

SPEAKING OUT: DAVIES OKEOWO ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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'I grew up in not so good circumstances, in a polygamous home and didn't see my father a lot. Sometimes I would go years without seeing him even though he lived only 30 minutes away. We



Figure 23 Davies Okeowo, 30, is an entrepreneur and the winner of Next Titan, Nigeria's version of *The Apprentice*
Credit: Davies Okeowo

didn't live in a slum, but it was a low-income neighbourhood, and it wasn't very rosy. One of the choices my parents made that I'm grateful for was putting me in a very good private primary school. It was my first glimpse of what could be.

In high school, business studies and accounting were my favourite subjects. I love commerce. For me it's easy to understand and comprehend. I studied accounting at university – I was the first person in my family to go to university and get a degree.

In my second year I had a realisation of what entrepreneurship could be. I know he's not always popular, but Donald Trump really made it happen for me. I saw *The Apprentice* and I thought, "this is what I want to do with my life". To run a business, to employ people, to create opportunities. From that point on I was focusing on entrepreneurship. I watched DVDs, listened to audio recordings, attended seminars and read books by Richard Branson and people like that.

I've never taken a job, I've always been full-time in entrepreneurship. After university, in 2014, I started my first business, but it didn't work out. Then on the 31st of October of that year, I was stuck in a traffic jam with my mentor. What should have been a 25-minute journey took three hours and she helped me to really identify my skills and focus my efforts. So, for once Lagos traffic was helpful to me!

She told me that a common challenge for SMEs [small and medium enterprises] and micro businesses is that they need accountancy and financial advice but can't afford a full-time accountant. The following month, I met my co-founder and, in January 2015, *Enterprise Hill* was born. We were aiming to help small and micro businesses in Nigeria get more profitable, by building accounting and financial structures. The business grew organically until August 2015 and then I took part in *Next Titan*.

Next Titan is Nigeria's version of *The Apprentice*. When I won, my parents were jumping for joy and dancing. It was the first time in my life I really made my parents feel that way. It was very special. I won five million naira (around US\$12,000), which gave

me the opportunity to take care of my family and also to invest in Enterprise Hill. That's when the real show started.

Thanks to mentorship I was quite grounded and I didn't see the money as making it big; I saw it more as five million reasons why I can't fail.'