

#8 Impact, Purpose, Significance & Embracing Authenticity with Evon Rantiade

Wambui: Hi there, Ade. It's so nice to have you here on my show. Thank you so much for joining me.

Ruth: It's my pleasure. Thank you for inviting me. I'm honoured to be here.

Wambui: Thank you. When people ask, tell me about yourself, what do you tell them?

Ruth: Well, I think there used to be a time when I would describe myself by what I do. But now, I tend to lead with who I am which is a spark of divinity. I truly believe that I'm part of the divine. Just someone who's currently having a human experience. But I think during that experience, I have been fortunate enough to serve humanity as a daughter, a sibling, a wife, and a mother. I'm a lawyer, and I'm currently executive director of, an N G O, called Pathfinders which works, to end, the sex trafficking of women, in Nigeria. I've morphed throughout all the years, but my core, my identity is, someone who is of the divine, who happens to be having a temporary human experience is the way I put it.

Wambui: I love that. Yes. We are all spiritual beings with human experiences. I love that. That's right. You've morphed and we've all morphed. Tell me a little bit about, your nonprofit, because that caught my ear when I heard that, and you put it very beautifully when you say that you create space for women and girls. The way you say it, it's like stretching tight shoes to create more space. I love that. So can you tell us a little bit about that?

Ruth: Yeah, it's my calling and that's why I like to describe it that way. It's what God has put me on the earth to do; to create more space, particularly for women and girls. Audrey Lord has a quote where she says, "I am who I am, doing what I came to do." Part of why, I describe it that way is because I have an understanding of what it's like to have, power and control taken away from you.

I like to always say that those who bear scars must help the wounded. I think anybody who's been through, anything hard in their life; if you've gone through any period of suffering, if you understand what it feels like, to not have been looked at with eyes of compassion, or with eyes of empathy, to have had things taken away from you forcefully, whether it's through physical assault or verbal assault or even emotional, financial assaults, whatever the case might be. I've

had instances in my life when that has been part of my story. So for me, stretching tight shoes is ensuring that everybody who needs to be at the table has a seat at the table.

That they have access to opportunity, they have access to really creating the narrative for themselves. I'm very big on the structural transformation of the narrative of African women. I want us to be able to tell our own stories and with our voices and also ensure that there is a balance to the economic landscape for women and girls as well.

The nonprofit that I started nine going to almost 10 years ago now, which is hard to believe, is focused on ensuring that that is the case. Giving women opportunities, particularly those who have had some of these instances, written into their lives stories, whether it's forcefully or just as a result of the economic conditions that have pushed them into making certain decisions and choices. We work in Nigeria. Pathfinder is actually a nickname that my father gave me because he would call me his Pathfinder. He would say, no matter where he was in the world, I would always track him down. So when I started thinking about a name for the organization, that came to mind because it's not only what my father called me prophetically, but it's also what I do. It's helped women find their path out of injustice. Out of some of these difficult and tight corners that they've been forcefully placed into.

The three arms of the work that we do, the first one is called the Justice Initiative. I like to just refer to that as influencing the influencer. It's the arm of the work, where we work with the people who have the power to end trafficking and end sexual violence against women and girls.

So we partner with government organizations. We do capacity building, for them and for other, CSOs that are working in the space. We also do a lot of research, to ensure that the information that we're using is actually, data-driven and can be verified and supported with information.

The second arm of the work is called Pathway to Freedom. I think this is probably what we're most known for, which is working with other survivors, working with women who are at risk of becoming trafficked, to address any of the economic gaps that they have, providing rehabilitation, for them by using what we refer to as our path plans, our personalized action, to healing plans.

Then the third arm of the work is of truth tellers arm because it's not just about ensuring that, that you're speaking truth to power, right? We're ensuring that we're speaking the truth to the seemingly powerless, the group of people who have had their voices silenced or muted. That's a community ensuring that they're aware of, the social ills and societal vices and ensuring that they have a say in the way that interventions are created so that they ultimately take ownership

over the things that we're trying to get, the changes that we're trying to create in society. So that's the awareness-raising arm of what we do.

Wambui: Awesome. That's quite profound. You said there are three branches, please tell me again.

Ruth: The three arms of the work that we do are the justice initiative, the pathway to freedom and truth tellers.

Wambui: Very good. How is that going? Is it specifically in Nigeria or do you have offices in other parts of the world?

Ruth: Yeah. It's difficult to work, it's challenging work because people trafficking is a 150 billion, dollar industry and so when you're taking money out of the pockets of traffickers, it makes it very challenging for them. So you can imagine that if a trafficker has, 10 to 15 women, that they're exploiting, each one of them can generate a hundred thousand dollars a year in profit for that trafficker.

When you're fighting against these sorts of things, you recognize the extent to which it is embedded within systems. In Nigeria where we're mainly focused, although we work with, other NGOs as partners in 12 other countries, across Africa and primarily in Europe, I started to recognize how laced into particular governments it is. You see officials who are steeped in corruption, working with human traffickers as well. So for the most part, it almost feels like they're almost one step ahead because it's a network, that allows for the proliferation of trafficking. Overall though, I would say that we're making some progress. There's still so much work to be done. But what I'm finding is most effective is not just when you're speaking about raising awareness and teaching people about the dangers of trafficking, but you're also pairing that with viable and sustainable economic opportunities, particularly for women and girls.

When you have the combination of those two things where you're giving people an opportunity to stand on their own, independent of you, and you're teaching them about the dangers of what could potentially happen, then you're able to affect the sort of change that you'd like to see.

Wambui: Right. I like that sustainability piece because when they're able to because maybe they do it because of the economic aspect of it. So when you can give them a way to have this sustainability and have something that they can rely on, I think that gives them power, right?

Ruth: Absolutely. An agency.

Wambui: An agency. Yes. You're doing such great work. I'm so inspired by you. Did you leave your high-profile job as a lawyer to do this?

Ruth: I did. I resigned in 2014. I always knew that I wasn't going to be doing that for the rest of my life. I was a partner at a law firm, and I think by most definitions I was successful, particularly for a black woman who was working in New York. I knew it wasn't what I was called to do. I think, life and the spirit of God for me, I'm a person of faith, just consistently kept telling me that this is not your full story, but I always say that no experience is ever wasted.

I think all of the knowledge and the journey of becoming a good lawyer, all of the skills that I gained from that I've been able to transfer into the work that I do now. But yeah, I resigned in 2014. I was reading a book called Let Your Life Speak. Which I think is particularly for your audience might be very helpful. It's by an author called Parker Palmer and it's really about life. The fact that your life is constantly telling you what it wants you to do with it. But we're just not slowing down enough to pay attention to all of the details. For example, I'm not very good at mathematics, so I still count on my fingers. I still can't tell you how many million, make 1 billion. I don't know. it's just not my strong suit, that's my life's way of saying, "Hey honey, sweetheart, mathematics is not for you, my dear." But we're not listening to that. So if you are naturally gifted in something, you're a good orator or you're a good writer. These are things that your life is saying to you. Perhaps your purpose is weaved into that in some way, but we just don't slow down enough to take the time to connect all the dots, you know?

For example, someone may have been living in a particular location and fell in love with somebody and that person broke up with them and dumped them and everything and they had to end up moving back to a different place. Your life is telling you that perhaps whatever it is that I've called you to do is not in this particular place. The idea is to slow down and start to piece together the picture, and then ultimately you'll see that, wow, okay. I think that there is something here, from just slowing down to listening to what your life has been telling you. I just started reading that book on a Friday, and I came across a line in a poem that said, "Ask me whether what I've done is my life." At that point, I'd been practising for 13 years and I thought, this is not what I wanna do. Like, I mean, I love it and I was successful at it, like I said and I enjoyed the work. I enjoyed the challenge of it but I knew it wasn't ultimately what I was supposed to be doing.

That was a Friday. I resigned on a Monday and you know, I remember walking into my senior partner's office and handing him my resignation letter and, he was like, "What the heck are you

doing? Are you mad? Who does this? Who would walk away from this to go and start a nonprofit, why would you do that? How are you going to survive and how are you gonna live? You have a daughter and think about your life!” But I just had this strong sense of urgency about leaving at that moment. I felt sure about it. I was turning 40 at the time. And it was the kind of career shift that I think scares a lot of people because you're accustomed to doing things in a certain way and when you switch completely, particularly into a context where you're in a nonprofit, where you may not be making any money for some time and your lifestyle is gonna be completely different. It was something that, I could understand why there was a lot of scepticism in my decision, at that point. But I can a hundred per cent say that it was the best decision that I've ever made because it gave me a sense of fulfilment and significance.

Wambui: That is so good. The fulfilment and significance. What is the difference between success and significance? I know you talk about that a lot.

Yeah, most people, tend to think of success as, achievement, power, control, money, financial security and things like that. But significance for me is impact. It's being able to leave the world changed, leaving a legacy of some sort. But I've since redefined my definition of success, and for me now, it's living a life of love and compassion, a life that inspires other people not to be like me but to be more of themselves. That's a successful life to me, where you're able to inspire people when they hear you speak and they hear you be transparent and authentic in the way that you are living your life. There's something that sparks up within them. That's what purpose is for me. It's really igniting part of you that not only It's your unique creative energy, but it also sparks something divine in the other person as well. That's what significance is. It's having the ability to be able to inspire other people and have them be more of themselves.

Wambui: Wow. you are doing that my friend, on your social media. You are inspiring us and we can tell that divinity, you are, you're leaving that impact and I appreciate you so much. I do.

Ruth: Thank you.

Wambui: You're welcome. I also see that you talk a lot about self-worth and value. Now my audience is professional women who have a lot of self-doubt and self-worth and that stops them. It makes them stuck from being the women that they were created to be. What do you think that holds women back? Irrespective of the socio or economic status,

Ruth: Yeah, first I just wanna say that I've been there, I know exactly what this feels like to feel insecure and to feel, you have imposter syndrome and to feel like you don't belong and, to

wonder about, how being a black woman in a space where they're mainly, white professional men. I understand all of the insecurities that have come with that. I experienced a lot of racism in my practice. I was a lawyer's lawyer, so I represented other lawyers.

All my clients were lawyers. And there was sometimes an assumption that I could not possibly be a lawyer. Some of them would come in looking for the tall white man to represent them and when I would show up, you could see in their mind like, how is this possible that you could have this, tall, black, strong firm woman? It didn't make sense in their mind. I understand a lot of what, what that feels like. A lot of it I think is part of societal constructs, that many of us have adopted. A lot of it is also just steeped in social societal injustice, that's laced in our laws.

It's in our religions, it's in our institutions, that subjugate women or consider women, second-class in certain areas. The truth of it is that the overwhelming majority are our self-deprecating thoughts. That we are unable to separate ourselves from because we are not our thoughts. We are the awareness to be separate from those thoughts. Our thoughts are based on our conditioning, our experiences, and our education, but you are the divinity that has those thoughts, but a lot of times we associate ourselves so much with the thoughts that we think that that's our identity.

I think that those are some of the things that tend to keep us in that space is when particularly if you've had some experience of trauma that then complicates your reality, but it doesn't mean that you're not able to overcome it. These are things that all of us, as women, professional women have to face and we have to address, but there's a way to rise above it as well.

Wambui: For sure. I saw in one of your reels talking about how our thoughts influence what we become. I know you said you pause and you meditate. What are some of the tools and strategies that you can share, that we can use to stop holding ourselves back? What can you share that can help someone live courageously?

Ruth: Yeah, it's not easy. But I think the first thing is that you just have decided that what you are currently doing is not working. Whatever it is you've been trying you have to be able to say, this is something that I've recognized is not serving me anymore. Particularly if there's trauma that's related to it I always say that if you don't deal with your trauma, it will deal with you, so if there's something that has happened in your past, something that you have not been able to get over whether it was a childhood traumatic, experience, a big t trauma as we, as they call it, where you've had, you know, sexual abuse or a small T trauma where you were neglected, things that were supposed to have happened where you're supposed to have been cared for by your parents, but they didn't have the time because they were always working or, no one took

the time to invest into you pour, unconditional love into you as a child. That's traumatic as well. If you know that that's something that's happened to you, you have to start to deal with it. Otherwise, it just sits there in your body and it's wreaking havoc in your body. It's not something that is inconsequential, you see people dealing with high blood pressure and dealing with neurological conditions and dementia and some of it can stem from unresolved trauma in your life. Another thing I think for me that has been. A breakthrough is just the ability to be able to live authentically because that's where your power lies,

When you can show up as yourself, that in and of itself is an act of resistance, when I can come with my natural Afro hair and I can walk around in my African-inspired jewellery, and just be who I am and speak authentically and use my accents when I want to use it and, not use it when I want to use it and, just be myself. That is where your power is, so you're not trying to emulate somebody else. You are just showing up as yourself and taking up the space as yourself because you are worthy of that. I think that's something that I've grown into. I've not always been this way. I've grown into it, and it was because I was able to address some of the trauma that happened to me in my own life. Then I think the third thing I would say is just, prioritizing the service of others. I think that when you are in service of humanity it takes all of the attention off of you on your problems.

Like you realize how small you are and you're able to transcend that sort of Me, me, me and mine thinking, because you can pour into other people. Then I would say, you know, practically speaking some of the things that you mentioned that I talk about, meditation any contemplative practice where you're just able to sit with yourself and with your mind.

So even before we had this podcast, I set my intention, for the podcast, it's going to be a beautiful space where I'm able to share. With you and share with your audience, everything that's in my heart is going to be transferred. Even though it's not live in person, they will feel this as I'm speaking, setting the intention in my mind, meditating being connected with the divinity within me and trusting the divinity to speak through me when I show up in spaces as well. I think. Those are some of the things that I would offer hopefully they'll be helpful.

Wambui: They will be helpful, and I like that. I like the fact that you said to be authentic, I think that when you're not trying to be someone else, it actually gives that energy back to you because really, it's a lot of energy. Expansion when you're trying to be someone else, it's tiring. So explain yourself and embrace who you are Africanness and whoever you are, whatever ethnic society be becoming from. I love that. I really do. Now, I also know that some of us, and maybe most of us, look for external factors to give us happiness. How does one cultivate unconditional self-worth? Just within, yeah.

Ruth: It's such a process let me take that back because some people can get there overnight, they just make a decision and they're able to move forward. But for me, it's been a process of really figuring out my identity. I mentioned at the beginning of the podcast some of the ways that I've been able to show up in my life as a, first as a daughter, then as a sibling, as a wife, and then as a mother. As a lawyer and all the different ways, I've been able to show up. But none of those things is my identity, that's what I've done, but it's not necessarily who I am, and I think. That's a very important distinction for those of us who are listening especially as women, we tend to wear so many hats simultaneously at the same time. Doing everything for everyone and at some point we start to. Receive validation from a lot of these other aspects, and that validation then becomes so important to us and forms to a certain extent who we think our identity is.

I think it's so important that we understand that what you do is not necessarily who you are. Who you are is what I spoke about earlier. You are the divinity. You are, the person who has a spark of creativity within you. You are the one who is the solution to the problem, you are the love. You are the grace. You are the peace. Connecting back to all of that, I think is one of the ways that you're able to then cultivate your self-worth. Another thing I mentioned, and I, spoke about a little bit earlier, is just meditation and prayer. That has helped me to still, my own thoughts, still my mind to start to hear more and connect more with the divinity. I think when I'm in those spaces where I'm able to just be quiet I'm able to focus my mind. There's a connection that happens right beyond yourself where you can, if you're a person of faith, and you don't necessarily even have to be, you know, a follower of the way.

Because there's divinity in all of us, you can connect with that divinity. One of the things I did, when I was going through a hard time, was going through a divorce, I don't even remember how long ago, a long time ago now. I remember that was probably one of the points in my life where I felt, extremely low I didn't understand what my value was. I think my self-esteem at that point had plummeted to the lowest point in my life. I remember having to remind myself who I am, and the way it showed up for me was by cutting out pieces of paper and writing out on them. I am. Peace. I am love. I am God. I am power. I have grace and stick them all over my house.

Everywhere. They were in the kitchen, in the bathroom, and in the toilet. Because you feel at sometimes in your life that you are not worthy necessarily because of what may have happened to you in your life. I'm also a survivor of sexual assault and physical assault. All of that, culminated at that point in my life when I was going through my divorce and all the insecurity of everything just came back in those moments. I think doing things like that, really being able

to sit in the emotion of what is happening and not be afraid that it's going to overwhelm you and allowing yourself to walk through that process of healing right after is something that many of us don't necessarily want to do. We want to just rush through it because nobody wants to have to think. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of pain to process through. But you cannot get over something without going through it. There's just no way. there's a scripture in the Bible, in Psalms that talks about walking through the valley of the shadow of death. You cannot, like hop over it. You have to walk through it. Trust that the divinity in you will guide you, through that. It was through some of these things pursuing meaning and purpose and serving others that I was able to then cultivate my self-worth because you realize that you're only a small piece in the big scheme of things,

There are millions of people that have gone before you, who have not been consumed by this exact same experience that you just had. That won't necessarily be, what will happen to you because we're so afraid, I think, of things that, we projected to the future as opposed to being very present in the now.

A lot of these things that we are afraid of, never, ever happen. They just create stress for us in the meantime. So I think these are some of the things that have served as a foundation to build my self-worth upon. It takes time to be patient with yourself and forgive yourself and the same grace that you would offer to someone that you deeply love, offer to yourself the same forgiveness and self-compassion. Watch the way that you speak to yourself. Dr Gabo Omate has something that he calls conducting a compassionate inquiry where you actually are able to be compassionate with yourself and to ask yourself questions in a loving and kind way as opposed to, oh, I hate when you do that.

Why'd you do that? Why do you do it that way? You're, you're so this, you're so that. Sometimes hearing our parents' voices in our heads, or the people who cause us trauma in our heads and you hear their accents sometimes. I joke about that. Because that's how it got like crystallized in your brain, so you have to be able to take that power back and love yourself and you'll heal yourself and give to yourself the things that you weren't given. As an adult now, be able to go back to, your nine-year-old self or your 15-year-old self, whatever it was.

Be able to love on that, little girl and say, you are worthy, you are divine, you are beautiful. Be able to care for yourself in that way. Those are the things, I smile at myself every day in the mirror. I woke up this morning, I had the biggest bags under my eyes and I was still like, oh, you're still good. You're still cute. Because your brain doesn't know the difference. You might as well say

Wambui: You might as well say positive things. It doesn't know the difference and it actually gives what you ask for, what it keeps in your mind it's gonna say, okay, here it is.

Ruth: Yeah, exactly.

Wambui: This is beautiful. I could talk to you all day, but I want to be mindful of your time and I do agree with what you said about the identity part just know who you are and who you are and sometimes for me I normally just tell myself, I am the daughter of the Most High King. You know, those kind of things. It gives you like what? I'm the daughter of the Most High King and that power, like, okay, I'm, I'm good enough, sit up, you know?

Yeah, and that's hard to do. I think the more familiar and the more often that you do it and these are like I've said recently, these are not just affirmations. It's not just positive thinking and I just, say it. So fake it till you make it kind of thinking actually, because there is a big difference between actually believing something and knowing something for yourself. I can believe, someone has told me two plus two is four. I believe it because that's how it works in the world. But how do I know that? I don't know it. I've just believed it. So when you know that you are the daughter of the Most High King that has been an experiential thing for you. There's been something that has shifted in your mind, right from belief to actually knowing.

When you know something is when you can actually start to live that thing, because just believing it is not enough. You believe it, but you've not experienced it. All of that experience, you know, comes from, from being still. Some of the meditative and contemplative practices, a prayer that I talked about where the spirit of God can just, we say in Christian Language Minister to you.

I'll just give one final example of when I was going through my divorce, I remember there was a time when I was just losing weight and I was just in a really, really dark, "Dark space" and I remember just sensing the presence of God, literally next to me one day, I was sitting there I'd been eating one bagel for the entire day because I was just so sad and depressed and confused and lost. The presence of God was just right next to me, it was as if there was a person there. I know this for those of you who may not really, deal with spirituality may sound a little bit strange and funny, but there was a sense of, the spirit of God being right next to me and saying, "Hey, let's share this bagel together." There wasn't a condemnation, it wasn't a sense of, you could have done this differently or Why didn't you do this? It was just presence sometimes, that comes in not just the spirit of God, but in conversations where you're blessed and graced with somebody who can come alongside you and just be able to walk with you through that valley and assure you that you will get to the other side. I think it's important, that we are

telling ourselves the right things and Cultivating a sense of knowing rather than just believing something. A sense of knowing rather than just believing.

Wambui: Yes, I love that. You are that person who's walking with many people, and I really appreciate you. So how can my listeners support your nonprofit work?

Ruth: Well, our NGO is Pathfinders Justice Initiative. Our website is Pathfinders with an 's' .org. (pathfinders.org) And on there are, multiple opportunities, of course, financial support if you're in a position to do that, but that's not necessarily the top priority for me. I think it's important that you connect with something. So whether it's being able to volunteer your time or your services, we have volunteers all around the world. You don't necessarily have to be in Nigeria or even in Africa. You can volunteer by doing, helping us with our social media or helping to do some fundraising perhaps, or helping us to look for grants.

There are things that I think people can do as far as their time is concerned. If they are able to volunteer the services and they can come to Nigeria, please come help us. If you're a doctor,

Wambui: I'd love to come to Nigeria.

Ruth: Yeah. If you have experience with social services and you're able to create curriculums for some of our programs, your educator, these are all, things that people can get involved in. It doesn't even have to be for my nonprofit, but since you asked me the question, just get involved with something that is bigger than yourself. But I would say those are probably the primary ways I'm being able to financially support the work that we're doing.

I'm, really proud of the fact that we've been able to serve, over 3000 women in the years that, we've been functional. We raise awareness for over a million people every day through our social media platforms, our radio, and television. We're really trying, I shouldn't say we're trying, we're actually doing a lot of good work and really transforming the lives of women by giving them agency and allowing them to self-determine because that's something, that has been stripped from a loss of survivors, not having the ability to make a decision for yourself what to put on every day or where to go. I mean, those are things that we take tend to take for granted that many of these women have had to deal with through their sex trafficking ordeal. I think connecting with the work that we do understanding that you have an opportunity, everybody can do something for somebody somewhere is a really good perspective to have.

Wambui: That's really good. I'm gonna make sure I link that in my show notes. Where else can my listeners find you?

Ruth: You can find me on Instagram at rebidahosa, R E B I D A H O S A. But probably the easiest way is through my link tree which is rebidahosa as well. That has all the information. It has my medium, my YouTube page, my Facebook information and then my email address is also rebidahosa@gmail.com. I'm pretty good at responding, on Instagram.

Wambui: You're pretty good at responding.

Ruth: I actually, try to respond as long as, people aren't insulting me, which I get sometimes, but, that's okay too. It just means that you've affected them in some way. But please reach out and if any of this has been helpful to you make sure that you share it with somebody and follow the good work of this channel and, ensure that you are also spreading light in all that you do as well.

Wambui: Thank you so much. This is so valuable and I'm sure my listeners will be so happy to listen to this podcast. I really appreciate you. Thank you. Have a very, very good day.

Ruth: Thanks again for the opportunity to be able to be here.

Wambui: You're welcome. Thanks.