

UNLOCKED

WRITINGS FROM COVID-19 LOCKDOWN



LEKAN OTUFODUNRIN

From the author of
The Journalist You Ought To Be

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OTUFODUNRIN**

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INTRODUCTION

If anyone had predicted that in 2020 there will be a global pandemic that will result in not only death of thousands of persons, but shut down of cities and even countries, he or she would have been dismissed as a big joker.

I recently saw a copy of The World in 2020 published by Economist and expectedly there was no hint of what we are going through presently worldwide. Social and religious gatherings banned, schools shut, workers in private and public organization asked to stay away from offices and work from home where possible.

But for essential services workers like in the health sector and some others most of us were forced to think of how best to have the long hours of the day and nights. Suddenly, it was difficult to differentiate between days of the week and the even the weekends for many due to the lockdown that totally changed our typical day schedule outside our homes.

For me, instead of allowing my usual writings and other online engagements to be locked down by "house arrest" of a kind, I unlocked my mind and went out of my way in some cases to write content for the various platforms I usually write for.

The platforms included the website of the Media Career Development Network which I head, www.mediacareer.org, Opera News where I'm a signed-on writer and The Nation Newspaper for my weekly Sunday column.

I also granted interviews for some broadcast stations and online publications and participated in a Tweet chat.

UNLOCKED is a compilation of my writings which is divided into three sections: Motivation, Interviews, Opinion/Analysis.

Each of the 23 has an introduction that gives an insight on what inspired the publication or other thoughts on them.

The purpose of this E-book is to showcase what I was able to achieve as a journalist despite the lockdown. Apart from its devastating effects on lives, COVID-19 provides us with the opportunity to review the ways we have always done things many things including meeting writing deadlines or generating content.

I appreciate the support of everyone, especially my immediate family, who made it possible to publish this book despite the late decision to do so as part of the celebrations of my 56th birthday.

Most importantly, I'm thankful to God for the grace and wisdom without which the publications might not have been possible.

MOTIVATION

1

Don't Lose Your Momentum



Past publications and documents have a way of reminding one of some events in our career journeys. This piece published on my Facebook page on April 7 was a reflection on some decisions I took years ago and advise for readers.

One of the best things to consider doing during this lockdown or restriction of movement is going through your old book packs and documents.

I do this once in a while and I always find things that remind me of how well I have done in the past and how I have failed to maintain the momentum that could have taken me to greater heights if only I didn't get distracted for whatever reason.

Momentum in this context is defined as the strength or force that something has when it is moving...the strength or force that allows something to continue or to grow stronger or faster as time passes.

Last week's decongestion exercise to get rid of materials that have overstayed their usefulness in my house was another reminder for me of the need to maximize whatever opportunities or ideas we have as we grow in life and career.

I saw some publications of projects that I abandoned when other things came up. I saw the complimentary cards of people I shouldn't have lost touch with. I saw ideas I wanted to work on but never did.

I once launched the Young Journalists Conference and Award and got people and organizations to support us, but the two programs have not been held for years now after three editions.

I looked at the list of past participants in the conference and award and I see accomplished editors, award-winning journalists and other top media professionals.

I saw folders of the National Christian Journalists conference held twice in first two years of Journalists for Christ which we have not held again, and I wondered why it has joined the list of my abandoned good initiatives.

I saw copies of newsletters that transformed careers I no longer publish which I could have moved online if printing cost was the limiting factor.

I saw the complimentary card the current Vice President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo gave me when he invited me to his office while he was a Commissioner in Lagos State to share with him the vision of Journalists for Christ.

I'm not sure I got back to him on what we discussed.

There are always reasons we could come up with why we lost momentum and didn't build on successes recorded, but in some instances, we can't justify our decisions. We sometimes just lost steam and gave up when we shouldn't and moved on.

As you go through your documents, if you find things you should return to after COVID-19, please don't hesitate.

It's never late to get back to building on your past successes and renewing your old relationships. While we must not be tied down to our pasts, we should move on if we must, but be sure it is not for lack of diligence and focus.

Sometimes, what we need to succeed is not starting new things but enhancing what we have always been passionate about in a better way than we used to do them.

What I have realised is that our progress on some initiatives could be slow, but what's important is that we should not lose momentum.

An Indian proverb states that the best time to plant a tree was years ago, but the next best time is now!

2

Even If You're Afraid, Just Do It.



Seeing an edition of New Africa Magazine, I once wrote a cover story for inspired me to write this Facebook post on April 3, 2020 to let my readers know that they can achieve anything if they don't write themselves off before others do.

As we hopefully await the Post- COVID-19 era, the lockdown is a good time to reflect on the things we have done and know the real stuff we are made of instead of undermining our potentials.

Looking through some old publications in my bookshelf, I found this copy of a 2001 edition of New African magazine published in London.

I wrote the cover story titled: Nigeria so far, still far.

As I looked at the copy again, I remembered I was asked to take on the assignment having not written for a similar publication.

All my journalism experience before then have been at The Punch Newspaper, except for one Christian online publication in the United States I freelanced for. When Sunday Dare, the present Sports and Youth Minister recommended me to the editor of the magazine to write the cover story, I was not too sure I could.

Yes, I had been a journalist for about 14 years then, but I considered myself more of a newspaper reporter and not a magazine writer.

Considering the international reputation of the paper, I was a bit reluctant about writing a report that may not be considered good enough.

I tried to ask Dare to get someone else, but he had already given my phone number to the Editor who called me to send my email for the outline of what he wanted.

And so, I had no choice. I took on the assignment deploying all I knew about such magazine reports.

I read the report severely to assure myself it would not be heavily edited.

When I hit the sent button on my email, I still felt somehow if the report will be accepted but stopped worrying and waited for the editor's verdict.

Lo and behold, he replied the next day that he had read my report and it had been sent for publication.

Two weeks later, I was at a vendor's stand in Agege, Lagos when I saw the magazine with my story and the exact headline I suggested.

I read the published report and there were only minor corrections.

Sometimes we think we can't, but the truth is that we just might be able if we do it, even if you are afraid.

Thank you, Honorable Minister Dare, for the opportunity to know what I didn't know about myself.

3

A Journalist's Journalist, a Rare Editor



Otufodunrin (Middle) With Alli And Abuja Bureau Chief, The Nation, Onyedi Ojiabor

In less than an hour after my post titled 'Just Do It, Even If You Are Afraid', one of the foremost investigative journalists in the country and Managing Editor (Northern Operations) of The Nation, Alhaji Yusuf Alli responded with this very humbling tribute about his encounters with me over the years.

You share the same gift of bringing others up like the Minister. If there is any Editor in Nigeria who inspires a reporter to believe in himself or herself, you are No. 1.

I was just a local reporter with THE HERALD in Ilorin in 1994 when there was a vacancy in AM News newspaper.

I have never met you, but you were a passionate reader of THE HERALD. Yet, you spotted me. As the News Editor, you told Senator. Babafemi Ojudu, (the Editor of AM News) that the newspaper already had a candidate in me as the State Correspondent of AM News.

When you invited me to Lagos, you neither collected any application nor interviewed me. You asked: "Will you like to go back to Ilorin today?" I said "Yes". While we were talking, Editor Ojudu came in and you simply said: "This is the correspondent for Kwara State."

Ojudu said: "The man you have talked about so much. Okay, he will get his letter. No problem." Before I left, you took me to Mr Bayo Onanuga (the immediate past MD of News Agency of Nigeria), who shook my hand and said: "we expect the best from you." In less than 40 minutes, I got a job, I returned to Ilorin. We did not meet again, you never asked for any favour.

Again, in September 1995, after the de-proscription of THE PUNCH by the military junta of the late Head of State, Gen. Sani Abacha, there was a vacancy in Kwara State office of the newspaper.

As the Group News Editor, I was your natural choice for the job as a State Correspondent. You kept on begging me to take the offer from September 1995 to May 27th 1996 when you called me on the phone (landline as it were).

You said: "Today is the last day, why will you not take this job? I have never known you but I believe in you. If you refused this offer, you would have disappointed me." I loved the Guerrilla Journalism in AM NEWS / THE NEWS and TEMPO so much because we were peppering the military invincibly.

I reluctantly agreed and you waited by the Fax machine to collect my credentials. Two days after, I was at THE PUNCH office, Onipetesi in Mangoro part of Ikeja.

Interestingly, I could not recognize you and you couldn't too. I met you to ask of Mr. Otufodunrin.

You looked at me and instinctively, you asked: "Is this Yusuf Alli?" I said, "Yes sir."

You broke all protocols and took me to Editor Tunji Adegboyega (Cyclone), who only asked: "Is this our man from Kwara State? Congratulations." No interview. About 10 minutes after, I was on my way to Ilorin.

I got my letter of appointment on May 29, 1996, but effective from June 1, 1996. A few days after, I went to the newsstand to read the sad news on the front page of THE GUARDIAN that " AM NEWS is rested"

A military administrator was happy I had lost my job but he was surprised to read my by-line in THE PUNCH the next day. His joy was short-lived.

The rest is history.

In the same PUNCH, God used you and others to make me to be one of the best. I won many awards as the reporter of the week, the reporter of the month countless times, the Best Staff of the Year and I later became Chief Correspondent; Assistant Editor; Abuja Bureau Chief; Deputy Editor(THE PUNCH) ; SATURDAY PUNCH Editor; Acting Editor, SUNDAY PUNCH; Editor, THE PUNCH(the ultimate prize a journalist could earn); and the Pioneer Editor, Special Investigation Desk (whatever this meant I never knew because I was asked to go and write my schedule of work after being 'promoted' to this level).

I lived and dreamt of THE PUNCH because you and others were there for me.

When you insisted that I must join PUNCH NIGERIA LIMITED, I did not know God was going to use you to fulfill my destiny.

You are a unique and a detribalised Nigerian, a journalist's journalist, a rare Editor, a motivator, a mentor and a good Christian who lives up to the tenets of the religion. You combine faith in God and service to humanity.

When you later came up with Journalists for Christ platform, I was distributing its magazine for you.

At a point, you were surprised a Muslim could engage in such. I told you: "God is one."

You drive a reporter with courtesy to get scoops. I will forever cherish you. If there is a good reporter in Sambisa Forest, I know you will fish him out. I know your children and children's children will reap the fruits of your milk of kindness. Thanks, my friend, my mentor and my eternal boss.

4

COVID -19: How to Enhance Your Career While At Home



Working fully from home was a new experience for many workers, but it also provided the opportunity for many who have always wanted time to review their careers and take necessary decision to do what they should have done before now.

This piece in Opera on March 23 was targeted at professionals who I wanted to take advantage of the situation they have found themselves instead of lamenting about it.

On Sunday, the Lagos State Government announced that its civil servants on level 1-12 should stay away from work for the next two weeks in the first instance as part of measures to control the spread of the Coronavirus in the state.

Some other states have earlier taken a similar decision along with that of the federal government ordering the shutting of all schools. Some private organizations have also opted for their workers to work from home in accordance with observing social distance which is one of the ways to reduce human contacts through which the virus is being spread.

Even youth corps members who were in the orientation camps across the country were asked to return home for now until they are recalled.

So, as it is, many workers and professionals are on holidays somehow. Even those who are to work from home, may not have much to do like if they are in the office.

However, instead of switching to the endless relaxing mode, due to the stay-home directive, this is one of the best times for professionals to review their career and take some decisions that can enhance their skills and growth in whatever they do.

The circumstance that warranted the 'holiday' which is the growing number of people who have developed the symptoms of the disease and tested positive is worrisome, but the best anyone can do in this instance is to stay home instead of embarking on unnecessary trips and take precautions that can make them healthy and safe from the infection that could harm their careers. Being successful in one's career requires being healthy which should not be taken for granted.

This is the time to take stock of what one wants to achieve this year in any area of endeavor and know the progress made and what needs to be done to make this year career goals fulfilling one.

Be honest with your career review and set new timeline if necessary considering the reality of the disruption caused by the pandemic and its likely consequences on the economy.

While the stay-home order lasts, outline outstanding things you need to do and make some a priority to be achieved before full work resumes. You must have things accomplished during this period. It could be a major project which you have been procrastinating on due to having to go to work daily.

Wake up as early as possible, even if it's not like when you have to beat the early morning traffic and prepare to 'work' on your career and other targets.

Working from home requires some technical skills if you must stay in touch with your office on various platforms and you must be able to engage online or through any other digital tools.

If there are skills you don't have and which you have been planning to learn, this may be the opportunity to learn them possibly online or any training with organization.

It is also necessary to know what services you can provide at this period and offer them to enhance your expertise or earn extra income.

There are lots of short online courses for professionals to take that can enhance their careers that no one should utilise this period to take and earn necessarily certification and knowledge.

Sooner or later, the Coronavirus siege will be over and it will be time to count the cost and gains and only those who made the best of the free time they had will have a good story to tell.

5

How to Keep Your Job in Crisis Time And After



One of the projections of the likely fallouts of the Coronavirus crisis is that some workers may not be reabsorbed by their employers for various reasons. To help many who may not know the right way to remain relevant why working for their companies from home and review their careers to position them for possible other jobs or career move, I wrote this piece published in Opera on March 26.

Early this week, I got an invitation to participate in a webinar by a *Life After Journalism* organization in United States on how "How Do Journalists Explore a New Career in the Current COVID-19 Climate?"

Against the background of the major challenges the media is going through due to the digital disruption of the industry and other factors before the Coronavirus pandemic and now that some companies are finding it to operate maximally, the webinar was to focus on job new options for journalists to utilize the skills they have acquired over the years in other ways than they are used to.

Specifically, the discussion was to be on: What journalists should be thinking and doing right now and How journalists can plan their future so as to have more career options – in spite of this pandemic!

Unfortunately, I was not able to participate in the discussion due to a development that prevented me from linking up, but I have a colleague who joined from whom I will get the highlights.

It was indeed thoughtful of the founder of the group Theola DeBose to initiate the webinar at a time like this when journalists, like other professionals, must be thinking of what future awaits them when the Coronavirus crisis is over.

Some companies are already cutting down on the number of their staff and salaries are not guaranteed even in government agencies. Without the government's support, some sectors may experience a major crash and consequently lay off staff.

So, to keep your job now and after, there are a number of options to consider and prepare for. The first thing is to pay attention to how the crisis is affecting the industry you are in and particularly the company you work in. The pattern of layoffs and retention of staff should give you an idea of how crucial your skill is and how valuable you are to the company.

This should help you to start thinking of how long you may retain your present job even if the decisions taken on staffing is for now temporary.

What is certain is that only a few companies and organizations will come out of this crisis unaffected. They will learn a number of new ways of running their operations that will define their future operations.

Having known how you possibly rank in your company's operational rating; the second consideration should be deciding what options are open to you in terms of getting another job or planning a career change if it becomes necessary to keep earning a living.

Some companies may eventually shut down or scale down operations, but new ones will also come up with new concepts to cater for new realities of the post-Coronavirus times. Who says you should not be the one to come up with new concepts in your industry if you are not too focused on the crisis instead of thinking of new opportunities the situation is throwing up.

Presently there are some skills in high demands like digital skills to be able to work remotely or offer online support services which every professional should master or acquire to remain relevant in your career. Instead of idling at home, this is the time to take online courses to enhance your skills or learn others that can make you almost indispensable.

Despite the restriction of movements and lockdown in some countries there are essential services still being paid for and only those who offer them can profit from the situation.

Lastly, notwithstanding what you presently do, this is when to consider other skills you have that can give you the opportunity to earn extra income.

6

WHY YOU NEED REGULAR CAREER CHECK-UP



The first area of focus I signed on to write for Opera.com was Career which is my area of expertise based on my work as a media career development specialist.

However, it turned out that my career articles usually attract very few clicks. I soon wrote more of Politics, Policies and Religion which earned me high clicks that guaranteed me good payment. Occasionally I still get back to write about career and this piece was one of the three or four, I wrote during the lockdown. It didn't matter if many people did not read them, I know the few who did and others who may do latter will find it helpful.

Check-up is usually associated with health. To stay healthy and avoid cases of sudden death, it's usually advisable for people to do a yearly medical check-up and take necessary precautions. Just like medical check-up is necessary for healthy living, regular career check-up is required for any professional that wants to achieve his or her career goals and don't want to have any regrets later in life when it may be too late.

While some are lucky to embark on the career they set out to have after graduating from higher institutions, others veer off into others for various reasons.

Whatever career one settles for, it is important to know all that is required to make a success of it at various stages.

Every profession has standard qualifications which must be acquired by practitioners. So, the first check is to be sure you have the right qualifications required for your level. If anything has been preventing you from taking the required qualification examination, you have to be determined to find the time to do it.

Unless you do, you stand the chance of not getting to the required level commensurate with your years of practice. There are companies that will never employ or promote you if you don't have necessary professional certification.

Secondly, you might have been practising a profession for long, but there must come a point when you need to assure yourself that you are doing what you want to continue to do or decide to change to any other one. There are people in professions they don't like, but stay on for some economic reasons.

If you confirm that you are satisfied with the profession you are in, all you need is to find other ways of enhancing your skills, if not, no matter how hard you try, it may be difficult to excel.

Thirdly, even when you like the career you are pursuing, you need to get the necessary training as an when due, ensure that you go for regular training including seminars, conferences to have updated knowledge in your field of endeavours. It will also be necessary to be registered members of the professional association of your profession.

Regular interaction and networking with your professional colleagues will ensure you get the necessary opportunities that can enhance your career.

Fourthly, where your work is very important for your career progress. So, it will be necessary to ensure that you are either employed in a company organization that can ensure your professional desires or have your own company that can compete with the top one in your sectors.

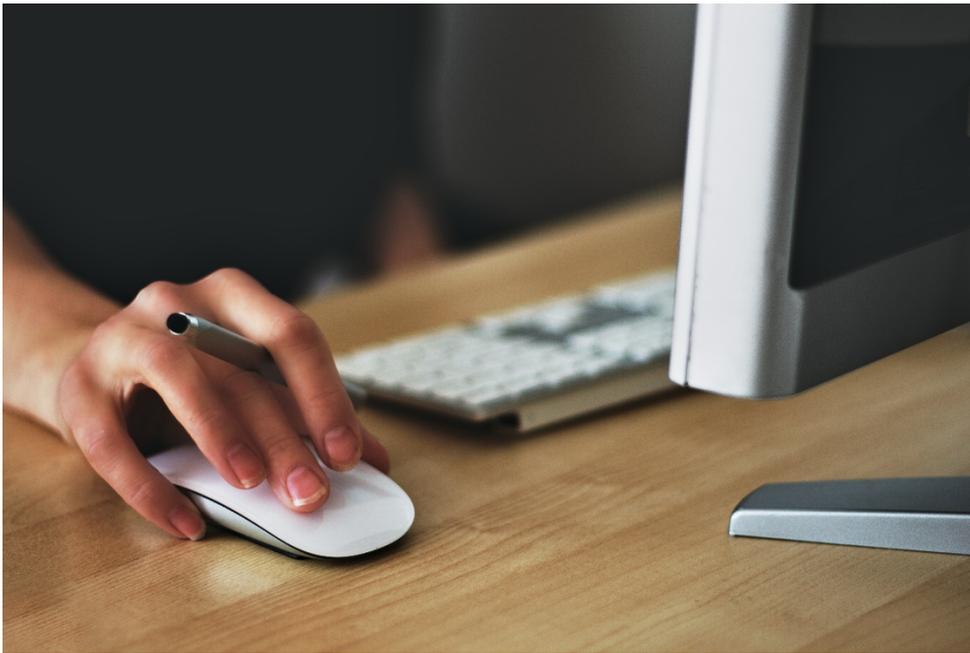
For those employed, if the company where you work does not have opportunities for career progression, you need to plan how to move on to a better place. The job search has to be done carefully to ensure that while you are planning to get an alternative, you remain as productive where you are.

Lastly, don't hesitate to get career guidance from professional human resources experts and career development specialist who may help you with dispassionate advice to ensure you don't make the wrong career move.

Whatever advice you get like medical prescription during medical check-up must be taken seriously to ensure that you have a successful career.

7

Testimony: Miraculous website clicks, much more than I needed.



There are many things we do and happen to us that we regard as routine, but some are clearly extraordinary that we must not but share the testimony to help others appreciate our God can turn the seemingly impossible situation around for our good.

This testimony originally shared in the closed Journalists for Christ WhatsApp group (which explains why some names known to members were mentioned) is self-explanatory. Read the short and long version to really appreciate what God can do, even for a writer!

Short version:

I needed about 15,000 website clicks to get the required 60,000 clicks for the stories I write for a platform. Without the minimum clicks, I would get half payment or something less.

With four days to the end of the month last Monday and having written 14 stories already out of the minimum 15 required, I wrote a story from the presidential broadcast on Monday and miraculously got 60,107 additional clicks.

To God be the glory.

Long version (The full version with all the untold story in the short version)

With over thirty years of journalism experience, there are some editorial accomplishments that should not matter much to me again.

But I strongly believe in acknowledging the almighty God who is really the one that makes things, however little as they may seem, possible, and not our skills which can fail us when we least expect.

Whatever our achievements are in life and career, we must always remember that we are what we are by the grace of the almighty God.

So much for the sermon. Here is the testimony. It's a bit long, but you will enjoy it. Trust me and be... (will tell you what I want to write in the space later)

I write for an online platform and based on a new two-month contract with the organisation, I'm supposed to write at least 15 stories or articles in a month to earn an agreed fee. How much? Don't bother. It's now almost a fourth of what it was initially.

Based on the contract, it's not enough to write a minimum of 15 stories, they must attract 60,000 readers clicks, not impressions. Impressions are the number of people who saw the stories and probably because they are minding their data did not click and just said in their mind "well done."

Or if you are like someone I won't mention said before he/she checked another page "I thought this man has retired *ni*, why is he still writing all these *small small* stories. It is well"

Only the clicks to read counts, not just seeing the stories. Impression na dash. So next time you see my stories, click, share, comment and support my writing ministry. Una hear. After all what are we brothers and sisters for? No be only for mouth, na for clicks.

Sorry I digressed. Let me finish my long story before Dayo takes the microphone from me and call the next person. It's supposed to be once I was blind, now I can see. Tell us the koko.

Okay. So if I don't get up to 60,000 clicks, I would be paid the rate for those who have no contract with the company. You won't even pray for your enemy to earn that rate. I did during the month

before the first contract was renewed and earned about N2,500 (not 250k, Two five) for more than ten stories with more than 60,000 clicks.

If I write up to 15 stories and don't get up to 60,000 clicks I will be paid only half of the fees. If I fail to write up to 15 stories, I will not be paid at all! Na so. Thank God for Lawyers who know how to craft agreements. Abi.

Fast forward. To cut the long story short. As of Monday night, four days to the end of the month, I had written 14 stories and got about 45,000 clicks. But for two stories about Bishop Oyedepo who has been a bit critical of the total lockdown lasting for too long, I would not have had more than 5,000 clicks.

All the other stories were just having 30, 40, 350, and even 10 clicks pere as I watched my chances of getting full payment slip away. Did I pray about the situation? Don't let me lie, I didn't. It seems like a lost case which I should not bother God with. But I guess my wife was. She knows the implication of half payment. Please don't speculate. If you know, you know. Madam Cokey no be so?

However, something kept telling me a miracle can still happen. Really, I said as I weakly whispered "It's okay o" to myself so that my wife will not ask me about it.

So I decided to take my last chance with the Presidential broadcast. An hour before the broadcast, I saw an interesting story on the Facebook wall of a veteran judicial journalist, Mr. Richard Akinola's about how an armed robber was once buried alive because though he had been certified dead by doctors who had left the firing range of the public execution during the military era, he 'woke up' at the point of putting him in the coffin and even asked for water to drink! (Wonders shall never end, *e don dey tey tey*)

The confused mortuary attendants asked the Policemen around to help shoot him dead, but they declined saying it's the job of the soldiers who had left to shoot to kill, theirs is to ensure security at the venue.

Left with no option, the attendants forced the body of the robber into the coffin and packed it along with that of others for burial. Chikena. It's the kind of story that can earn over the 15,000 clicks on the platform I write for.

I quickly, this time prayerfully, sat down to write the story to upload before those small citizen wetin (journalists? No they are not) see the story and write before I do. As I completed the story and checked the comments of the post to get some additional quotes, lo and behold I saw one comment I had to read twice to be sure what I was reading "Daddy Richard, sorry I was desperate for stories. I re-wrote your recollection as a story for a platform, here is the link". I will rather not say what the devil was asking me to say about this girl. It is well.

So when will this so-called testimony end?

Here it is: I sat down to write a story from the broadcast about the angle of who must have been responsible for leaking of the speech by President Buhari and uploaded before someone else will do again. Someone actually did a small version on another platform which I saw when I wanted to check one comment by another journalist on the issue on Twitter before.

Before my village people do their thing again. I uploaded the story and shockingly it moved from Pending to Test Online to Published within 15 minutes. Normally it takes hours sometimes. I have had some that took more than 12 hours to get published.

I refreshed after about ten minutes and saw 22 clicks. The last time I saw that number of clicks before sleeping, it didn't go beyond 25 till date.

Anyway, God is mightier than village people. As at the time I reluctantly ended typing this testimony by 7 pm on Tuesday, so that I won't take too much of your time, God has shot up the clicks to 60,107 for just one story. 107 more than the 60,000 required for a minimum of 15 stories.

Let somebody shout Hallelujah. We serve a God who can do exceeding and abundantly beyond what we can think of imagine.

8

Idle Thoughts of A ‘Locked down’ Editor



When President Muhammadu Buhari announced the two weeks extension of the lockdown in Lagos, Ogun states and the Federal Capital Territory, I wasn't sure how to react to it. Be happy or be sad? However, one thing I knew was there was nothing I could do about the extension but make the best use of the days as I did with the first two weeks.

In a rather deliberate long winding and maybe hilarious style, I enumerated the things we and others achieved working remotely in the first two weeks and what is possible the two extra weeks that ended up being three. Have fun reading this piece shared with our Journalists for Christ WhatsApp group.

Two More Weeks of Lockdown?

Hmmmmmm!

I'm trying to take a deep breath.

Is this for real?

Yes, it seems, my mind tells me.

No, not it seems, it has been declared so by the President and Commander in Chief who even announced that he has signed the Quarantine Law which he says will be released soon.

Who knows what is contained in the law?

Maybe questioning the need for the extension in one's mind is even an offence punishable by whatever.

So why should I worry about what I can't do anything about?
I survived the first two weeks, why won't I survive the next two.

Something deep in me says there are things I can achieve during the new extension.
Mediacareer.org has been running almost seamlessly with exclusive news and interviews we didn't have even when there was no lockdown.

The traffic of the website has been at all-time high with what we have been doing.

I see brother Gbenga of ChurchTimes Nigeria churching out endless series of Coronavirus related interviews with Pastors. He must have said to himself if the Pastors can run online Church what stops me from keeping my online platform going.
14 Fadare Workstation group on WhatsApp has kept all the staff and Associates of our Ogba office busy as if we are not part of the lockdown.

@Dayojfc @Oyinlola Awonuga @Abatan and our one and only consultant @Sanmi know they should get and give daily updates on our various outstanding projects they are working on.

Even though @Sanmi complains the children have been disturbing him without mentioning our madam @Funmi Falobi (or vice versa) he had no choice but to send the fully reviewed copy of our JFC Gender Audit with all necessary suggestions. He must be going through our IDP project sent in last week. He works for IPC, I know but the Lord is the Ijesha man.

@Dayojfc Not even fever treatment could keep him down. I had to call him to quickly proofread an NUJ story on our website which I got complaints about some errors I made in the copy.

So many people were reading the story about media houses owing journalists and we needed to properly edit it before people start wondering what kind of media training organization we are. I

know of a webinar he jointly organized from his sickbed before I threatened to call Sanwo-Olu's men to come and take him for supervised quarantine rest.

@Oyinlola Awonuga and @funto have been getting prompts from me regularly about one thing or the other to do like the profiles of Nigerians who died abroad due to Coronavirus.

@Abatan T has kept watch on a book project we are working on for one big madam and another coding work for a PhD project.

Mrs Otufodunrin has been complaining that one Mr. Lekan in her house has been working as if he is still a staff of The Nation. Lockdown or no lockdown, the house budget has however not shutdown. She is even asking for stockpiling. Trust women.

Who did I leave out? God knows you. Those I have been tapping their brains for one idea or the other. Palliatives are on the way. Trust me even if you cannot trust you know who in where is that place around the Rock (Don't risk allowing your imagination to run wide). Remember the Quarantine Law.

Less I forget @NikePoly2 has been running WhatsApp trainings like no woman's business (it's supposed to be man's abi) Don't worry we are gender-friendly here.

Our CeeHope Madam @ Betty2 and co (I didn't mention the sister whose name starts with B (ask @DavidLawalNew) for who she is, have been reaching out to vulnerable children and women (forget about that Humanitarian madam that has allegedly or reportedly reached how many homes with how much millions.) nationwide from one flat in Dideolu Estate. There is God o.

The second Tweet Chat is about to hold. God helps you if the @Betty 2 wants you to do something for her now. Don't bother to give the corona excuse. Where were you when the anointing for 'online everything' was being distributed.

@Gbemile 2 Tell them about the online lectures at NIJ. How do you teach practical photography online? God help you and your students

Finally final, what was I trying to say before I allowed my editorial mind to be *coronised*; Two weeks, like one Otta Bishop usually say, Birthday Lady Aunty Kate: Too what?

You can get busy in the lockdown.

Simply reorder your priorities. Bring forward what is doable now and stop worrying about those you can't do when there is restriction.

I know many who have before now been saying if only I have two free weeks to write, I would have written my book, project, or done whatever.

Oya now like the Daily Showers madam (I didn't mention names including UC) will say here is the time you have been praying for.

Don't you believe in miracle again? God has answered your prayers.

I can't wait to hear your testimonies when all crisis is over.
Let somebody shout Hallelujah!

Just imagine what Corona holiday can do to an editor.
It is well.

9

What Winning Awards Can Do For Your Career?



On the last but one day of the lockdown which I suddenly had an urge to check books in one of my shelves and selected three old magazines to read. One was the 2005 program for the rested CNN/Multichoice African Journalists Award event in Nairobi.

I read the impact of the award on the careers of past winners of the program and was inspired to write the article below to particularly journalists who have never taking applying for such awards as seriously as they should.

When the founder of the CNN/Multichoice African Journalist Award Edward Boateng asked Joana Mantey of Ghana if she knew what winning the award will do her career, she had no immediate answer.

With no answer forthcoming from Mantey, Boateng responded "It will open doors"

Doors indeed opened for Mantey as she got selected for the Hubert Humphrey Fellowship in the US after emerging as the first winner of the continental award.

According to Mantey in an article she contributed to in the program of the 2006 edition of the award; her selection for the fellowship was largely influenced by the CNN/Multichoice award.

The fellowship gave her an opportunity to pursue course work at the University of Maryland, USA.

"I also interact with season journalists and other notable professionals. I got a chance to sharpen my skills and build on my leadership skills"

Apart from Mantey, some other previous winner of the award got opportunities to further their education.

They include Declan Okpalaeke of Nigeria who won the Nieman Fellowship in Harvard University, Manfred Ashiboe-Mensah, Ghana for MA in Ohio University, Kim Cloete, South Africa - Nieman Fellowship, Harvard University and Wanja Githinji, Kenya who was Knight Fellow at Stanford University.

Angelo Kinyua of Kenya who won the 2005 edition said "being in the finalists' program was a whole new experience to him.

"I got to meet fellow journalists; top businessmen and top media executives and this helped me form a whole new network of contacts. That is invaluable, to say the least "he explained.

Beyond personal gains, Kinyua said, "People have stopped me in the streets to congratulate me and tell me that I am a source of inspiration to young people and also to African journalism "

Sarah Kimani from Kenya winner of the 2005 Environment Award won a five-month fellowship at the American University of Paris by virtue of winning the general news Television Award in 2004.

"In five months that I was there, they organized three workshops where I had to talk about what it takes to win the prestigious award. A lot of journalism students also invited me in their classes to tell them about journalism in Africa and the award.

"The best and the most flattering of my experience in Paris as a " CNN Ambassador " was when I was called upon to give a talk alongside CNN's Jim Bitterman, his wife Pat Thomson and two other former senior editors from Time Magazine, " Kimai recalled.

For Ntai Bagshaw from Nigeria who won the 2005 Economics and Business Award, there comes a point in a man's life when he believes he has achieved a remarkable feat.

"For me, winning the award's Economy and Business Category is one," Bagshaw said.

INTERVIEWS

10

‘COVID-19: JOURNALISTS SHOULD PRACTICE WHAT THEY ARE REPORTING’

My Media Career Development Network office is in the office complex of the Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS).

While thinking of content to help journalists know how to better report about COVID-19, I remembered that JAAIDS Executive Director, Olayide Akanni was the right person to speak with.

With her years of work experience in reporting and leading advocacy campaigns against HIV and AIDS makes, I asked for an online interview and she eventually sent me the detailed responses published on April 2, 2020, in

www.mediareer.org

Executive Director of Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS), Olayide Akanni in this interview speaks media coverage of COVID-19 in Nigeria and other issues on the pandemic.

The Coronavirus seems to have caught everyone unawareness including the media. What are the main issues you think the media should be looking out for to report?

The media should be focusing on the following things:

Facts about COVID 19 – signs, symptoms, modes of transmission, preventive measures and how individuals can take responsibility for their health, information about testing centers and contacts and how people can access testing services if they feel they are at risk or have some of the identified symptoms; current situation (Global and country/context-specific information about what is driving the epidemic, progress reports (what is working well / success stories); gaps.

Figures- Up to date data/ trends of the epidemic

Human interest stories – highlighting experiences of survivors and lessons learnt.

The Media also needs help to counter the myths, misconceptions and negative information, and unfounded cure claims.

The stigma associated with COVID 19 that survivors who have to be isolated may encounter and the fact that it's not a death sentence also has to be well covered.

Is the Nigerian media getting the necessary information on the infection, treatment and impact of the virus in the country?

It depends on individual journalists and where they are in terms of leveraging technology given that there are now constraints that the epidemic is imposing on the traditional ways through which journalists have been gathering information (in cities where the Government has imposed restrictions on movement and public gatherings; holding a press briefing where experts are brought to the field may not be doable; but a journalist who follows the health minister, NCDC, or a health commissioner on Twitter may readily access information than others who don't.

There are also infrastructural challenges that could limit journalists per time. Last week, I attended a Virtual Media interaction with the Lagos State Commissioner for Health in which he responded to questions from journalists, CSOs and stakeholders on providing an overview of the response in the State; several journalists couldn't join because of poor internet connectivity; given the Commissioner's schedule, he couldn't respond to all questions and other issues.

But again, access to that information happened because a group identified the need, convened that platform for interaction and reached out to a Commissioner who was willing and tech-savvy. What happens in states where officials in charge of the COVID 19 response don't even have the skills and are not leveraging technology to respond to the public? This pandemic is teaching us to think on our feet and think differently.

[READ ALSO: HOW TO GET COVID-19 FUND FOR JOURNALISTS, MEDIA](#)

Are you satisfied with terms like scourge, plague and others used in reporting about the situation in the country?

Sadly, there is already enough fear about COVID-19 in the minds of the average individual out there and these terms help to amplify that. I recall a conversation with a friend some days ago, she complained that the regular news and updates on COVID-19 on a WhatsApp group we belong to was scary and a bit too much, but it's equally important to put the information out there as there are still many naysayers out there who think COVID-19 doesn't even exist.

Maintaining the delicate balance between providing factual information that demystifies COVID-19 in a non-stigmatising manner that helps the public understand the magnitude of the problem so that they take personal responsibility for protecting themselves is critical.

Is there hope that our confirmed cases will not spike like some countries considering our large population?

As an Optimist, I really and truly hope so. The reality, however, is that we are seeing rising cases because more people are able to access tests in the major cities. Yet, many more people who may have been exposed are not even aware they have been exposed and do not even have access to the tests. So, we really can't quantify the magnitude of the problem.

Another key issue is that as a people we have not fully come to understand the import of social distancing which countries who have succeeded in achieving a flattening of the epidemic have adopted

Apart from the lockdown happening in a few proactive states, many people across the country are still moving around, large gatherings still occur like its business as usual. Enforcement of these principles of social distancing is key if we want to see a radical change and downward trend in the epidemic.

The media needs to help educate the public on why social distancing is critical now. We really can't afford to have an increasing number of cases as the system and our healthcare workers are already bearing a huge burden. On the flip side, many are asking, so if we sit at home, what do we eat? These are valid questions within our country context and governments at all levels. Well-meaning individuals, religious institutions and private sector corporate bodies need to rise up to this occasion to provide support and basic items, food supplies to individuals and families and the most vulnerable in our communities at this critical time.

READ ALSO: [**COVID-19 ANGLES FOR BEATS JOURNALISTS COVER APART FROM HEALTH**](#)

What is your advice for journalists covering the pandemic to stay safe?

My advice to journalists covering at this time is to practice what you preach. If you're educating and encouraging the public to adhere strictly to preventive measures, please do the same to protect you and your loved ones. Don't try to be Superman or Voltron (the defender of the Universe)

Leverage on technology and follow important sources of information – World Health Organisation as well as relevant sources at National Level sources, Ministry of Health, NCDC, and Health Commissioners to get timely updated information. There are many new things to learn about COVID-19 every day.

Realise you are not immune – (a few international journalists in major international media have also tested positive in the course of their work) if you need to self-isolate do so and get tested if you suspect that you may be at risk or have symptoms.

Stay safe, Stay safe: Stay safe, it's not a cliché and cannot be overemphasized.

11

COVID-19: More reporting options for journalists

Ogechi Onuoha who also used to work for Journalists Against AIDS and is still involved in health communication was another person I reached out to for her suggestions or issues reporters should be paying attention to in reporting about COVID-19.

I sent the questions on WhatsApp and she got back with the response published on April 6, 2020

Ogechi Onuoha, Head, Marketing and Corporate Communications, Marie Stopes who was former Programme Officer at Journalists Against AIDS (JAAIDS) reviews media coverage of COVID-19 in Nigeria and suggests more coverage options and responses to the pandemic.

The Coronavirus seems to have caught everyone unawareness including the media. What are the main issues you think the media should be looking out for to report?

I think the media is doing a good job reporting about the pandemic, cases, the updates from state and national government especially the states with cases.

What is your assessment of media coverage in Nigeria so far and what else should the media do to help curb the spread?

What they can do better is to look beyond COVID 19 and do analytical reviews of the COVID 19 lockdown and the impact on unplanned pregnancies linking it to maternal mortality post-COVID lockdown. Also mental healthcare of citizens remaining indoors for protracted periods. They could link COVID to the economy and the unemployment post COVID.

Across these proposed topics of analytical reviews, the media can speak with broader stakeholders, get expert advice that can inform the government.

READ ALSO: [WOLE SOYINKA CENTRE LAUNCHES COVID-19 REALITY PROJECT](#)

Are you satisfied with terms like scourge, plague etc. used in reporting about the situation in the country?

Rather than use scourge and other terms like it, the media can just call it COVID 19 pandemic.

Are you satisfied with the government responses at federal and state levels?

Government response at federal and Lagos state is not bad. I see coordination. It can be better but right now, it is not bad. Across some states, the response can get better with more thought-through actions, not those inspired by fear.

Is there hope that our confirmed cases will not spike like some countries considering our large population?

The hope of cases not spiking is determined by the handling and compliance to lockdown, social distancing and hygiene guidelines by all Nigerians.

If we get it right now and keep our borders closed we can get out of the woods soon. But if not, with the rainy season setting in, we may have more cases due to compromised respiratory challenges that come with the rainy season.

12

‘HOW WE HELD IMPACTFUL ONLINE TRAINING DURING THE LOCKDOWN’

I participated in one of the series of online training on WhatsApp by NixxHash Communications headed by Adenike Ashgbon who interned with me in The Nation when I edited the Sunday paper. I was very impressed by her efforts and innovative way of providing training opportunities during the lockdown and send her questions for an online interview. Her responses are published in this interview in www.mediacareer.ng.org on April 21, 2020.

Adenike Fagbemi, a brand strategist at NixxHash Communications, media consultant, content specialist and journalist in this online interview with Lekan Otufodunrin, shares her experience of organising very successful online training during the lockdown over the COVID-19.

What informed your decision to organise a series of online training during this lockdown?

The disruption happened and we needed to set out, keep giving value and also nurture new prospects that can pay for the services we render irrespective of their size.

As long as they are in business, how long they have been in business wasn't the deal for us, how well they can function while doing their business was.

Nobody is happy about this pandemic. Everyone is affected. In this part of the world that we operate, it's fair enough and awesome some people who had tested positive are recovering and getting discharged. But that doesn't stop the care and panic, it only reduced it.

At the same time, business-minded people are still finding it hard to wrap their heads around what works and what doesn't. What needs to be dropped and what needs to be improved. Then, I thought within myself, be an answer to some set of people's prayer.

I am having at the back of my mind that not everybody is my customer. You win some, you lose some. But everybody loves VALUE. So I sold Value to them.

I spoke to my friends. Again, roll with people who believe in you. Not everybody would. But, those that do, hold on to them! I reached out to them, 'guy, I want to do a Marathon Training for Business Owners, Small Medium Enterprise majorly... And I want it to be a Free own'.

At that time, I wasn't thinking or hoping for an extension of the Stay At Home Policy. I wanted to just give value. Meet new people, see things through their eyes, have them on my contact list and then retain them.

My organisation, [NixxHash Communications](#) is a growing one, we offer SERVICES, not PRODUCT, but, I wanted to create a Product out of our Services so, I packaged a FREE training and called it Brand Boost Training For 10 days.

I didn't have to read a book or anybody's theory to know that it will fly! Everyone loves free things and now that we have on paper some worthy idea, who says engaging people productively is a crime?

Then, I got to it. My awesome and amazing friends were more than pleased to be part of it. I was extremely pleased too.

What they stand to gain?! Nothing... But giving value and positioning themselves in the heart of those to be trained.

What have been the focus of the various training and how easy was it getting the facilitators and participants?

They've been diverse. Now, for the first ten days, I took turns to sample business owners' opinion on what kind of training they would love to have if given the chance to.

Before now, we have held two seasons of training on How Business Owners Can Boost Their Brands Using Social Media.

We already have a Community of Business Owners and their database we have worked with and have either patronized or consulted from us for free or even liked and commented on our activities on social media. So I threw it open there.

Some chose proposal writings, some How to source for loans, some How to even open and manage something as small as Facebook, some How to do basic highlight on Instagram and some How to get customers of course!

This got me thinking!

Immediately, I started thinking of topics, started brainstorming! It was hard seriously. I ran the topics by my friends who ended up as facilitators and we tweaked and tweaked till we eventually settled for the ones we explored.

I asked for their nice-looking photos, I sent all content to a part-time staff of mine to design and we had the final piece.

I had to rush all of that because if I didn't, I won't achieve one per cent of the things we did. If I waited one or two more seconds, everything will 'enter voicemail'

I went to work immediately I heard the voice! That's the gospel truth.

Okay, so a quick one, there is one thing about news, once it contains or carries value back up with a FREE entry, it will travel!

I received messages from the Far North to Far America, even Australia and the village in Osun. All wanted to join! Both well-structured and those not structured business owners.

I didn't even promote the fliers as I should on social media but just within a network and I must say the free sessions were awesome. The testimonials are heartwarming and the prayers are beyond what I can explain.

The Coaches were simply selfless and there's nothing more to say. I didn't give them a dime for those free sessions, but I later realised that one can only get such favour from people who are truly like minds.

What community do you belong? Are you the brightest in the room? Then, relocate. You should be among people who know what you don't know. This is not motivational talk. It's the truth!

In the process, I also realise that our darkest nights births our brightest stars. I have read that somewhere sometimes ago, not sure where but. This disruption gave me a practical view of it.

Poor internet connection is usually an excuse for many not to participate in online training. How did you and your participants cope with this challenge?

We had our training on WhatsApp. Not Telegram, not Zoom, not Facebook Live, not IG Live.

Just WhatsApp. We knew from the onset we don't want a crowd. So we had a limit – 250/260. And that was fine for us. Remember not everyone would want to be in every class, so we created different class groups for each class and shared the link to the next class after the class before it finishes its

session. Like a baton exchange sort of style. If participants want to be in that class they click a link and migrate. Simple.

In some cases, the classes are closed so there won't be distractions until after the Coach is done with his or her session and wants to take questions, while in some classes, the coach leaves it open but send a warning signal to those that might want to distract during her session. So everyone is aware there are set rules.

Sure some participants and even coaches had internet issues, but once they are up, they are up! Once I notice a coach is silent for too long, I put a call through to know what the problem is. If it is network issues or something else, I convey it to the class. So everyone is on the same page.

These were in the free classes. I never imagined that the stay at home would be extended. But when it happened, we rolled out classes for another 10days. This time around paid for classes. Prices ranging from N1000 to N3000 per class.

We have had Designing using Canva, Creating Animation Classes, Accountability PARTNERS Class, Content Writing and Marketing Class, Sales Funnel Class, How to Set Facebook and IG ADs Masterclasses and so on.

A lot of those that were part of the Free classes saved my WhatsApp number and kept a tab on my status daily with over 400 views and they enrolled for class sessions. But we didn't have as many in-class compared with the free classes. That didn't change the fact that we have reached over 1500 business owners this period and we are collating their data and intend to sell more of our Services in the form of Products to them.

In general, what will you say have been the outcome of the training? What have been the major success stories and feedbacks?

Feedbacks have been mind-blowing. A lot of them have made me breakdown like I have not done in years. Beyond what money can buy, I particularly value relationships and friendships. Once I love, I love totally and this season, I just believe this service was the best gift we could give business owners.

Stories have been transforming people's mindset towards using Social Media and Online Space to promote their business and make sales during this lockdown.

Lockdown doesn't mean no sales, it only means you take your business where others focus on and reposition it in a way people will know they need it. Do slash price and giveaways too. Show you care while trying to sell your market.

Based on the remote working operations of many organisations during this lockdown, there it is believed that work will not be the same post-COVID-19. What do you think?

I am not a Dangote or a Tony Elumelu or a business tycoon yet. I'm not even a Tycoon in the sector I operate just yet. But, the little I know, things will change and at the same time, we should learn to change patterns and strategies once one doesn't work.

What is your advice to media professionals on how to effectively utilize online tools?

Take up courses, learn and be open-minded. During this training we had and still have, I have media guys on my contact list that I know need it, but pride won't allow them to enrol. Let's drop the ego. Ask, mingle and explore. It won't kill. Media people should also be business-minded. How profitable are online training?

It's been profitable, of course not the way it would have been if there wasn't a slash in course prices. But not bad at all considering the lockdown.

13

WHAT OUR PRINT MEDIA MUST DO TO SURVIVE – TAIWO OBE

One of the ways to generate content for websites like the www.mediacareerng.org which I edit is to follow up on major reports. This was what informed my reaching out to foremost media trainer in the country, Taiwo Obe to offer suggestions on how media organizations owing staff and others can survive the distress in the media sector.

His response was published on April 15, 2020 on the media website.

Following the recent call by the Lagos Council of the Nigeria Union of Journalists for defaulting media houses to pay salaries of its members, we asked Founder/Director at The Journalism Clinic, Taiwo Obe options for media houses and journalists considering the state of the industry. His short and sharp answers are below.

MC: [The Lagos NUJ on Sunday urged four newspapers to pay outstanding salaries of their members.](#) Were you surprised that the newspapers and probably others are owing that much?

TO: No, because the matter had been out there for a while.

MC: Some of the media organizations according to the NUJ should have enough to pay based on what they make from various earnings. Do you think it is a case of not having enough to pay their bills or not prioritising staff salaries?

TO: Is this based on an assumption or knowledge? Do they have access to the said companies' books?

MC: From what you know about the media industry, what should the options, however tough that the management should consider?

TO: Some definitely need management consulting firms to look at their entire structures. Some need financial infusion, to enable them to pay off tired staff and bring in new ones who can adapt to modern newspapering and who would be remunerated commensurately and retool their newsrooms for true digital publishing.

MC: What is your projection about the future of print especially in Nigeria?

TO: There will be no future if we continue in this manner.

READ ALSO: [WHAT MEDIA LEADERS, STAFF MUST KNOW ABOUT BUSINESS NOW](#)

MC: What is your advice for journalists on how to work on their career given the state of the industry?

TO: [More enterprising in the utilisation of their knowledge and skills](#), and in an ethical way. In a class I once took one journalist boastfully said he had covered all Nigerian elections since 1979. I asked him: where is your book? His answer: he had never thought about it.

MC: Any other issue you think the media companies and professional organizations should pay attention to.

TO: Rethink their digital strategy.

14

What I Have Learnt Working For International Media Organisations – Adejuwon Soyinka

Going through my Facebook timeline on one of the lockdown days, I saw a post by Adejuwon Soyinka, an editor with an international media organization which reminded me of my earlier plan to interview him when he was recently appointed for the current job.

I reached out to him on the Facebook messenger and he agreed to answer my questions as soon as he can when I sent them. I quickly came up with the questions for Soyinka who I have known for years along with some brilliant young journalists. His insightful responses were published in mediacareerng.org on April 13, 2020.

Adejuzwon Soyinka, a 2019 Emmy Awards nominee, is Regional Editor (West Africa) [The Conversation Africa](#). Before his present appointment, he was Editor/Head, [BBC Pidgin Service](#) at BBC World Service, Senior Special Assistant (Media) to the Ogun State Governor, Deputy General Editor, TELL and Editor, [www.tell.ng](#) at Tell Magazine.

In this online interview with Lekan Otufodunrin, Soyinka shares his experiences and offers advice for journalists seeking to enhance their careers and take advantage of local and international opportunities.

It's already three months plus that you joined The Conversation Africa as the Regional Editor, WA. How has work been? How is it different from what you used to do at BBC and other media organizations you have worked?

Work has been quite interesting and full of learning. One of my experience over the years has been that new roles often present new challenges and new challenges are in themselves opportunities to learn new skills and further develop yourself as a professional. This has been my story since I joined The Conversation media group as West Africa Regional Editor. As far as management of human and material resources across national boundaries in West Africa is concerned, I would not say there has been much of a difference between what I used to do as Editor and Head of the BBC Pidgin Service and what I currently do.

In both cases, I worked with a team that has a presence not only in Nigeria but also in other countries within West Africa. There has also not been much of a difference in terms of working in an international news organisation with operations in different parts of the world. This means learning and appreciating cultural diversities.

In the area of journalism, I would say working at The Conversation has further broadened my perspective. This is in the sense that at The Conversation, we deal more with academics. To be qualified to write for The Conversation, you need to have a minimum of a PhD and affiliated with a university or research institution. Therefore, the journalism here is quite elevated.

As an independent source of news and views from the global academic and research community, our editors at The Conversation, work with experts to unlock their knowledge and promote a better understanding of current affairs and complex issues by the wider public and policymakers. We believe that access to such independent, high quality, explanatory journalism is very critical for the sustenance of democracy and promotion of quality public discourse.

Your decision to move on from BBC came as a surprise considering the award-winning productions you led and other accomplishments. What were your considerations for leaving?

First, I like to thank you for your kind words and appreciation of the modest achievements we recorded while at the BBC Pidgin Service. I say “we” because it was not a one-man show. It was teamwork and I am grateful for the opportunity to work with such a fantastic team at the BBC Pidgin

Service. Indeed, I had the privilege of leading a team of young, talented journalists to produce many original stories that created great impact both locally and internationally.

A testament to this is the fact that content produced by the BBC News Pidgin Service were severally referenced by other international media organisations like Independent UK, New York Times, the Washington Post and several other national publications in Nigeria, Ghana and Cameroon to mention just a few.

Some of the exclusive content produced by the BBC Pidgin team include, “[Sweet, sweet codeine](#),” and “[Sex for Grades](#),” both of which are investigative journalism documentaries that led to major policy changes not only in Nigeria but also across the continent. Our excellent journalism did not also go unnoticed as it brought some well-deserved accolades from within and outside the BBC.

Some of these include getting the first-ever [International Emmy awards nomination](#), in the current affairs category, for the BBC World Service and Nigeria. Apart from the Emmys, the team under my leadership also won the One World Media Awards in the Best TV Documentary category, 2019, BBC Digital Award, 2018 and BBC Media Awards, Best use of Social Media (2018).

We were equally finalists in the Investigation of the Year category at the Association for International Broadcasting Awards, AIB, 2018, a finalist in the Best Documentary category, Royal Television Society, RTS Awards, 2018 and finalist for the Global Investigation of the Year category at the British Journalism Awards, 2018.

Having achieved all that, anyone who knows me quite well would also know that I am the type that works with set tasks, deliverables and personal targets. I believe that having surpassed both institutional and personal set targets at the BBC Pidgin Service, the time was ripe for me to seek newer challenges, which would then present opportunities to acquire newer skills and further develop myself as a professional and that is exactly what I did.

READ ALSO: [My experience working in six foreign media houses- Fidelis Mba](#)

What will you consider as the major highlights of your work at the BBC and the professional lessons you learnt?

Speaking of highlights, first I would like to mention the privilege of leading the brilliant team at the BBC Pidgin Service to birth a major news outlet in Pidgin language, the first of its kind in the 97-year-old history of the BBC. Those people are some of the best in the industry.

The other major highlight of my work at the BBC, I would say, was the production of those two investigative documentaries: “Sweet, sweet codeine” and “Sex for Grades.” I found those two interesting because they drew from my previous experience and skills as a multiple award-winning investigative journalist right from my days at TELL magazine, Nigeria’s number one investigative news magazine.

Looking back at those two productions, their success and impact highlighted the importance of teamwork and team spirit, which is a major professional lesson I would say I learnt from the BBC. We could not have achieved the kind of result we got without the support of our colleagues in the BBC

Africa Eye team as well as colleagues in other departments of the BBC, including the digital team, editorial policy, legal, publicity, business development and a host of other colleagues.

The BBC is a great place to learn the value of diversity, team spirit and creativity and these are some of the many professional lessons I learnt from the organisation.

How will you compare your work experience in Nigeria media and the international organizations like BBC and now CA in terms of facilities, welfare and other considerations?

In terms of facilities, welfare and other considerations, there is a wide gulf between Nigerian media and International media outfits like The Conversation or the BBC. I believe that what makes the difference is the level of investment that goes into these organisations.

Although in a way, one might say that it may be an unfair comparison to place The Conversation or the BBC side by side with any local media in Nigeria in the sense that their business model and financing is completely different. Whereas the two international news media I have worked with are not-for-profit outfits, many Nigerian local media organisations are commercial outfits whose survival depend strictly on the vagaries of demand and supply market forces.

In that sense, their very existence can be threatened or determined through government policies or as we have seen in some cases, a conspiracy between the political and business elites of the society.

What are the basic requirements to be employed in international media organizations based on your experience?

I would say education, skills and experience. The requirements are not much different from what is obtainable in other newsrooms, locally. It is just that you need to carefully study the job description and required skill set and be sure that you have them before bothering to apply for the role. I must also say that colleagues need to understand that the era where it was sufficient to have just one skill as a journalist is over. Today's journalist is expected to have multi-media skills.

What is your advice for journalists seeking to enhance their career and taking advantage of global opportunities?

Acquire multi-media skills and if possible, learn a second international language apart from English. Then actively seek out such international opportunities. Go online and search for them.

In some cases, you may need to register your profile on some platforms so that whenever opportunities are matching your skills and experience, you get an automated invitation to apply for such roles. For instance, I know you can do that on the Jobs board of The Conversation Africa website and you can do that on the BBC Careers website.

You were a media adviser to a former governor. How easy it to function in that capacity and what was is your advice for journalists still seeking such position?

My first advice for those seeking such roles is to stop and desist from seeking the role. Do not seek such a role rather let the role seek you. As a journalist, if you are not an active politician who participated in the campaigns and actively contributed to the emergence of the principal, then the only other way that I believe you can be respected on the job as a professional is if the role sought you out and not you going to beg for the role.

Having said that, I will say that I enjoyed working with my Principal, Senator Ibikunle Amosun. It was tough working with him because he is a hardworking governor, who was and is still very passionate about the development of Ogun State and the welfare of the people. So much is his passion for the state that as governor, he always worked round the clock. Of course, the result of such efforts today stands in testimony to his credit in the form of infrastructural developments in different parts of Ogun State.

What is your general assessment of the media in Nigeria and what are your suggestions for improvement, especially considering the digital disruption of the industry?

I think the Nigerian media is doing its utmost best in the circumstance in which it has found itself. From my experience across the continent and beyond, I can say that the Nigerian media is one of the most vibrant.

This country has produced some of the best brains in the field of journalism and media practice in the world. Even when we speak of the digital age, the Nigerian journalist is not particularly lagging. We have one of the most vibrant digital media space on the continent as well. Therefore, the workforce is not an issue. The problem, in my view, is a lack of proper capitalisation of many of our local media organisations and the absence, in some instances, of the proper governance structure.

Any other information you think will be helpful to journalists in their career?

My advice to people aspiring to be a journalist is to be sure, of exactly why they want to be a journalist. You need to have a personal mission and set goals before you venture into the profession.

You will then find that your mission and set goals would become your anchor when the going gets tough as they would sometimes on this job. In addition to that, as journalists, we need to constantly innovate and evolve. We must be willing and ready to acquire new skills as that is the only way to ensure our continued relevance in this profession.

15

‘What Aspiring Broadcast Journalists Should Know’

This interview response followed the interest I took in a Facebook post by Abimbola Otusanyo of FAAJI FM radio station in Lagos. I’m not sure we have met but felt her ten years work anniversary which she published early morning on May 4.

I sought her permission to republish the post but requested she provides answers to more questions to support her career narrative. She gladly accepted and promptly sent back the responses below published May 5 in www.mediacareerng.org

Abimbola Otusanya of FAAJI 106.5FM, Lagos who marked her tenth broadcast journalism job anniversary offers advice for aspiring journalists and challenges on the job

Based on your experience so far, what is your advice for aspiring broadcast journalists?

Zeal is paramount in one's quest to become a Broadcast Journalist, money shouldn't top the list. It's been known from time immemorial that Journalism is not about money. Be sure you have the interest before venturing into it.

1. As an individual progress on the job, know what is expected and required of you. Never assume you know it all. Ask questions, from anybody and everybody. A Newscaster, for example, has to be in sync with happenings around, verify stories received from reporters; Errors are not avoidable. Make the internet your friend. And when in doubt, leave out.
2. A program anchor should never be eager to break stories on air without proper findings and verification. Ask about name pronunciations: Persons (François Hollande, for example, I have colleagues who got under fire for this). Countries and Cities (Sao Tome and Principe), the list is endless.
3. Seek knowledge in your field, always. Where affordable and available, get professional training, otherwise, read, read, read. Know the world evolving around you. Self-development.
4. For a Newscaster, who is required to translate from English a grasp of both languages cannot be overemphasised. It is so easy to err when you do not understand what you're translating. And some errors on-air are unpardonable. Understand and observe the rules guiding the two languages involved in your translation. Again, ask questions.
5. Do not set out to compete or be like anyone, don't imitate your 'idol'. Be you. You will stand out.

Apart from the supposed speech defect you got over, what have been other challenges you have had along your career journey and how did you cope?

1. The second question will be in many parts. Where I work presently, we multi-task. I am a Producer, a Presenter, a Newscaster, a board (console) operator. I'll just touch on each aspect.
2. As a Newscaster, my first challenge was the speed of translation within a limited time. Over the years, I learnt to double up, increase my spread without anyone running after me. As a personal rule, 30 minutes is given to translate five or six stories and rehearse. Sometimes, it exceeds but most times, I work within the time frame. It also took me time to learn breath control on the air.
3. I have had few episodes of gaffe on air because I do not hesitate to ask questions. Always.
4. As a presenter, getting materials for weekly presentation is tasking, sometimes you run the risk of treating a topic someone else treated a few days ago, it has happened to me, I had to subtly change my topic immediately my attention was drawn. And I was on air already. That is why you must always be creative and open to ideas and counsel, even when on the MIC.
5. I research and read a lot, anything and everything to stay atop my game. I draw inspiration from a thousand and one things.
6. I have not been exposed to enough training as much as I would love.

7. *As a board operator/studio manager, dealing with different kinds of people on a daily basis can be exhausting. People do not like rules. I have learnt to be firm, flexible, diplomatic, harsh, and friendly but never bending in the wrong direction.*
8. *Of course, financial challenges cannot be overlooked, but love for what I do has kept me going.*

16

How Technology Has Changed Doing Media



One of the things that kept me busy during the lockdown was granting interviews on media issues to media organisations. I spoke with KAPLAN TV, PLUSAFRICA TV, HUMAN ANGLE.COM and soon to be launched RADIONOW.

*This interview with the responses was with
techmirror.com.ng*

For many years, you have been in the media field, how has it been?

It has been a very fulfilling experience especially because I set out to be a journalist from my secondary school days and read Mass Communication at the University.

Working in some media organisations, especially The Punch and The Nation gave me a lot of opportunities which have enhanced my career up till now that I'm into media career development.

The technology and information Technology field has evolved over the years, how has it changed doing media?

Yes, it has significantly particularly with the tools we use, how we source information and how we publish or broadcast. I remember being a correspondent for The Punch in Ogun State in the late 80s and I had to send stories to Lagos using radio or analogue telephone to dictate every word of my reports. Yes, every word and when the person at the Lagos end can't hear a word, I will be asked to spell out each letter. So, for Ogun, I will need to say O for Oscar, G for God, U for uniform and N for Nigeria.

There were no mobile phones or internet. Today so much has changed. There is the internet, email, mobile phone and many digital tools that have significantly changed the media landscape and the way the media operates.

Newsrooms used to have a typing pool with reporters submitting handwritten reports that will be typed. We have really come a long way

Many newsrooms are harping on Digital skills while recruiting journalists, would this not affect the quality of reportage?

No, it should not. What is required is that anyone who wants to be a journalist in this age should have relevant digital skills without which he or she may not be able to do the job effectively.

While digital skills will not make up for the ability for practical journalism skills of knowing how to report, for example, it is necessary to know how to use new media more than ever before.

Employers may, however, have to provide trainings for good journalists who do not have digital skills. Quality of reportage can only be better, not less with the use of digital tools.

How do you source relevant information online when necessary if you don't have digital skills; How do you amplify your stories online if all you only know how to do is just report?

While some organization can afford to have separate digital staff, many now will prefer to have those who have the combined skills to maximize cost and get the best leverage for their publications.

Many journalists who started doing media before ICT came into Nigeria find it difficult blending into social media, how did you fit into the ICT?

I was fortunate to have caught the bug early when the new technology was being introduced to media operations. I was curious and learnt how to use the tools. This gave me the opportunity to attend a three-month Advanced Journalism training in Thomson Foundation in Cardiff, United Kingdom.

After the training, where I had a desktop computer to myself and signed up for my first email address, I used the skills and have been updating my knowledge regularly.

I have been very active online as journalism practice now has to be multi-media.

Many persons say the Social media has affected doing media negatively, do you share this sentiment?

Normally, social media is supposed to be complimentary as it helps to enhance the reach of traditional media. However, with the opportunity for as many people to share any information they want to on social media, the platforms are being misused by some persons.

The social media has indeed broken the monopoly of the traditional media in sharing major information, but there is nothing we can do about it. What I think is that more professional journalists should effectively use social media and become the real influencers there instead of leaving the space to people who misuse it.

If that is where many people get their information, we must meet them there.

Online websites are fast taking over news houses, where does this leave print newspapers?

It leaves the print media at a disadvantaged position where their usual readers have many other sources of information and don't need to read hard copies. Even for legacy newspapers that have websites, their content are offered free and they have to understand how to make more online revenue.

My personal projection is that with time, some print media may have to suspend their print editions, while a few strong ones will still be around for some time to come. For how long? I don't know.

They also have the option of taking their online operations more seriously instead of just seeing it as an appendage without enough investment in it.

Would investigative journalism have been prominent this way without technology?

Definitely not. Technology has enhanced sourcing information and making an impact on investigative journalism. It has made it easy for as many platforms as possible to publish investigations that have demanded accountability from relevant authorities.

How can young journalists become relevant in the age of digital journalism?

Simple. Get trained as a professional journalist and master the use of digital tools.

You have to be passionate about using journalism for the right purpose and report on issues that affect the generality of the people.

They must acquire the necessary experience and take on major assignments that can make their journalism impactful.

How has media career development network helped journalists evolve into Technology inclined reporting?

As a media career development organization, we have constantly drawn attention to the need for journalists to update their knowledge about modern media practice to remain relevant in the profession. We publicise training opportunities and also organize some.

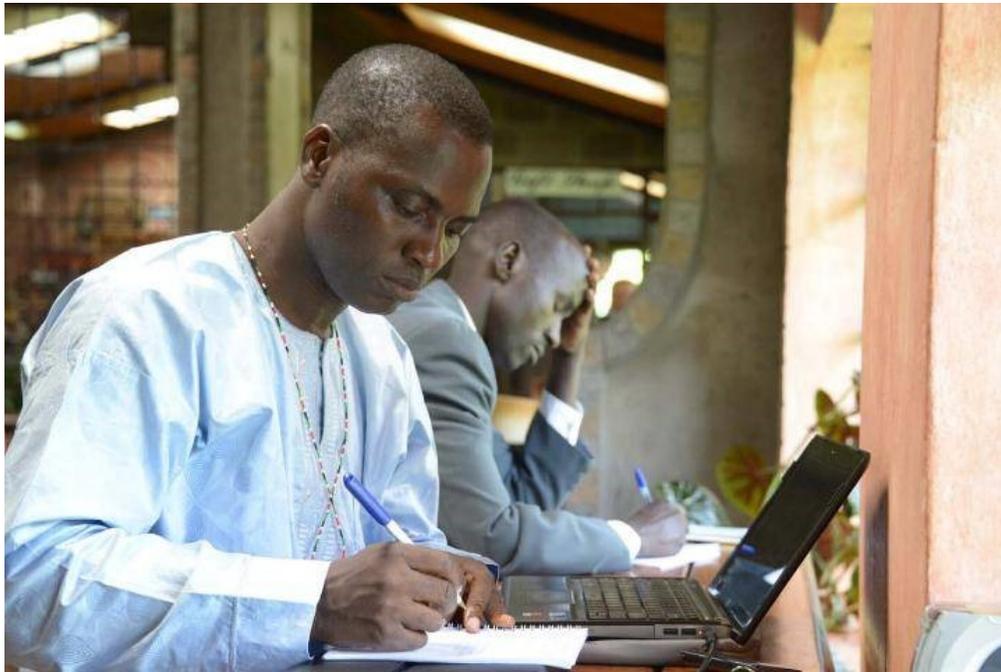
During the Coronavirus lockdown, we supported some journalists to participate in the various webinars and from the feedback we got, they learnt a lot about using new technology to enhance their reporting.

With Technology, where does this leave the Nigerian media in the next few years?

Like any sector of human endeavor, technology will keep improving on how things are done, and this will include the media. The media will need to adapt and innovate with technology to serve their audience better. It's adapt or die option for the traditional media and option is theirs.

17

Building a Career in Journalism and Investigative Journalism



For a Tweet chat to mark Workers Day on May 1 by Youth Digest Magazine based in Abuja I asked for the questions ahead and had responses to them. During the chat, I responded to the questions with answers below and added some other thoughts that occurred to me.

The Media is a daily growing field, how has Africa and Nigeria evolved with this growth?

Yes, the media is a very dynamic sector, especially with the digital disruption reshaping the landscape globally. Nigeria and Africa is part of the global village and the media has evolved quite well over the years.

We have evolved from the traditional media to digital and making the best we can of the new tools for media practice in the present age.

Is media business getting enough investments and growth in Africa?

I don't think so. For long the media was largely government-owned, but ownership has been liberalised which gave room for private investments that has boosted the sector.

However much more capital investment is required to enable the media function maximally. Many media organizations need to be recapitalised with modern equipment. Dwindling revenue has been a major concern, but like in any business, you need more money to make profit and impact.

What is required for one to start building a career in journalism?

Since journalism is a profession with a body of knowledge and procedures for practice, building a career in it will require an understanding of what it is about and deciding if it's what you want to do.

Journalism requires passion and flair for writing. Aspiring journalists must show interest in developing their writing skills and reading widely. You must be well informed about local and major national issues to be able to write on them and articulate the issues.

Let me state clearly that there is a difference between being a writer and a journalist. Anybody can write, but journalism, like I stated earlier, requires editorial skills which must be learnt and utilized in the day to day performance of the job.

Aspiring journalists should find opportunities for internships to hone their skills and have proof of what can recommend them for future hiring later.

There is an issue around the quality of reportage in newsrooms, should the solution start from grooming campus journalists in school?

Definitely it should, especially for those who are studying Mass Communication and those others who want to switch to the profession later in life. There should be enough practical opportunities to learn and imbibe the skills. This will be possible where to teach them at campus levels have the necessary experience.

Many Campus journalists over the years have gone on to dominate the field of journalism, do you think enough attention is given to campus journalism?

Students are doing their best to elevate this campus journalism practice it doesn't seem to be getting enough institutional support. It should be possible that students interested in campus journalism, whether they are studying Mass Communication or Journalism get the opportunity to access courses that that can enhance their skills. The kind of attention they get most times is when they publish things authorities don't like and the journalists are penalized.

The welfare of journalists come to play. Many are saying money should not motivate journalism. Do you not think this is killing interest in journalism and is strengthening poor welfare?

The point about money not been the motivation for practising journalism does not mean journalists should not be adequately remunerated. Poor pay and welfare is rightly discouraging young ones and one cannot blame them for expecting a commensurate payment for the hard work involved in journalism practice. However, while journalism is a business that must pay its bills, it is also social service and must be understood as such by aspiring journalists.

There may be times when you don't get paid and it should not be a discouraging factor for anyone who wants to utilize the media for the general public good.

Ownership of media houses have been a subject of debate, should ownership of media houses be limited to certain persons?

Ownership is not limited to certain persons to the extent that anyone who has the kind of money required for establishing one can do so, except in the broadcast sector where getting a license is required. The challenge is that media ownership requires lots of money and only those who can afford it can. Thankfully the digital age makes it possible to for just anyone to establish one, even it's a blog.

How can one become a prominent journalist?

Prominence should not be the goal of any of you but being excellent in your work. You may also need to report major issues in unique and excellent ways to be noticed either by your organization or the world generally.

How has the media career services helped ensure the development of journalism?

We have done so in many ways in accordance with our goals and objectives.

We have provided the much-needed mentoring support, training programs and resources to enhance the skills of journalists.

We have a Media Career centre and Library with various publications.

We draw the attention of journalists to opportunities and have a daily updated website that provides updates about the industry and other training organizations.

During the lockdown, we supported journalists to participate in webinars through data and airtime.

What is your advice to young journalists, what would you advise?

They should keep updating their knowledge and skills and be prepared to take on a major assignment.

OPINION/ANALYSIS

18

Who Leaked Buhari's Broadcast Speech?



Following the presidential broadcast by President Muhammadu Buhari on the lockdown in Lagos, Ogun and Abuja, I wrote this piece immediately on April 27 for opera.com. I could have written on the extension of the lockdown which was widely reported on other platforms, I, however, chose to focus on the existence two versions of the broadcast speech.

The article turned out to be one of my most widely read article with more than 60,000 clicks.

After four weeks of lockdown that has kept me home, I was really looking forward to the presidential broadcast of President Muhammadu Buhari on Monday evening.

There have been some informed speculations about what the President was likely to say based on the public outcry over the effects of the restriction of movement in particularly Lagos, Abuja and Ogun states, which I also know maybe the right decision to take, but I preferred to hear from the horse's mouth.

So, when I took my seat before the television as the President began his broadcast with my telephone ready for tweeting some major points, I assumed that what was being read was news to everyone, except for the aides of the president and those who took the decision.

Just when I was waiting for the preamble of the speech to be over for the President to get to the major decisions, particularly the expected relaxation of the lockdown, I received a forwarded copy of the speech in a WhatsApp group I belonged to.

I know some people or media organizations usually have advanced copies of the speech, but I didn't recon that it had become free for all before the broadcast started.

As I was trying to think of how the sender who is not a staff of any major media house got the copy he forwarded, I got a call from a cousin who asked why the copy of the president's speech some his friends claim to have before the broadcast was released.

As far as he was concerned, it was not right for just anyone to have the speech when it was still being read by the President.

True. I, however, explained to him about the old practice of giving advanced copies to media organizations to print overnight to coincide with usually morning broadcast.

I'm aware that the practice had continued even with the changing media landscape which now includes the digital media, irrespective of the time of the broadcast.

The standard practice is that there is an embargo of when the speech must not be published or broadcast.

If this was what happened in this case, the mass circulation of the speech ahead of Monday night broadcast calls for a review of the old practice. What is clear is that it may be difficult to ensure an embargo with such address, especially if it contains some sensitive decision which is not supposed to be known ahead of the broadcast.

And as if to underscore the importance of allowing the President to read his final copy before it is circulated, the address that was earlier shared on various platforms was amended in the broadcast.

The date for the commencement of the relaxed restriction of movement is May 4, not 2 as in the first copy. So, there was initial confusion about which date was right since some people didn't bother to listen to the broadcast having read the first copy.

The first copy had no fixed time for the lockdown in Kano, but in his address, the President announced two weeks.

There were also some amendments and corrections in the final copy the president read.

While those who released the first copy to the approved persons might have meant well to ease the work of the media, those who leaked it to the public simply betrayed the trust expected of them and breached the embargo.

Normally those who got the speech officially know that they can still be sent an updated copy if any amendment was made. But how can the first copy be withdrawn from circulation now when it has gone viral, no thanks to the emergency 'journalists'!

The Cable newspaper, however, suggest that the wrong copy in circulation was the draft prepared by a member of the presidential task force on COVID-19 sent to the office of the Secretary of the government of the federation (SGF).

It might have been reportedly copied from a Microsoft document with the original text and edits including repetition of many words and phrases.

When journalism used to be practised by real journalists alone, ethics of the profession and unaccepted practices were known to all. Unfortunately, everyone is now either a publisher now or an information sharer.

Everyone wants to be the first to share information even when they don't know the source. What was the point of anyone who is not a journalist or a media organization being in a hurry to circulate the president's speech?

I hope the lessons have now been learnt by all concerned. Media aides need to realize that they cannot guarantee that their embargoed press releases or speech will not be leaked.

People who get information also need to avoid hitting the send button each time they get any information.

And if the leak was from the office of the SGF, it's time to checkmate any possible future leakage. What happened on Monday is an embarrassment that should not be allowed to happen again.

19

How Not To Give and Receive

Worried by the pattern of support for the needy during the lockdown, I wrote this piece for my weekly Sunday column in The Nation newspaper on April 26, 2020.

Why would anyone who wants to give money to people online ask them to openly reply to their post with account details?

This practice called give-away has been on before the Coronavirus crisis, with celebrities announcing that they are in a mood to give out various amounts to those they select out of the usually large number of respondents who want to benefit from the free money.

I have always felt something was wrong with this approach where benevolence has become an open show with the world knowing who is giving and who is receiving, even when it's just a token.

However, I got really agitated by this approach days ago when someone on Twitter and Instagram offered to support journalists in Nigeria who may be experiencing some challenges due to the COVID-19 fallouts and asked that interested beneficiaries should do the usual open submission of details.

I understand random persons not minding giving their details that will remain on the Internet that does not forget, but not journalists.

As an alternative, why not ask interested persons to follow the giver on the two platforms and they will be followed back so that they can send their details directly without others knowing?

How about adding an email to the message for those who want support to send their request to?

My advice was acknowledged but the offer ended with the list of selected beneficiaries posted on the thread. Some excited beneficiaries also shared a picture of the bank alert indicating how much they got.

Some unlucky ones hoped they will be included next time.

While I appreciate the online givers, my advice is that this open option of getting the details of the beneficiaries is not in the interest of the receivers.

They need not be subjected to the humiliation of being seen by all asking for money online when what some of them need is just temporary support to get over the disruption of the current crisis.

With this kind of open solicitation, there is also the chance of some people who really need the support, but cherish their reputation, not sending their details.

Who knows what some mischievous persons can do with the requests for support achieved online forever someday or criminals who can utilize the account details for whatever cybercrime?

Many Nigerian are indeed desperate for support at this time of lockdown and restriction of movement, but their identity should be protected. Givers should just be satisfied with giving and not getting any unnecessary publicity if their real intention is just to give and nothing else.

I'm trying to understand why some individuals and organizations are branding their gifts, like bags of rice, to the poor and vulnerable? I know some organizations need evidence of the distribution of what they are giving to the needy for record purpose, it should not be the case that givers should be always be followed around with camera and beneficiaries interviewed.

It's also necessary that charity should start from home for individuals and organizations that are announcing generous support in response to the go government's call.

Individuals and organizations should first take care of people around them, relatives, staff and members before wanting to get any acclaim for what they are giving at the state and national levels.

Receivers should also be appreciative of what they are getting and not complain unnecessarily. They need to understand that even the givers are affected by the crisis but are just trying to help with what they have.

They also have to be orderly and not frustrate organizations and individuals giving them food items and other gifts during distribution.

20

Where Is God When It Hurts In Times Like This?



*One of my old books which I have not been able to find is *Where is God when it hurts?* which I would have loved to read following the pandemic that has raised a debate about God's role in the matter. I tried as much as I did during the various rearrangement of my books during the lockdown, I didn't find it.*

I went online to read some reviews about the book and consequently wrote this piece for opera.com published on April 25. Judging from the less than 50 clicks it generated, it didn't attract the kind of readership I expected as the first time I wrote on the same topic years ago in my Sunday column in the Nation. I wasn't sure why. Maybe Opera readers couldn't be bothered about too serious and deeply spiritual issues like this. Who knows who will still read it someday and will be comforted that as the Bible implores us, we should always give thanks in all situations.

In his award-winning bestseller book, "where is God when it hurts?" Philip Yancey did his best to answer the questions on people's mind when they are faced with life situations that make them wonder if God is really as loving as he is believed to be.

If God indeed desires loves us as his creation, why does he sometimes put obstacles in our way? Why does he seem so distant? Why does he allow what is considered evil like the Coronavirus that is presently ravaging the globe?

I can imagine that not only many Nigerians but others worldwide are asking the above questions with the uncertainty of when the pandemic will end.

Not only the normally religious person is confused about what some have said to be possibly the expected end of the world, but even those who have never professed any faith are expecting a divine intervention that will restore normalcy.

Already thousands of persons have died and have tested positive with no accepted vaccine for a cure yet.

From our one index case in Lagos, we now have 1095 positive cases, 32 deaths and 204 persons discharged

Not as many persons who should be tested have been attended to indicating that the number will spike as more get tested.

When we ushered into 2020 with the exchange of happy New Year greetings for the 'magical' year many things were expected to be available to all based on the Vision 2020 projections.

Though we knew that we were far from our targets in Nigeria, we would have been comfortable remaining the way we were and working ahead for another decade to perfect our well-being, but what has befallen world has taken everyone by surprise. No one is spared. The developed and developing world. The low, high and the mighty.

Both believers and non-believers have always trusted God to take control of the world one way or the other and leave us in our auto-flight mode, but the turbulence we have run into is not the kind world leaders have an immediate answer for.

It is therefore understandable that many are asking the kind of question thrown up by Yancey's book; where is God when it hurts?

How do we explain God's love for the world when he seems to have left us in our helpless situation?

Like passengers in a plane flying through a turbulent weather, this is not the time to doubt the assurance of the pilot who is God in this case that all will be well.

The daily rising local and global figures of infected persons and those who have died should scare us, but like the Bible enjoins us, in all things we should give thanks.

As grave, as the situation is, there are many who are recovering even when available treatment is more of a gamble with doctors experimenting with a combination of drugs and therapy to stabilize victims and hope that they will test negative.

Even some who are symptomatic have only had to self-isolate to fully recover and test negative. Doctors and other medical personnel are doing what they know best in circumstances like this and God is indeed the one who is healing.

What would have happened if the situation is beyond the control we presently have? We would all have become lame duck waiting for our turn to die.

Instead of despairing over the crisis and wondering where God is in all this, this is when we should renew our absolute trust in the almighty God who made the earth and knows the end from the beginning.

Even for those who claim to be atheists, this is when they need to appreciate the fact that there is a supreme God who has got the whole world in His hands with the assurance that He will never leave nor forsake us.

As terrible as the present pandemic seems, there have been previous similar cases globally that the human race has survived. What should keep us going is the assurance that like in the past we shall overcome.

Yancey's thoughts in his book are apt for the time we are. " To resent the world (or question God's existence because of Coronavirus) would be a tragic mistake. At one time, it may have been 'the best of all possible worlds,' but surely it is not now.

"That this world spoiled by evil and suffering still exists at all is an example of God's mercy and not cruelty," he noted.

Here is a quote for any Christian whose faith may be wavering because of what we are going through:

"Faith in God offers no insurance against tragedy. Nor does it offer insurance against feelings of doubt and betrayal. If anything, being a Christian complicates the issue. But if you believe in a world ruled by a powerful God who loves you tenderly, then it makes an awful difference."

21

How To Get COVID-19 Fund For Journalists, Media

Reading on various websites of offers of support for journalists to effectively report about COVID-19 got me thinking of how to help journalists in Nigeria to understand what they need to be able to access some of the grants.

I took time to review the call for applications and came up with this piece published on April 1 on mediacareerng.org which has expectedly attracted high traffic on our website.

Following the outbreak of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic globally, some organisations have been offering financial support for journalists and media organisations interested in covering the situation in various communities worldwide.

The fund is particularly helpful for freelance journalists, community-based media and start-ups in need of funds to provide wider coverage beyond what the traditional media are offering.

We took time to look through some of the grants and hereby highlight what interested journalists and organisations in Nigeria and Africa need to know to qualify for the support.

Below are some requirements:

[The National Geographic](#) is offering \$1000 -8000 USD for writers, photographers, videographers, audio journalists, cartographers, filmmakers, and data visualization experts.

Reporting within local media ecosystems may cover any aspect of the virus and its fallout, including but not limited to:

Social consequences of COVID-19 and measures to contain it, particularly related to equity—such as its impact on immigrant communities, domestic violence, and early childhood education.

Stories of resilience and solutions that could be applied on a regional or global scale.

Novel forms of data visualization or science communication to help communities better understand how to protect themselves.

Lessons learned from the local response(s) to COVID-19 that could be applied to other large-scale challenges, such as climate change or the refugee crisis.

Best practices of how educators, students, and schools are reacting to this crisis, particularly as they illuminate under-resourced schools.

Priority communities include Those at high risk or hit especially hard by the virus, indigenous communities, immigrant or refugee communities, underserved, urban, rural, elderly populations, and children.

[The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting](#), a non-profit organization that supports independent global journalism, is seeking proposals that develop innovative approaches to reporting on the novel coronavirus crisis using collaboration among journalists and newsrooms across state lines or national borders. This opportunity is open to all newsrooms and independent journalists in the United States and abroad.

The centre is seeking strong proposals that involve a strategic and concerted effort by multiple journalists and/or newsrooms to pursue a reporting project together, leveraging resources, expertise, and publication platforms.

In addition to a strong collaboration component for reporting and publication, it encourages proposals that:

- +Focus on systemic, under-reported issues underlying the coronavirus crisis
- +Use data-driven and/or interdisciplinary approaches to reporting on coronavirus
- +Hold the powerful accountable

[Global non-profit Internews](#) has launched a rapid response fund to help small, community and local news organisations worldwide survive in the face of COVID-19. The fund will launch with \$100,000 to be made available immediately and is targeting \$1 million in donations to provide immediate support for journalists globally.

Though the [Facebook journalism](#) \$ 100m grant under the [COVID-19 Community Network grant program](#), is mainly for newsrooms in the United States and Canada, journalists and media organisations in Africa may learn from specific things the supported media are doing that can be replicated locally.

COVID-19: Media, Storytelling and Social Mindset

John Okocha a writer and film producer used to work with me at The Nation. His knowledge of film production greatly helped in boosting our video production before. In recent years he has engaged in working in with local and international NGOs in Borno in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps.

He called to ask me to be a guest speaker in a WhatsApp chat with members of his Agents of Change group on how to better use the media in the campaign against the spread of COVID-19. I was supposed to have some talking points, but I ended up writing this paper which I presented and discussed with the group. It was published on April 20 in mediacareerng.org

Lekan Otufodunrin writes on the role of media, storytellers and content producers in the campaign against the spread of COVID-19

Apart from medical professionals, if there is one other major group of professionals that should play a crucial role in curbing the pandemic we all have on our hands globally, it is media professionals, including journalists, writers, storytellers and anyone involved in professionally sourcing and disseminating information.

Note that I said PROFESSIONALLY, especially because nowadays virtually anyone with a telephone can source and disseminate information. This has become a major cause of concern as all manner of information, many of which cannot be verified are available in our present information overload world.

Even in my house. I am constantly engaged in a battle to disabuse my wife's mind against the various things she is reading on WhatsApp.

Because COVID-19, as President Buhari stated in his recent broadcast, is a matter of life and death and a new disease with limited information about it, there must be enough awareness and constant information available for readers, viewers and listeners on various platforms.

So, we all have a major role in ensuring that people get the correct information about what has happened, where the disease originated from, the situation in our country and others, the symptoms, the treatment and various efforts being made by the government.

People need information about the possible overall effect on our social and economic life and how to cope with the reality we are faced with.

One way the media will succeed in playing its role in this battle is how the stories are told. Apart from normal news, the media and other storytellers must adopt innovative ways of getting information across to the people to make them believe that COVID-19 is not one imaginary disease like some of them still think using the various multimedia channels.

I was shocked when one of my supposedly enlightened neighbours told me she doesn't believe the disease is real despite the daily figures announced of the persons who have tested positive.

She said until she physically sees someone who is down with the disease, not on television, before she will be convinced the whole thing is not a 'scam to make money' She is not alone with this mindset, there are many who exhibit their doubts about what we are contending with considering their outright disregard for the various measures like social-distancing.

Na something go kill person. Forget about coronavirus, someone else said.

So as media professionals, writers and storytellers, we have our job cut out for us at this crucial time.

Whatever used to be our area of focus, we must find the coronavirus link and write about it or have production on the matter of the moment.

Let's meet the people wherever they are and provide the necessary information they can use to stay safe and flatten the curve of the coronavirus infection graph in our country. Let's speak the language they understand to get our messages across and break down the medical jargons about the disease.

Let's provide them access to information about where they can get help and allay their fears about various conspiracy theories and end of the world prophecies.

Let's fact check unsubstantiated information being circulated and tell our audience what to believe and what they should not.

Let's retain our use of traditional media but learn to effectively use social media and be the right kind of online influencers needed at a time like this. Our messages don't have to be the usual long format.

It can be as short as a tweet or a Facebook post. It can be a short skit but very informative and not some kind of trivialization of the matter we see in videos shared online and in WhatsApp groups.

Since the lockdown began, I have not left my house but I have written my weekly column in The Nation and contribution to an online platform I write for on various aspects of the pandemic, including How to enhance your career while at home, How to keep your job in crisis time and after and the one for this Sunday: What next after the lockdown?

Traffic on our mediacareer.org has interestingly been at an all-time high with various interviews with top media professionals on how the media should properly be reporting about COVID-19 and the various developments in the media world with the pandemic.

We noted that funds are available for media houses reporting coronavirus for their communities and there are various webinars for journalists and have been highlighting them on our website along with engagements on social media.

I have granted interviews to print, broadcast and online media on coronavirus reporting by our media organisations from my 'hideout'

For me what I have done is not to allow the crisis to shut down my work. I have found my place in the whole drama of life which we have not experienced before and did my best to maximise the opportunities and cope with the challenges.

Sooner or later, coronavirus will be over, but before it ends, we have to start telling the stories in the best way we can and be prepared to tell the full story later.

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COVID-19: What Journalists Should Know About Reporting a Pandemic

To support journalists to participate in various webinars organized by various global media organisations, the Media Career Development organization I head, offered to provide data and airtime. Some journalists applied and got our token support and wrote the report of what they learnt during the trainings.

I took a last-minute decision to participate in one on April 23 and immediately it ended, I wrote a summary of the highlights of the presentation by the two speakers and published on mediacareerng.org

The organisers were so pleased with my report that they recommended it to those who missed the webinar.

Lekan Otufodunrin joined in the webinar by Global Investigative Journalists Network (GIJN) on — Staying Safe: How to Report A Pandemic which had Dr Courtney Radsch, Advocacy Director of Committee to Protect Journalists and Dr Richard Darwood, Medical Director, Fleet Street Clinic as speakers on Thursday, April 23, 2020

He shares the highlights of the advice for journalists covering COVID-19 globally.

Don't Put Yourself In Direct Risk Situations:

Except it is absolutely necessary, avoid going into places where you could be at risk or have physical contact with people you need to interview. You must adopt innovative ways of getting the information you need including images and videos.

Medical workers can help you take in your equipment, like cameras to take pictures into the hospital. Use long lenses and microphones.

You need to maintain real distance between yourself and people who are infected. Personal protection should be taken seriously. Use facemasks properly and follow all safety and protective procedures wherever you go.

Don't take the risk of thinking you know how to use the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). It may be hard to get it right. The fact that you are allowed to go into a hospital or Isolation centre without taking all the necessary precautions does not mean you should.

Should Journalists Go To The Hospital At All? No.

You can cover the story you want to report about coronavirus just as effectively as you should without going to the hospital.

Dawood:

There are so many aspects of the coronavirus pandemic that do not require that you put yourself at risk health-wise.

Be your own safety police.

Observe the necessary hygiene measures:

Try to limit the equipment you take to assignments to reduce possible contamination. Use mobile cameras and other gadgets that can easily be disinfected.

Make sure your devices are fully charged so you don't have to be looking for unsafe places to charge your gadgets.

Your clothes and other wears should be properly washed when you get home.

Remember where you have been to and wash your hands before touching your face or other parts of your body through which you can be infected.

Have the right kind of sanitizer to use when you need to and stay home if you are not feeling well. Update your knowledge about the virus.

Keep abreast of new developments about the virus since it is relatively a new disease and many new findings are emerging.

Beware of the new laws and regulations:

There are increasing attempts to criminalise journalism. Know the legal context you are working in as there are new laws in force, including executive orders and quarantine laws.

Some security officials may in some instances claim ignorance that journalists are among essential work professionals exempted from the lockdown and restriction of movements.

There are also regulations about fake news publications which can be used against journalists if you publish anything that is not correct at this time.

Take Care of Your Digital Security:

Because many journalists are working remotely online, you should be aware of increasing cases of phishing, circulation of misinformation and malware on websites that are sources of information.

Courtney:

Journalists should be more careful about mails they are opening and links they are clicking to check for information you need on COVID-19 and other reports.

There are many malicious actors out there who may be targeting journalists. The surveillance regime is such that all kinds of methods are being used to track people and can be applied to journalists for ulterior motives.

Censorship Is On The Rise:

There are all kinds of censorship limiting access to some official information and statistics. Government officials may not want to speak on some issues they should.

Beware of non-official sources and restriction of movements. Know the content of the quarantine laws so that you are not accused of violating it.

Know the documents you are supposed to have to move around if you must.

About the book

UNLOCKED is a compilation of writings of accomplished journalist and media career development specialist, Lekan Otufodunrin during the five weeks lockdown of Lagos and other parts of the country.

Divided into three sections: Motivation, Interviews, Opinion/Analysis, the purpose of this E-book is to showcase what he was able to achieve as a journalist without leaving his home in Lagos.

The platforms he wrote for included the website of the Media Career Development Network which he heads, www.mediacareerng.org, Opera News and The Nation Newspaper.

He also granted interviews for some broadcast stations and online publications and participated in Tweekchats. UNLOCKED is a compilation of writings of accomplished journalist and media career development specialist, Lekan Otufodunrin during the five weeks lockdown of Lagos and other parts of the country.

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About the author

Lekan Otufodunrin is a journalist and media career development specialist.

With over 30 year of media practice, he is presently Executive Director/ Managing Editor of Media Career Development Network, Nigeria's foremost media mentoring and coaching organization.

He was former Managing Editor and Sunday Editor of The Nation Newspaper and Group News and Political Editor of Punch Newspapers.

He is President of Journalists for Christ and author of *The Journalist You Ought To Be* and *Journalism of My Life*.