

LETTER OF THE DAY

This holiday, read a book, learn a skill or even start a business

Every year, when schools close for the holidays, a familiar scene plays out across Uganda. Our children sleep in late, spend hours on their phones, and drift through the weeks with little to show for it by the time school resumes.

But what if this holiday season were different? What if, instead of idling away precious time, our young people used these weeks to build something, a skill, a habit, or even a small business?

This is what even the new curriculum is all about. Children should be great thinkers and innovators, and school holidays can be an avenue to practice what they learn from school.

The school holiday is not a gap in a teenager's life. It is an opportunity, arguably one of the greatest they will have before adult responsibilities close in.

With no classes, no exams, and flexible time, a determined young person can accomplish more in six weeks than they realise. The question is not whether there is time. There is. The question is whether we, parents, guardians, and the teenagers themselves, will use it wisely.

Employers and customers increasingly value practical skills; the ability to do something useful, solve a real problem, or create value. A teenager or a youth who learns a skill today is investing in a future that the classroom alone cannot fully prepare them for.

Skills can be digital — graphic design, video editing, social media management, coding, or online freelancing. They can be hands-on like tailoring, baking, hairdressing, carpentry, or crafts. They can be service-oriented, such as tutoring younger children, event ushering, car



washing, or delivery errands. The starting point is not money or connections. It is the willingness to learn.

Many of Africa's most successful entrepreneurs started with nothing more than a simple idea and the courage to try. A teenager/youth does not need a business plan or start-up capital to begin. They need observation; what does my neighbourhood need? What service are people paying for? A young person who notices that homes in their area need cleaning, that children need tutoring, or that people want fresh juice and snacks in the morning has already done half the work. This means that they are now transferring their school knowledge into practice. They are becoming researchers and thinkers outside the box to solve societal problems.

Parents must not be passive during this season. Rather than simply monitoring screen time

or worrying about bad company, get involved.

Ask your child what they are curious about. Take them to a market, a workshop, or a family business and let them observe how things work.

Introduce them to someone in a trade or profession they admire. A conversation with a mentor can spark a fire that lasts a lifetime.

This is what competency-based education is all about — a child who can do something practical on their own.

It is also important to let teenagers make small mistakes in a safe environment. If a young person tries to sell something and fails, do not mock them. Help them understand why, and encourage them to try again.

To every young person reading this: the world does not wait for anyone. The friends who will lead industries, start companies, and shape communities in 10 years are not waiting for the

perfect moment. They are using the time they have right now. You do not need to start something big.

Start something real. Learn one skill. Offer one service. Read one book about business or a craft that interests you. Take one step.

Your parents may not know what you want. But beyond academics, there is a passion or an interest you have in something. Share that idea with them and ask how you can grow or expand it into something tangible, a business idea, or do something that can earn you an income, help the community, add a skill to you, and allow you to be very productive every holiday or even at school.

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