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How the Journey to the C-Suite Recalibrated My Growth as a Young Executive.

RECALIBRATED



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Connecting ideas, people, and capital
to shape Africa's next decade.

The Journey to the C-Suite
Elevate. Lead. Thrive

EDITOR'S NOTE

From Acceleration to Alignment: My Journey to Intentional Leadership.

When I first entered the C-suite, I did so unusually early. In my early twenties, I served simultaneously as Executive Assistant and Operations Manager at the Uganda Chamber of Mines and Petroleum (UCMP), a dual role that placed me at the intersection of leadership and execution. I was the bridge between the Board and the Secretariat, guiding discussions with ministers, foreign investors, and general managers of multinational oil and gas companies. Those rooms were formative; they taught me how power moves, how agendas are built, and how influence is managed long before decisions are announced.

Soon after, I took a bold leap, leaving that seat to build my own consulting firm, MBhazi Advisory, which focuses on investment structuring and strategic partnerships across Africa's energy and extractives sectors, and later founded Nishati Initiative East Africa, a not-for-profit advancing clean energy access and enterprise development across the region. The transition was steep but purposeful. It moved me from supporting leadership to embodying it, from taking notes on vision to designing systems that execute it.

It was a fast climb that came with its own lessons. Success arrived before I had time to refine the quiet fundamentals of leadership, the patience, the systems, the emotional calibration that sustain it. At the same time, managing teams that were constantly expanding across countries and mandates forced me to learn in motion.

Leading seasoned professionals at a young age forced me to replace authority with persuasion. I learnt that people don't follow instructions; they follow conviction they can trust. That lesson gave me ambition, but also the humility to seek structure.

That is why I joined The Journey to the C-Suite Programme, not to prove what I already knew, but to strengthen what experience alone had not taught me. I wanted to understand the architecture of effective leadership: how to lead people who lead others, how to manage complexity without losing



clarity, and how to scale teams without lowering standards. I wanted to learn from seasoned executives who had built institutions that outlasted them, and to translate that maturity into how I lead my own firms. I entered this programme looking for frameworks, but what I found was rhythm. It has refined how I show up for my teams: more intentional, more strategic, and more grounded in the discipline of growth.

Today, my work stretches from structuring energy investments through MBhazi Advisory to advancing clean-energy enterprise through Nishati Initiative East Africa. The titles have changed, but the pursuit is the same: building systems that work and teams that last.

And so, when I joined the Journey to the C-Suite, it was not another milestone; it was a return to the drawing board. A chance to pause, audit, and refine how I lead. Let me take you through that journey.

"This is what the Journey to the C-Suite gave me: not a new title, but a new rhythm."

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

The Lessons That Rewired My Leadership

The Journey to the C-Suite programme has been far more than a leadership programme; it has been a recalibration of how I think, work, and show up. Each session offered both wisdom and discomfort, the kind that unsettles you just enough to grow. Looking back, a couple of extraordinary speakers shaped my perspective on leadership and my sense of purpose within it.

Jennifer Semakula Musisi

Discipline, Faith, and the Quiet Power of Integrity

When Mrs Musisi walked into the room, the atmosphere shifted. Her presence alone was a leadership lesson: calm, composed, and anchored. We gathered around her, seated in the form of a fireside chat, something that made this particular session feel more personal and intentional.

She spoke of discipline not as a rule to follow but as a personal covenant: the decision to do what must be done even when no one is watching. Through stories of her journey as the first Executive Director at KCCA, she reminded us that excellence is not performance for praise but a standard of self-respect.

A moment that stuck with me, and I believe most of the class as well, was when she shared a story about how she once took one of her head cleaners on a trip to Dubai to show what world-class cleanliness looks like. That small act transformed how the cleaner led her own team back home because on her return, she hit the ground running with leading cleanliness drives and initiatives to ensure proper standards in keeping spaces and the city clean. This shows how leading by example can drastically change the motivation of teams.

She closed with a reflection on balance, reminding us that leadership must leave room for joy.



Brigitte Kusiima

The Brand Called You

Brigitte's session on personal branding was less about aesthetics and more about authenticity. She pushed us to audit the stories we tell in boardrooms, online, and in silence. She asked, "What do people say when you leave the room?" It wasn't rhetorical. It was a mirror that we all held up during the last few months, reflecting and being honest about what answers we get.

Through her lens, she showed us how visibility without clarity is simply noise, and how reputation must be built deliberately, not just reactively when a crisis hits your door.

Brigitte demystified the idea that self-promotion is all arrogance; instead, she framed it as stewardship of one's narrative, deep in authenticity and "always showing up as your truest self". I left her session determined to communicate my leadership with greater intentionality, not just what I do, but why I do it. And since then, I have become more deliberate about what I post, how I engage, and how consistently my values show up online and in person.



David Kaggwa

The Strength of Calm

David's class on Inclusive Leadership Across Generations was a study in perspective and was easily my favourite session of the programme. David's style was engaging and dynamic, teaching that makes you think rather than just listen. And as a class, we were very engaged throughout the whole session as we navigated different aspects of leadership through analogies.

One that he used was the Navy SEALs' "drown-proofing" exercise to explain composure under pressure: how staying calm when you can't control your environment often determines whether you stay afloat or sink. It was a sharp analogy for executive life, where decisions must be made amid uncertainty and competing demands.

This lesson was not about pretending to be unshaken but about being prepared enough to stay steady when others can't. That insight alone has reshaped how I handle high-stakes meetings, focusing less on reacting in the moment and more on entering every room fully prepared for what could go wrong.



Alfred Brian Agaba

The Strategy Room

Alfred's session on Strategy Formulation, Execution and Monitoring felt like a masterclass in connecting purpose to systems. As a Management Consultant, it could not have come at a better time.

His "Journey Planning Model" broke strategy into something you could see and use: purpose, process, and people working in sequence. A tool for connecting long-term vision to everyday execution through a simple route: how to move from goal-setting to alignment: defining the destination, mapping the route, assigning responsibility, and tracking progress through measurable checkpoints. That approach changed how I plan now, using strategy as a system that keeps everyone moving in the same direction.

I must say, it came in handy while leading investment and partnership structuring for a USD 3 billion oil and gas field project in West Africa. Coordinating developers, financiers, and government teams demanded the same balance of vision and discipline that Alfred emphasised, and this framework has become a daily reference with the teams.



Pamela Natamba

Team Dynamics

Pamela's session on team dynamics was one of the most practical parts of the programme. She spoke about what it truly means to empower a team, giving people the tools, context, and trust to act without waiting for instruction.

Her question still rings in my mind: "If you do the work of others, who will do yours?" It captured the quiet mistake many leaders make, mistaking micro-managing and over-involvement for effectiveness. She walked us through how executives are responsible for empowering their teams with deep clarity. People perform better when they know their own outcome, the boundaries they can act within, and the feedback they can expect.

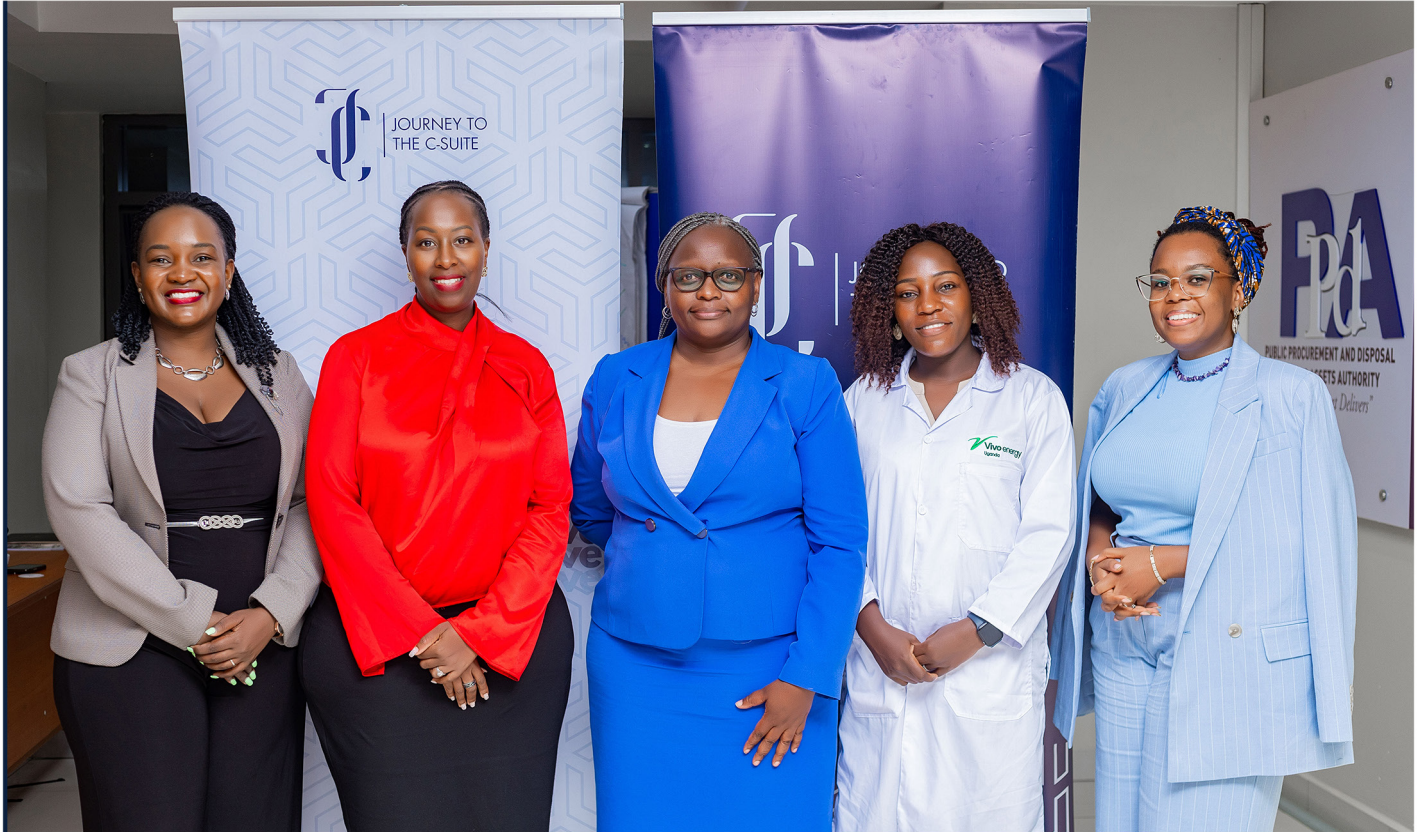
Since then, I have noticed how often I step in to correct my team rather than to enable them. I have since worked on creating space for them to decide, even when their approach differs from mine. This has made my teams more confident and my own leadership more sustainable.



FROM MOMENTUM TO MASTERY

TURNING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE:

How My Leadership Shifted in Practice



I was not chasing a title when I joined the Journey to the C-Suite program. I needed a reset, space to slow down, sharpen my leadership, and find a better rhythm as my teams and firms kept growing. The programme arrived at the right time, pushing me to look at my habits, my teams, and even my own pace through a sharper lens.

Bringing ESG and Carbon Financing to life

One of the most defining moments for me was standing at the front of the room, this time, not as a student, but as a peer leader. Alongside Sandra Mwesigye and Josephine Nakato, I co-led a session unpacking the intersections of ESG principles, carbon financing, and the upstream and downstream dynamics of the oil and gas sector.

I led our class presentation on ESG and carbon finance with Uganda as the focus. Translating industry complexity into an accessible learning experience for fellow leaders, especially those in sectors that are key to Uganda

We explored how the country's energy and agribusiness sectors can practically participate in emerging carbon markets, and what credible participation looks like. The session unpacked readiness, from data and verification gaps to the need for stronger ESG reporting frameworks that meet lender expectations. We also discussed how local companies can start small: track energy use, document interventions, measure outcomes, and partner with credible certifiers early. The point was to demystify ESG, to move it from policy language into business action. To show that Uganda's energy transition will not depend on global goodwill, but on local systems built with discipline, evidence, and

accountability.

From Field to Pump: Understanding Uganda's Oil and Gas Chain

Within the peer-led series, Sandra Mwesigye and Josephine Nakato covered the oil and gas value chain from two ends that matter for Uganda.

▪ **Upstream:** Sandra briefed us on the upstream segment with a practical update on CNOOC Uganda's field work, project timelines, and community and CSR initiatives in the Albertine region. It clarified where progress stands and the coordination required before production milestones can be met. (story continued on the next page)

TURNING POINTS ALONG THE WAY

1. The B&M Co. Ltd Experience

Leadership in Motion

As part of the programme, we were divided into groups, each with a coach, and tasked to create a company concept. Our assignment was to identify a leadership icon, link them to a real C-Suite challenge, and develop a solution to present to the class.

So, with Shine Ikiriza, Annette Namyalo, Pauline Nassali, and Henry Matovu, guided by our coach, Samuel Juko, we created B&M Co. Ltd., a brewing company established in 2016. For our Icon, we picked Mr Baker Magunda, the current Chief Executive Officer of SBC Kenya Ltd, and formerly the first Ugandan CEO of Uganda Breweries under EABL ownership from 2006 to 2008.



Inspired by our icon Baker Magunda, we centred our presentation on "Character and Competence", which taught us that leading peers requires humility, clarity, and emotional maturity as a group.

There were moments when egos clashed and deadlines loomed, but by the end, we had built something bigger than a grade: a shared respect.

Simply put, this exercise was a laboratory of leadership. It practically strengthened our leadership values; we had to manage diverse personalities, make joint decisions, and defend our strategies under pressure. It was a reminder that leadership is ultimately tested in how well people work together to deliver results.



2. Hassan Saleh

Decisiveness and the Currency of Character

When Mr Hassan Saleh spoke, it was with the precision of someone who has seen the boardroom from every angle. He dismantled the illusion that leadership is power. "Every organisation," he said, "has its own DNA, it's own culture, habits, and hierarchy. You must learn it before you try to change it."

He spoke of empathy, restraint, and the unseen cost of influence. His reminder that what you give, you cannot take back made me rethink the permanence of every decision. I left his session with one conviction: "Effective leadership isn't loud. It's steady, consistent, and deeply aware of its ripple effect."

3. A Personal Shift

From Approval to Purpose

Perhaps my most profound transformation came in silence, somewhere between sessions.

I realised how much of my drive had been shaped by performance, the need to deliver, impress, and prove that being the youngest in the room does not mean inability to lead and make decisions.

The Journey to the C-Suite programme pushed me to redefine success not as applause but alignment with the overall vision, the "why" this all started with. That shift from external validation to internal conviction is what will shape my next chapter as a leader.

WHAT CHANGED IN HOW I NOW LEAD

Clarity of Story

Brigitte's session on personal branding pushed me to align my digital presence with the depth of my work. I revisited and rebuilt my platforms around real projects and lessons rather than general commentary. That small reset created clarity; my online story now matches the quality and focus I bring to my work.

Delegation with Safeguards

Pamela's insights on accountability reshaped how I manage teams. I've shifted from "I'll handle it" to "Who's best placed to lead this?" and paired that with check-ins focused on blockers, not reports. It's built confidence on both sides. I trust my team's judgment more, and they operate with clearer authority.

Strategy as a Daily Discipline

Alfred Brian Agaba's session on strategy grounded my approach in rhythm and accountability. I learnt to translate ideas into action through clear cycles of review and recalibration. It's made our planning more predictable, our decisions firmer, and our results easier to measure.

Conversations with Power

Hassan's session helped me understand that real influence is rarely about titles. Before making a case, I now map where authority truly sits, formally and informally, and tailor my approach to how that system decides. It has made collaboration much smoother and outcomes much faster.

Executive presence moved from performance to reliability I used to think presence was a strong argument and a full calendar. Now I know it is calm, straightforward procedures, clean data, and prepared teams.

Before high-stakes meetings, I now run a "drown-proofing checklist", a phrase coined by David Kaggwa in his session on inclusive leadership.

With my core leads, we ask: what we know, what we do not know, and what we will say if asked. It lowers the temperature and raises the quality of decisions that we make. Imperfections still appear, but we do not hide them; instead, we log them, fix the process, and move on.





Why this matters now

Earlier in my career, I could carry most of the weight myself, but that is not leadership; it's simply endurance management, and it does not serve an executive leader and their team's delivery. So, over the years, I have slowly been delegating more, letting my seasoned professionals lead projects independently.

Midway through the programme, I saw how unsustainable the former approach was while setting up a project office in Dubai for a renewable-energy client. Managing projects across time zones, regulations, and cultures demands structure, not proximity. So, from lessons learned over the last few months, I built a "bench map"—a concept reinforced by Pamela Natamba's emphasis on accountability and trust. We set a simple operating rhythm: weekly decision reviews, written pre-reads, and clear "owner, input, deadline" lines on every workstream. The result has been a functioning project team in Dubai that continues to work smoothly in my absence, operating with renewed confidence.

Leading large-scale energy projects across West Africa, alongside a new renewable-energy mandate in the Middle East, has tested every principle I gained from the Journey to the C-Suite. The programme reshaped how I translate ambition into proper structure. I now prioritise systems that support clarity, accountability, and informed decision-making to achieve our goals.

My teams now operate on precise planning and review rhythms, making collaboration efficient with measurable outcomes. Conversations with partners have also become more analytical and less reactive, centred on evidence, risk data, and measurable impact. This shift has strengthened performance across my teams and created clear alignment across borders.



"I no longer chase control; I build systems that make it unnecessary."

LOOKING AHEAD — THE CONTINUUM OF GROWTH



Elevate. Lead. Thrive. The Anchors

Every journey has anchors. For me, one of them is Janet Navugga, whose vision for The Journey to the C-Suite created a rare space where experience meets renewal, where Executives get to network and solve real-life problems together, with guidance from the nation's most seasoned industry leaders.

The other is Samuel Jjuko, our group coach for B&M Co. Ltd., whose calm, pragmatic guidance turned our team from individual performers into a cohesive unit. His mentorship shaped more than outcomes; it shaped our confidence in the programme and our careers. We could not have been assigned a better coach.

Of course, the admin team behind the entire programme, led by Patra Higenyi, the steady force behind the scenes, coordinating sessions, managing countless details, and keeping the entire programme running smoothly. Your professionalism

made it easy for us to focus entirely on learning, and your consistency gave the programme its rhythm.

Leadership in Progress

This programme challenged me to stop shrinking my excellence to fit the room. It taught me to present work that speaks credibly on any stage, local or global. It taught me to build empowered teams that lead with clarity. And most of all, it taught me to show up as my authentic self, unapologetically and wholly, in every boardroom, every partnership, and every space where decisions are made.

In sum, the Journey to the C-Suite wasn't just any other Executive Leadership programme. It was a mirror held up to myself. Through the voices of Musisi, Kusiima, Kaggwa, Agaba, Natamba, Saleh, and many more profound guest speakers, and through the testing ground of B&M Co. Ltd., I learnt that leadership is less about rising above others and more about rising within yourself, authentically and with purpose.



"The Journey to the C-suite ends on paper, but in practice, it continues in how I lead strategy, how I build people, and how I balance ambition and integrity."

— Patricia Komukyeya-Mbabazi Kony --

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