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THE ENTREPRENEUR

Aisha Addo: The Accidental Entrepreneur

November 2020



W5

From the W5 Projects Vice Presidents

Dear W5 Community,

It is with great pleasure that we present to you the first issue of **The Entrepreneur** by the W5 Western Entrepreneur Association. This publication is a new initiative which aims to showcase talented entrepreneurs and act as an informative and insightful resource for students looking to learn and pursue entrepreneurship. It follows that we wish to share the spirit of the W5 Entrepreneurship community and are committed to inspiring innovation, growth, and passion.

Increasingly, the world of entrepreneurship is spearheading a wave of disruption and growth in all industries and will continue to shape the way we think and work. In this issue, we want to discuss and highlight the power of diversity in different areas of entrepreneurship.

We also encourage our community to stay educated, sign petitions, and donate where possible to the Black Lives Matter movement. Please feel free to reference the **W5 Notion Board** with 14 days of readings, podcasts, and resources to learn and hear from Black voices on the issue.

In this issue, we are extremely grateful to have interviewed the incredible Aisha Addo. Aisha is an award-winning entrepreneur who has created the female mentorship non-profit program, Power to Girls, as well as the female-oriented rideshare service, DriveHER. In this article, Aisha shares her insight on the entrepreneurship industry and journey.

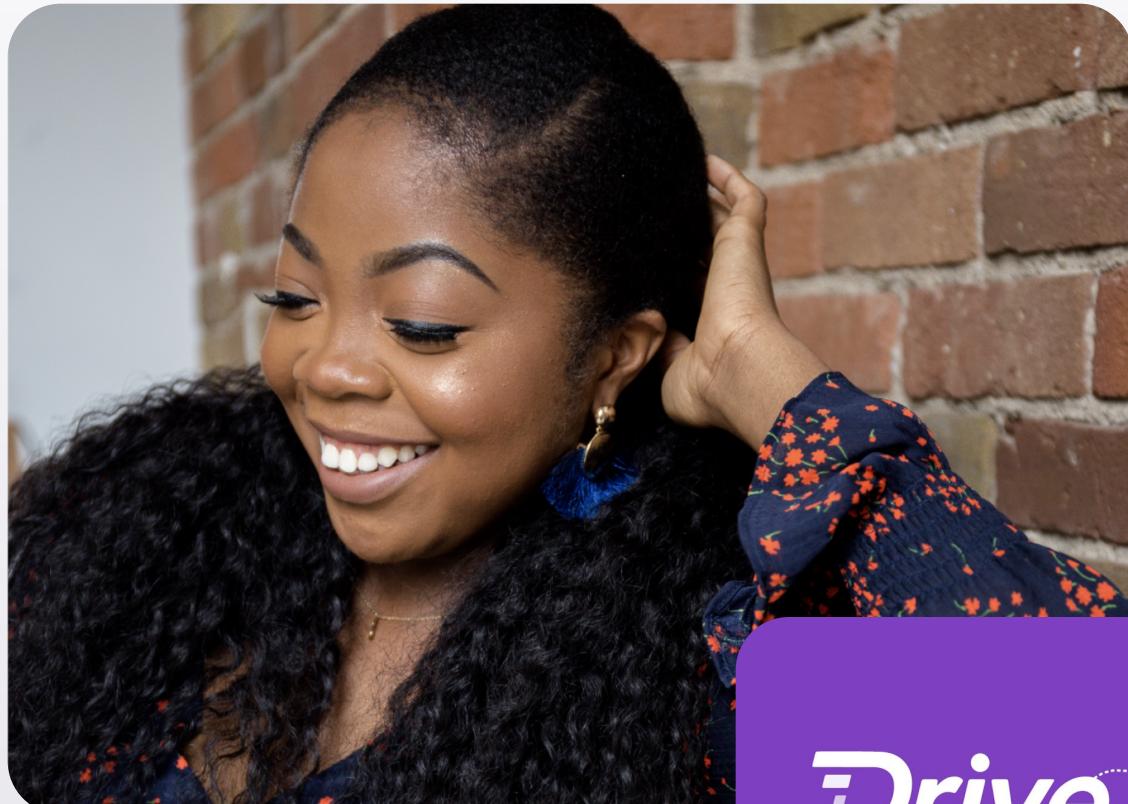
As entrepreneurship is based on the principles of initiative and growth, we encourage you to reach out with any inquiries, suggestions, or comments on this issue.

Sincerely,

Fiona Lee & Samantha Lin
Vice Presidents of Projects, W5



Aisha Addo: The Accidental Entrepreneur



DriveHER

Aisha Addo is an inspiring entrepreneur who has founded the rideshare service for women, DriveHER, as well as the Power to Girls Foundation, a girl-to-girl non-profit mentorship program. She is an award-winning entrepreneur and role model for young entrepreneurs who want to make a difference in their community.

How would you describe yourself and your entrepreneurship journey to young entrepreneurs?

My entrepreneurship journey is very **unconventional**, in the sense that each aspect of my businesses was started as a result of a **personal need** that translated into things that other people could relate to and were experiencing at the same time. It was based on a personal need and a personal desire to create change for an issue that I felt was becoming a pain—a pain point for me. I always refer to myself as **the accidental entrepreneur**, in the sense that in all of my years, I never thought that I would be the entrepreneur I am now. Now, everytime I think about something, I wonder, How can we turn this into this? How can we turn this into that? My entrepreneurship journey was very unconventional, but as time went on, my entrepreneurship spirit just heightened. Everything to me is an **opportunity** now.

What motivates you?

I have three pillars that I always refer to. There's **faith**—having an anchor, something that grounds me. There's **family and friends**—one of the biggest pillars in my life personally. Recognizing that everything that I do extends to them is very important to me. The third pillar is around the **empowerment of girls and women**. One of my main desires—I call it my personal manifesto—is really connected to empowering girls and women and creating safe spaces for them. As much as I want to create those spaces for them, I also want to make sure that I'm connected to them in that way. I'm inspired by my girls—the girls who I get a chance to work with through **Power to Girls**—and the women who I come in contact with inspire me. So those are my three pillars in terms of what **inspires me** to do the things that I do.

Was there a specific moment or story that prompted you into starting Power to Girls?

Power to Girls started very accidentally. I came to Canada when I was turning 14, and the **experience as an immigrant** was very interesting. My very first experience of Canada was in high school. You can only imagine, being a 13-year-old girl and being an immigrant. I spoke English, but I spoke English with an accent, and being in that space was very different. It was brutal, in the sense that kids were mean. **The culture is different.** Their way of life is different. I was also at a point in my life where—at 14 years old—you’re still trying to figure out who you are as a person. You’re still exploring **what it means to be a girl.** So, it was a very interesting time for me.

One event that stood out to me took place when I was 17. I was at church, and there was this older lady who was reprimanding a young girl, in a very harsh, rude, and judgemental way. The young girl started crying. I remember watching the whole thing unfold, thinking that even if the young girl was in the wrong, there was a better way to approach the situation. After the older lady left, the young girl was bawling her eyes out. I went up to her and tried to give her some level of comfort. This was the first time I had started talking about **Power to Girls.**

I said, “You know what? A group of us are meeting on Friday, and **you should join.**”

That Friday, six of the girls came—the founding members of Power to Girls. What really stood out to me was despite the fact that I was older than them, they taught me so much about myself. The **mentorship was reciprocal.** They held me accountable, they called me out on things—it became such a beautiful relationship. It was recognizing that I was a part of each and every one of these girls’ journeys. Over the years that we’ve been running, we have worked with over **500 girls**, and in some way, shape, or form, I have interacted with all of them. That beautiful **connectedness** and cycle is what allows girls to come back.

For more information on Power to Girls, please visit powertogirls.com



How do you get from Idea to Action as an Entrepreneur?

Aside from building your business case, it is super vital and important how badly you **believe in yourself and your idea**. If you do not believe in it, it's easy to give it up. When I come up with an idea, I get excited and I'm ready to execute. The moment that excitement dies signals that I'm losing the belief I have in that idea. I say that to illustrate that **the difference between idea and action is execution**—how well you execute will determine your success. More importantly, how badly **do you believe in yourself and what it is you are building?** Believing in yourself is not a sugar-coated way of saying that you're perfect. It is that moment when everything is against you, yet you still believe you are capable of executing your idea. I think that is what truly takes people from idea to action.

Could you tell us more about your experience as a Black woman in the tech and entrepreneurship industry?

Absolutely. Quite contrary to popular belief, there are a lot of women entrepreneurs, and a lot of women entrepreneurs who are women of colour. **Women open up businesses at a higher rate than men** in Canada and even other parts of the world. However, most of their entrepreneurial pursuits do not fit the mold of what "entrepreneurship" has been designed to look like. Using the tech space as an example, there is a "**bro-code structure**" that has been put in place. More importantly, there is a systemic bias that a lot of people have when they speak to women who are creating technology services or products. There are a lot of women in technology. It's just that you don't see them at the forefront, because tech is supposed to look a certain way. In recent years, we've seen a shift with that.

The majority of the challenges I was experiencing, I had to solve on my own. There wasn't **a space that was designed to support people like me**, until recently, but even that's a work in progress. Everytime I have conversations with people, where I share what I'm facing, they always refer me to the same resources. And everytime I went to these resources, they couldn't help me. So, you could tell there was a bit of a resistance—**barriers to entry**. They had this cookie-cutter way of doing things and people they wanted to represent. So, there was just a lot of resistance and barriers. I also took that as a way of learning and understanding not only myself, but the industry I was trying to get into. I think that really helped me, because to be honest, as a result of DriveHER, I've been in spaces that I never thought I'd be in. For me, it was a learning opportunity, and I'm still learning.

The **challenges, implicit bias, and systemic racism are all still there**, they haven't gone anywhere if we're being honest. It's just that a light has been shone in that dark hole, and a lot of things in the tech space that people thought were okay, are now being questioned—reports of toxic masculinity and the violence that women experience. It's been a learning curve. Through it all, you now see conversations around **Black Lives Matter**—things we've been talking about for years. To me, for companies to suddenly say "now we care," shows that they really don't care, and just want to look good for the media.

"But what are you actually doing? How many women of colour are on your boards? How are you creating a safe space that does not infringe on the personal development or even the emotional wellbeing of your staff? How are you creating a space that is void of discrimination?"

Granted, we all have biases, we're wired that way. It's **recognizing that the biases you have should not be the reason someone does not get an opportunity**. It's been a very interesting time, but like I said, it's a learning opportunity.

What can the startup space do better to help support other Black/female entrepreneurs?

One of the main things is being honest with ourselves and **recognizing that we all have biases**. The second thing is that a lot of the time people are against creating specific spaces for people of colour or women because they see that as being discriminatory, a challenge I experienced when starting DriveHER. But I think it's really important to recognize that sometimes in order for us to get on the same level playing field we need to take ourselves away, checking those biases first by doing **proper training** around diversity and inclusion and justice and freedom.

"You cannot talk about diversity and not be inclusive. Diversity does not mean inclusion. Inclusion does not mean justice. Justice does not necessarily mean freedom. What we want to attain is the freedom to build, to grow, to create businesses and solutions, knowing we didn't build it because we are a person of colour, but because we are capable and have all the skills just as much as the next person."

The start-up scene needs to be **intentional** around creating this space and around unlearning a lot of the biases that have been learned and thought about people of colour and Black people and Black women. It's a **learning process**. If we are intentional about what each of these principles means to the people we come into contact with, we will be able to turn things around for the better.

For more information on how to support the Black Lives Matter movement and inclusiveness within the entrepreneurship industry, visit the W5 Notion Board for an extensive list of resources:

notion.so/w5/blm-program-4e2e6b169003447faa9f86d1732fa37e

What are some of the most important skills that help make an entrepreneur successful?

Not taking yourself too seriously—being **open to criticism**, learning new things, and not being afraid of not having all the answers. There is a pressure to be perfect. Networks and the relationships that you build are very vital to your success—who you know and **how you build your relationships**. From a business standpoint, have your processes and strategies mapped out. Finally, show that you're **taking care of yourself** and your mental well-being.

How can readers of our publication and W5 help in your cause?

One of the things I always encourage is mentorship and **becoming a mentor**—being that person you needed when you were your younger self.

Additionally, Power To Girls is looking for **volunteers** who are well-versed in particular topics who are open to sharing their experience with younger girls.

With DriveHER we are currently still restructuring, but when we're done we will still be looking for people to be using the app. It's a growth journey, if there are any ways that people want to offer their support or services not mentioned, I am always open to hearing about that.

Last thing I'd say to anyone is to believe in yourself, my new motto is believe in yourself even when no one else does, **believe in yourself for everyone who does not believe in you**.

Closing Remarks

Aisha Addo is an exemplary model of **entrepreneurship in the 21st century**. She merges her social values and beliefs with her capacity for action to make a difference. Through experience, she has learned to use her creativity to find innovative solutions to the issues she faces.

We want to give a special **thank you** to Aisha Addo for being a role model and sharing her experiences for the first issue of The Entrepreneur. To hear more from Aisha, her podcast, Unfiltered with Aisha, gives more insight into her work and journey as an entrepreneur.

Given this is the beginning of a new school year, and the beginning of many of your post-secondary careers, we want to share some advice and words of wisdom from the W5 leadership team.

1) **Just do it!** Western is full of incredible opportunities for everyone! We know it can be overwhelming, so choose the opportunities that truly mean a lot to you—now is not the time to hold back. If there is an opportunity, club, or idea that piques your interest, go for it! Like Aisha said, all you need to do is believe in yourself!

2) **Take care of yourself!** With the pandemic and everything else happening in the world right now, it can be extremely overwhelming to stay engaged all the time. We find it helpful to plan ahead and make sure you block out time for everything you need personally, from studying to hanging out with friends.

To close, from your W5 VPs of Projects, we hope you have a successful and safe year! Please reach out to us with questions, comments, and concerns at flee67@uwo.ca (Fiona) and sln378@uwo.ca (Samantha).



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