

**FOUR  
THINGS  
LITERATURE  
TAUGHT ME  
TO TEACH  
START-UPS  
AND  
BUSINESSES!**

**"A THOUGHT PROVOKING  
GUIDE ON STARTING AND  
BUILDING BUSINESSES"**

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**AKINPELU AKINYINKA**

**1.0**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Akinpelu Akinyinka Samuel is a graduate of English and International Studies from the prestigious Osun State University, Ikire Campus.

Well known as AkynSpeaks, he has carved a niche for himself as a life, business and thought strategist. He believes strongly in the power of the mind and that the mind/thoughts are the most powerful resource a man can wield without external influence. Over time, he has spoken to a number of people at several speaking engagement, and on social media platforms with a huge fan base.

His passion about thoughts as led to the founding of [The ThinkSmart Hub](#), a Facebook community that aims at repositioning thought processes that place members at a disadvantage. He also runs a podcast [The ThinkSmart Podcast](#) which is also aimed at helping people get better in life and business by correcting their mind and thought patterns.

This particular e-book is focused on helping businesses and startups become better at what they do. The methods taught here include what he has learned as a literature student both as an undergraduate and a research assistant. Interestingly, this method has been privately taught to a handful of start-ups with outstanding results achieved. It is as a result that he feels compelled to let out the simple secret so as to help other start-ups achieve better results.

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I dedicate this short piece to all personal-development enthusiasts, entrepreneurs, aspiring entrepreneurs, start-ups and everyone who is on the journey towards living a life of purpose and excellence. Cheers!

# **FOUR THINGS LITERATURE TAUGHT ME TO TEACH BUSINESSES AND START-UPS!**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **BE A LITERATURE STUDENT**

I'm not certain I'm saying this because I am a graduate of English which automatically makes me a graduate of literature as well (I loved literature courses more though), but I sure know that this will definitely help you; at least if you would try it out.

Let me warn you that there will be the temptation to think that you already know these things and as such take them with levity especially if you are a literature student or guru. I enjoin you to think differently; because of course, you cannot change your life if you are not willing to change your thoughts. As novelist Leo Tolstoy opines, "everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself" this by all standard tells us that we must be willing to embrace changes in our thought pattern, only that way we will be able to change our lives. When you change the way you think, you put yourself in a place that encourages increased and broader perspective. Broader perspectives enable you to see more opportunities you might have been missing before, those opportunities diligently harnessed in turn change your life for the better.

### **EXPECTATION**

There are a number of things literature students do, but I will be sharing with you four most important ones as regards business. Again, that will be as much as I see it.

I enjoin you to keep your mind open and read through with a positive spirit. Expect that you will get utmost value from this piece; expect that you will be able to start any business by basically following through the processes stated in this piece.

Often time, we get what we expect. When you discipline your mind to always expect the best, you will eventually get the best from every endeavor. In that light, expect the best. I am passionate about living a purposeful life and that includes helping people and businesses in whatever form I can. Expect outstanding results while you read through the four things literature has taught me to teach start-ups and businesses.

## READ

If we encounter a man with rare intellect,  
we should ask him what books he reads.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

Hardly will you find an average/committed student of literature who does not read. Reading might not necessarily be your thing in the real sense but to survive as a student of literature, there are no two ways about it, you must read.

How do you go about African Literature without having a taste of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*? Wole Soyinka's *Death and the Kings Horseman*? Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are not to Blame*? just to mention a few (I wouldn't want to bore you). What would you say of classical literature if you have not met with Shakespeare's plays? Or how well can you discuss female diasporic poets without Maya Angelou? These are situations very close to impossible if not impossible as far as literature is concerned.

An average literature student is, therefore, a reader. Reading is not an option but a necessity for true literature students, ask around. (Well, every course of study requires reading, we just probably do more of it #wink).

## **HOW DOES THAT AFFECT MY GOD-DAMN-BUSINESS?**

This is probably your question right now, how does this concern running my business? Let me help you get awareness.

Warren Buffet; the American real estate and business tycoon read 600 to 1000 pages of business books per day. In fact, he once said "read 500 pages like this every day. That's how knowledge builds up, like compound interest". Does that make any sense? Did that create any spark in you? Let's do the math; if there are 365 days in a year and someone reads a minimum of 600 pages per day that means he would have read 219000 pages of business books in a year on the minimum. My brothers and sisters, it will take more than a miracle to make a smarter business decision than

such a person. Bill Gates reads 50 books per year, that's equal a book per week. Elon Musk says he learned to build rockets by reading. These are known successful people who have validated and still validating the power and prowess of reading. Join the league.

Interestingly, you do not have to start out reading 600 pages per day, start from as small as 5 pages and grow from there. In the words of the Ruthless Executioner himself; Steve Harris, "it does not have to be perfect, it just has to be done"

For any businessman, woman or an aspiring entrepreneur, you will be making one of the biggest mistake in history if you do not read about the business or trade you are about to jump into. Trust me, people were there before you. You must learn from them in your own interest, see their errors, their triumphs, obstacles and all, read their literature. Only that way will you be on the track for success in your chosen trade or business.

Ask yourself, how many business books have you read? How many books on sales have you read? How many books on leadership have you read? Pick up as many as you can and get going. Get into the minds of the best sellers and experts around the world by reading their books and stories, find out what has made them successful at what they do. On one of social media strategist John Obidi's teleseminar, public speaker and founder of the Highly Paid Expert Network; Victor Bassey says this about reading "when you read, do not read like a student who wants to read to pass an exam, do not read like a lecturer who wants to teach what he has read, read like a thought leader, pick those things that are important to you and ask questions about why they are so. Get to know if they can be done another way"

Sadly for us as Africans, it's almost a continental reality that we do not value reading as much as we claim; at least the conventional forms (little wonder some students of literature will prefer to read the summary of texts online and get themselves D's in a 3-unit course). You find people in almost every society investing huge sums in businesses and projects they know little or nothing about, a business they haven't even read about, how disheartening! That your friend is in that line of business does not make you fit for it. That people have scaled through businesses they know nothing about in the past is not a guarantee that you can make head way doing the same. It is as bad as trying to fly an airplane without attending a flight school; a first-degree crash is inevitable. Ignorance is bad but interestingly it has got a pill; knowledge, find knowledge.

During my days as an undergraduate, we were to take a course titled The African Novel. We were to study some selected African novel with Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* top on the list. What 90% of us heard and believed about this particular novel was that it was difficult to understand and that it gave even Dr.s and Prof.s a hard time as such the willingness to read the novel was missing. So much praise, so much buzz, but no one dared to read (at least the larger percentage). We simply believed the novel wasn't worth reading if you ask me. Of course, why should I read a novel I am not likely to understand in the first place? Even when a lot of us haven't even physically seen or held the book, we sheepishly believed what we heard and settled for an online summary. The words of humorist and American author Mark Twain are true "‘Classic' – a book which people praise and don't read".

Long story short, when failure seemed to lurk I decided to read the book. Please don't ask what my grade was but I certainly know that not everyone was as lucky as I was. Don't wait till it's late, pick up that book now, take that course now and enroll for that class now. It might not be as classical, difficult, and technical as you thought. Even if it is, it will be worth the stress in the end.

Let me run a quick one here; if you want to start a business in Nigeria, I can recommend a book that deals with entrepreneur struggles that are peculiar to the Nigerian society. This book discusses issues related to small and large businesses and share new ideas on how to start one. What makes this book interesting is that you will find in it what you will not find in business books written by foreign authors like Richard Branson, Warren Buffett, Robert Kiyosaki, Donald Trump and their ilk. This book understands particularly what is practicable in the Nigerian market space. It's written by a foremost business mogul and entrepreneur who interesting is from my state. I am talking about *Small Business Big Money* authored by Akin Alabi. This book will do you and your business good.



## WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU READ

Permit me to share with you what we do when we read.

1. Engage
2. Review
3. Question
4. Deconstruct (ideology in the text and ideology of the text)
5. Summarize

When you pick a business/leadership book to read, do not read it like you read bible stories, read like a student of literature. Get emotionally involved with the book, ENGAGE the book, and pick those things that are relevant to you. In my case, I usually have with me a pen or a marker to highlight my reference points. That way, you can always go back to REVIEW what you have read. You can easily browse through and get an understanding of what the book means to you. Your review process also affords you the opportunity to QUESTION whatever point you find in the book. Questioning the book allows you to become reflective, you are able to agree and disagree with some of the highlights of the book. This process takes you to another important step; DECONSTRUCT. In deconstructive reading of a literary text or play, we refer to the author's intention as "the ideology in the text" and the reader's perception as "the ideology of the text". This goes to show that an author can have an ideology that fueled the writing of the text but in reading the text, a reader might arrive at another ideology, perspective or thought different from that of the author. Here, the text gives new meaning to the reader aside that which the author has given the text. Most times, the author is not conscious of this new ideology the reader as arrived at while he/she was writing. In essence, you can deconstruct any text/book, be it a business, leadership, personal development or literary text. When next you pick that business book, engage and deconstruct it diligently. You just might come up with new perspectives that are uniquely meant for you and your business. The final stage is to SUMMARIZE. Just have a general overview of what you have read/learned and how you intend to apply it. You can choose to write your summary out on your note pad. This is important because we often forget to put into practice what we have read/learned once we finish reading the book. The summary helps to constantly have your highlights close to your heart and easily implement them.

## **ACTION POINTS**

- Do not start any business if you have not read at least 3 books on that business.
- There are always people ahead of you in every sphere of life and business, learn from them.
- Don't just read, engage, review, question, deconstruct and summarize.
- Ignorance is not an excuse, it has got a pill; knowledge.
- Motivate yourself to read.

AKYNSPEAKS

## **WRITE**

Just as a painter paints and a ponderer ponders,

A writer writes, and a wanderer wanders.

-Roman Payne

Another very important thing an average student of literature does is that we write, yes we do. Whether published or unpublished is not the question, the fact remains that we do write. Anywhere in the world, an average literature student must have written at least one poem, one drama, one prose before eventually finishing in the university and bagging a degree. Even for the laziest of literature students, you must have at least written one poem. (Poem seems easy for lazy students because of its structure, it's a trap trust me. Other genres can be much easier).

Writing and creativity are key for literature students, especially for aspiring authors. This is a quality start-ups should hold dear to their hearts.

### **SHOULD I START WRITING PLAYS AND POEMS?**

Well, nobody has asked you to write a play or a poem about your business sir but you might want to agree with me that so many entrepreneurs/start-ups fail because they despise writing. They see it as stressful or out rightly unnecessary. Long ago I got talking with a young man who was an aspiring entrepreneur, believe me, he had brilliant ideas. We talked passionately for hours while I kept jotting new things I had learned and new ideas I had conceived during the course of our discussion and then he said the unthinkable "I don't write down my ideas like you do, I just think them over". I can't explain how that sounded; I was in shock with mixed feelings of disappointment and dismay. How can someone have these brilliant ideas and not think of writing them down just for once? Needless to say, he started writing that minute.

You don't need to write an epistle. At least get a notepad or jotter, it shouldn't cost a fortune. Not having one is what will cost you a fortune; it will cost you several ideas.

Many big and viable ideas have not seen the light of the day because those who have conceived them refuse to simply write. Mexican essayist and one of the best novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Carlos Fuentes says that “writing is a struggle against silence” your big idea remains in a deafening state of silence until you write it out. Someone might be quick to say "how can not writing make me lose a viable idea?" Well, writing in the simplest words as I see it means "bringing forth". Writing involves bringing forth something from the inside and making it visible, writing involves converting the untouchable into touchable and visible. Whatever you write down first existed in your mind, writing them down implies that you have transferred them from your mind into a paper.

As simple as this is, many refuse to go through the process. They conceive a brilliant idea and refuse to put it on paper till they lose pertinent aspects of that idea or totally lose hold of that idea. Once you have brought forth a conceived idea, you have passed the first stage. That way you cannot forget the idea. You frequently see it on paper, you have the chance to re-shape and re-form it at will; you can now begin a step by step plan towards bringing the idea to fruition.

In *Thinking For A Change*, John C. Maxwell talks about how you can change your life by changing your thoughts, he says you must find a place to shape your thoughts and that your idea must stand the test of clarity and questioning. More important to this discourse is in the fact that one of the best ways to shape your ideas (business ideas in this context) “is to put your thoughts in writing” p.4. For him, if you have to shape your thoughts and ideas then you must write it down. S. I. Hayakawa also has this to say about penning your ideas “learning to write is learning to think. You don’t know anything clearly unless you can state it in writing”

There is no such thing as luck in the business of progress and success. What is needed are calculated strategies and purposeful effort in the investiture of thoughts, finance, time and human resources. You must have a plan and not leave things to chance. Luck as I see it is a product of consistent and persistent effort. Those people you often refer to as lucky have actually put in hard work into their careers, businesses, relationships over time. You probably are not aware of those efforts such that when you see the results they are getting, you then refer to them as being lucky. No such thing as luck, what you sow is what you reap. If your ideas will materialize or not is solely dependent on you and the effort you’ve put in. Take a bold step towards planning, have

a step by step process of how you intend to achieve your set goals. The first thing to do is to WRITE.

Some people are so lazy that they find it difficult to write out a budding idea, they keep them in for so long until the idea is nowhere to be found. Writing helps you pull out resources from the invisible world into the visible and material world. Endeavor to write out every single idea you conceive, you can then proceed from there into developing a plan.

Another problem that hinders aspiring entrepreneurs from writing is that they think the idea is too small to be written. You conceive an idea and then it seems too small and intangible as such you think it's not important enough to be written; this is a lie of a decade. What we fail to understand sometimes is that little drops of water make an ocean; it is, therefore, unreasonable to despise that first drop of water. Ideas might not come in their bulk, they sometimes come in bits such that idea A connects with idea B and then C and so on before all of the ideas come together to make a whole and tangible idea. When you despise and throw away idea A because it looks too small, when idea B comes, it becomes useless as well. No idea is too small, they are meant to be written down as soon as they are conceived.

Don't undermine writing. Make your notepad your best friend, it's powerful. So, when next you have that thing popping in your mind, pick a pen and write it down no matter how small it seems to you. Eddie Rickenbacker says "I can give you a six-word formula for success: Think things through, then follow through.

#### **ACTION POINTS.**

- If you intend to be successful in business, writing is not an option. (a notepad is your best companion)
- You don't know anything clearly until you have written it down.
- Your brain will pretend to have stored all the information, don't mind her, write it down
- Ideas do not come in their full glory sometimes; they come in bits and pieces. It is your job to put them together.
- Do not despise any idea no matter how small it seems.

## **PLAGIARISM**

A wise man will always allow a fool to rob him of ideas without yelling “Thief.”

If he is wise he has not been impoverished.

Nor has the fool been enriched.

The thief flatters us by stealing.

We flatter him by complaining.

-Ben Hecht

Plagiarism in academics simply means using someone else's intellectual property without the person's consent or without acknowledging the person. Plagiarism is punishable by law but again you cannot punish an offender if you cannot lay hands on him yet.

Authors try as much as possible to protect their intellectual property and fight against plagiarism. I remember as an undergraduate my supervisor once refused me access to his unpublished works even when they seemed very useful for my project. I couldn't use them because of course they were not published yet and there was no way I was going to be able to source the excerpts. That's a brilliant way to protect your intellectual property.

### **BACK TO BUSINESS MISTER!**

Now back to business. Fighting plagiarism in business involves guiding your ideas jealously, very jealously at that. People, especially young and budding entrepreneurs often get so excited about an idea or a seemingly viable idea that they begin to share with almost everybody and they put almost every single detail out there for others to feed off. It is not out rightly bad to share a little portion of your idea with friends, loved ones, and potential investors but you must filter what you share and understand what "little" means to you and your idea, else you will soon get that brilliant idea of yours plagiarized.

Your intellectual property is already on the market for sale at the cheapest of prices.

## **DON'T BE GUILTY OF PLAGIARISM AS WELL.**

As much as we do not want people to plagiarize our content, we are also intentionally keen on not plagiarizing other people's content and effort.

Some managers and business executives are so into plagiarism that they would deliberately refuse to give credit to their staffs, team members, or individuals who were directly responsible for a particular breakthrough or success. A good number of managers would prefer to ascribe the ground breaking success to themselves and plagiarize other peoples effort. If you are guilty, you should read Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson's *The One Minute Manager* and understand the power of "one minute praising".

In *Blue Ocean Strategy*, Renee and Chan says that;

"When individuals feel recognized for their intellectual worth, they are willing to share their knowledge; in fact, they feel inspired to impress and confirm the expectation of their intellectual value, suggesting active ideas and knowledge sharing". p.182

If you ever want your members of staff to go beyond their call of duty, acknowledge their intellectual capacity and contributions, motivate them and do not attempt to plagiarize their effort.

There is danger in plagiarizing other people's content, effort or ideas. When you plagiarize, first is that you shut down your very own creative ability, you are not likely to break new grounds. Plagiarism places you in a comfort zone and you begin to relish the idea of stealing other people's content, idea or ascribing their success to yourself. When this continues over time, you become a shadow of someone else.

Copying without editing will end up making you copy mistakes. When you drown yourself in plagiarism, you will not only take on someone else's success, effort or ideas, you will also take on the mistakes that come with it. Let's profit from the words of American guitarist, singer, and songwriter; Jimi Hendrix "I've been imitated so well I've heard people copy my mistakes".

## **ACTION POINTS.**

- Guard your ideas jealously; it's yours and yours alone.
- Not everyone should hear about your idea before fruition, else you will short-change yourself.
- Do not plagiarize other people's idea; you are permitted to redefine though. (copy but don't paste)
- Acknowledge the effort of your team; else you will kill their enthusiasm.
- Understand the power of praising.

AKYNSPEAKS



## **CRITICISE AND BE OPEN TO CRITICISM.**

Criticism is something we can avoid easily by saying nothing,  
doing nothing, and being nothing.

-Aristotle

Criticism and being open to criticism is truer with the very passionate and practicing literature scholars. A true literature scholar is usually not a conformist; they will always find reasons to ask questions, criticize and probably disagree with any seeming loop holed presentation, intellectual discourse or argument. I have been privileged to attend seminars and conferences (thanks to Dr. 'Bode Ojoniyi) many of which witnessed intellectually stimulating presentations and discussions accompanied with an excellent sense of delivery. But to my awe at the end of each presentation, no matter how perfect the presentation seemed you will find other scholars asking brilliant questions, therefore, brewing another argument. Interesting, isn't it?

If you do not question previous trends, you wouldn't create current solutions. It is impossible for you to solve today's problem with yesterday's solution, you need to get today's solution for today's problem.

Another amazing thing I discovered in those seminars was that the presenters were usually happy to entertain questions and criticism; it usually makes their work more accurate in the end. Maybe not all of them though, but I am yet to find one you flares up at criticism.

Again, my Oga like I fondly call him taught me a very important lesson about intellectual papers and arguments I'm not likely to forget in a century. I was to write an academic paper, psychoanalyzing a particular movie. I remember writing "a man is necessarily a product of his immediate environment" in my abstract, he immediately corrected that portion when he read through; "there is a sense in which man is seen as a product of his immediate environment". Look critically at these two excerpts and you will understand my point. The former was totally assertive while the latter was not. He told me that even when you are certain and 100% sure of what you are saying or writing, academic papers and discourse requires that you allow for

opinion and be open to criticism. You cannot afford to be totally assertive about an issue; someone else might have an alternative and opposing opinion which could as well be valid. Then and there did I learn that you truly cannot know it all.

## **BUSINESS CRITICISM!**

Try this with your business and I bet you will be amazed at the results you will get. Be open to criticism, permit criticism and let it make your business bigger and better. Encourage your employee's opinion, don't just boss them around. Do not be a conformist and a boss all at once. Be a leader.

Lan Bercu, a renowned international speaker and president of the Lead Across Cultures International talks about "point at the mulberry tree while scolding the locust tree" and how it relates to modern business in her book *The 36 Ancient Chinese Strategies For Modern Business*. She says "one must practice active listening skills" for conflict resolution in business, she suggests that you

- "Learn to openly express opinions and points of view. One cannot rely entirely on nonverbal, intuitive understanding"
- "Be prepared for a up-front challenge; accept criticism, counter proposals, and suggestions". p.153

Of importance to this discourse, Lan acknowledges that accepting criticism, counter proposals and suggestions is important to the growth of any business. That you accept criticism does not make your point, view or stance out rightly wrong but it in itself gives you a broader perspective, it shows you aspects you might not have paid so much attention to while starting out and eventually makes you better. Acquiring or practicing active listening skills is also important. It requires tremendous discipline and will-power to zip your lips and just listen with rapt attention and a positive spirit. The discipline to listen is what some start-ups and business executive lack and it does not only them but the entire team more harm than good. When you are able to accept criticism and listen with a positive spirit, only then will you be able to in the words of Lan "ask more effective questions"

## **START THE CYCLE AGAIN!**

You don't get better at what you start and then stop doing, you only get better at what you continuously and consistently do. When you complete this cycle, start all over again. It is important that you don't get to the point where you get comfortable with what you have achieved. Soon enough, those achievements, businesses, beautiful career heights that you have attained will become a norm. It will become usual and everybody on the streets will be able to have just the same. Some years back in Nigeria, having an O'level result was good enough to get you a job. Gradually, that time faded out and you now have to get better qualification like N.C.E, O.N.D, H.N.D and then B.SC/B.A. In recent times, degree results aren't getting the big jobs again; everyone is getting enrolled for a Master's degree and some Ph.D.

Have you noticed that you have to run very fast these days just to be on the same spot? At every career or business, competition has grown to the point that it takes a jetty movement to be significant and get to the top spaces of any career or business. Being good is no longer good enough, you need to be excellent

It takes consistent effort and dedication towards improvement to get up to date and develop a winning edge over other competitors. Don't ever get comfortable, nothing tangible happens for you in your comfort zone.

I hope at this point the bankers, engineers, doctors, artisans and all would forgive me for asking them to be literature students.

### **ACTION POINTS.**

- Create an environment that encourages contributions from your employee.
- Develop the discipline to listen without interrupting.
- Be able to discern what and what not is important to your business from every conversation
- Do not be a conformist
- Learn to ask effective and strategic questions

## WORK SHEET

This worksheet is meant to make you reflect and evaluate your all round prospects as regards what you have learned in the course of this e-book. In your own interest, you should honestly use this worksheet so that you can determine your growth/ lapses and then proceed from there.

NOTE: answer all questions correctly and honestly, take your time and think your answers through before filling the spaces.

### SELF-ASSESSMENT TEST

Questions	Answers
1. What industry do you operate in?	
2. How many books have you read about the operations of your industry?	
3. On a scale of 1-10, how well do you know your industry?	
4. Do you have a notepad and how well do you write?	
5. Are you easily angered by criticism?	
6. If 5 above is 'YES', why so?	
7. Would you be willing to take a session on how to break away from 6 above?	
8. Are you guilty of plagiarism?	
9. On a scale of 1-10, how well do you acknowledge and commend the effort of your staff /team member?	
10. Would you regard yourself as successful in your line of business/industry?	

Thanks for taking the self-assessment test, you are awesome!

## BOOK RECOMMENDATION

I rarely recommend books or content to people because I am very keen on protecting my image, no one wants to get dragged into the mud. On a flip side, I will be recommending ten valuable books that deal with business, sales, and marketing because I wouldn't want to leave you hanging and clueless on what book to read after discussing so much about reading.

**Disclaimer;** I will not be responsible for the choice/s made by you or any other person as a result of reading the recommended books. I have not received any form of gratification to recommend any book and the books listed here are to simply help build, market and scale your business. You will be responsible for whatever choices you make going forward. Also, these books have been listed in no particular order.

### **BUSINESS**

*Small Business, Big Money* - Akin Alabi

*The Personal MBA* - Josh Kaufman

*Blue Ocean Strategy* - W. Chan and Renee Mauborgne

*The Lean Startup* - Eric Ries

*The 36 Ancient Chinese Strategies for Modern Business* - Lan Bercu

*The 80/20 Principle* - Richard Koch

### **SALES**

*The Psychology of Selling* - Brian Tracy

*Pitch Anything* - Oren Klaff

### **MARKETING**

*All Marketers Are Liars* - Seth Godin

*The Psychology of Persuasion* - Robert B. Cialdini