

Four Takeaways From She Leads Africa's #SheHiveDC Conference

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There is something powerful about women who come together to empower, share, and learn from each other. She Leads Africa electrified Washington, D.C. for a weekend doing that and more. The room felt intimate as a wealth of information was given and meaningful networking took place.

Looking to gain more insight and knowledge about becoming successful the audience participated in several discussions with speakers. During the conference there wasn't any fluffy stories that made their success seem like an overnight, miraculous event. Hearing truths about being an entrepreneur and being given practical skills to put in place on the spot made this conference different than others for that reason especially.

Having success doing what you love is attainable, but it won't always be easy is what I walked away with. The lessons on life, business, and career overlapped to these four takeaways.

Know what your business and career is and why you're doing it

All the speakers made it clear that knowing your 'Why' would help you get far in business. It was concisely noted in the "Building Your Personal Brand" panel with public relations professionals Talaya Waller and Bukola Are. The 'why' pushes you to keep going even when the odds feel against you and you don't know what to do next. The road isn't going to always be straight and paved in yellow bricks, but the clarity will help you to focus, re-strategize when you need to, and keep going.

It also helps to develop everything else around the business idea and career goals so you recognize when opportunities appear. Everyone is unique and identifying that key component should be clear in your elevator pitch, negotiating for yourself, and creating powerful partnerships moving forward.

This became very apparent after meeting two Shea butter founders, Rahama Wright of Shea Yeleen and Funlayo Alabi of Shea Radiance, presenting on different panels, and seeing how they were completely different. Their reason for operating, how they wanted to reach consumers, and a list of other things separated them.

Your 'why' is the foundation for your business and career.

There's room for everyone

No need to fret if someone has a similar business idea as you. Don't be stingy with resources and contacts because you're afraid of someone getting what you're supposed to have. Its a ridiculous thought that will be more limiting than beneficial in the long run.

The room was filled with brilliant women and some of their ideas overlapped or had similarities. It goes back to knowing your 'why' and how to achieve it. On the "Having an Impact" panel with Rahama Wright, Sheri Munis, and Stephanie Kimou the concept became clear when discussing how to get funding for your business. Each were funded in various ways: Wright through investors, Munis is self funded, and Kimou through organizations.

Not only were the shea butter companies a great example of this too, but also during the "Building Partnerships" panel and exercise with She Leads Africa co-founder, Afua Osei. During the exercise each group had to create a food business and then think of a company to pitch a partnership with. Several groups had subscription box service companies, but each group's goals were different and had different ideas on who to partner with and why.

When you don't feel like you're in competition it opens you up to more relationships and opportunities. This was very apparent over the two days as all the women networked and connected with each other. The support for one another grew as we learned and shared more as a group.

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Have Grit

Whether you own a business or work for a company, getting to success takes pushing through the difficult things and doing more than just the work. This is called grit. "You've Got to Have Grit" was the theme of speaker, Nicole Lamb-Hale, Former Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Manufacturing and Services, U.S. Department of Commerce, panel discussion about negotiating. Reflecting on the entire weekend it was clear all the speakers had grit to get them where they are today.

Grit is a mixture of a lot of things such as resilience, discipline, credibility, and knowing what's best for you. It comes together and moves you along to the next phase in your life, and you continue to need it as you go further.

It may look fun, even sexy, but success doesn't happen overnight. There's a lot of work going on behind the scenes. All of the panelist spoke about getting where they are today and the lesson they learned. The grit got them where they are in their careers. They encouraged us to do the same and trust the process because it will be worth it.

Speak Up

There were several occasions throughout each day where we were able to network, pitch our business, and be heard. It was clear how the power of letting people know what you do and why opens up so many doors. People want to help you, but can't do that if you don't tell them what you're doing. This can also be translated into social media and other forms of communication.

During the "Building a Media Mogul Career" panel with Denise Horne, she broke down how to put together an elevator pitch and the key was to always end with an ask. The ask can feel like the hardest part, but its important in getting what you want. The ask also helps you understand what you need and why you're sharing information with other people.

People are eager to help, but even if you're told no it doesn't mean they can't offer something else or say yes later. There is a great impact on your business every time you have a platform and let people know about your business. Never be sorry for using your voice to get what you need and want to succeed. This was a great asset to the speakers also.



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