

KAIZEN

CONTINUOUS
IMPROVEMENT

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FEATURE

Magatte Wade:

Entrepreneurship
from Africa to
America

ALSO INSIDE:

Student Essay Contest
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Guest Speaker William
Kline

INTRODUCTION: Forbes magazine named Magatte Wade one of the “20 Youngest Power Women of Africa.” Magatte was born in Senegal, educated in France, and started her entrepreneurial career in the U.S. Her first company, Adina World Beverages, based on indigenous Senegalese beverage recipes, became one of the most widely distributed U.S. brands started by an African entrepreneur. Her second company, Tioossān, sells skin care products based on indigenous Senegalese recipes online and at high-end boutiques. Magatte was also named a Young Global Leader by the 2011 World Economic Forum at Davos and is a frequent speaker on college campuses.



Kaizen: Where in Senegal were you born?

Wade: I was born 80 kilometers south of Dakar on the coast of the Atlantic, in a small town called M'bour.

Kaizen: What was your education as a child like?

Wade: I never went to school when I was a child in Senegal. I credit a lot of who I am and my love of freedom to that—to the fact that my grandmother allowed for me not to go to school.

Kaizen: So you were raised by your grandmother primarily?

Wade: Yes, for three or four more years.

Kaizen: At what age did you go to Europe?

Wade: I was seven-and-a-half or eight, and I went to Germany for two years.

Kaizen: Did you start formal schooling there?

Wade: Yes, they threw me into school right away. I had to wear shoes. I hated shoes. In Germany, the primary schools are private, and my class had two teachers for eight students.

Kaizen: After Germany?

Wade: The rest in France, all through high school and business school. Then I decided to move to the United States.

Kaizen: Was that because the U.S. was attractive?

Wade: You have to understand that when I go for something, I usually try to go for the best. So America was attractive to me because that's where most of the people who I revere in this world came from and also the fact that Silicon Valley had been on my radar for so long.

People say that America is a place where anyone can be anything. To me it wasn't a cliché. It was really how it felt.

Kaizen: What year is this now?

Wade: This is late 1997.

I first went to Columbus, Indiana. In my last year of business school we had an exchange program with Purdue University in the United States. When I made my decision to move, I called Carol and Eldon, my host family who lived in Columbus, Indiana. They had a family

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From the Executive Director

It's a cliché—but absolutely true—that immigrants built this country. It's a concern then that the percentage of immigrant-founded companies has declined nationwide. So reports a Kauffman Foundation study released last October, citing an unfriendly immigration process as a factor and speculating about a reverse brain drain.

So it is appropriate and encouraging that our feature interview is with Senegalese-American entrepreneur **Magatte Wade**. I spoke with Magatte in New York about her journey from Senegal to France to Silicon Valley and about the state of entrepreneurial culture in America and Africa.

In this issue of *Kaizen*, we also report on a visit by guest speaker **William Kline**, who visited us from the University of Illinois, Springfield, and the excellent work on entrepreneurial education by students **Yann Biancat** and **Jeremy Frew**.

Last semester's **High School Business Day** was our largest yet. Over 200 students from area high schools participated in panels and workshops led by Rockford College professors and area business professionals. More on that event in our next issue, but for now kudos to everyone involved for an energetic day.

At the Center, we also continue to build up our collection of resources on entrepreneurship and business ethics. All of our previous issues of *Kaizen* are available there featuring our news and extended interviews with entrepreneurs in a wide variety of exciting fields—from architecture to technology to marketing to venture capital to sports and more. So please feel welcome to visit us on the second floor of Burpee—or online at www.EthicsandEntrepreneurship.org.

Stephen Hicks, Ph.D.

MAGATTE WADE CONTINUED

business, so they said, “Yes, come on over. We have plenty of work—accounting, marketing, all types of things.” They sponsored me for a visa and took care of everything.

Kaizen: How long were you in Columbus?

Wade: I was there for about nine months. Eventually, Carol was like, “As much as we want to keep you here with us, it would be selfish because you have such bigger potential. The world is yours if you’re willing to take it” And she said, “Honestly, as your soul-mother, I have a feeling that there is something going on between you and this man in California.” That gentleman was seven years older than I was and from the same business school. He had moved to San Francisco to start a branch of a French company. Emmanuel Marchand was his name. I was always on the phone with him. So I went and, like it’s said, “I left my heart in San Francisco.”

At that time I totally followed my heart and went. I had no job, no nothing.

Kaizen: So now you’re in your early twenties, broke, and in California.

Wade: Completely. But in California I had stars in my eyes. I mean Silicon Valley! I looked for a job and within a week I got four job offers with four visa-sponsorship offers.

The one I picked was to be a headhunter in finance with a multi-national back then called AOC Financial Executive Search, now called Ajilon Finance, which is part of Adecco, a huge multi-billion dollar company.

At the same time, the man I moved there for had decided to start his own company and was becoming an entrepreneur.

Kaizen: Perfect.

Wade: Later, when I was 25 years old, we bought a house in Los Altos. And there I was, in Silicon Valley in this big home with a big pool and everything.

It was wonderful. At that point, Emmanuel and his business partner had gotten on track—their business was working really well. We had decided that now was going to be my turn to do what I wanted to do because I was excited about the power of entrepreneurship and the jobs it was creating.

At the same time, I was thinking of the need for jobs back home in Senegal.

Kaizen: This came to mind in California?

Wade: Yes. It had been bothering me because I got hit by the contrast. And beyond that I felt like I was living in a body that was not mine in the sense that even what my parents believe, I don’t believe. What people in Senegal are

happy with, I’m not happy with. When you have tasted freedom, you can never—there is just no way—you cannot even suppress it if you try. I think all of those years in Europe I suppressed who I truly was. And that’s why the notion of authenticity is very important to me.

Kaizen: How did you come to focus on a drink as a particular vehicle for something authentically African?

Wade: When Emmanuel and I visited my country for the first time together, one of the things that I was most excited about was hibiscus. I missed it. I hadn’t been able to go back for at least four years. In that time—frame, I came back and found you could not readily find the hibiscus. It shocked me.

Kaizen: Is the hibiscus a soft drink?

Wade: No. Hibiscus is what you would call a fruit drink, though normally it counts as a tea. Tea is only one leaf: whether white tea, green tea, or black tea, it’s the same leaf, but it’s how much you oxidize it. Technically, hibiscus is a dry flower—the calyxes of the flower—that you seep in hot water for five minutes or so. You can drink it straight after you seep it and add some sugar or not. Ice it or hot, either way it is perfect. But we call it a fruit drink because in my country we usually add pineapples to it or orange juice or whatever. I was going to go for the most pure version of it—just the hibiscus and maybe some mint. I went after my grandmother’s recipe because that’s what I grew up with.

Kaizen: How was it part of the Senegalese tradition?

Wade: When people come to Senegal, when they first land, you offer them a drink. It’s hibiscus usually, and a ginger drink. Now when we went there, I asked, “Do you have hibiscus?” They’re like, “Oh. You are so behind. Who drinks hibiscus?”

Or at a restaurant, I asked the waiter for hibiscus and he’s looking at me like, “Didn’t you just land from America? I mean, who wants hibiscus?” And then I heard him making nasty, disrespectful comments about African things. That’s when I became ill to my stomach because this was to me the direct reason why Africans cannot be respected—because they don’t respect themselves.

Now hibiscus is what poor people from the village who are uneducated drink. So if you had made it or even have a little bit of money, you’d go for the Western brand Coca-Cola or Fanta or Pepsi—that’s how you show your status.

Kaizen: Sophistication means Western?

Wade: Yes. So the elite are consuming only imported brands. But the bottom of the pyramid can’t afford the Coca-Cola brand name, so they go for the knock-off products.

Then the people who are growing hibiscus lose their livelihood, because no one wants what they grow anymore. And hibiscus, also called bissap, is part of Senegalese tradition. It is called the “juice of Teranga.” Teranga means hospitality, which is what we people from Senegal are known for.

Kaizen: So the Western drinks were displacing it?

Wade: Yes.

Also at the same time I’m seeing that there are some homes where kids want to speak Wolof which is a traditional language, but the parents would almost tap them. “You don’t speak that language in our home.” The same thing with attire.

Kaizen: So Senegalese language, drink, and dress are disappearing?

Wade: Yes. Everything.

Kaizen: And you decided to focus on the drink.

Wade: Because right then and there I got very angry. “Where is my beloved drink?” I was ill to my stomach for everything that the missing juice meant.

Kaizen: The loss of the drink was symbolic of the broader trend?

Wade: Yes. That’s when it really all made sense to me. Hibiscus was disappearing, and the women who grew it were losing their livelihoods. So they are leaving the countryside to go to the capital, Dakar, to try to find jobs. Most of them don’t find jobs because there aren’t any jobs. A lot of them end up in the street or in prostitution or who knows what else.

Kaizen: A downward spiral.

Wade: Yes. That’s when my whole experience in Silicon Valley came to me and everything I learned there. I learned the power of branding. Branding is basically a culture, but you build it within a product or the company. It’s the notion that no one can touch the values.

Basically branding is the opportunity to tell a story. I was like, “Okay, branding is going to allow me to tell whatever story I want to tell. Branding will allow me to get my culture loved by people and the product is going to be my vehicle.” It was so simple. And as this company grows—a company like that is going to allow me to put these women back to work. The jobs are going to be taken care of; my culture will be taken care of. That was the magic combination for me.

Kaizen: A win-win in a lot of ways.

Wade: Absolutely.

Kaizen: The Adina name for your drink—where does that come from?

Wade: Adina means life in its philosophical dimension.

Kaizen: What was your plan? The raw materials would come from Senegal, so the women will have jobs, but everything would end up in the United States, because that is going to be your market.

Wade: Yes. It’s harvested, packaged, and warehoused in Senegal and then shipped via containers to the U.S. where they would be turned into extracts especially for us.

Kaizen: Where did this happen?

Wade: We had three plants: one in Chicago; a plant in Oregon; and one in the Boston area.

Kaizen: On the business side: Where is the capital coming from?

Wade: To start Adina, my husband and I put in \$50,000 and I started it in my kitchen.

Kaizen: Your kitchen in Los Altos?

Wade: Yes. I had the first two drinks, which was a ginger drink we call Ginga and the hibiscus drink we call Bissap.

At some point I decided: “I want to make this big and I don’t have time for reinventing the wheel.” So I went looking for a partner. My husband was like, “I’m not going to be your partner; I want to stay married. So go find yourself another partner.” [Laughs]

Kaizen: Wise man.

Wade: I know. Right?

So I sit down and I did my little chart. I put all of the things I wanted from this partner—what he needed to know ...

By the time I started my chart, I had gone to a plant in Oregon to negotiate with them to take us on. I chose them because they are the ones making products for Tazo Tea. For me it was like, “I need them because what I’m doing and is very similar to them.”

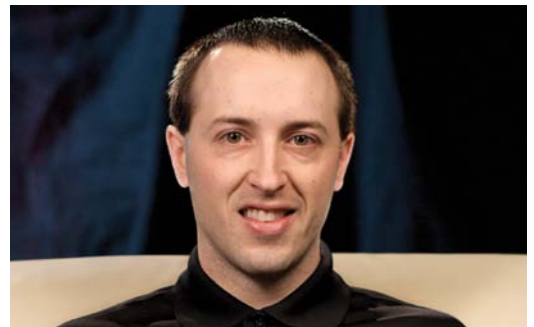
I went there to meet the owner. The nice thing was that I needed to have my drinks organically certified and they had all of that. He was going to piggy-back me on what they ran. So Tazo didn’t lose anything. [Laughs] This was it!

And so I did my little chart—that’s how the name kept popping up. Greg Steltenpohl, Greg Steltenpohl, Greg Steltenpohl. I’m like, “Okay, I’ll go after him then.” People were like, “Are you crazy? He’s in retirement after Odwalla. He’ll never come back to a juice business.” That man has

CEE Essay Contest Winners



Yann Biancat



Jeremy Frew

James Tooley’s *The Beautiful Tree* is a prize-winning book about entrepreneurial education efforts in the developing world. Students in the Philosophical Foundations of Education course read and wrote a review essay on Tooley’s book. The essays were judged on their accuracy and depth of interpretation as well as their independence of thought, and the best essays won a cash prize. Congratulations to our co-winners!

Guest Speaker: Dr. William Kline



On November 6, Dr. William Kline, Program Director and Associate Professor of Liberal Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield, visited Rockford College. Dr. Kline gave two lectures on business ethics and entrepreneurship.



Ms. Wade (left) in Senegal in 2005

MAGATTE WADE, CONTINUED

been put through the washing machine and then the dryer by Coke—horrible

The distribution Greg had built was based on the fact that he had convinced the supermarkets that the drink needed to be in the cold section, and most of them don't have a special fridge for it. So he would tell them, "I have the fridges for you." It was that little idea that really put him on the map. He would basically bring his own cooler, brand it, and stock it all up. And because it's a whole lot of work, the stores allowed him to not have to go through their own distributors. So Greg was able to build his own distribution.

Kaizen: He was giving them the whole package?

Wade: Yes.

My friend happened to know him because Greg had invested in his software company. He introduced me and even before I was done—even before I got to the "What do I need you for" part, he said, "How can I be a part of this?" His wife decided to join too. We decided we were going to go the fast track. We said, "We can raise all the money in the world for this." We just knew it. We didn't go fundraising right away, obviously. You have to prepare your thing; you have to talk to lawyers; we even have to finalize things amongst us, and so on.

I was still the person on top with R&D. Now my job was also going to be on top of sales because there is such a thing that we call the "founder's glow." Also for fundraising: my job was that I'm the storyteller; I'm the charmer; that's what I do. Then we have our wonderful COO and Greg also. So not only is it a beautiful idea that you're all going to fall in love with, but we can make it happen.

Kaizen: You had a marriage of credibility and experience.

Wade: It was a marriage made in heaven really, if I had been smarter. So we started fundraising in October.

Kaizen: This is 2004?

Wade: Yes. We wanted just a million dollars from family and friends just to prove the concept. We ended up with two million dollars and people we had to kick out of the deal. As we were closing the financing—that's when my husband passed away.

It was a disaster. My husband died in mid-December that year. I was a mess.

We got the company off the ground. I don't make excuses anywhere, but I was probably not myself for years. Maybe there were things

"THE MISTAKE I MADE WAS NOT GETTING MYSELF A GOOD LAWYER AS A PROPER ADVISOR."

I would have seen that I could have stopped, but I was so weak and I let a lot of things happen. They weren't bad things, but in terms of making sure that control doesn't fly or that I missed many opportunities to insist on opening up the board.

Kaizen: In hindsight, then. Let's say you have a smallish business and you want to fast-track it. What would you say about board size? Is there one right answer?

Wade: Yes there is. First of all, the mistake I made was not getting myself a good lawyer as a proper advisor. I mean, you don't have a husband and wife on the board! I mean, duh! Even if I didn't catch that right away, I should have been able to catch that anytime afterwards and I should have brought that up to them, the board, and the investors. No investor would have been against me because this is a fiduciary thing to do.

Kaizen: Standard procedure.

Wade: Absolutely. And the fact that I felt often that we didn't have an independent board because Greg and his wife controlled the board. It was also difficult for me to challenge them directly because with my African background, as a younger person you never speak up against older people. Greg and Dominique could have been my parents—they're older than my parents, actually. So you don't speak up against them, or if you do there is a certain way.

Kaizen: So you have a semi-dysfunctional internal organization. What about sales?

Wade: Sales are going fine. But I have teams. But that's why I was so all over—on the road everywhere. I built a national sales team with our first national VP of sales, so she would be doing a lot of things. But I'm the one who comes up with the sales plans and things like that.

Kaizen: How did you first connect with your buyers?

Wade: I met a lot of my buyers earlier when I was primarily going from door to door. From one deli to another, from one grocery store to another. One-by-one-by-one. Knock-knock. Who's the owner? Who is the manager? With my little cooler dragging behind me with my drinks in there all nice and cold. If they had time, we would go in the back and I would walk them through everything. Oftentimes I made the sale on the premises. Sell it to them and deliver right then and there, and move to the next place.

Kaizen: That's boots on the ground.

Wade: Absolutely. That's the only way with beverages.

Kaizen: Now, back in Africa, part of your motivation is building infrastructure. Are there challenges back there?

Wade: Oh yes. You see, even in Senegal the hibiscus is not popular anymore because of what we talked about. But people are consuming hibiscus around the world. It turns out that hibiscus is a big part of the culture in Mexico—in most Latin countries. And in some Arabic countries, like Egypt where it is a national drink. A lot of the tropical, warm areas. So who now has the market cornered? The Chinese. The Chinese are growing hibiscus and selling pretty much to the whole market; it's cheap stuff.

Kaizen: And you want to build an African supply chain?

Wade: Yes. There are two kinds of hibiscus. There's the standard, which is light pink and very stringent in flavor—that's the one you want. Then there is the VIMTO variety, which is darker, almost like a sangria color, a very deep, rich red, but not lots of flavor. I don't want that one. I grew up with the

other one. The cheap people try to go with the other one because it goes farther.

But beyond that, the biggest problem for the Senegalese is lack of quality and consistency in quality and quantity. In Senegal, there is no such thing as an organized market. Over there are maybe ten people, and the group over there is one hundred, and the group over there is maybe one woman. All of it is sold to some middlemen who put it together and ship it to God knows where. It's all like underground markets and the stuff is dirty; you can't trust anything. With a company like mine, that's a big no-no.

So, by necessity, we had to build a supply chain. We knew that the strength of the brand was that part of the story that the hibiscus comes from Senegal with the highest taste and quality. We also had to make sure that we had quality not only in taste but in cleanliness and consistency. We also had to produce what we needed because moving container loads of hibiscus every two months—that's a lot of hibiscus.

We had to organize the Senegalese women into something formal. To go from being marginalized—one here, one there, and one there—to being grouped so that we could control the quality train. We needed everything to be streamlined and standardized. We also had to get their organic certification and their free-trade certification, all of which are hard to get.

So we had all of that work ahead, and we knew that if we were very successful we could get it done in three years; a normal time-frame is five or six years. We were being very aggressive.

Kaizen: To get consistency across time and to scale up?

Wade: Yes.

What we needed was expertise around growing hibiscus. So I started researching and that is how I came to ASNAPP—Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products—an organization all about African plants and botanicals, but natural. Their main goal is to find ways to commercialize African plants and botanicals. Its founder is Jim Simon who is the head of the plant and biology department at Rutgers University in New Jersey. So, of course, I called him; I flew to New Jersey and explained to him everything we were doing. He's like, "You are the partner we've been missing. We're missing the private sector link and especially the buyer link." I said, "I have a whole supply chain to build and you guys will help me with this because you are the experts."

Kaizen: A win-win across for-profit and non-profit sectors?

Wade: Absolutely. ASNAPP was going to be the coordinator between the women and the organic and fair trade certifying bodies. Adina was going to pay the organic certifying process, but it was built into the costs that the women were going to charge us. What we paid them, they were able



Ms. Wade speaking at a 2013 conference

to turn around and reimburse us for that because technically they are the ones who are going to own all of that.

Today, these women ... if you want to buy anything from them, you have to place an order at least one year in advance. They have something very valuable; they know what they are doing.

Kaizen: So you've built a culture of small business in Senegal.

Wade: I would say I built a culture of quality with the people I was working with. But these guys had to train them exactly because what they were going to have was a beautiful, top-end product with the right certification. Within three years we had everything done; we were certified.

Kaizen: What year was that?

Wade: I started the whole process in 2004 and by 2007 we were good to go.

The women were definitely on their own.

Kaizen: How many women are we talking about back in Senegal who were actively involved by this time?

Wade: Four hundred women when we started. By the time we were done, 4,000 women were involved.

Kaizen: Are there other challenges? Religious or political obstacles?

Wade: That was no problem really because in Africa the women have a culture of really being independent. In Senegal, women there would say, "What I earn is mine, and what my husband earns is mine." [Laughs]

They are entrepreneurial by instinct, most of them. But where they miss out is respect for consistency, respect for quality, respect for standards.

Kaizen: Those things can be learned, as you showed.

Wade: Yes. One example is that when I first began production, I had managed to bring the first ship-

Ease of Doing Business in Senegal

GNI Per Capita (US\$):

\$1,070

Doing Business 2013 Rank:

166 [of 185]

Starting a Business:

102

Construction Permits:

133

Getting Electricity:

180

Registering Property:

173

Getting Credit:

129

Protecting Investors:

169

Paying Taxes:

178

Trading Across Borders:

67

Enforcing Contracts:

148

Source: <http://www.doingbusiness.org/data/exploreconomies/senegal/>



Tiossân body wash products

MAGATTE WADE, CONTINUED

ment. But then the next shipment, we were all ready with all of our money, and the plant called me.

Kaizen: The plant in Oregon?

Wade: Yes. The plant calls me: “We’ve got a problem.” The plant damaged a big-ass machine. A machine worth tens of thousands of dollars broke because there was a huge rock in one of the bags.

Kaizen: A quality control issue then?

Wade: Absolutely. Not only did the rock destroy this thing, but on top of that there was a pile of hair in the filter too. And in one of the bags they found a dead bird. This is why Africans are not respected, once again.

So I took the first flight to Senegal because this had to be dealt with in person. I took three little bags of hibiscus with me: one from China, one from Thailand, and one from them—you know with all of the nasty stuff, the dust and all of that stuff.

They didn’t know why I was there, but they knew that there was a problem. I met with about 40 representatives for the 400 people, and we had this big meeting in the village under a tree, no seats. I showed them the three bags and I ask, “Which one should you like?” Of course, they all go for the Chinese because it’s the one that is the most beautiful and clean.

Then I asked, “What do you think of this one?” They said, “That thing! Who did this? It’s gross.” I said, “That’s yours.” And I told them everything: how I got the phone call, the nasty stuff in there, the dead bird, the rock that destroyed the machine, and also the hair. We had hair nets; we had gloves. All of these things are part of the process—even the shoes that you wear.

Kaizen: When was this quality control trip?

Wade: Probably 2006. It was early in the process, because there’s no way we would have passed certification.

Kaizen: How do you replicate your success with Adina?

Since I started Adina, on the hibiscus alone, you know what happened? One of the founders of Naked Juice—which was an arch-rival of Odwalla—who is no longer with Naked, started a whole new company called Ooba, a hibiscus soda company. It is very natural, high end—all of the good stuff of hibiscus. Also, Whole Foods developed a hibiscus sorbet. Republic of Tea, another big tea company, created a whole line based on hibiscus.

Kaizen: So, many opportunities?

“IN SENEGAL, WOMEN SAY, ‘WHAT I EARN IS MINE, AND WHAT MY HUSBAND EARNS IS MINE.’”

Wade: Yes. There are secrets all over Africa—drinks, foods, massage techniques. Everywhere you look. I was in Nigeria this past October talking about how to see all of these opportunities around them. Package them and modernize them for the 21st-century customer.

And really understand the cultural-creative demographic. That demographic spends half a trillion dollars every single year on the type of companies and brands that people like me built. It grows at a double-digit rate.

Like my customer base for Tiossân. They have money. They can buy any Chanel product they want. But they would not be caught dead with any of those products on their skin or anywhere near them—because of what the brand means. It’s all shallow. Not authentic. So the only reason Chanel is still alive is the new rich in China and Brazil and India;

that is where the sales are coming from. But soon—because China is always looking at what’s the best of America, because they also have a complex of inferiority—they are going to realize that if you want to show your elite status, you don’t consume Chanel, you buy Tiossân. That’s when the “Aha” moment will happen. I’m asking Africans to get on board now.

Kaizen: Are there tribal issues or class issues?

Wade: It’s not even tribal issues. You know how they say that fear is usually your biggest problem? It makes you paralyzed. For them, it is the complex of inferiority. It is in everything. From starting to think that they can’t do it to thinking it is only the white person who can do it to anything coming from them cannot be good. I see treasures; they see things they cannot wait to bury. When I go to Ivy League schools and see Africans there who want to go and work for McKinsey or an investment banking company, make all of this money, and go home with their CD’s and iPad and drinking Coke. That’s all they care about—showing off.

Kaizen: So they see through other people’s eyes.

Wade: Yes, yes. And that notion of status is foreign to the notion of status that the creative person has. The cultural-creative person cannot stand people who work in Wall Street; the cultural-creative person has the means to buy a Mercedes, but they would rather have a Prius. That’s the cultural-creative demographic.

Kaizen: You said that that’s \$500 billion per year for the U.S.? And that demographic would be attracted to potential African products?

Wade: Yes. I tell them, “There’s a customer base out there that is almost built for us. It’s almost like they came to life at this right time for us.”

Kaizen: You’ve been critical of a lot of NGOs and the celebrities that come in with their ideas of how to solve African problems. What’s your main criticism of the traditional approaches?

Wade: First, most of their approaches are on the “pity-branding” side of Africa.

Kaizen: Pity-branding?

Wade: Yes. Most of so-called brands that come out of Africa or anything related to Africa doing business is pity. Bono, for example, and his aid thing. It’s all about aid. Aid, aid, aid.

Kaizen: So it’s really charity?

Wade: Yes. How can somebody receiving charity build up self-esteem?

Kaizen: It needs to be positive? Creative? Authentic? Active?

Wade: Yes. Also what I don’t like is that in

most African countries we have more NGOs than we have small businesses. This is ridiculous. All these NGOs are doing is giving something for free. Well, who can compete against free?

Kaizen: So it puts the small African business out of business.

Wade: Yes.

Kaizen: Going back to your African roots, you then decided to go in a different direction with Tiossân?

Wade: Yes. The constant with me is to reintroduce indigenous assets from my culture to the modern world, using the power of branding, marketing, and packaging. My customer base is the cultural-critic demographic. That's my formula. Beverages was an entry-point.

Kaizen: Now you're starting with skin care products.

Wade: Yes.

Kaizen: What raw material did you start with back in Senegal?

Wade: The main product of the formula is indigenous to Senegal. It's a combination of black seed oil and shea butter. Black seed is a novelty that we are introducing to the market right now. Shea butter has been done and over done, but black seed is totally new. It came to us from the Islamic traders from Timbuktu way back when. These are 400 year old types of recipes that I'm bringing back. Obviously we had to modernize them, because if I only followed the indigenous recipe—it stinks; the texture is horrible. [Laughs]

Kaizen: You had to solve those problems.

Wade: Exactly. We had to fix the look; we had to fix the texture. And to scent it I decided to go with French perfumers who are among the best in the world. The formula is indigenous to Senegal and modernized by a leading California green chemist and scented by top French perfumers, which is all part of my route: Senegal. San Francisco. France.

Kaizen: So you are test-marketing now?

Wade: Yes.

Kaizen: What does that involve?

Wade: We are testing the concept in terms of lifestyle because our goal here is not "Rah, rah, rah. Look at us Africans, we are so great." For Tiossân products, we want to make sure that people really like them—that they like the scents, the textures, the packaging. We have a great marketing job to do.

Kaizen: What does authenticity mean for skin care products? How do you tell or show the story?

Wade: When women come here—some of them walk in this space and get it right away. When they walk in here they feel that I'm different and they feel like this is not really corporate; this is different. And when I start to talk



The Tiossân storefront in Hudson, NY

about me and what I care for—and you know I'm bold in my views and in what I want to accomplish—and they just start to fall in love.

Kaizen: And who you are, Magatte Wade, is built into the brand?

Wade: After Adina, I never wanted to do that again. But now I am ready to again make me my brand, but I have to try to build it in a way where at some point I can move out and it still stand on its own.

Kaizen: How do we help younger people become more authentic?

“WE ALL CRAVE COURAGE, DIGNITY, AND HONOR AS MUCH AS WE CRAVE FOOD.”

Wade: Most important for young people—or anybody who is vying to be authentic—is how you surround yourself. I feel like if I had been surrounded by more people who were willing to stand their ground, it would have been easier for me to practice the habit of authenticity. It's the support network.

But at your own level you have to start practicing the habit of courage. That is really what it is all about: courage. Because if decide you are going to be authentic and original, you are going to be hated for it. It is going to be hard. Hence the community that is supposed to surround you and remind you of what you are doing and push you. It's courage. At that point, you are really facing yourself.

Kaizen: How does one develop or practice the habit of courage?

Wade: I have found that for myself is that it's oftentimes questioning myself on very basic things, like when I go to a store and I want to

buy something, especially clothing, I'm going to think, "Why do I want this dress?" Do I want it because somebody told me I look great in yellow, or because my friend has the same one?

Kaizen: Self-knowledge.

Wade: Yes.

Another thing about courage, dignity, and honor: I really believe that we all crave them as much as we crave food. It is not so obvious, but it is so there, and that is the danger. If you are hungry, you can identify what is missing in your life. But dignity, honor, and courage, and how it makes you feel—that to me is the key of humanity. If you have lost those, you've lost everything

And that is what my brand is all about. Tiossân is not only a real product that is going to do wonders for your skin and beauty, but most importantly Tiossân is a way of life. And more than even a lifestyle, it's a new way of being and thinking. I really am trying to take people on a romantic journey: a tale of courage, dignity, and honor, and being authentic and true to yourself.

Kaizen: Wonderful.

Wade: If we do that, we win. I know we'll win big because you win whenever you cater to people's natural needs. And dignity is, I think, the biggest need of man, as humanity. I would rather not eat and conserve my dignity rather than eat and not have it.

This interview was conducted for Kaizen by Stephen Hicks. For more information about Magatte Wade and her company Tiossân, please visit her website, www.tiossan.com. Our full interview with Magatte will be posted at www.ethicsandentrepreneurship.org.



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