

Tessy Jibodu: Seven Years of Tutoring Fashion Entrepreneurs

Her world revolves around fashion. She took it a step further by establishing a fashion institute, which she has made a haven for young budding designers. In less than seven years, Tessy Jibodu, who is Chief Operation Officer of Zaris Fashion and Style Academy, has graduated 700 designers, who have in turn established their own fashion houses.

Mary Nnah writes

Over the years, Chief Operation Officer of Zaris Fashion and Style Academy, Tessy Jibodu, has helped people, especially young talents, find their footing in the fashion world. Having studied fashion education and design at the Department of Industrial Design, Yaba College of Technology, and later had a stint in business entrepreneurship training at the Lagos Business School (LBS), Jibodu was equipped to take up the responsibility of training people in fashion design.

This was when she realised that there was lack of innovation in the fashion industry. So from being a fashion practitioner, she veered into being a fashion tutor, an aspect of her that gave rise to Zaris Fashion and Style Academy. She said, "I sewed clothes for seven years, then closed shop for one year before setting up Zaris Fashion and Style Academy. So I am both a fashion designer and a tutor. I still do fashion designing. I got involved in training because I found out that we needed to be innovative in what we were doing."

For her, being a fashion designer and owning a fashion academy are both interesting, even though the training aspect is even more tasking. "You have to do more research and reading to be able to teach", she maintained.

And having tried her hands on all aspects of fashion, she feels teaching is on a higher level. "If you studied fashion, you have the ability to impart what you have learnt to the younger generation via teaching while you also try to know what exactly we need to change in the industry to make it better as well as improve fashion education in Nigeria."

For Jibodu, today's fashion designing is totally different from the traditional idea of fashion designing some 10 years ago. According to her, years back, the trade was devoid of a lot of intricacies. There were absence of pattern drawing and drafting, illustration, cloth ornamentation and many other details that are the basis of what fashion education is about today.

Her training, the fashion tutor said, helps



Jibodu

to improve the output of garments that are produced in Nigeria. "And we felt that was the best position to make a difference in what tailors produce at the end of the day", she noted. Today, with so much innovations brought into the fashion profession in Nigeria in the space of seven years, Jibodu said it has been an uphill task getting to this point.

She added, "To sustain a business in Nigeria, any business at all, is a lot of work, dedication, and sacrifices. We pay a lot of taxes and we face other regular challenges encountered by business owners in this environment. So existing for seven years, wherein we have graduated 700 designers who have established 100 businesses and are doing great, is a great achievement. It is a milestone and we pray to still be in the business in years to come."

"As a fashion school, we have won several awards like the Best Fashion School in West

Africa, amongst others. The best Designer for Africa Fashion Week 2017 was a Zaris alumnus. We have also been Da Viva ambassador consecutively in 2014, 2015 and 2016. We are graduating 80 students in 2018. It is a fulfilment for me to see those that we have trained making a difference in the industry."

Crafting a livelihood as a fashion designer, Jibodu said is easy only if one is creative, adding that to be in the business of fashion, "you have to keep evolving, doing new things. Another thing is for you to understand how fashion business works in Nigeria in relation to elsewhere in the world."

On highlights for the milestone anniversary, the fashion entrepreneur said they would be academy's parade of the crème de la crème of its alumni, the very best and their businesses, alongside other established designers in the industry in an anniversary exhibition tagged,

"Zaris-Power 2018" scheduled to take place on October 7 at Radisson Blue Hotel, GRA Ikeja, Lagos, starting with a red carpet event at 2.00pm.

She said, "We want to showcase what we have groomed over the years. Our alumni keeps track of all the business established by students that graduate from this institute and we are able to track the ones that are doing exceptionally well. That is what gave birth to Zaris Power 2018."

"We are also working in partnership with interested corporate organisations whose CSRs are oriented towards empowering young entrepreneurs to empower 20 young designers with passion for fashion education. And we are going to graduate 80 students for 2018 session."

The major challenge for Zaris so far has been what Jibodu described as the "Nigerian Factor", which she has found quite tough to contend with. "You want to take a loan, for instance, you have worked to meet the set criteria, at least 90 per cent, and yet, you still cannot scale the hurdle. It will be helpful to the industry and the general business ecosystem if the procedure can be lowered a bit so people can access much-needed loans. That is one way the government can help young businesses and young entrepreneurs in Nigeria", she pointed out.

Her highpoint is being able to be consistent all through the seven years of the Zaris existence. This she stressed has been based on the institute's mission and vision. "It is overwhelming for me to see that we have trained over 700 students who are interested in fashion education and out of the numbers we have over 100 who have established fashion businesses in Nigeria."

For budding designers, she said passion was the ultimate. "If you don't have the passion, the stress inherent in the business can easily defeat and drive you to leave it. The second is persistence. Be consistent in the business. Always be there in the face of people, do a lot of adverts; use the social media to sustain your business", was her heartfelt advice.