

# HR guru offers two cents in memoir

**Politics.** The interaction between the author's past and present explores how memories, actions, and lessons from his past shape the possibilities of his tomorrow.

BY PHILIP MATOGO

There's a kitten at my place, it's about five months old. It saw the book *Whispers of Walukuba: Roots and Wings of Learning, Love, Loss, Leadership, and Legacy* by Geoffrey Mulangira lying around and decided to take a bite-size attempt at seeing what it was about.

Within seconds, it had leapt into action like the book was a square mouse. Tearing at it, the kitten went to work. In the process, it seemed to be saying: "Whispers? You are not the cat whisperer, dude. If you are, where's my treat?"

Imagine if the kitten had succeeded in tearing the book to smithereens, I would have to tell the editor that the cat ate my book and, by extension, my review. Thereby providing my bemused editor with a "The dog ate my homework" scenario; a classic, often clichéd, idiom used to describe a typically fabricated excuse for failing to turn in assignments on time. Thankfully, the book was uneaten.

However, the silent testimony of a book's near-finish is usually an opportunity to turn the page, see what happens next. That is precisely what I did, finding in the process an actual page-turner of a book.

By genre, it is classified as an autobiographical memoir, owing to the way it explores many different themes, often spanning a broad period of time rather than focusing on one specific event. Nonetheless, it captures the events of Mulangira's life in the round.

Professionally, Mulangira is a strategic human resources leader with more than 15 years' experience shaping workforce excellence within Uganda's most demanding healthcare and service sectors. His foundational HR career began in December 2008 at Rakai Health Sciences Programme (RSHP), a globally renowned hub for groundbreaking HIV research. It is here that he first learnt as an assistant HR Manager that meaningful work is built on a foundation of people.

By January 2011, he advanced to lead HR for a private security force of 8,000 plus full time staff at Saracen Uganda Limited, a role that deepened his understanding of the complexities of scale and duty. A decisive shift came in June 2013 when he entered the mainstream healthcare sector, serving as head of HR and administration at Kiwoko Hospital until December 2018. This passion for healthcare institutions led him to Mengo Hospital in January 2019, where, as head of HR until May 2024, he guided a dedicated workforce of over 730 employees. Since June 2024, he has brought this wealth of experience to Nakasero Hospital, steering the people strategy for more than 830 professionals at this tertiary facility.

That is the prima facie version of Mulangira's sto-



**Title:** Whispers of Walukuba: Roots and Wings of Learning, Love, Loss, Leadership, and Legacy

**Authors:** Geoffrey Mulangira

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**Pages:** 375

**Where:** All leading bookshops

ry. However, this version is truncated and about as inspiring as a written drug prescription. What intrigued me about Mulangira's story is the passion for distinction in the service of others that induced a double take from me. The writer is a devotee to a people-centred approach to HR. To be sure, his approach locomotes a typical focus on transactional management to the atypical practice of prioritising employee well-being, growth, and experience.

Throughout the pages of this book, we see a man who treats staff as individuals with unique needs, driving employee engagement and retention through empathy, personalisation, and empowerment. The man is a doer, not a "yapper", as the children of today would say. He is so dialled in when it comes to his work, which is also his passion, that he might be "the man" in the book, *The Man with the Key Has Gone!* You know the book; it's the 1993 biographical book by Dr Ian Clarke, an Irish physician and entrepreneur who moved to Uganda in the late 1980s. The title itself is a Ugandan idiom used to describe situations where a task cannot be completed because the person holding the metaphorical and literal key to a room, cabinet, or office is absent. Mu-

langira sounds like a person who would be entrusted with that proverbial key, and he would often be gone because of the far-reaching nature of his work. Would work then stall? Dr Clarke, who worked with the author at Kiwoko Hospital, unfurls a foreword to the book which answers our question: "I first met Geoffrey in the role of Human Resources and Administration Manager at Kiwoko Hospital. In an environment where fatigue runs high and resources run low, it is the HR leader who often becomes the guardian of culture, and the architect of resilience. Geoffrey understood that the "whispers" of a place—the unspoken stories, the quiet struggles, the uncelebrated acts of courage were the fabric of its identity."

Thus, we might deduce, Mulangira was more than the man with the key. He was the guardian who was the key. His near-unimpeachable conduct as an HR leader is prefaced in this book by a past that is rooted in south western Uganda, blossoming to full flower in Walukuba, a somewhat tony division located within Jinja City in the Eastern Region of Uganda. It is situated near the shores of Lake Victoria, often associated with the Walukuba-Masese Division.

The interaction between the author's past and present is a common theme in his personal development, often exploring how memories, actions, and lessons from his past shape the possibilities of his tomorrow. Mulangira's story arc would not be complete if it did not bend towards the impersonal and inexorable march of tragedy.

This book unveils a life of contrasts, which is ultimately the victory of the spirit. Its contagion will depend on whether you read this book or not.

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