human being, we're complete, whole, capable, resourceful, and we're able to get on with it - it's true. It's very restoring to me to know that that is true about human beings, that in the right environment and with the right awareness, I am able to find my way. Just give me the right resources, which is all about awareness in coaching.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR DIPLOMA EXPERIENCE?

It was a learning experience; learning about yourself, learning from the other participants, the faculty, the course content. I have been coached by Madeleine, I have been tutored by Sophie and Zia, so I'm looking at the faculty themselves and saying that they're completely different characters, having completely different, in my perspective, takes on this. So that richness is learning from my cohort, learning from my faculty, learning from the content that's in the programme, and then after that, going out into coaching sessions and then you're learning from the client.

The client may be having "AHA!" moments, but through the session, you're also having your own "AHA!" moments and you know, you have to control yourself and keep yourself contained. But it's that richness that just got me into a space where I realised "how much haven't I been exploring and experiencing, as an individual, in terms of how we relate in the leadership journey, in the work environment?"

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF FROM THE DIPLOMA?

The thing about coaching is you watch yourself changing, and then you watch the client changing, within a couple of sessions. For me, as a Coach 'student', for lack of a better word, I was getting mesmerised by the whole process, meanwhile my own client was getting mesmerised by the whole process. It's one of those experiences where "Okay, it works. Hang on, it ACTUALLY works. Wait a minute!" So, I need to document how it works, and I think I had more questions at the end than I had at the beginning.

HOW HAVE YOU USED THE LEARNING FROM DIPLOMA?

I have "coaching moments" in every sphere of my life, at home, at work, in both a professional and social setting. People that know me and have worked with me can attest to this change. I love in life when I have 1 + 1 = 3; when there is a product that is uniquely the output of just the two of us.

I think now, as a calling, every conversation I'm trying to see, how do I come out of this with a unique product that is the combination of two of us.

With my team, I've seen this. Though I'm not coaching them per se, I'm approaching it as a coaching conversation. They come out with outcomes I think is certainly not me, but also not just them, and they can speak to it and say, "This is what WE came up with". You can even listen to the language changes.

Mentoring is usually imparting yourself on the person, not in a negative way, but bringing your experience and knowledge to the person and helping them accelerate. When I started coaching much younger people, it became apparent to me that they were not interested in becoming me or even doing things the way I did. They just wanted help in manoeuvring this jungle that is the corporate world. Therefore, when coaching came along, it sat well with that.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING LEADERS TODAY?

The leadership challenge of the future is understanding your consumer and understanding your people. That's where coaching for me sits very well because it's all about understanding people - the consumer and your own people, and what they bring to the table - the skills that they have, the knowledge that they have, converted from the wider awareness.

Your real, hidden advantage is what can I do, what's the unique proposition of all of these people here, that someone else cannot create somewhere else. I can tell you that is very hard to replicate.

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