Mindset, motivation and the moonshot

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How to transform your legal practice (and your life) during tough times with Ozioma Egwuonwu

Reinvention is the most critical skill of this century—and we're all capable of it. Not once, but repeatedly. And not alone, but together.

These were the key messages of internationally acclaimed speaker and strategist, Ozioma Egwuonwu, in a three-part series designed to help legal professionals transform their lives, careers and organizations using her signature framework, Reinventing the Future.

The May 2021 sessions were the latest in BLG's ongoing Professionalism Series, part of the firm's efforts to help clients, communities and the country as a whole prepare for what's next. Total attendance was close to 1700 and each session was worth 1.0 CPD credits under the Law Society of Ontario.

You can use this event recap to explore Egwuonwu's four Ms: the mindsets, motivations, models and methods you need to achieve your "moonshot"—a popular term for a bold personal or professional goal. See how your fellow legal professionals responded to interactive polls during each session in the "Survey says…" sections. The "Homework" sections pose questions you'll need to answer to help reinvent your own future.

What's your future?

According to pwc, technological breakthroughs, demographic shifts, rapid urbanization, shifts in economic power, resource scarcity and climate change are the megatrends that are impacting our everyday. A global pandemic has disrupted the way we work, with drastic impacts on lawyers. For business, there is a constant push-pull between four different worlds: red (where the search for the next hottest thing for the customer drives innovation and specialization), blue (where big-company capitalism rules), yellow (where small is best and humans come first) and green (where social responsibility and trust dominate the corporate agenda).

The rate of change is exponential.

“Chaos exists in exponential change,” Egwuonwu says. “But it’s also where amazement exists. We have to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. Start seeing yourself as an agent of transformation.”

Survey says…

Almost half of the attendees believed the legal profession was headed towards a red world. This was also the world 38 per cent of attendees preferred to live and work in, with the rest preferring a blue or yellow world (25 per cent each) or green world (13 per cent).

Mindsets

Mindsets influence our attitudes, behaviour and results. According to researcher Carol Dweck, those with a fixed mindset believe that abilities are determined at birth, so they’re driven to prove themselves. They avoid challenges, fear failure and take feedback personally. Those using a growth mindset believe that potential can be developed, so they focus on learning. They embrace challenges, aren’t afraid to fail and see feedback as an opportunity to evolve.

But there’s a third mindset, Egwuonwu says.

A “transformation mindset” grabs opportunities for reinvention. Faced with chaos, those using a transformation mindset don’t settle for incremental shifts. Instead, they transform systems and structures on behalf of their clients, firms, families and selves.

To reinvent your mindset, Egwuonwu recommends four strategies. First, adjust the way you look at the world, including the language you use. Next, make supportive practices part of your every day routine. Third, focus on connecting with others in ways that energize you. And last, conduct a regular “reality audit” to explore what’s holding you back.

Survey says…

Just over half (51 per cent) of attendees said they had a growth mindset about their future, while 48 per cent said they had a mixed mindset and one per cent admitted to a fixed mindset.

Homework: Reinvent your mindset

What kind of mindset would you like to have in your life and business? (Find out which mindset is your current go-to using this American Bar Association quiz.)

What would your world look and feel like if you fully embraced this mindset?

What practices will support you in developing your desired mindset?

What relationship can you create with yourself and others to help nourish this mindset?

What current realities about your practice and personal life must you face to make progress?

Motivation

Motivation is what inspires us to move forward, Egwuonwu says.

Intrinsic motivation comes from within. We are intrinsically motivated when we find things interesting, enjoyable and aligned with our values, and this leads to autonomy, mastery, purpose and innovation. Extrinsic motivation is about external reward and punishment. It leads to stress, disengagement and burnout.

The Japanese word *ikigai*, which loosely translates to “a reason for being,” is the meeting point of what you’re good at, love to do, can be paid for and the world needs. If you find your *ikigai*, you’ll have both purpose and financial security, asserts Egwuonwu.

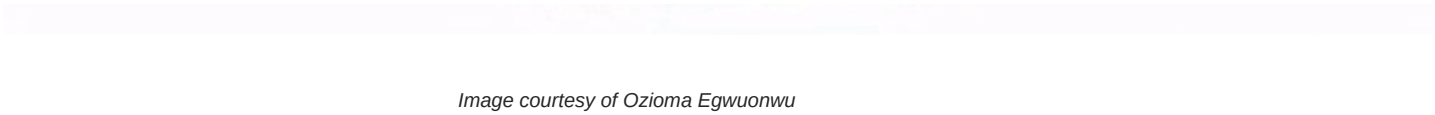

Image courtesy of Ozioma Egwuonwu

Survey says…

When attendees were asked to identify the key motivational driver for their career, 53 per cent said intrinsic and 47 per cent said extrinsic. When asked how they felt at the current moment, most put themselves on the lower half of the *ikigai* chart, with a heavy concentration at the point where profession and vocation meet (“comfortable but feeling of emptiness”).

Homework: Find your purpose

Where are you on the ikigai chart? Where do you want to be? What can you add to your life to get there?

What inspires you to move forward?

Models

The models we use in everyday life are key to our transformation.

Models can be people—the individuals who shape our understandings and support (or thwart) our progress.

They can be mental models, which Peter Senge describes as the values, beliefs, assumptions and shortcuts that often unconsciously limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. Egwuonwu equates mental models to a map of the world. “We have to compare the world we want to live in to the map we’re holding in our mind,” she says.

Models can also be approaches.

How we choose to learn, for example, can influence our outcomes. Harvard's Richard Elmore identifies four styles of learning. Hierarchical learning is top-down. Distributed learning is about personal choice. Individual learning happens on your own. Collective learning happens together. "Content is everywhere," Egwuonwu says. "Networks are the new classroom. Look to the people around you as a guide for reinventing yourself."

David Cooperrider's appreciative inquiry is another way of looking at learning. Instead of exploring what's wrong and identifying problems, appreciative inquiry looks at what's right and how to get more of it. "Every human system has something that's working," Egwuonwu states. "We get more of what we look for, whether that's deficits or strengths."

Survey says…

When it comes to models of learning, attendees were fans of personal choice, with 36 per cent preferring distributed individual learning and 32 per cent preferring distributed collective learning. Only 12 per cent preferred a hierarchical individual model. When asked what attendees found themselves inquiring into most of the time, 84 per cent said "what doesn't work" and 16 per cent said "what works."

Homework: Explore your models

What are the mental models that you hold about yourself, your work and the world? How do you feel about possibility? Collaboration? Fun? Change? Your practice? The future?

What's your preferred learning style? Is that supporting your transformation?

What's working for you right now? How could you get more of that?

Methods

Theories lay the foundation for change, but doing the work of transformation requires a new toolkit.

Here are seven methods that Egwuonwu recommends:

The Johari Window. Self-awareness is a prerequisite to change. The Johari Window is an exercise that helps us understand ourselves in four quadrants: what we know and show, what we know and hide, what others know that we're blind to, and what no one knows. We can make conscious choices to share hidden aspects of ourselves and to ask our family, friends and colleagues about our blind spots. "Self awareness is the gift that keeps on giving," Ozioma says. "The more you know, the more you can grow."

Adaptive expertise. Expertise is located on two continuums: efficiency and innovation. "Routine experts" are very efficient at what they know well, but throw them in a new situation and they flounder. "Adaptive experts" can transfer their knowledge to new contexts so they're both efficient and innovative. "Routine expertise will only get us so far," Egwuonwu notes. "We have to believe in our ability to adapt and collaborate with others to come up with new solutions."

Cynefin framework. This method, pronounced ku-*nev*-in, helps leaders identify the best way to approach a situation based on whether its context is clear (use best practices), complicated (use good practices), complex (use emerging approaches), chaotic (use novel approaches) or confused (anything goes). Identifying the context before identifying the tools or resources you'll need saves time and reduces stress.

Collaboration. This is the key to solving most of our challenges, Egwuonwu admits, but it needs to be done well. Strive for quality communication, cooperation ("moving from ego to eco"), connection ("pay attention to those on the periphery") and commitment.

Design thinking. This way of approaching challenges and opportunities combines empathy for where you are, creativity in considering alternatives and rationality in ensuring your solution fits with your unique context. This HBR article is a good summary of the concept.

Focus. Tools to increase your focus include Getting Things Done, the Pomodoro Technique, Todoist, Asana and Trello, but more important than apps and techniques is a personal commitment to achieving your goal. At the beginning of every week, Egwuonwu completes an "effort list," identifying her goal (where she will put her effort) and role (who of her many selves she needs to be to accomplish it) for each day of the week.For example, one of Egwuonwu's friends hates writing but loves cooking. If her Monday goal is to finish a chapter of her book, she brings her "chef self" to the task, which leads to better focus and more fun.

Flow. Moments when we are completely absorbed in a challenging and enjoyable task are known as flow, a concept popularized by positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Being in a flow state increases our capacity for joy and fulfillment. To trigger flow, eliminate external and internal distractions, work at your biological peak time, work on a specific task that's just challenging enough, set a goal, use caffeine strategically, stay hydrated and put together a flow playlist.

Survey says…

Egwuonwu asked attendees to rate their ability to navigate complexity. Sixty per cent said "I get by OK," while a third said they were "complexity connoisseurs" and eight per cent said they found complexity hard to handle.

Homework: What's in your toolkit?

What methods will help you get to your desired destination?

The moonshot

We want to shoot for the moon, but fear holds us back.

"We're told as high performers that we have to be perfect," Egwuonwu explains. "If we admit we don't know something we're afraid we'll lose status, respect, praise—all external motivators. This fear keeps us reinventing results that nobody wants, including ourselves."

To achieve our moonshot—our purpose-driven, bold, audacious goal—we need to shift from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset, from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, from models that maintain the status quo to models that invite transformation—all using methods that help us achieve self-awareness and adaptive expertise.

"This transformative process requires a compass, not a crystal ball," advises Egwuonwu. "It's a process of becoming. There's always another mountain to climb. This isn't a one-and-done."

Remember to call on all available resources to achieve your moonshot, including the people who can support and collaborate on your efforts, and to celebrate your lunar landing. If we don't mark the end of a reinvention cycle, Egwuonwu says, our brains don't register that something has changed.

She left attendees with an invitation to draft a contract with themselves. Here is her example:

"I commit to redefining my future by transforming _____ , _____ and _____ in my professional/personal life. This means opening up to _____ and leaving behind _____. The experience I am seeking to create in my life and in the world is full of so much _____. As these desired changes begin to take place, _____, _____ and _____ will also change. In ___ (days/weeks/months) I will be able to say that _____ was achieved. I will celebrate this achievement by _____."

"We must create a new vision of possibility, then together make that dream a reality," Egwuonwu concluded. "May you boldly and courageously become the version of yourself that you know deep inside you were meant to be."

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