

SO YOU WANT TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR...

Just one misdirected SMS and bravo, a car venture takes off!

Someone mistakenly sent him text asking for help with purchase of a car, and he seized the opportunity

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Long before Evans Muriu enrolled in Strathmore University for a diploma in accounts, he was clear the drive was more from a childhood dream to understand the intricacies of financial arithmetic than to land an accounting job.

"I never wanted to work [as an accountant], but I always had this inexplicable desire and thrill to grasp the basics of financial accounting," he says.

Deep down, however, Muriu knew his destiny was in entrepreneurship, only that he hadn't thought it would have anything to do with cars until an anonymous text message accidentally got into his phone.

"After someone mistakenly sent me text asking how he could buy a car, I decided to seize the opportunity since my friend's dad had a car bazaar," Muriu recalls.

He executed the transaction so professionally that both buyer and seller gave him numerous

referrals, which eventually jump-started what is today known as Vance Motors Ltd.

"The buyer was a mechanic whose insightful advice has been priceless in my business since that time," he says.

This maiden transaction, he believes, hammered in him the philosophy of sacrificing short-term gains at the altar of long-term benefits.

"It's better to earn a shilling for the rest of your life rather than get a lump sum," Muriu states.

But as many upstarts, he lacked the huge capital needed to rent a yard from where he could display the cars he needed to sell. This radically shaped his business philosophy.

"I discovered that when developing a business idea, identifying client needs and how to solve them is more critical than worrying about where to get the capital. If I had concentrated on renting a yard, it could have put me under a lot of pressure due to the monthly rent bill," he says.

What Muriu does, therefore, is to rent just the space he needs for his vehicles, in established yards across Nairobi.

It's economical, he says, in addition to the fact that it allows him the flexibility to adjust to specialised demand in different markets. Every neighbourhood, he had discovered, had customers with different vehicle needs.

In addition to selling cars, Muriu has also started a youth group

called Kuna Vijana. It seeks to empower the youth socially and economically by acting as a bridge between young talent and working professionals through a mentorship programme.

"We act as a link between people in the industry and talented youth out there by organising forums where they meet and discuss issues," he explains.

"Through this process, raw talent is honed and made ready for the market," he adds.

With offices in major centres across the country, Kuna Vijana

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has a mission to instill the spirit of self-reliance and multi-tasking among the youth in order to uplift their lives. Among the group's achievement so far includes recruiting more than 10,000 members across the country, and helping a group of IDPs in Mai Mahiu to construct more decent housing.

The youth organisation also sponsors youth activities in Mukuru slums, does casting for various theatre groups, and organises educational workshops to give career guidance.

"Many youth today, for lack of proper guidance, chose careers for the wrong reasons. They are either driven by the promise of huge monetary gains or by perceptions that certain jobs are fashionable," Muriu observes.

His advice is that after high school, education becomes more of a lifetime endeavour rather than a short-term engagement.

"After 18 years there is a time to study and the freedom to choose what to study. From here, life becomes a game of opportunities and time," he says.

Muriu, who only gives his age as "old enough to be an MP but not old enough to be president", reveals that he plans to retire at 30 years so that he can fully concentrate on pursuing his passion of uplifting the social and economic status of youth in society.

"To me, retirement is reaching a point where your money works for you instead of the other way



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round. It's the establishing of systems that can operate without my direct input," he explains.

Muriu is determined to turn around the long held perception that prosperity and achievement is a preserve of the grey-haired.

His advice is that although education is good because it opens up the mind to conceptualise issues in a broader way, "success in life takes more than just having good academic grades".

Evans Muriu:
"Success in life takes more than good academic grades"