

TRUTH EVERYDAY

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LIFE

Networking has worked wonders for UNAA president



Francis Senoga giving a speech after receiving an award as the winner of the 2012 outstanding Ugandans in the diaspora network

IN SUMMARY

FRANCIS SENOGA. Life in the diaspora, many may believe has a lot more to do with hard jobs than following one's dreams. However, for Senoga, it opened him up to a world where he exploited his talent and spread his wings.

For Francis Senoga, life has rotated around the axis of give and receive and not give to receive. After a two hour long interaction with the President Ugandan North American Association (UNAA) at Good African Coffee in Kampala's Lugogo Shopping mall, I cannot help but appreciate the power of networking, ambition and being strategic in life. As he spreads out his arms to usher me in, his soft voice and calculated speech portrays a man with humility laced with outstanding confidence.

A letter saved the day

Describing his family in Mpigi District where he was born in 1970 as, not poor and not rich, he kept dreaming of going to the United States. Even when he tried to flush the American fantasies out of his mind, they stuck there till he finished his A' Level at Nyenga Seminary where he also sat his O'Levels.

While his peers exchanged love letters and shared gossip among schools, for Senoga, "the dream of studying, living and working in the USA lay in the power of communication."

"I always tell Ugandans that establishing international contacts and networks starts with keeping in touch. It is not about the money," he shares with a tone of polished experience.

Senoga grew up in the 1990s when Uganda's communication infrastructure was nothing to write home about. There was no internet, the postal service was annoyingly slow and phones were a reserve for the rich.

But the son of Francis Ntege and Peninah Nansubuga persisted and wrote to Theresa Namusisi, his aunt working with the catering department of University of St. Thomas in Minnesota, USA. He was not even writing much to her, "I just wrote to say hello and update her about Uganda."

Upon release of Senior Six results, the "highly contested nature of Makerere University" opened his eyes to greater challenges overseas. His aunt was not the type to disappoint him when he most needed her. She facilitated his travel to Minnesota and there he was!

America became his oyster

Challenging though it came off to him, America was ready to embrace the ambitious young man, geared up to grab any opportunity that came his way. His aunt being staff at the university entitled him to a partial scholarship and other privileges.

This saw Senoga become among the first Ugandan students admitted to University of St. Thomas where he pursued a degree in Computer Science and later Master’s degree in Software engineering.

“I had several challenges. I was with strange people, speaking in new accents, different food and culture. I had to start life afresh,” he hastily cuts me short when I tease him that all must have come on a silver platter.

“The work load kept coming in. I had to read hard, learn typing and prove myself in this new land. I had to build new networks,” he says nostalgically, preferring to keep his family out of the interview. This saw him get a stint in a computer laboratory as a tutor lecturing trouble shooting, internet surfing and soft ware.

After this, he worked for five years with Minco Products as an engineer and then Paisley Software Company for two years. He passionately reveals his icons as Apple founder, Steve Jobs, and first black US President, Barrack Obama, “for using their talents to better the world and having good taste for incredible products.”

Links that matter

Armed with this, he identified the challenge of Africans forging their way through America and started up a social networking email group in Minnesota. He was only being a curious young man passionate about his computer work and thinking of how it can help fellow Africans. This earned him election as the African Students’ President and later International Students’ Association chief at the university.

In 2005, UNAA went down to Minnesota in their regular state visits and sought a public relations aide (marketer). And Senoga was the natural choice. He had a track record of working with and for Africans. Ugandans later recommended him as Secretary UNAA.

This was his ultimate opportunity to initiate, “groundbreaking changes in UNAA especially in I.T to better processes of uniting Ugandans.” He was the brain behind the online invitations for Ugandans who could now access them from the revamped UNAA website. Through his company ssensoft.com, he hosted the UNAA website and, “improved on the information technology infrastructure.”

He was not sowing political seeds but those who saw potential in him nominated him in 2009 for Vice Presidency of UNAA. In 2011 at Denver in the city of Colorado, he was elected President UNAA where he reports to the Board of trustees, executive and council.

On his Presidency at UNAA at a time it is celebrating its silver jubilee this year, he admits, “I am humbled and honoured but grateful to those who made it possible and proud of what it achieved in 25 years.”

“It is testimony of what Ugandans can do when they get focused,” the winner of the 2012 Ugandan Diaspora Network outstanding Ugandans in the Diaspora award says. He envisions a UNAA committed to the objectives of its founders, “to better the lives of Ugandans in North America and elsewhere, boost trade relations between Uganda and America and promote more social and business networking among Ugandans.”

“We aim at creating a little Uganda inside U.S and bring Uganda to the U.S,” he says. It has not been a smooth ride though for the president as, “balancing family, private work and the association can be a night mare. It’s also challenging, working on consensus building given a people with different agenda, ambitions and backgrounds but I thank God people are always ready to help and are very understanding.”

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