

## **African Entrepreneurs – Successful and Responsible**

### **Episode 01**

**Title: Office chairs to success - Ibukun Awosika from Nigeria**

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### **Characters (Clips) / Narrators**

	Women	Men	Age	Language
Intro/Outro		x	Unimportant	
Narrator	x		Unimportant	
Ibukun Awosika (clip)	x		48	English
Funmi Adeyemi (clip)	x		42	English
Ayo Akande (clip)		x	43	English

**Intro:**

Hello and welcome to our new Learning-by-Ear-series entitled: “African Entrepreneurs – Successful and Responsible”. It presents businessman and –women who are particularly good in their profession and at the same time committed to the societies they live in. Our first episode is taking us to Nigeria, the homeland of Ibukun Awosika. Whoever wishes to buy office furniture in what is Africa’s most populous nation, will almost definitely meet this energetic entrepreneur. She has been furnishing offices all over the country for more than 20 years. Join us as we visit her in her hometown Lagos.

## **1. Soundbite Sewing Machine**

### **2. Narrator**

In the Sokoa Chair Centre workshop four sewing machines are rattling away, their small needles whizzing through colourful fabric. You'll probably find the results one day in an office somewhere in Nigeria. For Ibukun Awosika's company specializes in office chairs. Which is why the boss also knows how the perfect chair should look.

### **3. Soundbyte Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“Well, a perfect chair is an ergonomic chair that supports your body in the context of the work that you have to do for so many long hours of the day. And a perfect chair is different for each person. That is why you have so many different designs of chairs.”*

#### **4. Narrator**

Office chairs have been the main business of the 48-year-old for many years, as well as that of her company, Chair Centre Limited. The Sokoa Chair Centre is a part of this company. Ibukun Awosika landed in the furniture industry at the age 25. She studied chemistry at university, and, like all Nigerian graduates, she then had to enter the country's National Youth Service program. The program starts with three weeks military training, followed by a year of work in a company, where the graduates obtain their first professional experience. After her year, Ibukun Awosika was quite sure: She wanted to work in a bank. In the end, though, she ended up in a Lebanese furniture company. It was the first job she was offered. Without thinking twice, she accepted. But she didn't like the working atmosphere. So she took her destiny in her own hands and decided: I can be my own boss.

### **5. Soundbite Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“I employed a carpenter as a chief-carpenter and he helped me to find two more carpenters that will work with us. I employed two people for the upholsterer-section and two people for the spray-section. That makes seven. I also knew that I only have to pay the salary one month after. That means I could get the service in advance and pay the salary later.”*

### **6. Narrator**

Apart from that, every customer had to pay a 70 percent deposit. That enabled the young company to start producing immediately without needing to invest any of Ibukun Awosika's own money. That is how she managed to complete her first order . It was a job she'd always remember.

### **7. Soundbyte Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“That I never forget. The first order we got was to produce paper trays and wooden dust bins. That was the first order. But it was magical to me because it was the first thing we had to do.”*

## **8. Soundbite Teacups**

### **9. Narrator**

Ibukun Awosika leans back relaxed, and beams when she thinks back to the early days. Then she sips her tea and chats with her younger sister Funmi Adeyemi. The 42 year-old has been working in a bank for many years and often gives tips on money matters. She is not at all surprised that her big sister had worked her way to the top.

### **10. Soundbite Funmi Adeyemi (English)**

*“She is a natural leader. Without a doubt. She is not the first child. We have an older sister, then we have an older brother before her. But she was always the natural leader. So she was always the one to get everybody together and organise things. And she was actually quite intelligent at school. So she was always coming first, you know.”*

### **11. Soundbite Hammer**

## **12. Narrator**

While the chair production continues in the workshop on the ground floor, Ibukun Awosika remembers a time when, despite her assertiveness, she had to work hard to be truly convincing. In the first year, her small company received an order from Texaco Nigeria – one of the big Nigerian oil companies. Ibukun Awosika and her employees were to furnish some offices. However, when she turned up to sign the contract, she found that the divisional director was ready for anything but a young, slim woman in flat shoes and a short skirt.

## **13. Soundbite Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“He was like: Oh, hello young lady of course looking behind me as well, expecting that I am carrying the brief case of the MD (Managing Director) gentleman that was coming to sign the contract. I stood there and he said: Are you the MD? And I said yes. And he said: Are you sure. And I said, yes Sir, I am sure.”*

#### **14. Narrator**

Despite this experience, she has never had the feeling, in all these years, that she was not taken seriously as a woman or that she had to suffer discrimination. And that is although the Nigerian society is dominated by men, and women in top positions are hardly to be seen. But Ibukun Awosika shows other women that they can make it to the top. In 2008 she received the International Women Entrepreneurial Challenge Award. She doesn't consider this prize as recognition for just her own success. She sees it also as an award for Nigeria. That is important to her. She is often angry about the bad reputation her country has in the rest of the world.

#### **15. Soundbite9 Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“Every country has some bad people. So we do, too. We have some badly behaved people, whether politically or just ordinary. But that doesn't mean that every Nigerian is bad. There are many hard-working people. The ordinary people are just trying to make a living to survive.”*

#### **16. Soundbite Saw**



## **17. Narrator**

The hard work does not only take place in the chair factory, which is an hour's drive east from the mega city Lagos. There is also much to do in Ikeja, a lively district close to the airport. That's where the premises of Furniture Manufactures Mart, which also belong to the company, are located . A deafening noise resonates through the factory halls. Several large machines are in full swing, sawing desktops out of laminated wood. Alongside them, workers make small chests of drawers and kitchen units. For many Nigerians, a steady job in such a company is a stroke of luck, considering the high unemployment rate. School leavers especially, but also graduates, often have a difficult time finding a permanent job. A few years ago already, in the hope of changing that a little, Ibukun Awosika built the "After School Graduate Development Centre".

### **18. Soundbite Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“What we do is to retrain graduates to make them more employable. And after the training programme we send them to our partner companies who will take them as interns. So they will go for internship. They have intensive programmes for about a month. And then we send them into industry for about three up to six months to any company who would like to take them.”*

### **19. Narrator**

The strategy does not always bear fruit, and not everybody who goes on the program ends up with a job. But most do, and Ibukun Awosika is happy when she gets news of her successful graduates. She is convinced: A good education is the best thing to have if you want to make a real contribution to society.

### **20. Soundbite Door (knocking on the door, short discussion with Ayo Akande) (English)**

## **21. Narrator**

Ayo Akande gives his boss a few documents to sign. He is the financial director of Sokoa Chair Centre and has been a member of staff since 2005. That is a record for him. In the past, the 43 year-old always looked for a new employer after 3 years at the most. This time, though, Ayo Akande is sure he still has a lot to learn from his present boss.

## **22. Soundbite Ayo Akande (English)**

*“You know, one thing I discovered from her is to delegate people. She actually delegates and allows you to use your initiative. At the end of the day she is able to correct you and to say: You have gone wrong here, you are right here and whatever.”*

### **23. Narrator**

Ibukun Awosika has plenty to do every day. She is not only the managing director of the company, but also the mother of three sons. She has to accompany the youngest one to a football match in Lagos, and, at the same time, she's making plans for a visit to the middle son, who's at boarding school near London. It'll soon be the school's parent's day , and she sometimes flies to Europe for the day to be there. When she has a quiet minute to herself, she sometimes asks herself how she manages it all.

### **24. Soundbite<sup>14</sup> Ibukun Awosika (English)**

*“How did I manage as a mother in the midst of everything? Good question. But I do have a great husband and I believe having a great partner makes all the difference because if you don't have that support and encouragement to give you the latitude to have the sense of liberty than it's much more difficult.”*

## **25. Narrator**

She also gets support from other family members. Sister Funmi Adeyemi especially, knows exactly where to take her sister if she wants to help her relax.

## **26. Soundbite<sup>15</sup> Funmi Adeyemi (English)**

*“To the mall, to the shopping mall, especially the outlet mall you know. We do that a lot when we are on holidays, you know. In the mall she is worse. Shopping-therapy that’s actually what we are enjoying doing.”*

## **27. Narrator**

But Ibukun Awosika doesn’t yet know when she will finally find a quiet moment for a shopping spree. Before that her sewing machines will have certainly rattled through a whole load more colourful fabric.

## **28. Soundbite Sewing Machine**

**Outro:**

Today we paid a visit to entrepreneur Ibukun Awosika in Nigeria. Our reporter was Katrin Gänsler. What do you think of the Nigerian businesswoman? Could other young Africans also succeed in climbing the ladder of success as she has done? We look forward to your feedback. If you would like to hear the program again or tell your friends about it, you can also find our “Learning-by-Ear“-Series in internet at the following address: [www.dw.de/lbe](http://www.dw.de/lbe).

Goodbye for now, see you for the next episode of Learning by Ear!