

Transcription Episode 7 -Patrick Awuah

00:00:04:12 - 00:00:46:04

Reeta

I'm Reeta Roy, and this is Transcending Boundaries, a Podcast that features deep conversations with exceptional leaders. Each episode dives into the lives of women and men who have changed their communities, their countries, and the world for the better. Join me to discover the relationships, experiences and insights that have shaped their remarkable journeys. My guest today is a visionary educator, a leader whose work has redefined what it means to empower the next generation of African ethical leaders.

00:00:46:06 - 00:01:35:14

Reeta

African changemakers. Born and raised in Ghana. He witnessed firsthand the challenges of governance which shaped his worldview. It combined his deep love for his homeland with the determination to drive systemic change. He left Ghana during political instability and embarked on a journey of self-discovery that eventually would lead him back to contribute. After a successful career at Microsoft, he made the courageous move to found Ashesi University, a pioneering institution rooted in ethical leadership, critical thinking, and a commitment to Africa's renaissance.

00:01:35:16 - 00:02:19:24

Reeta

His vision has turned Ashesi into a beacon of excellence, empowering young Africans to tackle the continent's most pressing challenges with integrity and creativity. Over the years, he has established and built an institution that inspires global admiration. His work has not only transformed lives, but also redefined education as a force for social change. Please join me in welcoming a champion for higher education and ethical leadership, and an unwavering believer in Africa's promise.

00:02:20:01 - 00:02:25:17

Reeta

Patrick Awuah Welcome, Patrick. Thank you for being on this podcast.

00:02:25:21 - 00:02:27:17

Patrick

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here.

00:02:27:19 - 00:03:11:04

Reeta

Fantastic. It's our pleasure just to have you. So this is a conversation about who you are and how you became who you are. And really to just get to know you as a leader, really as Patrick. So I always think that a good place to start is the early years and childhood and your story, your childhood is rooted growing up in Ghana. In a household with parents who were obviously very influential in your life. But it was also a time in Ghana, a time of change, a time of social, political events and all of that must have shaped your worldview. Would you tell us a bit about that childhood?

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Patrick

So my childhood was interesting, because my earliest memory of my mother was actually my grandmother. So my parents, after they had had me travel to the UK for their education.

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Reeta

So grandmother brought you up.

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Patrick

So my grandmother brought me up for I think my first three years I was with my grandma. And then my parents returned and now I was with my parents and cousins. And through my, my childhood we always had a household of at least six children in the house because cousins lived with us. My father was an engineer.

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Patrick

My mother was first a nurse, and then she switched to, the, to run a shop, in the market.

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Reeta

What did she sell?

00:04:13:03 - 00:04:59:23

Patrick

She sold, she did wholesale for Unilever. Okay, so Unilever products, sold to the woman who then sold retail in the market. And, they were both very, very strong about education. They pushed us, and they kept telling us how important education was. I felt, you know, by the time I was maybe 10 or 12, I had started to see that my parents were a little disappointed about Ghana's trajectory.

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Patrick

So I understand that, you know, Ghana's independence occurred when they were in their early 20s. And, you know, they sort of launched into their careers with a lot of hope for the country, a lot of pride, a lot of expectation for what Ghana's trajectory would be. And by the time I was entering secondary school, they were starting to feel that the country was not on the right track.

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Patrick

We had a military government then. And there was an attempt by that government to establish, sort of a permanent, one-party state. So, with my parents, I was seeing a lot of things. They were very hard-working. They pushed us a lot. My father was was tough on me, actually.

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Patrick

He expected me to be the very best in class. If I came second in class, he would ask me why weren't you first?. It was that intense. And then, by the time I was entering, my, you know, mid-teens, there was a lot more upheaval. You know. What people don't realize when if you read Ghana's history and you see how many different governments we've had and how many changes of government they've been, you'll see the coups that happened.

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Patrick

But what you don't see is the attempted coups that happened. So when you see a change in government by military coup every six years, actually within those six years there have been multiple attempts at a change in government. And so that was very disruptive and I was very aware of all of that. And the way I dealt with it was just to listen to my parents about really focusing on education and working very hard.

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Patrick

And I was this very nerdy student.

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Reeta

I kind of imagined that.

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Patrick

I didn't know the word nerd or geek. I was just a serious student. I didn't learn those words until I got to the U.S. And that was my life. It was just studying.

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Reeta

Just studying.

00:07:42:15 - 00:07:50:16

Patrick

And just prepare, myself and aim to have, you know, a good career in the future.

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Reeta

And that decision then to leave to go to school in the US and first to Swarthmore and then later on, you know, you went on to grad school. Tell me about that journey. What was it like going to school in the US?

00:08:06:12 - 00:08:35:12

Patrick

So going to school in the US. You know, when I got the offer to attend Swarthmore, it was it was just amazing. Right? So, I got this offer. I had a full scholarship. My parents are responsible for \$100 a year towards my tuition, which they could afford. And so there's a lot of excitement. Then I applied for a visa.

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Patrick

The visa gets denied. And the reason it's denied is because the consular officer wants to see \$400 in the bank, and my parents couldn't show \$400 in the bank. And for me, this was also quite revealing. So it was very high and then, oh my goodness, this may not happen. And then Swarthmore says, well, we'll give you a full scholarship and then I'm back.

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Patrick

I'm going to go to Swarthmore. And a lot of excitement about that. When I arrived at Swarthmore, it is this beautiful place and just incredible resources. The school, the college had two libraries, each of which was larger than any library I had seen in Accra. And, the engineering labs, the science labs were just incredible. And the thing that really stood out, the two things that struck me beyond just the physical infrastructure and the resources, it

was the method of teaching and learning, was different from anything I'd experienced before.

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Reeta

In what way?

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Patrick

The faculty, they gave us a lot of reading, and we would come to class and we would discuss what we had read. And in Ghana, if we had reading, we would go to class, the teacher would read some notes to us and we would memorize those notes. And then in exams you would repeat those notes back to the teacher.

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Patrick

It was just sort of memory recall, except for maybe mathematics. But even then you just memorizing formulae and so on. But at Swarthmore, it was all discussion, problem-solving, analysis. And it was a breath of fresh air on one hand. But it was also quite demanding on the other hand. I was a bit unsettled. Until, I understood oh, they just want us to ponder these things and engage them in an intellectual discourse about it. So that was great. The second thing was faculty at Swarthmore could give take home exams and.

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Reeta

It's been a wild concept.

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Patrick

It was a wild concept to me. And some of the take home exams were closed book take home exams. So you were to go to your dorm room or wherever you wanted to take the exam.

Don't open your textbook. Don't talk to anybody. Don't consult your notes. Do this exam in two hours and return your blue book to the instructor.

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Patrick

And it was amazing to see a student body that operated that way. And nobody would cheat. And we were all really about learning. So that was Swarthmore. It was just an amazing experience.

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Reeta

Must have been remarkable. And I can see how that experience in many ways comes back much later on as you build Ashesi. And just before we get that, I want to carry on. You joined Microsoft, right? In 89? Yes. You joined Microsoft and you spent a decade there, right? It was also an incredible period of time for the company.

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Reeta

On the upsurge. What did you learn from that environment?

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Patrick

The thing that, a couple of things about Microsoft. When I joined the company, it was number two or number three in market share in most of the product categories that it was operating in. And by the time I left, it was number one in most of those categories. It was an organization with very bright, very hardworking people.

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Patrick

Bill Gates had this vision, which sounds quaint today, but which at the time seemed, an almost unreachable goal that there would be a computer in every home and on every desk.

And now we have computers everywhere. They're in our pockets, they are all over the place. But it was just astonishing, this vision that the day would come when there'll be computers everywhere.

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Patrick

And we were going to be part of making that happen. And we talked a lot about changing the world. And had a belief that we could. So it was very empowering that way. And there's something about being in a place where you are creating new products. You're selling those to customers and you're learning from mistakes you've made.

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Patrick

You're learning from what worked well, what didn't work so well. And you keep iterating. So that was my experience at Microsoft.

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Reeta

It was powerful. And, you know, I think about this young boy becomes this amazing man. He leaves Ghana has an incredible experience, educational experience. And then this amazing professional growth experience. And yet all this time you couldn't stop and you didn't stop thinking about Ghana.

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Patrick

Right.

00:14:42:02 - 00:14:52:24

Reeta

And that never left you. And how did you come to find what your purpose would be, even as you were growing as this young professional?

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Patrick

Right. So. Even though I was away from Ghana, I was still engaged. I was supporting my parents at this point, financially, supporting my siblings financially. So I was engaged with Ghana in this way. And, For me, there's a, I would say a couple of moments that made a big difference in what my trajectory would become.

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Patrick

One was, crises in other African countries. So Ghana had become a democracy, but then we had the genocide in Rwanda. There was, a disintegration of the government in Somalia, civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia. And so being in the US and reading all these stories of really difficult, terrible things happening on the African continent was something that bothered me.

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Patrick

But with the Rwanda genocide in particular, there was a vice president at Microsoft, his name is Mike Murray, who started a grassroots effort to fundraise the company to support people in Rwanda. And, I made a note of that. I joined that campaign. But, watching Mike take the actions that he did as someone who's not African was, you know, it made an impression on me that, you know, those of us who are Africans, what more could we be doing?

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Patrick

And then when my son was born, I felt that oh, wow. You know, there's another generation of Africans coming. He's one of them. And what happens on the continent will matter to this next generation and the generations after that. And, we need to be working to make Africa a better place for future generations of Africans.

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Patrick

So it was becoming a parent of an African child. I think is what got me to step from thinking about myself and maybe even just my family to thinking about generations. And when I started to think about that, it seemed to me that I should be doing something more. And, you know, the work I was doing started to feel not as exciting.

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Patrick

It's like, oh, this is just software. And it was such an interesting thing because software was just magical, right? And then suddenly it was, oh, this is just software, but there's humanity to worry about. And that's what got me to start thinking what can I be doing differently? What can I be doing to make a difference on the African continent?

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Reeta

Incredible. And so you make this huge decision to leave Microsoft. You went on to business school and you use that year or maybe it was a couple of years to put a plan together. And it's a plan that led you home, right. Yeah. Tell us about putting that plan together.

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Patrick

So Reeta going to business school was actually my way of, yes, on the one hand, I was preparing. But more than that, it was a way to manage my fear.

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Reeta

Wow.

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Patrick

So a lot of people say to me, you're such a courageous person.

00:18:55:15 - 00:18:57:00

Reeta

And you are.

00:18:57:02 - 00:19:24:00

Patrick

But, yeah, perhaps, maybe. I was a very fearful person back then. I'd ask my wife if we should go off and do this. And she had said, yes, let's do it. You know, I told my colleagues at Microsoft, this is what I was going to do. But through all of that, I was afraid.

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Patrick

I was afraid, that I might fail. And the way to minimize the chances of failure, it seemed to me, was to prepare myself better. I needed to know more than just engineering. I needed to understand how organizations function. And decided going to a business school was the way to go. Figure that out. So that's why I went to business school.

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Patrick

And then it turns out that when I went to Berkeley, there was a very entrepreneurial spirit, in the Bay area in Berkeley. And that institution was sending students out from the business school to help with, business development in developing countries. And I proposed a project, to have one of those teams come with me to Ghana to develop a business plan, do a feasibility study, and develop a business plan for a new university in Ghana.

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Patrick

And that was approved. So I had a team of three other students join me, and we went to Ghana and we did, we did our homework. Really understand what is needed, what the gaps were in education, what, you know, the private sector and civil society and government

thought universities ought to be doing and also understanding what the aspirations of Ghanaian students were.

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Patrick

And we took all of that and understanding the market. Right. The economy of Ghana, the political economy of Ghana. And then developed a business plan out of that. And with that document in hand, I went back to my former colleagues at Microsoft and asked them to join me to take this business plan from an idea on paper, to something real.

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Reeta

That's remarkable because, Patrick, with just one go. You said you've listened. You really spent the time with those other students. Yes. Listen. Yes. And to understand. Did it reduce the fear in you? It's what I want to know.

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Patrick

It did for a while. So, by the time Ashesi was launched, it was about to launch, I was very confident because I had this plan. The only thing in the plan that was uncertain was, would we be able to raise the money for it? So when we did sort of the feasibility study it was like yes this, this thing is going to work.

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Patrick

The only problem was, it wasn't clear where the funding would come from. The amount of funding that I needed. But I felt, oh we're going to get that funding. And this is such a good plan. And I was very confident. And I moved with, I moved with incredible confidence and passion and, started to put things together in Ghana.

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Patrick

We got a team of an advisory board of 25 professors and researchers from the US to help us with curriculum development. I started to look for land.

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Reeta

Tell us about that land because there was an interesting man that, you met who was absolutely instrumental.

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Patrick

Yes. So there's this, the Chief of Berekusu we met. I was looking for land. We'd gone around a bunch of places. I was introduced to him. And in our first meeting, he had called a meeting with all the elders and the youth, the youth leaders of his community to meet with, my co-founder and me, Nina Marini and me.

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Patrick

And a couple of things really struck me about him. You know, there's a protocol in Ghana when you're talking with traditional leaders that there's a linguist, they speak the local language. The linguist interprets to English. And, what the linguist would say back in the local language, I would interpret the English to Nina. And at a point the chief said, for the sake of this woman, I will speak English.

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Patrick

And he spoke English, which was breaking from his protocol because he wanted her to understand directly instead of hearing through people, and, I took note of that. And then he showed us where the property was that we could use for this university. We had a number of follow-on meetings.

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Patrick

And in one of those meetings, the youth leaders were late to the meeting. And most of the places, you don't wait for the youth. It's when the elders are assembled. You start. And this chief said, no, we wait for the youth, and we waited. Youth leaders arrived. We had our meeting, and afterwards, I asked him.

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Patrick

Why did you make us wait for the youth?. This was very unusual. So this again, he had broken his protocol and he said, this project is about future generations, and it is important that they be present when we have this conversation, because this is about them. And then he looked up, a plane was over, was coming overhead as it was telling me this plane was passing overhead.

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Patrick

He looked up and he said to me, he asked me a question. He said, you know, other societies are so advanced. You know, look at that aeroplane. Do you think we will get there? And I said yes. And, and he said, okay, well you have to put this here. And he later told me that the reason why he really wanted Ashesi, in this village was that when he met us, we weren't talking about Ghana.

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Patrick

We were talking about Africa. And so, Reeta, it was just so interesting to me. This local leader, whose vision of what he cared about was Africa. Not just his local community. Who cared very much about the youth in his community. And who was so graceful and rich trying to really communicate with people from another culture.

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Patrick

Right. And I felt wow this is someone that we ought to be working with. And there were six other properties we were looking at. But this was the one. This was the place to set up Ashesi.

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Reeta

The story speaks about wisdom, foresight, an incredible intellect. To be able to look well beyond. And to think what it would mean for Bereksu, but also for the world.

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Patrick

Right. And interestingly, ambition and humility in the same place.

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Reeta

Absolutely. Absolutely. Now here you are. You've had this conversation and multiple conversations with the chief. This is the site. This is the place. Work begins you know. Right. And I know it wasn't as definitely a straight line, but work begins. How did you know that you were going to be on the right track? How did you know that the academic offerings would be what you had hoped they would be?

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Patrick

Right. So we had started classes. We acquired land to build and all of that. But we rented a building and got started with 30 students and just a few weeks after we started construction, I get in my office, I log into my computer and I open my email, and there's this one message at the top from a student.

00:29:13:06 - 00:29:35:16

Patrick

I open this message and it's a very simple message written in very large font. Right. So the font was so big that it just filled my screen and it was a very simple statement from a student who said, I am thinking now.

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Reeta

I am thinking.

00:29:37:06 - 00:29:38:20

Patrick

I am thinking now.

00:29:38:20 - 00:29:39:18

Reeta

Now.

00:29:39:20 - 00:30:17:22

Patrick

And then he signs off; Thank you. And that was it. You know, nothing else. It was just like this very simple, very straightforward message. But I remember reading it and thinking, oh, he is experiencing what I experienced at Swarthmore. Yes. He has encountered a pedagogy that is compelling him to think. And he recognizes that.

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Patrick

And I think at that moment I knew that Ashesi was on the right track.

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Reeta

Absolutely. Absolutely. Now, speaking of right tracks, and always these early stories, they're, they're moments. Right. And they're moments where decisions have to be made. Are we going one path or another? And I'm sure there were many moments, but there are two long years ago you shared with me and the financial health of any institution is always critical.

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Reeta

And the early days were challenging. But there was one moment where you and your board weren't sure whether you were moving forward. Can you share more about that?

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Patrick

Yes. So remember I said that I had this plan, this business plan, which said, this is very feasible, the only question mark was would we be able to raise the money? Well, it turns out we were able to raise some of the money, but, not enough. And by our second year, we were running very low on, on funding.

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Patrick

And it wasn't clear where we were going to find the funding to get, get us through, you know, our J-Curve. And it was utterly frightening. Because, I had students I was responsible for. This was not just some sort of intellectual exercise or some business plan. This was real. People had put their lives in our hands.

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Patrick

And, I became fearful again and what I did was, you know, we actually developed an exit plan. How would we shut down gracefully? As we put it. And shutting down gracefully would mean transferring students to other universities. You know, breaking our lease, laying people off, all of that. And once we had done the analysis of what it would take to do all of that and do it, graceful shutdown, graceful shutdown. But at some point, I realized that there would be nothing graceful about it. It would be very, very painful because as part of that planning process, again, I did my homework and I would go to other universities and sit in their classrooms pretending to be a student. And I was reminded that the education that was happening in other classrooms were not what Ashesi was doing

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Patrick

So we would really be letting our students down. So you know, I spoke with a mentor in Seattle and he gave me some advice and one of the things he had told me to do was to have a conversation with my board about, try to understand why we're afraid and, ask them if they were not confident in my leadership.

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Patrick

I did something a little different. What I did was I sent email to the board, and I quoted from a karate book that I read. And in that book, there's a statement in there that says that when, when heaven is about to bless you first, it makes you suffer and makes you strive, exert yourself.

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Patrick

So in moments of difficulty, you need to first recognize that. And second, you need to have introspection. You need to ask yourself, is my cause a just one? And if, after true introspection, you determine that your cause is not a just one, then you will tremble even before, even in front of one soldier. But if your cause is a just one, then,

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Patrick

Then you must go. Even against an army of 10,000. And so I send this statement to the board, and I said, I have reflected deeply on what we're doing, and our cause is a just one. So we must go against 10,000. We must make this work. And then I sat back and waited for the responses. And the responses were incredible.

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Patrick

Every single member of the board said, absolutely, Patrick, we're going to make this work. We're all in. And, you know, there's a board member who's is also especially important. His name is Todd Warren. Todd and his wife Ruth are on the board. And Todd was my manager at Microsoft. And he's this person who, through all that sort of challenging time.

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Patrick

He just kept donating to the university. And, you know, often when you're sort of in a difficult situation like that, there are people who are quietly helping, who stand behind you the whole way, who make such a difference.

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Reeta

Yeah.

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Patrick

And, you know, so , I could so I could see while Todd is here, the board is here. We have other friends. Let's go talk with them. And so I talked with everybody. I spoke with all those guys. I spoke with my team, let them know what the situation was and why I say the team, not just the executive team, but,

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Reeta

The staff.

00:36:26:01 - 00:36:57:18

Patrick

The staff. And we all put our heads together. How do we keep our costs in check? How do we raise, local revenue? And literally within months after that, we had commitments from donors who were going to support us for the next four years. And we had a new plan at the University that we executed.

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Patrick

And we came out of that very difficult moment.

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Reeta

Yes. I want to go to another moment. And this one is a moment, actually, not just for Ashesi, but for the country. Yeah. It was a time where the university, your university did something completely unorthodox, which was to introduce an honor code. And I go back to that closed book exam right back at Swarthmore, where you were putting forward the opportunity to have exams which were unsupervised or un-proctored.

00:37:34:03 - 00:37:34:10

Patrick

Right.

00:37:34:10 - 00:37:43:08

Reeta

And yet it caused hue and Cry. Yeah. So what happened? What happened? And how did it all come about?

00:37:43:14 - 00:38:10:08

Patrick

So what happened was, we had a visiting professor from the University of Washington who walked in my office one day, I think it was in 2006, and he said he had given an assignment, and one third of the class had copied from each other. And I was startled by this. I was oh, this should not be happening.

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Patrick

This is, our mission, is for this not to be happening. And so at our next staff retreat, I asked the team: what is the most painful truth about our existence? What is it that is true about

Ashesi today that we wish was not true? And we need to be very honest with ourselves. And so lots of things were said.

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Patrick

But eventually we settled on, you know, actually, the most difficult truth about our current situation is the students do not, have not, taken ownership of the mission, and there are many students who will cheat if they think they can get away with it. And if it's not really driven by the students, then we're not actually accomplishing the mission.

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Patrick

So we left that retreat and we called a meeting with the students and we said this to them: We think that this is the situation and we think that you should take ownership for the mission. And what that did was the students then started a debate, and it went on for a year and a half. It took them a year and a half of discussion, debates and talks.

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Patrick

About what they wanted the culture of the university to be, and how they might drive that. And in the end, they decided to establish an honor system. And with this honor system, each class would vote. It had to be a two thirds majority or more to pledge two things. One, that they would not cheat and two, that they would not tolerate those who do.

00:40:23:22 - 00:40:54:10

Patrick

And once a class by two thirds majority or more, make this pledge, then the university would stop proctoring their exams and leave it in their hands. And we agreed to that. And, so then we started to have these un-proctored exams, which was very unusual. In secondary schools, the kids were just so intrigued by this idea.

00:40:54:12 - 00:41:23:11

Patrick

Many high school kids loved this idea, but it turns out that the accreditation board at the time was not so sure that this was a good idea. And they felt, look, you know, for the credibility of your exams, you must proctor them and you need to dismantle this honor system and you should take charge. This business of putting students in charge doesn't make any sense.

00:41:23:13 - 00:41:59:04

Patrick

And so they sent us a directive saying discontinue or risk loss of accreditation. And I think that that letter was, a pivotal, moment for Ashesi, and strengthened the Ashesi in ways that nothing else could have done. Because what it did was, it really said to us, it asked a question: is this the hell you're willing to die for?

00:41:59:06 - 00:42:25:23

Patrick

Right. This notion that students own the mission is it something you're going to risk accreditation for? And the answer was yes. So the students, again, in a unanimous vote, said we must keep this system. The parents supported us. We did an ethics conference and corporate Ghana supported us. And this is all over the news in Ghana.

00:42:25:24 - 00:42:53:14

Patrick

It was on radio and all of that. And I think that that moment really strengthened the honor system at Ashesi. The accreditation board saw the passion with which the entire Ashesi community was reacting to this letter. And they decided to let us continue. And I think that was a very, very important moment for Ashesi.

00:42:53:16 - 00:42:57:16

Reeta

Powerful moment and a powerful moment for higher education in general.

00:42:57:17 - 00:43:00:03

Patrick

Yes. Yes.

00:43:00:05 - 00:43:19:07

Reeta

Powerful. Patrick. You are courageous. You're incredibly courageous. You're bold, and yet you're so calm. How do you strike this balance? Is it the work that you do? Is it the hobbies that you have? What is it?

00:43:19:09 - 00:43:53:06

Patrick

I think that there are a number of things and I'll talk about maybe two of them. The first one I want to say is that my wife, Rebecca, has been an incredible source of support. And, you know, her agreeing for me to do this. And she's been with me all through this. And in moments of difficulty, she's often a person who is who is telling me that, you know, we should stay the course, right?

00:43:53:08 - 00:44:27:01

Patrick

The second is that I practice karate. I started karate in my first year at college, and I love it, and I've, I've kept practising since then. So since 1992 till now, I think there have been two years when I wasn't doing karate. And it's a place where, you know, when I'm in the dojo, somebody is teaching me or now I teach, other students.

00:44:27:03 - 00:44:53:04

Patrick

It's a very centering thing for me. It's a thing that's been constant, like when I was in college, Microsoft, the Ashesi project. It's always there. And, you know, I think there's a lot to be said about sort of the, you know, keeping your body healthy. Learning to breathe properly.

00:44:53:06 - 00:44:57:16

Reeta

I should learn to do that.

00:44:57:18 - 00:45:08:14

Patrick

And having something other than, having multiple things that you do, I think is very helpful. And for me, karate is something that keeps me very centered.

00:45:08:16 - 00:45:13:04

Reeta

Discipline. Practice. Centering.

00:45:13:06 - 00:45:13:24

Patrick

Right.

00:45:14:01 - 00:45:43:03

Reeta

It's fantastic. Fantastic. Just thinking it's been 20 years since the founding of Ashesi. You've gone from 30 students in that one room schoolhouse, essentially where you started, right? It's like your garage to 1500 students. Right. And the graduates, you know, find jobs or jobs find them within the six months of graduation. That's remarkable.

00:45:43:04 - 00:46:12:17

Reeta

That's absolutely remarkable. You know, the students, the graduates, they've been learning. And they they won't stop learning. They're creating. They're leading. They are doing phenomenally important things. Just incredibly important. And many would assume Ashesi

is a science-based organization. It is. But the bedrock is a liberal arts education. It's a love for the humanities, for history, for literature.

00:46:12:19 - 00:46:40:24

Reeta

And then coupled with science, whether it's in , computer sciences, engineering and most recently a school on law and public policy. Right. All of that. I want you to speak a little bit about why a liberal arts education is so important. Both of us are products of one right? But to speak about that and also speak about what's next for the institution.

00:46:41:01 - 00:47:23:10

Patrick

So I think of the liberal arts, as this model of education that really compels us to see all of the world. Problems don't come in very neatly defined, you know, silos. Right. We need to understand our purpose. Yeah. So whether you're a scientist or an engineer or whatever discipline that you do, I think that that purpose should be so grounded in a love for humanity, a love for the world, an understanding of humanity.

00:47:23:12 - 00:48:01:09

Patrick

And I think liberal arts is really good at sort of fostering that breadth of thinking, and engagement and to me, it's the most important thing that we do at Ashesi is that breadth of a curriculum and that approach. The liberal arts is also about you learning how to ask the right questions, you learning how to discern relevant from irrelevant information.

00:48:01:11 - 00:48:25:12

Patrick

You're learning how to navigate and find the truth. Right. And it's the truth is not easy to discern sometimes. Yeah, but you need to have a process or sort of a toolkit for how you go about, figuring that out. So that's why that's why we've taken that approach with the Ashesi and it's something that we will always do at the university.

00:48:25:14 - 00:48:28:02

Reeta

And what's next?

00:48:28:04 - 00:49:03:01

Patrick

Well. You know, I was telling you, the Chief of Berekusu and one of the things that I loved about his view was he was really attracted to our mission statement, which is focused on Africa. Right. Well, if we're really to live up to that, then we need to recognize that our project has to be about other, other institutions, in other countries.

00:49:03:03 - 00:49:37:17

Patrick

And so Ashesi is very, very strongly engaged now with collaborating with other universities because the task at hand is beyond any one institution. And we all, we all ought to be working together to really create this new world that that we desire. So that's, the first thing that I want to say, and it's a very important part of what we're going to do next.

00:49:37:19 - 00:50:27:18

Patrick

The second thing that I want to say is that for us, we decided to take a slightly different approach for our next strategic plan. So we're thinking about what the world looks like 30 years from now and what we should be doing now to be useful to that world 30 years from now. And when you look that far out, things like climate change, the demographic growth that is happening in Africa, the Continental Free Trade Agreement, you know AI and, synthetic biology, health, all of those things, those big waves are very important to us now.

00:50:27:20 - 00:51:03:02

Patrick

And we're organizing our work to be relevant and useful for that. And so whether it is, leaning more into engineering, getting into the policy space with law, public policy,

economics, and engaging more with people who are already in corporate and government settings and engaging with that group as well. It's all about that 30-year future for us now.

00:51:03:04 - 00:51:27:13

Reeta

That's powerful. That's powerful. Maybe it brings us to a good place to close. You know, when you look ahead and none of us can really know what what's coming even beyond that 30 years, the next hundred years. But what we do know is the people who succeed us and succeed you, right, will build off of this incredible foundation that you've laid.

00:51:27:15 - 00:51:52:03

Reeta

What's that piece of advice, that wisdom you'd want to pass on to your kids? the students? Really those students who are the future leaders and how they hold true to the vision for not just Africa, the world. What would you say to them?

00:51:52:05 - 00:52:40:23

Patrick

So a couple of things I would say. One is that values are very important and it is really important even in changing times that we hold, we hold on to enduring values. And so taking the time and, you know, to really determine what your values are that are going to be positive and good for the world, it's important. And we all need to find a way to navigate holding through those values, regardless of what is happening around us.

00:52:41:00 - 00:53:34:16

Patrick

The second thing that I would say, particularly to, young people in Africa today, is that the project of development will require sacrifice, from each one of us. It will not be easy. To make change you must expend energy. Right. And so we should not be afraid to make personal sacrifices, we should not be afraid to pay attention to the needs of others, to have empathy.

00:53:34:18 - 00:53:55:24

Patrick

We should not be afraid to stand for the truth, right? And we should not be afraid to work hard and to maintain discipline moving forward. So that's the advice that I'd give young people in Africa today.

00:53:56:01 - 00:54:08:15

Reeta

Thank you. Thank you so much, Patrick. You've just been such an enlightening human being and leader. And, what a pleasure. Thank you for being on this podcast.

00:54:08:17 - 00:54:09:14

Patrick

Thank you. Reeta.

00:54:09:17 - 00:54:47:00

Reeta

Thank you. From a young man who left Ghana during turbulent times to returning as a beacon of hope for his homeland. From a stellar career at Microsoft, where innovation was his craft, to founding Ashesi University where transformation is his mission, from reimagining education to cultivating a generation of ethical leaders who are reshaping Africa's future. Patrick Awuah exemplifies the power of vision, resilience and purpose.

00:54:47:02 - 00:55:18:17

Reeta

He's a living testament of transcending boundaries. Thank you for joining us on Transcending Boundaries. I hope this conversation sparked a new idea, or inspired you to reflect on your own leadership journey and the values that guide you. If you enjoyed today's episode, please subscribe, leave us a review and share our show with others. Until next time, keep leading with purpose and with courage.