

'Your' race 'Your' career whose race are you focusing on?

by Ibukun Adebayo



A young gentleman recently apologised for repeatedly questioning me on my career, and explained his reasoning, quoting an African adage – translated – 'the horse at the back focuses on the horse in front when running its own race'.

Despite having agreed with this adage so many times in my life, I retorted 'that's not true!' against my character norm which is to give a well thought-out response to most debates. My knee-jerk response left me in the position of having to quickly think of reasons why that adage does not stand true, and I eventually came up with the following.

When defining your career, you can't choose to focus on your mentor 'horse', parents 'horse', or your role model 'horse' all ahead of you. These may all be 'horses' in the front that have run or are running a great race, with great success, accolades, riches, medals and recognition being their just reward, but who says that if you keep your focus on their race you're going to get the same result? Indeed, who says you're both cut out for the same career or race?

I've watched a few programmes i.e. My Wife and Kids, and 'Fresh Prince of Bel Air' where Michael 'the man of the house!', and Geoffrey 'the butler' were in separate races and they careered off the race track, outside the stadium and into a cab which dropped them off close enough to the

finishing line for them to take the podium; if you're watching the 'horse' in front, what happens when they veer off course or take short-cuts to try to reach the finishing line – do you follow the horse or keep on track? Who says their finishing line is yours?

The fact is that there are many tactics to running your career race, and the 'horse' in front – your role-model or mentor - may just be a 'pacesetter', in the race to set you on your way, set the initial pace for you and then drop out – if you're relying on a 'pacesetter horse' to get you to the point where you fulfil your career goals, then again, what happens when they drop out of the race?

Despite the many career options out in the market, many professionals who would make great bankers attempt to follow the 'horse in front' into IT; many a great lawyer follows the 'horse in front' into Project Management, with 'Testing' being the new career choice for many horses who might be best employed as doctors, teachers or lawyers. Careers such as nursing are being ignored by many 'stud' horses as these have traditionally not been seen as 'jobs for the boyz'. Conversely, many traditional 'jobs for the boyz' are being taken up by women – did anyone read the news reports of the lady in the City, who quit to become a £60 per hour plumber?

The main focus, throughout your career race should be where 'you' aim to be at the end of your career i.e. your finishing line. Yes, keep an eye on the pacesetter horse that will drop out eventually, and the mentor horse in front – spurring you on to run faster and harder to reach your goals, but be prepared to excel and overtake the horse in front during the course of your race to enable you to achieve the ultimate desired prize, i.e. a job in your own chosen career field, where you've run your own race, and where the finishing line has been determined solely by those God-given skills He invested in you, and not by the horse in front.