

MENTAL HEALTH FOR ENTREPRENEURS

As entrepreneurs, especially when we are just starting, we'd be juggling multiple roles; accountant, admin, customer care, social media manager, visionary etc. depending on the uniqueness of your startup. Yet, right beside all these are physical meetings, grant seeking, and there's your personal life staring at you from one corner.

It is not abnormal to see young professionals who are savvy and amazing in the office but constantly emotionally unavailable and mentally fatigued. The professional system is set up to catch us early these days; we finish secondary school early, get in the university early, finish early and there's that pressure at each stage to function better than our mates. It's a race and some of us are running it unconsciously.

That person you met at this innovation hub has been to ten (fellowships), your friend has 10,000 followers, your younger brother's friend just got awarded 'Africa's most' the list never ends. Interestingly, the human brain fights for social dominance because it believes dominance will preserve its life. Let me explain that.

A cub will never try to struggle a kill with a lion. So, the cub's ambition becomes growing up to be that big lion, so he can eat and not die from hunger. More online followers, more respect and credibility for your work... this gives birth to more customers and more customers mean more money and more money means you can relax better and meet your needs except, that's not completely true.

More money will not make you relax more if you didn't relax before. More money will mean you work for the money not finish and you fight harder to make sure it keeps increasing.

Whatever you don't give yourself now as a startup, you'll likely not give yourself when you are established.

Another great fallacy is that "entrepreneurs have more time and can do whatever they want."

What they don't tell us is how many people's work we have to single-handedly do now. Even though there are apps and bots for automation, we still want to fight and make sure it sounds and appears human; that's work.

As an entrepreneur knowing you can work any time is a two-edged sword. You will either have time for other things by working with schedule or overwork yourself because it's work on your terms. For example, I'm typing this on a Sunday when according to my schedule, it's a free day. But then, I've been busy updating all my online structure so my team has a standard they can't go below. I am experiencing what I am telling you.

Amidst all these, how does one care for their mental health? Tell me malaria or something serious. Some of us in Africa don't even take malaria seriously anymore. We work until we are bone tired. Unfortunately, mental alarms are not quick to notice if we've not been paying attention to ourselves.

If you've suddenly lost your creative edge, are constantly getting fatigued, easily bored, easily irritated, unexcited, having no friends, having contacts with no one else but colleagues, partners, clients, and staff, you need time off. You've created a loop.

When you have a goal, your brain begins to release dopamine; a feel-good hormone to inspire you to get it. Let's assume your goal was to be the best entrepreneur of the year in your state of residence. When you get the award, your brain releases serotonin; another feel-good hormone that responds to feelings of significance and social dominance. Feels good right? All that 'feel good' is brain chemicals. If during your focus period, you worked alone to achieve more, your brain equates being alone to achieving results. The downside of that, however, is that you have eliminated oxytocin; a hormone that's stimulated by companionship and social connectedness and security. Sex can give you instant oxytocin shots like a 'quick fix' but consistent companionship is needed to keep stimulating oxytocin.

I'm focusing on social connectedness because it's something many of us, entrepreneurs don't pay attention to. We are too busy for family, too focused for friends, too disciplined for outings, too unavailable for love and we end up dry in one aspect of our lives while the other part thrives.

There's no need being the most hardworking, respected, highest paid, most awarded, most celebrated ... name it all if all we'll end up being is depressed, lonely, single and intolerable.

There are amazing well paid young professionals who wouldn't have as many depressing moments if they'll only engage themselves emotionally and connect with other people outside work.

Save yourself mentally; get friends who are not in your field of work. Have conversations that drift from your topic of expertise; it will help you sit still and learn instead of being the one to dish out always. Let people refresh your emotional tanks too. I know you're responsible and all, but learn to hand over the reins to other people; delegate. Rest!

Get on a roller-coaster, let the wind hit your face; come out of your ac office and feel the sun on your face once in a while. Get a new hobby that causes you to meet new people.

Finally, if you have emotional problems; heal! Don't use work as an excuse for your emotional unavailability. I know a few solid professionals that I don't want in my personal space. Some are rude, narcissistic, quick to put others down etc. Don't be that person everyone manages because you're skilful. Skill can be learnt any day.

The president, African Women Entrepreneurship Programme, Mrs Ajala Angela once said: "I'll hire for character over competence any day."

Don't be competent professionally and lacking in character. Give yourself space to evolve, forgive your failures, and stop shaming and guilt-tripping yourself. Get a counsellor if need be. Your problem is someone else's expertise; find that 'someone'.

You're more than your business; respect yourself for that. Also, give others the space to evolve and become better people.

Healing & Harmony to you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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