

ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET AND A RISKY JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

At the age of 16, Chogo Masanja sampled cookies at a candy store and thought she began selling small candy cookies in her home town of Buhongwa, Mwanza Tanzania. The effort was much like that of many youngsters who open snacks stands to earn a few shillings to spend at school; however, people began asking her for more. Using meagre profits and her mother's kitchen, Chogo began making larger batches of candy biscuits, then designed her own wrappers and developed a commission system for friends who sold cookies at several schools.

Business was so good that it became an obsession. Chogo worked after school, weekends, and holidays, and aside from a brief period when TBS and TFDA suspended her operations until she made candy cookies by hand until she graduated from high school. At first, she could meet demand without equipment or sacrificing other activities, but when she provided candy cookies for a school fund-raising event, demand exceeded capacity, and Chogo found her-self buying professional equipment, hiring helpers, and purchasing bulk supplies.

Looking back, Chogo recalls the obsession the long hours, and the challenge to learn about business. Always on the initiative, Chogo set about placing orders with local stores and developing contracts with dozens of schools and civic organizations. Her business, Chogo's biscuits, soon occupied her entire family and closest friends, and she registered the company and set up a Candy boutique. During her first month, she had 15,000 orders and before graduating from high school, Chogo was distributing specially cookies to retail stores in three regions along Lake Zone: Geita, Kagera, Mwanza, and Simiyu.

In 2009, at age 22, Chogo repositioned her company as a major distributor of especially can-cookies shops for the 2000s. The chain would complement her candy cookies manufacturing and distribution system, but it would also mean major changes in her organization. She paused to think about her plans, realizing that to launch a regional or national chain would mean a corporate endeavour. She and her family could not handle all the responsibilities, and the nature of Chogo's cookies would change. This was not a pleasant thought, although the idea of pursuing a major business was exciting.

Reflecting on her business, Chogo realized that she had fun and made a great deal of money, but many people considered her success no more than the luck of a personable young lady who made good candies and accidentally stumbled into a few good markets. On the other hand, Chogo knew that she had worked extremely hard to attract clients. Most of her customers had not been comfortable buying from a young high school student, and she was seldom taken seriously by customers until they had dealt with her for a long time. Winning over her customers had always been a challenge to Chogo, not a roadblock, and creating unusual candy cookies had been a joy, not a job.

Thinking about her plans, she was not anxious to become a corporate manager, and although she had always worked well with others, Chogo liked the feeling of independence. Running a company would mean sacrificing her autonomy, yet the idea of a chain of stores for years. At the same expansion would mean financial risk, and Chogo had always carefully calculated her expenses to avoid even a major crossroad in her young career, and the choice seemed to be whether to follow her dream and expand or to be content with her existing business.