

THRIVING IN UNCERTAINTY

Live Interview and Q&A on
Post Covid19 Challenges
and Opportunities



Yemi Faseun

Introduction



The COVID-19 Pandemic birthed a lot of conversations, most of which bothers on clarity on the uncertainty which the pandemic presents to the world. Yemi Faseun was a guest on the Thriving in Uncertainty webinar series with Falana Temitope where he spoke about the Challenges and Opportunities of the Post COVID-19 World. This book captures the essence of the interview.

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Job hunters and the Post-Covid Era

For job hunters, what should they expect? Do they need to rescale? Do they need to stop searching? What's the reality for job hunters at this time?

YF:

"I'm going to respond to your question from two perspectives: first, those individuals who are uncertain in the workplace, and then, the individuals who are uncertain, given the fact that they don't have jobs right now. Now, for the individuals who are already in the workforce, the uncertainties are real. I'm not going to be panel-beating the facts; the uncertainties are very real. Again, we have been talking about our vulnerable situation in a very complex and uncertain world, given that there is little technology could

do, and it is also absolutely ambiguous because of the changes happening in the world, and this is what we call VUCA.

But now, what has happened is, because it happened to all of us at the same time, and the realities are hitting us, the employers and employees are both going to suffer the outcomes. Like I said earlier, if the organization isn't making money, let's not kid ourselves, there is no way employers would be able to pay salaries. For instance, if I am the Head of Human Resources, I cannot go and tell the employer, "*this is the payroll for April*", when in my conversation with the CFO or financial controller, I am fully aware that no money has come in, in the last two weeks. How am I going to present the payroll, a hundred

percent payroll for instance, to the employer to sign up? It's going to be difficult. For the organizations that are still able to do business, and the top lines are not impacted negatively in any way, that's fine. But for many organizations, and this is based on conversations I have had with a lot of people in the last couple of weeks, the top lines have been impacted. So we need to brace up for the impact that is about to hit us when we get back to the workplace, or even before we get back to the workplace.

Where we are right now, I kind of make allusion to an airplane that is going through turbulence, and the cabin crew is telling us, *"guys, it's a turbulent situation; please, brace up for impact."* Now, the plane might not crash, but there is turbulence, and that is the situation we are in right now,

and it is going to impact the pilot, the cabin crew, and the passengers. And so, everybody is involved. The uncertainties are real. I'm not going to move away from that fact.

Also, we need to also take the employers into consideration. If business is impacted negatively, how are they going to pay salaries? For negatively impacted businesses, the possibilities of looking at an 80% salary payment, graduated if things remain the same to maybe 60-65%, and if things still remain the same as time passes, maybe to 50%. But the point is, not all employers would be able to say to you as we speak that it is business as usual. We are in uncertain times, and that's the reality.

So, I'm telling everybody; let us all brace up."

Employers and Employees; What Next?

Given your analogy of the times we are in, being like that of the turbulence an aircraft experiences, if we are not going to crash, what do we have to do as the “passengers” in order to keep it together?

YF:

“First, all passengers have to see themselves as pilots in this instance. Let's all learn through this experience and realize that, even if we did not crash, what will be the lessons learnt? From the book, *Who Moved My Cheese*, could we have seen some signs that the cheese was moving gradually? Could we have seen the signs that, when we got to the cheese station yesterday, it had developed some mould? Did we notice the day before yesterday that the cheese had

become smaller? Did we notice that some jobs were going to be irrelevant post 2020? We knew that some other skills were going to be very relevant in the workplace post 2020.

Sincerely, nobody saw covid-19 happening, but now, it has happened. So for the individuals who were already in the space of skilling and retooling themselves for the future, it is probably going to be a smoother transition. There are three kinds of people: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and the wonderful people. The wonderful people are the people who see things happen and go “Wow!” So, for these “wow” people, the individuals who are going to be victims of the change, it is probably going to be that they would need to

do something quickly; very quickly. In this lockdown, not everybody is staying at home. But for the individuals who are, and who seem to have lost in this game, the best time for them to start retooling themselves for the future is now. They should not wait until we get back to work, post- pandemic, before they start asking big questions like, "What should I do?" Now is the time to ask and answer those questions, and I do not have any prescriptive procedure like "5 steps to do this"; everybody needs to have a personal conference with himself or herself, and a personal conference for me is like *"Yemi, let's have a conversation; what is going to*

happen in the future?" The reason for asking and answering that question is in terms of the future. I say a lot that we need to spend time in the future. Those who spend time in the future are going to be beneficiaries of this present situation. You need to quickly do it now, and ask yourself those questions: "What next for me? Where am I in the scheme of things? How is this going to play out?"

Let me sound a note of warning to you and everybody: if the pandemic ends on a Friday, and we all go back to work on a Monday, it is not the same workplace anymore. The ship of the old order of things has sailed."



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Post-Covid Impact on Industries

Being someone who has been on The Future of Work for some time now, I know there is a massive shift that is certainly going to happen, and like you said, Covid-19 has really catalyzed it, and everything is happening to everybody at the same time. You said something about retooling. I want to ask: for different industries, is it going to happen at the same pace?

YF:

“Well, maybe not at the same time. This is why individuals would need to appraise themselves and find where they are in the scheme of things. For instance, in the financial sector, you and I know that banking transactions are still going on as we speak; not a lot has changed. If you

want some money, and you go to the ATM right now, you would get some money. But some other sectors are heavily impacted. For instance, the services industry is so impacted. What we are doing right now would probably be something we would have said, let's get 20-25 people in a room and do a training on Post-Covid Workplace Development. But right now, we are making use of technology, even during the pandemic to make sure that this is working for us. So, many organizations are going to go back to work and realize that they have lost out, and some others would say, “we were 80% ready for this. What do we need to do to tighten the remaining 20% so that if anything like this happens again, we would be ready?”

Business Continuity Management (BCM) must be something that is embedded in every business going forward, from the risk management perspective. In some environments, this could have been an earthquake, a tsunami – it could have been anything: isolated cases in specific environments. But this is affecting all of us, and we need to go back and say to ourselves, “in another 6 months, if anything happens, and we are not able to bring everyone to the head-office to work, how are we going to do things? If we cannot meet our customers one-on-one, how are we going to be able to continue to serve our customers?”

Two things: for every business, BCM will be different because of the different sectors we are in. Secondly, on an individual basis, I need to stress this: you will need to do a 'probability continuous management'. If you do not have the tools now

to be in the new workplace, what do you need to constantly do?

Let me say this to everybody, like I have said on most of my social media pages: if you are not in love with self-development, you are cheating on yourself. Every employee waiting for an organization to send them on training in today's world is already a loser. The possibility of tooling and retooling ourselves exists on a daily basis; it depends on what we are doing with those possibilities. LinkedIn will offer you some free training programs on Project Management, Public Speaking, Excel etc. What are you doing with the tool in your hand? Like the tool we are using to have this conversation, before now, what were you doing with the tool? We were slaying on Facebook and Instagram. But individuals are using the same tools to upscale and retool for the future, and they are rapidly

maximizing the opportunities that exist today.

I know one or two people who have had fantastic job offers even in this period of the pandemic, as we speak. The organization said, “we cannot wait until the pandemic is over. This is your offer letter; come now.”
Business Continuity Management for businesses, and Employability Continuity Management for individuals need to be in place. The skills that brought you here are not going to be the same skills that

will take me further. So, let's spend time in the future. The future doesn't happen suddenly. The future that happens is the one we expect most times to happen because we are spending time in that future. Organizations are going to change their BCM plans, and individuals will need to ask questions around “what's going to happen to me? What else do I need to do to be ahead of the game?” It is a constant question that we must answer ourselves. Self-development is the only answer.



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Maximizing New Opportunities for Work Professionals and Job Hunters

Covid-19 poses a lot of challenges, but it will also unleash a lot of opportunities. We have known about The Future of Work for some time. Forbes said that, Artificial Intelligence will give birth to about 58 million jobs, and a lot of opportunities around new technologies, new ways of doing stuff will also emerge.

So from your office, what candid advice will you give to working professionals and job hunters in terms of maximizing the opportunities staring at us, even in the middle of this uncertainty?

YF:

“For job hunters, that CV you were dropping in organizations before the pandemic, if there is a time to look at that CV again, it is now. Use this opportunity to reflect on the skills that you wanted to sell to organizations, and also look at the same CV in the light of what is happening, and ask yourself, “will these skills still be relevant, going forward?” If those skills are relevant, that is fine. If those skills are not relevant, what you need to do at this time is to add to those skills. More things would be done offline.

Someone asked me a very funny question. Everybody is saying “work from home” but let’s take a roll call now. A front desk officer, or a receptionist, can he or she work from home at this point? This is just a basic example.

The job of that person is to welcome people into the office, and make inquiries about who they want to see. But can that individual work from home right now? If anyone was looking for a job with the role of a front desk officer, they have to stop and think. With all that is happening right now, am I going to be able to apply for a job with a front desk role?

What other opportunities are coming up? Digital marketing is taking a big chunk of the opportunities available to us right now. We all have to be in the digital space. HR, Admin, Operations, Finance personnel, we all have to take advantage of the digital revolution happening to the entire world at the same time. Fit your skills within the space of what is happening. Before now, prior to the pandemic, we were selling our skills based on what we can do. What I will advice job seekers, and even

individuals with jobs to do is, use this opportunity now to retool for the opportunities that will come. Just like you said, some new jobs will come up, and going forward, some jobs will become irrelevant. It's time for everybody to upgrade. I personally do not have a catalogue. People should take experiences from what is going on around them, in their organizations, and forecast in their minds that, "if artificial intelligence takes over what I'm doing right now, what next am I going to do?" I can refer people to the World Economic Forum Top 20 Skills in 2020. That would be very relevant. Emotional Intelligence, Leadership, System Analysis, Ideas Creation, Innovation etc. As a Human Resource personnel, if the Managing Director says to me, "this is post pandemic. What are we going to do about the work force?" And the first thing I say is, "in order to make up for the

revenue and profit, we need to increase our head count by twenty percent.” Five minutes later, that head of HR will be fired. You see what I mean? The first thing we need to start looking at is, what else can we do with the workforce rather than just increase cost and head count? Employers want to listen to people who will give them advisory based on the things that have happened, and

how we are going to start doing things differently. So, job hunters, what new skills are you going to take to the work place that has changed forever? Employees in the work force, what new skills are you going to develop to ensure that you continue to be relevant in your organization? Believe me, a lot has changed, and those things that have gone are probably never going to come back.



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The Place of Certification and Skills

In Nigeria, we are highly certification-conscious. Most college graduates aren't being employed because most organizations do not need them, as they have seen that, it is not just about the certificate, but about what the individual has to deliver.

But is it advisable to go for more certifications at this time, or pursue skills?

YF:

For every one listening to me, I would say, all the certifications you have listed out on your CV, this is post pandemic - go and review them. In the post pandemic era, the craze for certification will drop. What we need is knowledge and new

skills set; not certifications. Skills, knowledge, advisory, and competence to do the job will become more important, over and above certifications. Certifications can lend credence to competence. I am not totally saying that there is no place for certification. But what it would do is to justify the knowledge and skills we have. It will not replace knowledge. It will not replace competence. We then need to lay more emphasis on knowledge, new skills set, competence, and advisory to do the business, rather than on just acquiring one certification after another. Certification has a place, but what it does is to certify your knowledge and skills, and not to replace them. People leave school and say, "Yemi, I want to go into HR; what certifications do I need to focus on?" I tell them, "Why don't you focus on building your on-the-job experience,

and competence, rather than certifications?" There is a place for certification, but what is more important is self-development. For all of us, the skills set that took us to where we are, is not what would be needed when we get back to the workplace, post pandemic. Things are going to be different. But please, do not

stop developing yourself. I cannot say this enough. The time we are spending on so many other trivial things that seem irrelevant, let's invest that time on retooling, reskilling ourselves, and getting new competences, and getting ready for the new place of work.



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Entrepreneurship and Self-employment

What are some of the skills needed in this regard?

YF:

A lot of individuals are going through the phase of not getting jobs, and asking themselves what they can do. If you have knowledge and experience in a particular field, then you can go for it. But let me sound a note of warning: do not go into business because other individuals are going into the same business. You need to understand the product and the service you want to offer the market. It is ultimately about value. If you have built yourself enough to the point

where you feel you have got value to give to the market, then be ready to take on that journey of entrepreneurship. I say that the market place does not pay for certifications or qualifications; it does not pay for a well-dressed face; it pays for value. What value are you taking to the market place? Build your content from a product-service perspective, be sure that you have value to offer, do a test-run if possible, and approach the market. Everybody can be a CEO right now, and I agree the possibilities exist, with what social media allows us to do. But it's value over anything.



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Post Covid and Human Resource Management

As an HR professional, what sort of HR skills and competences are we expected to have, post-covid?

YF:

I anchored a webinar a few days ago. It is ultimately about employee value chain. How we recruit is going to change, going forward. How we reward people is going to change too. The culture and the practices, including policies of the organization will change. Leadership, performance management, methods of learning and development etc, will all change. A CEO asked an HR, “who is the best training provider we have?”, and the HR said “Zoom”. This

is because learning and development is now going fully online. Virtually everything about Human Resources is going to change; everything.

It is not just about recruitment. Once you go through the entire value change, everything will change. The way we are going to do on-boarding will change. There are individuals who have joined organizations and they are being on-boarded online as we speak. I do not need to wait until May 1st when I walk into the office before I am on-boarded. We can start having conversations online before I join the organization. It won't be business as usual; things are going to be different.

Some Platforms for Online Learning

What are some platforms we can go to for learning online?

YF:

“LinkedIn offers some free training programs. Coursera is

a good website, and virtually, all business schools are offering trainings online. Go online and just explore, and see possibilities available to you. There are so many of them right now. But the free courses on LinkedIn can be a good start.”

This book was
put together by



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