

PREPARING FOR A GLORIOUS MEDIA CAREER

Handbook for Mass Communication students



Lekan Otufodunrin

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By

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Introduction

The dream of any student in a higher institution is to become an accomplished professional in the field.

As a Christian media organization, Journalists for Christ International Outreach is committed to mentoring Mass Communication students, campus journalists, student writers and others interested in media career to excel in the practice of the profession.

We are aware of the gap in the curriculum of mass communication Departments and journalism schools in the country compared with current practice in the field and are willing to stand in the gap and give communication students the benefit of the wide experiences of our members.

This is why for the second time in the history of our organization, our monthly Lagos fellowship was tagged Mass Communication Students Forum.

The topic for this edition is Preparing for a Glorious Media Career which I spoke on in August 2013. We have no doubt that God's purpose for you is a glorious one, but there are things you must do to be what God wants you to be in the profession.

My prayer is that God will grant you all the grace and the willingness to take necessary steps to the media professional He wants you to be.

Lekan Otufodunrin
President.

Definition of Key Concepts

To effectively address the topic, it is necessary to examine the key concepts which are Preparation, Glorious and Media Career.

PREPARATION according to the Oxford Learner Dictionary means the process of making someone or something ready for something. It means things you must do so that you are ready for something.

For the purpose of the topic, preparing means what you need to do for your media career to be glorious before and after graduation.

GLORIOUS is defined as being extremely successful and likely to be remembered for a long time. I like the extremely part of the definition. It means not only to be a successful media professional, but also to be extremely successful in your practice. To be an excellent practitioner not just an ordinary journalist but an extra- ordinary journalist who towers above colleagues in his or her accomplishments.

MEDIA CAREER includes career in Journalism, Broadcasting, Public Relations, Advertising, Publishing in print and online and other related endeavours.

The Bible which is the manual for anyone who claims to be a Christian has more than enough examples of why planning is important. There is a popular saying that he who fails to plan plans to fail. As a student, you are not too young to plan and know what to do to succeed in the career you have chosen to pursue.

In Genesis 28: 36 we see Joseph as good planner who after interpreting Pharaoh's dream of a time of plenty and famine came up with a survival plan for the next 14years.

Planning may be tedious but it is a responsibility, not an option. It is not enough to pray for a glorious career. Prayer is not a substitute for planning. Like Joseph did, you must in your quest for a glorious media career take time to translate God's plan for your sourjorn in the profession into practical actions.

Prophet Nehemiah in the book of Nehemiah 2:11-17 also illustrates the importance of planning ahead. After carefully observing and assessing the damage to the walls of Jerusalem, he presented an excellent plan that allowed Jerusalem to survive eventual predicted failure. You must plan ahead and check information to ensure your idea will work.

How to plan for a glorious media career

To plan for a glorious media career you must take the following steps:

• Accept God's Plan For Your Life

“There they answered Joshua, whatever you have commanded us, so we will obey you. Only may the lord your God be with you as he was with Moses.”

Joshua 1:16.

There is a need to fully agree with God's plan for you as a career. Having opted for a media career, you need to accept your destiny and key into it and begin to have passion for the profession. Even if God is still going to direct you to another path, you have to stop exercising doubt about His plan for you now.

An America Journalist once said journalism can only be improved by those who love it but not those who hate it. If you don't love what you are studying and you keep thinking of why you should be studying another course, you are preparing to fail. You should stop thinking you would be better studying one other course or the other. Who told you, you will do better in the other courses?

Our God who created you has the manual for your life. He knew you before you were born and ordained you a journalist. He knows your end from the beginning. The earlier you accept what he wants you to be for now, the better.

Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka recently revealed that one of his career goals was to be a journalist. He actually applied and wrote a test to be employed as a reporter at the defunct Daily Times Newspapers.

However, according to him, he was not employed because he was told he wrote a short story instead of a news story. He ended up his statement on the matter saying “thank goodness, I am not a journalist”. Whatever he meant by the statement, positive or negative, I thank God I am a journalist.

In response to his statement I wrote the piece below titled “Thank God I am a Journalist,” published in *The Word*, a devotional publication of Journalists for Christ International Outreach for July 29 - August 4, 2013.

At an interactive session with a group of students recently, Nobel laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka revealed that one of his career dreams was to be a journalist.

He actually sat for a test to be employed as a reporter at the defunct Daily Times Newspapers but was not hired because, according to him, he was told he wrote a short story instead of a news story.

On reflection about his failed attempt, Soyinka is glad he ended up a literary writer but, or not a journalist. "Thank goodness I did not become journalist" he told the students.

I want to believe that Soyinka's comment is not meant to disparage journalism as a profession. I will rather align myself with those who think he probably believes that he would not have been able to accomplish his global literary status if he had been a journalist.

If God's purpose for Soyinka is to be a literary writer and not a journalist, so be it. God indeed has a purpose for all of us. The scripture says "before we were formed in our mother's womb, He knew us." *Jer. 1:5*

However, I know many journalists who are not happy that they found themselves in journalism. They wish they were practicing some other perceived, more-rewarding profession.

But for me, I thank God I am a journalist. I have no doubt that I am fulfilling God's purpose for my life. Instead of being ungrateful to God for making me a journalist and being envious of some other professionals, I have learnt to discover God's purpose for me in journalism and make my calling and election sure.

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I know that my goal in life should be that I be what God wants me to be, not what I want.

I am too sure that He that called me to be a journalist is faithful. I know that He will provide all my needs according to His riches in glory.

I know that the God I serve is no respecter of professions. What He makes possible for the Doctors, Lawyers, Bankers and other professionals, He will make happen for me too as long as I abound in the place of my calling.

My desire is not to be accomplished for personal reasons in the eyes of the world by opting for any profession other than that which God has ordained for me.

On the Day of Judgment, I want to stand before God and be told 'thou good and faithful journalist enter into your rest'.

• Don't leave God out of your plan

“Come now, you who say, Today or tomorrow you will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell and make a profit” Whereas you do not know what will happen. For what is your life?

It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

Instead you ought to say "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil." James 4: 13- 16

Having accepted to study Mass Communication, it is good to have goals. You will however be disappointed if you leave God out of your plans. Don't make plans as if God does not exist. The Bible says, on our own we can do nothing, but with the almighty God guiding us, we can do everything.

You should not lean on our own understanding but believe in God knowing that there is a way that seemeth right but the end is destruction.

When you are asked to choose a sequence to study in school, many choose on instinct or based on what they have heard instead of committing the decision to God.

Many students opt for Public Relations or Advertising because of the perception that print is said not to be lucrative as others. Some believe they can't cope with the writing required in the Print. My question to you is, have you asked God which sequence He wants you to specialise in? There is no decision that is too small to commit to God.

A decision on area of specialty is indeed too important to decide of whimsically. A graduate of Micro-Biology, Declan Okpalaeke once decided to enroll for a Post Graduate study in Mass Communication at the University of Lagos with the intention of learning more about film production which was one of the courses for the programme.

However as it turned out, the Film course turned out to be boring, but the Journalism lecturer inspired him so much that he took interest in reading The Guardian Newspapers which the lecturer keeps talking about as an example of a quality newspaper. Eventually, Okpalaeke applied to work in the newspaper and got employed.

Having allowed God to direct him, Declan Okpalaeke excelled so much in his first year of practice that he won the CNN African Journalist of the Year award in 1999. You must always put God's desire at the centre of your planning. He will not disappoint you.

• ***Make Glorifying God Your Priority***

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 10: 31.

“Not unto us, O Lord, Not unto us, but to Your name give glory, because of your mercy, because of your truth.”
Psalm 115: 1

Closely related to not leaving God out of your plan is making glorifying God through your career a top priority. Your ultimate desire should be how you can honour God through your work instead of seeking personal glory. The scripture says “We are the light of the world, a city set on the hill that cannot be hid.”

The command for us according to the scripture is that we should let our light so shine that men may see our good work and give glory to our father who is in heaven, not us. We should be willing to be used by God. We must never forget that we are what we are by the grace of God. We must admit that “the race is not for the swift, nor the battle for the strong. It is not of him that willeth, or of him that runneth, but of the Lord that showeth mercies.”

What is that skill that we have that we have not received? And if we have received it, why do we behave as if we have not and want to take the glory that does not belong to us but our Father Who is in heaven.?

The song that should always ring on our heart should be:

*All the glory must be to the Lord
For he is worthy of our praise
No man on earth must
give glory to himself
All the glory must be to the Lord.*

• Know The Difference Between Planning And Worrying

“Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own thing. Sufficient for a day is its own trouble.” Math 6: 34

As student journalist, chances are that you may be getting worried about some negative things you must have heard about the profession or some things you have seen while on internship in media organisations. You probably have been told that journalists don't earn good salaries. Some of the journalists you have seen don't inspire you and you don't want to end up like them.

My warning to you is that you should beware of what award-winning magazine journalist Fola Adekeye calls “Arrows that flies in newsrooms”. As he rightly noted,

there are too many negative stories about the profession which are not true reflection of the total story of the media. Like every profession, journalism or media work has its challenges and it is not true that it is not a profession for anyone who wants a good life. Every profession has its own challenges.

The fact that some people have failed does not mean you will fail. If you are convinced that God wants you to be a journalist, you should have the confidence that you will have a glorious career. Journalism is not about how long you practice it, but how well. I know many young journalists who have accomplished much more than some veteran journalists have achieved because of the grace of God on their lives and their commitment to their work.

I know a graduate of Nigeria Institute of Journalism, Lagos who got a year fellowship in United States and other opportunities abroad while still in school when many more experienced journalists have remained local journalists. You don't have to worry unnecessarily about what your future is in the profession; you should put your trust in God who is able to do exceeding and abundantly above and beyond what we can think or imagine. Though there is a thin line between planning and worrying, planning for tomorrow is a time well spent, but worrying is time wasted. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps to take and schedules to keep by trusting God. He that has called you is too faithful to fail. He will make a way where there seems to be no way. Like he made a way in the wilderness for the children of Isreal, He will never leave you nor forsake you in your career journey if you put your absolute trust in Him.

Practical Steps For A Glorious Career.

- **Take your study seriously**

The journey to a glorious career starts from while you are in school. You have to take your study seriously and give yourself to it. It is in school that you will learn media theories that will help your understanding of various aspects of the profession.

You must do your practical assignments very well and ask questions when you don't understand what you are taught. Through practical assignments like news and features writing, broadcast and print production, you will learn rudiments of the media profession.

A number of Mass Communication graduates who have eventually become outstanding journalists are those who we're very involved in practical assignments during their studies.

Journalism is a very practical job and the earlier you start getting acquainted with what it involves the better.

• ***Maximise internship opportunities.***

Internship in media organizations is an opportunity to have hands-on experience which you must take advantage of. You must do your best to get a media organization for the Internship and be very willing to learn not only from the persons you are assigned to work with, but also others around.

If you don't appear interested in learning, you can easily be left to idle away by senior journalists you are assigned work with and also have to meet their own deadlines.

Of course, you know you will be assessed at the end of your internship and your rating will depend on your performance. There may be instances where you don't get to be assigned enough work to do, you will need to be patient and find a way to keep yourself busy. Read papers to master how to write or learn by observing what is being done by the journalists in the media organizations you are.

When you are through with your internship, maintain the relationship you have built and keep sending reports for publication or any other contribution you can make. When you are through with your studies, it will be easy to get employed where you had your internship if there is a vacancy based on your past performance. They already know what you are capable of doing and very familiar with their operation.

Even though in my university days internship was not compulsory, I got a holiday job at the defunct Concord Newspapers and had many bylines including front page stories. Writing for newspapers was so easy for me after my internship that when I applied for a job in 1987 at The Punch and was asked to bring a story from a court, I did it with much ease having written judicial stories during my internship days and still had some colleagues on the beat.

Here is a piece I wrote about my internship days.

• ***I remember when I was an intern***

Compulsory internship was not a requirement for Mass Communication students in my days at the University of Lagos (1982-1985).

I was, however, lucky to get a vacation job at the headquarters of the defunct National Concord newspapers in Lagos in 1983 while on holidays after the first year of our then three-year course.

The internship helped me to practice all the theories, of especially news and features writing I had been taught. On my first day at work, I would have been sent to cover an earth tremour incident in Ijebu Ode, Ogun State because there was no staff reporter on duty when the News Editor was alerted about the development. Then, there were no mobile phones to contact reporters to head to the scene of breaking news.

I had been briefed about what to look out for and assigned a driver for the sudden journey when Dele Olojede, Africa's first Pulitzer Award winner, a senior correspondent with the paper showed up and he took over the assignment but I still had the opportunity of accompanying him on the trip. I didn't get a joint byline for the story of the tremour which led the paper the next day, but I got more than enough bylines, including a lead story, for an intern before I completed my, about, four months memorable stay.

I cannot forget the day a story I wrote along with another intern led the paper. When I saw the copy at the news stand, I bought one though I would still have been given another copy at the office.

I was so excited that I almost told some of the free readers that I was one of the writers of the lead story in The Concord newspaper they were reading.

Last Monday, July 25, I was reminded of my internship days, when I was one of the guests of honour at the exhibition by students of Nigeria Institute of Journalism, Ogba, Lagos to mark the students week. As I moved round to see the exhibition of the publications of some of the students during their internships in various media organisations and print advertising copies, I was very impressed by how many bylines some of them had. The print advert copies were as good as some of the ones by major advertising companies in the country.

One of Nigeria's CNN African Journalists award winners, Toyosi Ogunseye of The Punch who was also one of the guests of honour attested to the high quality of the work on display by the students. Kudos to the students who made their school proud with what they achieved during the internship. When I look back at how far I have come in journalism, I can't forget how the internship at National Concord gave me the opportunity to start writing in national newspapers, including The Guardian before I graduated.

When I went for a job interview at The Punch in 1987 and was asked to bring a story from the court, it was not a big deal for me. I wrote some court stories while at National Concord and still had some contacts among judicial reporters.

I also didn't need to be told to go to late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's house in Apapa which was not far from our house in Ajegunle to get condolence messages when I learnt of his death. The report earned me my first job at The Punch as the Ogun State Correspondent without any formal interview in 1987!

Many thanks to those who edited my amateur news reports in the early days of my internship. I remain grateful to, particularly, Papa Femi Onayemi and Adebimpe Afunku who went through my stories line by line and taught me how to write a publishable story.

If you are a journalism student reading this or you know anyone who is an intern or would still be one, my advice is that internship could be a lifetime opportunity to learn the basis of any profession. It is an opportunity to learn what lecturers would not teach you in school. Kudos to NIJ students. Thanks for reminding me of those early days of the "Journalism of my life."

• ***Start building your media portfolio***

When it is time to apply for full time jobs after graduation, you will need a proof that you have the requisite skills to work in a media house. In the print media you will either be tested for your writing skills or asked for your past writings.

Start writing, publishing, broadcasting, blogging and in any way you can do to hone your media skills and keep records like any other professional. Unlike in our own days when you have to compete for limited spaces and opportunities, now there are many channels including campus focused sections of national newspapers.

The Nation publishes eight-page pull-out called *Campuslife* weekly. The Sun also devotes four of its sixteen page weekly Education pull-out to campus stories. The Guardian and others also publish similar pages which ironically has more non- mass communication undergraduates as contributors.

With the benefit of the Internet, everyone can now get publish online even when traditional media organisations don't accommodate your contributions. You can publish your write-ups on blogs, websites and other platforms, share photographs, broadcast video on YouTube and audio through podcasts.

With the abundant opportunities now, there is no excuse for any mass communication undergraduate not to have practical evidence of what he or she has done and has the potential to do. While your certificate is important, what you can do is also very important and will go a long way in your media job search.

I once hired a Micro-Biology graduate who had well written short stories which she presented as a proof of her writing ability. There is really no room for rockies these days. Your potentials must be apparent through what you have done to be considered.

The competition to work in the media is very stiff considering that virtually everyone thinks they can be one. Having a degree in Mass Communication will be an advantage if you can prove that you have the required skills.

You will not be competing with only media graduates, but also graduates from every other field of study who are also needed because of the diverse nature of the issues the media deal covers. Toyosi Ogunseye, Editor of Sunday Punch started writing for The Sun while she was a Micro Chemistry student at the University of Lagos. She wrote on things happening on the campus and even before she graduated she was already being paid for her contributions.

• ***Read Biographies***

To get well acquainted with the media world, I advice that you find biographies of experienced professionals to read. There are many local and international biographies to learn from, so that you don't have to reinvent the wheel.

With such books, you can have a good picture of what the media world is and carefully chart your glorious path. The books would teach you, among others, what experienced journalists did to succeed, the mistakes they made and the various situations you can find yourself and what to do.

One of the best media biographies I have read is *The Gatekeepers* by O'Femi Kolawole which documents the career of 20 top journalists in the country. It is an engaging read which any aspiring journalist should have.

Be Innovative

So much is changing in the media world and aspiring professionals in the field have to be innovative to make an impact. You must come up with new ideas not only to enter the already crowded field but also to survive.

You should think of solutions to media problems and come up with new concepts that will compel employers to give you a chance or become a media entrepreneur yourself.

You can come up with new programmes for broadcast organizations or columns for newspapers. I meet many graduates of Mass Communication who are blank about what the profession is about and wonder how they expect to get employed.

You should start thinking from school how you are going to make a difference. The courses you are taking should get you thinking of what is not been done and what needs to be done to improve on media practice. The new media provides a good opportunity for student journalists to develop new ideas of how to practice journalism present age of constantly changing technology.

• ***Write Professional Exams.***

There are professional exams in Advertising and Public Relations which any student who specialise in these sequences should register and write before graduating. This is the practice in other fields like Marketing, Accountancy and others where students get chattered, even before getting their degrees and Diploma certificates.

Having professional certificates will be an added advantage when applying for employment and the best time to start thinking enrolling is now

• ***Attend Seminars And Trainings.***

Apart from school work, find paid for and free seminars and workshops to attend. You will learn a lot from such sessions and meet professionals who can support you in your career journey.

• ***Spend Quality Time Online***

Instead of wasting hours on social networking website, you should spend quality and professionally enhancing time online. The Internet provides enormous resources to aid your study and networking opportunities at the global level. You should constantly access up-to-date relevant materials on the various courses you are taking.

Subscribe to get some materials from international media organisations and institutions. More than ever before, the world has become a global village in which anyone who is interested can be a global professional.

• ***Pray***

Above all, pray without ceasing. The journey ahead of you is a long one and you need God's grace to succeed. The Bible says the "labour of the foolish weary all because he knoweth not the way to go. Except the Lord builds the house those who build it build in vain.

Media Career Services

(MCS), is a media training, research and consultancy organization devoted to promoting excellence in media practice in Nigeria.

The organization is concerned with providing resources to meet the challenges of media career through regular training for all categories of journalists and other media professionals.

We provide a wide range of local and international resources on best media practices for journalists.

Our team lead by the founder, Lekan Otufodunrin, a media career specialist and journalist is made up of experienced journalists with local and international network to meet the career development needs of journalists.

We organize lectures, short training programs, seminars, conferences and awards. We identify and help facilitate Fellowship opportunities for interested journalists in diverse field of journalism practice.

For more information, contact Media Career Services
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***JOURNALISTS FOR CHRIST
INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH***

is a Fellowship of Christian journalists in Nigeria. Its principal goal is to spread the gospel among journalists and other media professionals. We seek to encourage and support Christian journalists to remain steadfast in their faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and win over journalists who have not given their lives to Christ.

We promote Christian ethics in media practice and support programmes that can ensure the development of the media.

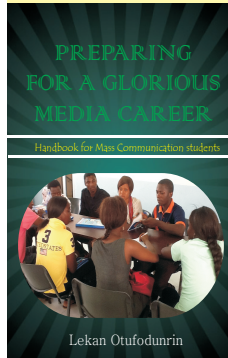
We are linked with many Christian media groups worldwide, including Gegrapha (www.gegrapha.org) - The International Fellowship of Journalists.

For more information on JFC, contact Journalists for Christ, P. O. Box 15399, Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria.

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About The Book



Preparing for a Glorious Media Career is a handbook for Mass Communication students and other aspiring journalists.

Against the background of the noticeable gap between the curriculum of media training schools and current practice in the industry, the handbook provides spiritual and practical insights for excelling in the profession.

It answers frequently asked questions which usually agitate the minds of Communication students who require guidelines on how to prepare for a career in the media.

About The Author

Lekan Otufodunrin, journalist and media career development specialist, is Managing Editor, Online and Special Publications, The Nation Newspapers, Nigeria's most widely read newspaper.

An adjunct lecturer at the department of Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Otufodunrin, is a member of the Nigeria Guild of Editors (NGE), Fellow of Thomson Foundation (Media Training Centre), UK and Poynter Institute (School for Journalists), United States.

He has won several awards for his media training work including The Most Inspiring Lecturer by the Mass Communication Students' Association, University of Lagos and Most Educational Supportive Editor by Redeemer's University Mass Communication Students Association.

Among his published books are Reporter Extraordinary, Excelling in Journalism and Purpose-Driven Journalism.

