

African Entrepreneurs – Successful and Responsible

Episode 10

Title: From Small Salesman to Cosmetic King – Girmai Teclai’s German Success Story

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Characters / Narrators

	Women	Men	Age	Language
Intro/Outro	x		Unimportant	
Narrator		x	Unimportant	
Girmai Teclai (clip)		x	Around 45	English
Luchia Germai (clip)	x		Around 25	German
Saba	x		Around 25	German

Intro:

Hello and welcome to a new episode of our Learning by Ear series about successful and responsible young entrepreneurs. Today we leave the African continent for Germany, where we're going to meet a successful entrepreneur who's originally from Eritrea in East Africa. Girmai Teclai is a distributor of beauty products. He started out small in Germany, but now he's become a big businessman.

1. SFX: Truck arrives. Girmai talks to the driver in German

2. Narration:

The lorry driver looks a bit disorientated. He's just arrived to pick up a consignment from 'GT World of Beauty'. Girmai Teclai opens the gate for him and starts giving instructions. The lorry driver is told to reverse into the warehouse, while the fork-lift truck driver Björn is asked to bring over the boxes. The consignment for Holland is ready to go and Girmai is happy. He's the boss of the company, which sells and distributes beauty products, and when he's not working in his office he can usually be found overseeing operations in this cavernous warehouse.

3. Girmai Teclai (English)

„When I come in in the morning, I have to go through all the shelves, to go upstairs, to the third floor. I have to see if everything is okay. I have to check everything. So every day I have to be here. Not only once or twice a day, but I have to be here every hour.”

4. SFX: Warehouse atmo, forklift truck noises

5. Narration:

Girmai has a total of 26 employees here in Gelnhausen, a small town not far from Frankfurt. Here in the warehouse, they assemble the orders, pack them, and distribute them all over Europe. Most of the goods go to other retailers and shops which sell them on to the consumer. Every day, around 150 deliveries leave the warehouse. The shelves are piled several metres high with creams, lotions, and ointments. GT World of Beauty specialises in beauty products for people with dark skin. There are 1600 different products in its range. While Björn, the fork-lift truck driver, is dealing with the consignment for Holland, the boss goes up to the next floor.

6. Girmai Teclai (English)

“So these are hairpieces. We import our own hairpieces from Asia. First of all, we store them on the first and second floor because they’re expensive and very valuable products. Secondly, they are light and easy to carry. *(takes something)* So this is human hair. In the media, you always see that long hair, and you think it’s their own hair? No! It’s Chinese hair. But human hair also lasts longer. You can style it, you can blow-dry it, you can curl it, you can wave it. With synthetic hair you style it once and then you throw it away.”

7. Narration:

Girmai walks past more than a thousand different types of hair, filling countless shelves. Dark hair, light hair, curly hair, straight hair... The boss, with his close-fitting black T-shirt and his own short, carefully styled hair, is especially proud of the technology in the warehouse. This is one of the reasons why his company is a market leader in Germany, he says, and enthusiastically demonstrates the automatic mechanism for moving the enormous shelves.

8. Girmai Teclai (English)

“I push the button and then I have to push this, and then I have to move. **(BEEP)** You can see that it closes within 27 seconds and it opens another shelf. Now if you want to take pallets from there, this shelf is open, and now you can take the pallets out.”

9. SFX: Warehouse atmo

10. Narration:

This sophisticated mechanism is needed because the business has been growing steadily for years. Girmai started the company in 1985. Back then it was just one small shop. Now he has 50 workers on the payroll, here at the company headquarters and in six of the company's own shops in Germany and Belgium. In the last five years alone, turnover has doubled, and this success is reflected in the office section at the front of the building, where more of Girmai's employees are busy on the phone to customers, taking orders. This young woman is one of the boss's relatives:

11. O-Ton Luchia Germai (German)

„My name is Luchia Germai, and I work in the office. I started here doing work experience, and I enjoyed it. Then immediately afterwards, I was taken on as a trainee. Girmai isn't like a boss, he's just like an ordinary person, a friend - not only with me, but with everyone here. It's a lot of fun working with him.“

12. Narration:

The relaxed atmosphere is also apparent in the layout of the office. There are no locked doors here, and even the boss's office is open at the top, so everyone can hear what's going on around them. Inside, the boss is sitting in front of a big screen. On the walls, are pictures of his family, and the cupboard is full of awards, as well as a trophy from Eritrea Frankfurt, a football club made up of Eritrean migrants. It's engraved with a dedication to Girmai, although he himself hasn't played for some time.

13. Girmai Teclai (English)

“The people who started at my age, they are fading. So they are replaced by the young guys. And in order that the young guys continue, I help them financially.”

14. Narration:

Social commitment is important for the entrepreneur. Even if he doesn't have time himself to get directly involved, he tries to help financially. He's also creating jobs for young people, and offering them traineeships – here, and also in Frankfurt, where the company has a subsidiary. Girmai wants to drop by there today.

15. SFX: Getting into the car

16. Narration:

So Girmai hops into his smart Mercedes, which he bought brand new four years ago. Racing down the highway at 160 kilometres per hour, the Eritrean talks about the important influence his father had on his career.

17. Girmai Teclai (English)

“He had buses, travelling from the city to the village. And he also had a shop. I was going to school and then after school I helped my father to run the shop. And I was always good in business, to be honest. I was buying and selling. That`s how I grew up.”

18. SFX: Atmo car engine

19. Narration:

But Eritrea`s long struggle for independence from Ethiopia held back the country`s economic development. For the young people, during wartime, there were only two alternatives: fight, or leave the country. Girmai decided to go to Europe. He came to Germany in 1980, where he helped out in a bakery and worked in a supermarket. Then, when he`d saved enough money, he set up his own business.

20. Girmai Teclai (english)

„When I started, in the very beginning, when I was thinking of buying and selling goods, I was just buying these cosmetics from neighbouring countries like [the] Netherlands and the UK, bringing them in my travelling bag and selling them in the night clubs. You can imagine, I go to dance with my friends and instead of dancing I was just carrying my bag to sell products. But it was fun!“

21. Narration:

Beauty products specially designed for people with dark skin – back then, this was a gap in the German market. Soon afterwards, Girmai was able to open his first shop in Frankfurt. The fact that he was a foreign businessman in Germany was never a problem for him. In his opinion, self-motivation is a much bigger factor in achieving success than origins or education.

22. Girmai Teclai (English)

“To be an entrepreneur does not happen because you studied marketing or you studied business. I know there are people who studied business, but I know also people who don’t know how to write, they didn’t go to school or attend any class, and they are great business people. I would say that everybody can do it. But you have to have a special feeling to do business.”

23. Narration:

Girmai has this feel for business, and he loves it. He’s the master of his own time, the money is good, and he’s in control of everything – this spurs him on. It’s a bit like his baby, he says; he enjoys spending time with it. But he admits that his four other children, the real ones, sometimes don’t get to see enough of him, because he has to work hard to make sure that GT World of Beauty remains successful.

24. Girmai Teclai (English)

“The competition is also tough here, it’s not easy. You know, you have to be better than the others in order to be successful. You have to be good in marketing. Your marketing concept must be good, your advertisement must be good, your stock... *(phone rings)* Ah, Peter... Hello!”

25. Narration:

Girmai’s phone rings constantly. This time it’s a British business partner on the line. The skyscrapers of the financial metropolis of Frankfurt are getting closer, and Girmai is firm and business-like on the phone as he confirms payment for a delivery. Then he goes back to discussing his business strategy. Price isn’t the most important selling point for him any more – instead, the emphasis is on quality. He remembers the time he started his business in Brussels when a man came to see him in his shop. The man asked why Girmai had all those beautiful furniture and decoration in his shop, which he regarded as unnecessary. In his opinion, all that a customer needs was a good prize. Girmai felt very insulted and he told the man, that his customers of course deserve a beautiful shop. Soon his business strategy was approved as his shop always was overcrowded with customers. Some time later, it turned out that the man had a shop right across the road, and he designed it exactly like Girmai’s.

In Frankfurt, Girmai parks his Mercedes in front of the main station and proudly demonstrates what he’s talking about.

26. SFX: Shop

27. Narration:

In the elegant GT World of Beauty shop, the floor is gleaming, the shelves are well stocked, and attractive saleswomen are busy advising the mostly female clientele. One of them is Girmai's niece, 24-year-old Saba. She did her sales apprenticeship in this shop, so she's quite used to surprise visits from the boss.

28. Saba (German)

“He does come in now and then, but he's not here all that often. When he comes in he looks around a bit to check that the shop is looking perfect, to see if we're good with the customers and give them good advice. He likes everything to be clean and perfect, all the time.”

29. Narration:

Girmai's happy with the way things are going, though in any case the shop only contributes a fraction to his total turnover. He casts a professional eye over the racks of shelves and examines the products. But when asked which is his favourite product, he hesitates for a suspiciously long time.

30. Girmai Teclai (english)

“My favourite is this one. That's what I use. I mean, I tried many kinds of products, but the best one that suits my hair is this. Older products, I still know them; but newer products, not any more.”

31. Narration:

So Girmai isn't a real expert on beauty products – but he certainly is a real, successful businessman.

Outro

And that's all for today's Learning by Ear program. Our reporter was Adrian Kriesch. We hope you enjoyed the tenth part of our series about young African entrepreneurs. If the stories encouraged you to think about starting your own business, please visit our website at www.dw.de/lbe. Here you'll find more information on how to become an entrepreneur, and we're also always glad to get your feedback. Send us an email, to lbe@dw-world.de. Goodbye for now - until next time!