

Your Excellency Amb. Robert Godec, distinguished guests and friends; all protocols observed.

I stand here to celebrate successful women entrepreneurs today, as a sign of the contributions that women have made in our Kenyan Economy today.

Celebrating these women is a reminder of why they set the goal, the journey they walked, the challenges they faced and what they needed to accomplish in order to earn future celebrations like today.

Success can be ingrained within your culture. We have all heard the phrase “success breeds success”. By creating a culture of success and celebrating women will surely encourage more women to strive to become serious entrepreneurs.

At AWEP Kenya Chapter, already we are training, coaching and developing entrepreneurship skills to a large group of women Survivors of Gender Based Violence who are today we have transformed into serious entrepreneurs and we shall be celebrating their great success by showcasing in an exhibition their products/skill next month. We want to mark their accomplishments with a celebration which will be remembered in the future.

And as (*Bill Gates*) puts it; ‘It’s fine to celebrate success but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure’

### **Challenges facing women entrepreneurs:**

1. Education:
  - Access to trainings to acquire skills for products development,
  - Value chain development,
  - Financial literacy and entrepreneurship skills.
2. Markets & market linkages
  - Trade fairs
  - Exhibitions
  - Buyers
3. Information such as 30% procurement of government tenders
4. Access to affordable financing of the business considering interest rates are very high. AWEP seeks to create a fund where women entrepreneurs can borrow and expand their businesses at affordable rates.

### **Characteristics of Successful Business Women (Entrepreneurs)**

**1. Self-Belief:** The first and probably the most important characteristic possessed by successful women entrepreneurs is self-belief. They believed in themselves; what others said about them didn’t matter. They never looked for problem solvers; they believed they were the problem solvers and that belief worked for them.

**2. They had Faith:** Faith is moving ahead, even in the face of uncertainty. *Did these successful business women have faith?* My answer is yes. No one can build a successful business without faith because business is a game where you thrive on uncertainty. When starting a business; success is never guaranteed, compared to climbing the corporate ladder. If you lack faith, you won't have the drive to press on even when there's no sign of progress.

**3. They are passionate about what they do:** If there's one thing that propels successful business women forward; it is passion. Successful women entrepreneurs are passionate about what they do and that's why they built a business around what they love to do best. As Oprah Winfrey became the richest black woman with her passion for public speaking. So if you have a passion; believe in it, strive to be the best in it and you will emerge a success.

**4. They are humble and willing to learn:** Entrepreneurship is a lifelong process and successful business women know this. Things change so fast in the business world; you could be an innovation today and become obsolete tomorrow. To stay on course and adapt swiftly to the ever changing trend, successful women entrepreneurs keep studying and learning. They read industrial journals, books and magazines. They attend seminars and update themselves regularly with the latest industrial trend. Successful female entrepreneurs know that their cup is never full; they know that they don't have the right answers to all questions. So they humble themselves and learn when availed the opportunity.

**5. Ability to handle criticism:** Show me a business woman who hasn't been criticized and I will show you an average woman. Successful women entrepreneurs were able to achieve success because they refused to be bugged down by negative comments. From Oprah Winfrey and Rachael Ray to Martha Stewart; they have all been criticized heavily. If you are an individual that listens to other people's opinion before taking action; then your success will be limited.

**6. Persistence:** Another trait possessed by successful women entrepreneurs is persistence. Starting a business is one thing; but sticking to the entrepreneurial process is another. Nothing good comes easy; you must give a good fight and persist on what you want; if you are to really achieve success in the business world. Without persistence, I don't think you can become a successful business woman.

**7. They had big Dreams** "The only thing I had was this recipe, and with that recipe was a dream. And those were the only things that I had to build my business: a recipe and a dream. And there was no way I wasn't going to see this dream through. And, so, my journey began. I made the decision, and I was going to see it through." – Debbi Fields

If there's anything that kept the successful women entrepreneurs going; it was their dream to build a successful business and achieve beyond mediocrity. Successful business women envisioned a lifestyle; they envisioned a future for themselves and they went for it.

**8. They go beyond their comfort zone:** *Is Oprah the only female talk show host? The answer is no. Then why did she emerge the richest black woman in the world?* The reason was because she went an extra mile than others. You can never become a successful entrepreneur by sitting within your comfort zone; you have to step out into the unknown and that's what the successful business women did. They left the comfort of their home and security of their jobs to face life squarely. They paid the price for success.

**9. They balanced their acts:** "When my company started really growing, I didn't have any help in my house at all. I had the upkeep of my daily life, I had a one year old and a three year old, and I had my house. So I had to prioritize." – Julie Aigner Clark

One of the key characteristics of successful women entrepreneurs is the ability to balance their acts between family and business responsibilities. It's really quite a challenge building a business alongside raising a family; and to succeed, these women entrepreneurs had to overcome this challenge. How did they overcome this challenge? How did they balance their acts? They did it by mastering the art of delegation and time management.

"How did you balance growing the business with raising a family? You just do. I had a business, a lot of orders, and a baby howling for supper. You balance it. You give your baby supper first and then get your orders in. I have worked on more holidays... but what are you going to do?" – Lilian Vernon

**10. Strong sense of purpose :**To courageously ensure that our business is ecologically sustainable, meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future." – Anita Roddick The last characteristic possessed by successful women entrepreneurs is "*a strong sense of purpose.*" And this sense of purpose reflected in their business mission. This is why their businesses and brands will stand the test of time even after their demise.

"I was a woman with a mission. I would stop people, even buses I would stop and say, 'Here, you've got to taste these cookies. Just try them.'" – Debbi Fields

In conclusion, these are the ten characteristics that make up successful business women. If you aspire to become a successful business woman; then strive to develop these traits and I will see you at the top.

**As a chairperson of AWEP Kenya Chapter:**

African Women's Entrepreneurship Program- (AWEP) -Kenya chapter's mission is to equip women in Kenya with education, tools, skills and information to access business and leadership opportunities and become agents of change within their communities. Our vision is to have empowered women who are champions of economic and social progress within their communities. I welcome you all to register and become AWEP members.

Thank you