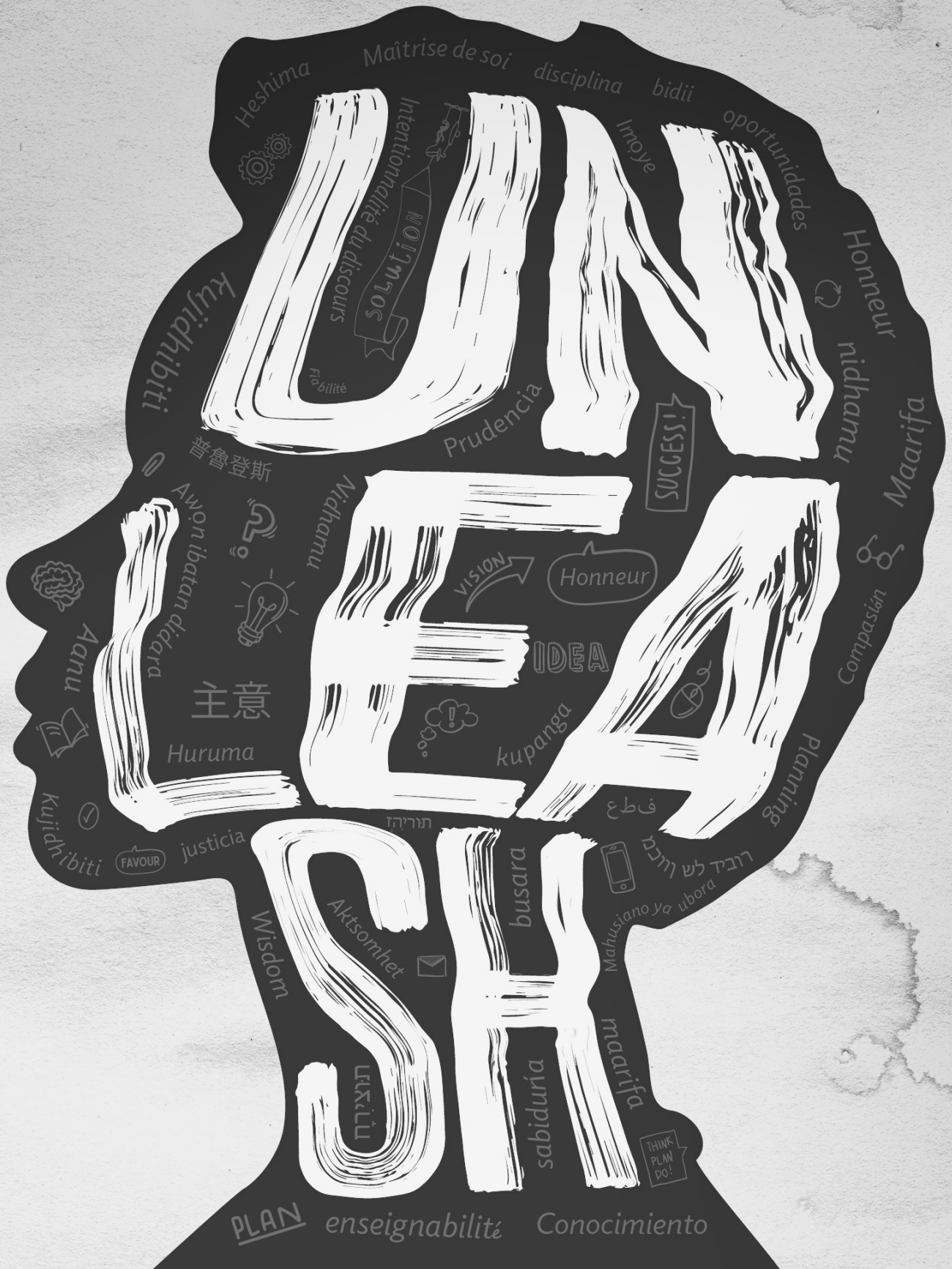


# TOPSYKOLA-OYENEYIN

The Blueprint for a Life that Attracts  
Uncommon Opportunities



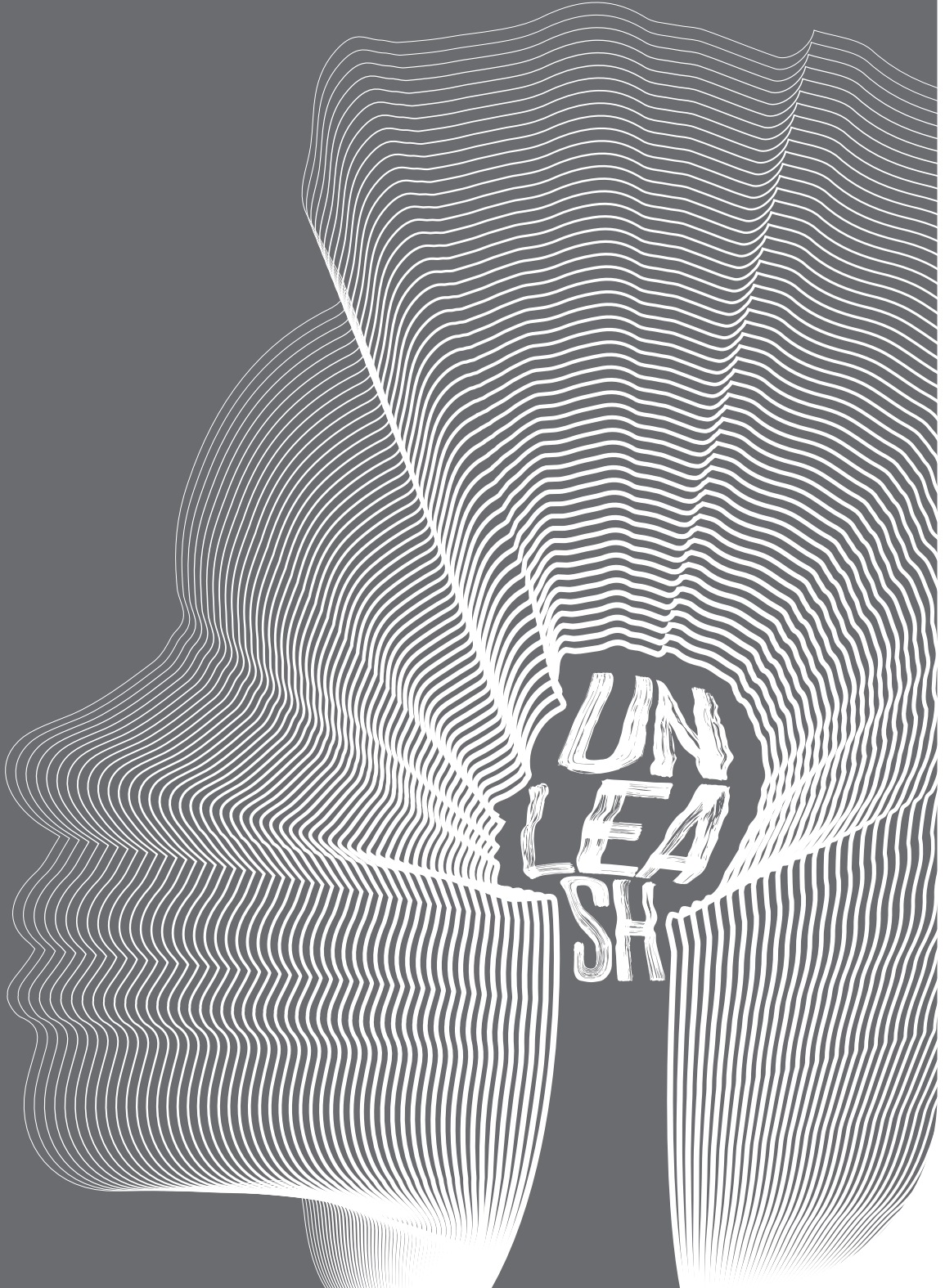
# DEDICATION

*To Oluwademilade, Zurielle, and Avital.*

*May the principles in this book form the bedrock of your life and propel you far above and beyond what you can ask, think, or even imagine.*

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## PREFACE

# FINDING EXPRESSION

At the end of 2019, while on holiday in Dubai and preparing for the new year, a statement was impressed in my mind: “You are not too young.” At first, I imagined it was a point for me to reflect on. Growing up as the youngest person in every room can easily lead to a mindset of being “forever young,” when in reality you may no longer be young. You get accustomed to the label, “Small girl,” failing to realize you are now a grown woman. The implication is you continue to act like that label, rather than step into a position of leadership, i.e., realize it is now your responsibility to give others a leg up. As I reflected more on the statement, I looked beyond myself, and started thinking of some of my supposedly young friends, between the ages of twenty-five and thirty, and I said to myself, “They are not young. Labeling them as young is limiting their potential.”

As I meditated more on that impression, I started sensing strongly that now is the time for a young generation to rise, find expression, and thrive. At the age of twenty-eight, I became a General Manager in Nigeria’s oldest Bank—a role typically occupied by people in their fifties. Opportunities that were rare then are about to become more common. The COVID-19 pandemic, similar to the preceding global pandemic — the Spanish Flu of 1914 — has accelerated cultural changes, new economic policies and technological advances. Time will tell if the economic growth in the 2020s will mirror that of the 1920s “the roaring 20s”, but two things are clear — there will be a generational shift of power and influence, and new wealth will be created. The acceleration of digitalization has created an enabling environment in which young, skilled people can innovate, create, and drive significant impact. No longer do young people need to wait for or seek a place at the table. Now, they can create their own tables. However, while the possibility exists, realizing it is not so straightforward.

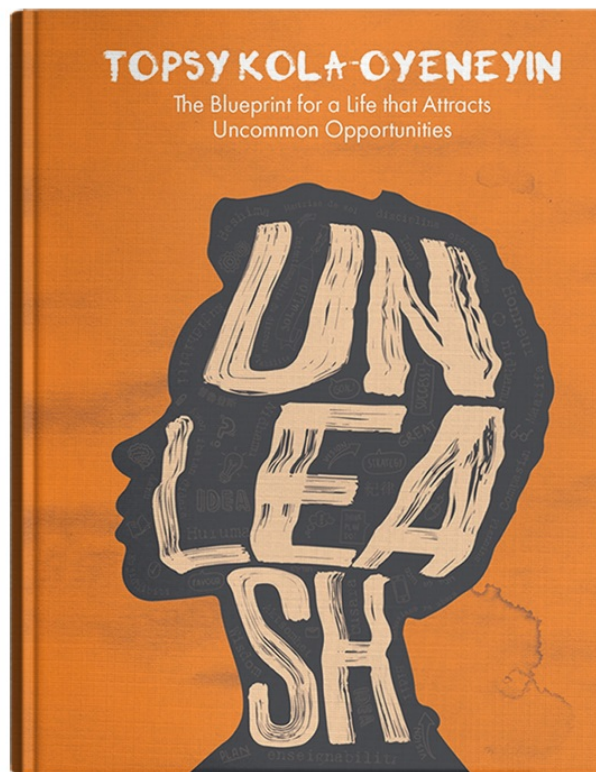
Despite the youthful energy and zeal, the “how to” is not always evident and the understanding required to make necessary trade-offs to achieve the desired end might be lacking.

As a result, despite an abundance of opportunities, some young people are not rightly positioned or prepared to take advantage of them. I wrote this book to bridge the gap between your reality and your desire; to help you prepare and position to take advantage of this season of transition and uncommon opportunities. It is time for you to UNLEASH YOURSELF and find full expression. Within these pages lies the blueprint that will empower you to do just that. This unique blueprint contains practical principles guaranteed to help you achieve your desired results. These are not motivational one-liners or theoretical sayings, but actionable insights that have delivered guaranteed results in the lives of the top 1%. I have applied

these principles and seen results in my 20+ years’ experience of counseling a range of Fortune 500 leaders and successfully executing large scale transformation programs in both the public and private sectors globally, including in multiple African countries. Furthermore, I continually apply these insights in my on-going efforts to build a mutually beneficial marriage partnership and raise two highly opinionated young girls.

One line from the second stanza of Nigeria’s national anthem has this important prayer: “Help our youth the truth to know.” This is my desire for everyone that reads this book. May these timeless truths shine light on your life’s path, make you a magnet for uncommon opportunities, and UNLEASH you into your fullest potential.

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## INTRODUCTION

# DRAWING THE BLUEPRINT THAT UNLEASHES YOU

*“When the roots are deep, there is no reason to fear the wind.” - African Proverb*

We said goodbye to the last guest, and finally, our long-awaited wedding day was over. It had been a beautiful day — memorable, filled with family and friends, lots of love and laughter — but it was now midnight, and I was thankful yet totally exhausted. My exhaustion stemmed not just from the day’s events but everything that led up to it. I woke up the next morning, still tired but excited there was no longer a lengthy to-do list of wedding planning. The only to-do I had was to get to the port and onboard our honeymoon cruise, perfectly curated for us by my travel advisor (A.K.A. my sister). I could barely wait!

I love water — everything ranging from taking long showers to swimming and even just the sound of raindrops. So, the thought of spending ten days by the sea, sleeping and rising to real ocean sounds was just blissful. We got on board the cruise ship with time to spare. It was a 15-deck ship with over 1,500 cabins and a capacity for over 3,600 passengers; huge was an understatement! We took a tour of the ship which would be our new home for the next 10 nights. Every day, we would sail somewhere new, and the ship would dock overnight. I was awed by the sheer size of the ship and how it moved around on water. I saw the anchors that held the ship in place to prevent us

from drifting at night and would control the ship in the event of bad weather, as our tour guide explained. I found the idea of the anchor quite compelling, and it left a permanent impression on me. Imagine if you had something that keeps you grounded as you navigate the journey of life. Something that keeps you secure during crises and ensures you don't stray away from your intended destination.

One thing that anchors do that I find fascinating is keeping ships from drifting away due to strong currents or wind. The anchor allows the captain to steer the ship and not lose control because a ship that is not well anchored can slowly, gently drift away from its intended destination. Our journey in life is quite similar. In storms, we expect shifts. We are alert, we approach each wave with caution and prudence. But it's the slight drifting away when the ocean is quiet that is subtle and more dangerous. Drifting happens gradually and all of a sudden, you discover that you are in a place far from where you imagined and planned.

Like ships, we also need anchors — something to secure us within the radius of our dreams, potential and aspirations. We need something to help us combat the winds and currents of life that tend to shift us off course. If we aspire to build limitless lives, then that anchor would be the right blueprint — one that ensures we are constructing lives that attract uncommon opportunities. Typically, in construction, the blueprint for any building is made up of three major parts: the drawings, the dimensions, and the notes. I daresay the blueprint that will anchor your life and empower you to fully unleash your potential is also made up of three major parts.

First, it includes three drawings, which I also call “the ways of the wise builder,” illustrating how you operate, how you relate, and how you work.

Second, within the framework of each drawing lies four dimensions, making a total of twelve interrelated dimensions within the blueprint.

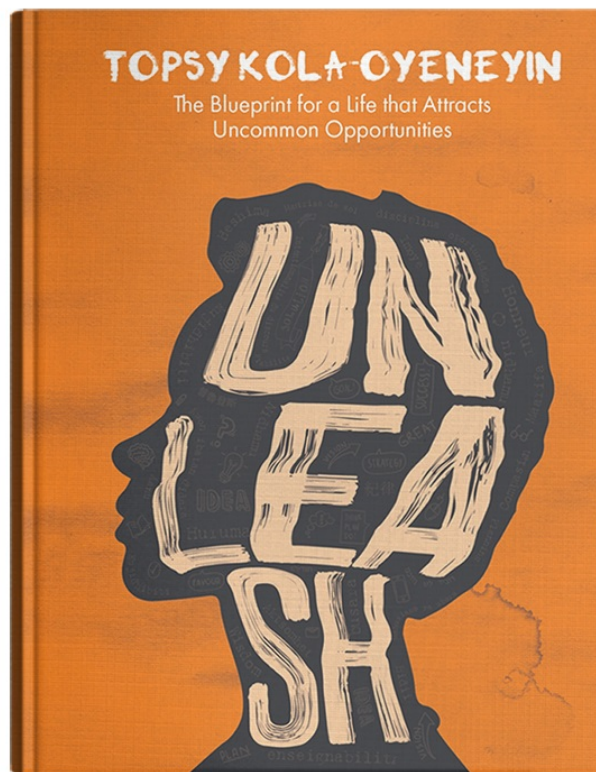
The third and final part of this blueprint contains the notes — parting



thoughts on how to implement this blueprint in your life, no matter your age, location or current life stage.

In the following chapters, we will illustrate each of these three parts of life's unique blueprint in detail. We'll elaborate on what the twelve dimensions are and how each can position you to attract uncommon opportunities. Our detailed illustration will also include practical steps you can take to apply each dimension in your daily life in order to fully unleash yourself. Ready? Let's dive in!

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## DIMENSION 6

# TEACHABILITY

*“There is no shame in not knowing. The shame lies in not finding out.”* - African proverb

“Topsy, what do you think about heading Operations?” my CEO asked me. I replied swiftly and without hesitation. “No! I don’t think that’s a good idea. I am very fine with driving transformation and besides, I am not a banker; Operations is core banking.” I would proceed to suggest a few names of qualified people I thought he could consider. Never one to give up, the next day my boss called me first thing in the morning to inform me he would really like me to lead our Operations function. I accepted.

Running banking operations was a totally different ball game from transformation, where I had handpicked my team using specific criteria. As the Group Head of Operations, responsible for over 700 branches and the bank’s head office operations, I was now leading a significantly larger team that were both older and often more experienced than me. Navigating this terrain and delivering results required many things, chief of which was sincerity about what I knew and did not know, and a willingness to listen and learn. In my very first meeting with the senior leaders of the Operations Group, I put my cards on the table. I told them that I was aware that I did not have the experience they had and there were many things I didn’t have expertise in regarding banking operations, so I would be doing a lot of learning from them. However, I did mention I was aware of what I knew - how to drive change, how to mobilize people towards a common goal and how to create an enabling environment for them to function effectively and excel, and that would be my primary focus.

The sincerity and honesty broke the ice. My colleagues were surprised by my openness in admitting what I did not know, acknowledging how I could add value to them, and my willingness to learn. Over the course of my time as Group Head of Operations, I learned from everyone – from the tellers at the branches who dealt with the nitty gritty of processing transactions, to the experienced Heads of departments in the Head office. I discovered practically the favor triggered in the direction of a person with a teachable heart. Teachability was not just a nice idea, it was actually vital to my survival and ability to function effectively.

## **What is Teachability?**

The Oxford dictionary defines “Teachability” as, “Being ready and willing to be taught.” Being ready to receive instruction; and being willing to learn – having an attitude that’s open to be taught. Both readiness and willingness are required to be considered teachable. Others might refer to this as being inquisitive, curious, and thirsty for knowledge. My simple definition for being teachable is being someone who is eager to learn. Your teachability is evidenced when you seek out learning opportunities; when you are active in the process of drawing them out and not just waiting to receive them; and when you are consistent in applying what you’ve learned. There is no greater reward or joy to an instructor of any kind than to see their student take what was shared, apply it, and get results. Mike Murdock says, “The evidence of desire is pursuit.” That quote resonates across many topics and certainly applies when it comes to teachability. A teachable person pursues knowledge and applies it.

Being teachable also requires a level of humility. The humility to acknowledge what you don’t know and to put yourself in a position to learn from those who do know – irrespective of their age, gender, social status, etc. Some of us might have grown up with the wrong perception that asking questions makes you less of a person, or makes you look foolish. Maybe you grew up in a home where questions were frowned upon — you were always told to be quiet when you wanted to seek clarification. Or perhaps at school, you were ridiculed when

you asked questions and you adopted a mentality of “let me not ask questions in case they are stupid or sound foolish.” Whatever the case, today you prefer to suffer in silence and ignorance than ask questions. To manage perception, you keep quiet and “act like you know” when you don’t know. It is time to let go of that mindset. Personally, I have benefited tremendously from the art of asking questions — not random questions but relevant questions. I ask questions a lot. I’m shy by nature, but when it’s time to ask questions, my shyness evaporates. It has helped me strike up conversations with strangers and always gives me an opportunity to learn something new.

Teachability starts with a mindset that believes there is something you can learn from everyone, even from those who on paper seem less knowledgeable. There is always something to learn – even if it’s to learn what not to do. If you believe you can learn from someone, there is a way you approach and engage them that opens them up to sharing. Most people want to assess your level of interest before engaging you. No one wants to cast their pearls before swine. To be a candidate with whom knowledgeable people want to share wisdom, you must give off a sense of being someone who is continually in a “learning ready” state. How do you become ever ready for learning? By your posture — your attitude towards learning, your level of attentiveness, and your demonstrated interest and curiosity based on the quality of your questions.

## **Illustrating the Power of Teachability**

Prior to my working in the banking industry, I spent a few years in consulting where I’d had the opportunity to be involved in different change initiatives as an “advisor.” I had advised my clients on driving change, working with colleagues and clients to structure change programs, develop communication, and facilitate execution. I found that I got a thrill from such projects, because I got to work hand in hand with my clients and I had the opportunity to see how my recommendations translated (or did not translate) into action. But it is one thing to advise and another to implement. It is one thing to be a support person and another to be the one responsible for

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR



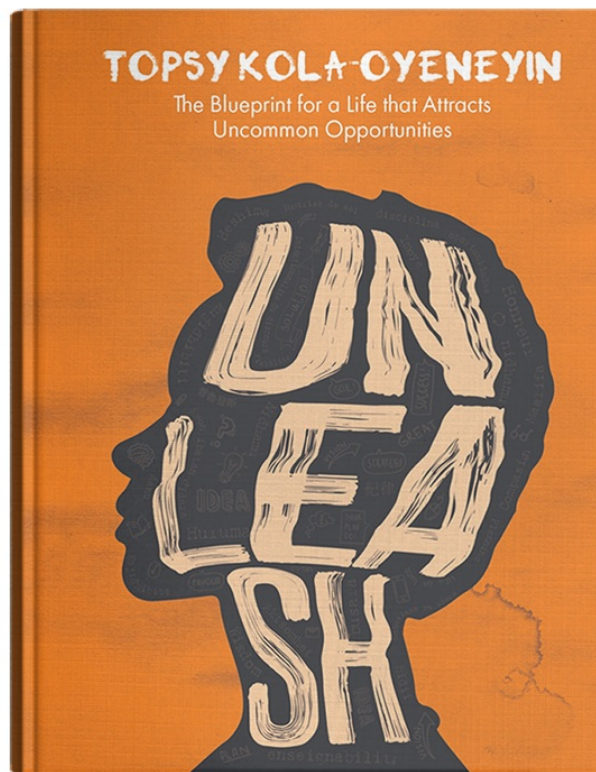
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A systematic pacesetter, she held a senior managerial role in Nigeria’s oldest bank at the age of 28, overseeing colleagues nearly twice her age. She subsequently worked with the Central Bank of Nigeria and led the innovative team behind “Cashless Lagos,” Nigeria’s payments transformation program.

A wife and mother of two daughters, Topsy is passionate about both digital innovation and the empowerment of young Africans, and effectively marrying both to transform African economies. Follow her thought-provoking posts on Twitter (@TKOinsights) or Instagram (@tkoinsights\_) or visit her at

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