

PHOTOS BY SAMUEL LUTWAMA



St Joseph Secondary School in Mukono is one of the many schools Ssenyonga (below) owns

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TIPS FOR POLITICIANS

PLAN WELL

Do not be swayed away by honours and titles that come along with political offices because they are like mirages with no clear destination. When you come to the end of your political career, all these accolades become insignificant and you are left alone facing your retirement.

DO NOT RUSH

Anyone aspiring for a political career should respect the natural path of ascending from humble beginnings through ranks and processes, just like I did.

LIFE OF POLITICS

Muyanja says joining politics was largely influenced by a yearning for titles and honours. Growing up, he used to admire the social influence politicians enjoyed, so after establishing his footing in business, he decided to rebrand himself in the political arena.

He left the management of his business to his wife, Hilda Nadunga Muyanja and launched his political career in 1992. Ssenyonga started as a youth counsellor and, over the years, scaled through the municipal politics to become mayor of Mukono municipal Council in 1998. He remained mayor for over a decade before he contested for Member of Parliament for Mukono South.

"Once a businessman, always a businessman. True, politics has made me what I am today; I have been able to gain social acclaim. But again, it is in politics that my name has been smeared by those who want to bring me down," he said.

Ssenyonga added: "I have also lost a lot of money in winning the political office and this pinch was felt in my business. Having weathered all the storms, I feel I need to go back and find my first love, which happens to be business."

Two years after joining politics, all his petrol stations were closed due to lack of operating capital. Ssenyonga regrets devoting all his resources to politics because he lost the balance of the smooth running of his businesses.

"Politics ate into the time for my business because I was always being carried away by political engagements as a mayor," he said. "I would be one of the richest Ugandans by now if I had continued with my business ventures, but politics crippled my business growth."

Ssenyonga's future lies in his school business



Johnson Muyanja Ssenyonga weathered many storms to become the mayor of Mukono municipality and president of all municipal mayors in Uganda. He rode on that to become the Member of Parliament for Mukono South. The former teacher, businessman and singer, has created his own brand of magic that makes him a darling to those he serves. Samuel Lutwama asked him about his retirement plan

Ssenyonga, 52, dropped out of school after A' level at Lubiri Secondary School to do business. By the time he was 21, he was financially established and had built his first house from the lucrative fuel business.

Just like the saying goes, 'the apple never falls far from the tree', Ssenyonga was not a stranger in business; he was born and groomed in a business

family. His late father, Edward Zziwa, was a businessman and prominent farmer. Ssenyonga has no doubt it was his father who shaped his way of thinking about business and being enterprising.

"From an early age, I worked with my father in his petroleum business and, through him, I learnt a lot of business principles, which I later adopted to run my petroleum business," he said. Zziwa operated a petrol station on

Jinja Road.

GROWING IN SAVING

As a young man earning money at his father's business, Ssenyonga was privileged to be surrounded by a support team that instilled in him a culture of saving.

Ssenyonga singles out his uncle, Leo Kibirango, who was the Bank of Uganda governor in the 1980s. Kibirango influenced him to open a bank account.

"I opened my first bank account while I was in Senior Two at Lubiri Secondary School," he recalls.

Besides encouraging him to save, his uncle had an eye for business. When he spotted his business potential, Kibirango encouraged him.

With time, Ssenyonga teamed up with Dungu Kafuma, a well-known car mechanic at the time, and started getting deals from the Government to repair and service their cars. On top of that, they were supplying batteries and car tyres. The deal fetched some good money, which helped grow Ssenyonga's scope of business.

By 1985, he had bought a car (Toyota Caravan Minibus) which he hired out to some government officials. "I hired out my car to Namirembe Bitamazire when she was the education minister and I was getting good money," he says. "I reinvested the returns in buying spare parts."

In 1997, Ssenyonga felt confident enough to venture into business alone.

"I bought eight acres of land in

Namuyenje, Mukono district on which I built schools," he says. "Back then, the thought crossed my mind to invest in schools. That was the genesis of St John Educational Primary School."

The secondary school now boasts close to 1,000 students and the primary level has about 700 pupils.

Today, Ssenyonga owns some schools in Mbale and Mukono.

"The schools gave me more than financial fortunes; this also exposed me to the outside world through the exchange programmes. I have been able to traverse the world more because of the school than the political engagements."

It was after his influence was noticed that Ssenyonga decided to join politics. Nevertheless, he says when it comes to investments and securing the future, business projects take precedence over politics.

"Politics gives all the honours and widens your social influence, but does not guarantee you a happy ending," he says.

SUPPORT SYSTEM

Ssenyonga has two wives and nine children. Lillian Nassolo, his first wife, is the mother of his five children. Ssenyonga says his wives have been inspirational in his life. Hilda Nadunga, his second wife, was his children's teacher before he married her.

Has saving changed your life? Tell us about it on sunday@newvision.co.ug