

THE MENTORING OF FUTURE ENGINEERS

HELD AT KPLC INSTITUTE OF ENERGY STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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The Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), is a well-known company in Kenya that is responsible for the distribution and transmission of electricity in Kenya. The AKAD Education group and KPLC partnered up and a seminar was held on 27 and 28 August at the KPLC institute of energy studies and research. The seminar was aimed at high school students who are interested in pursuing a career in engineering.

Unfortunately, I did not attend the first day of the seminar, but I was able to find out the activities that took place on that day. The students present were asked what they expected to gain from the seminar and Dr. Weche, the CEO of AKAD Africa, typed out all their expectations in order to go through them at the end of the two day seminar and see if their expectations were met. Michael Mutie, an AKAD peer mentor and mentee, then gave the students an introduction to AKAD. Ernest Ochieng was next and he spoke about the value of mentorship. Ernest recently won the Powering Kenya competition and he won fifty thousand Kenya shillings and he was also chosen as the KPLC apprentice. They then took a short tea break before returning to continue with the seminar.

The next speaker after the tea break was Mr. Derek Bbanga, who is a well-known image consultant in Kenya. He spoke to the group about confidence building and personal branding. While speaking about personal branding, he mentioned that in relation to the first impression, dressing and body language takes 55%, voice takes 38% and what you say is about 7%. Mr. Teddy Warri, who is the founding president of Africa 2.0 and the director of Africa's talking, was also present and he spoke to the students as well. After lunch and experiential training, they were given



(Derek Bbanga)

a tour of the facility which I heard was very interesting.

The seminar began at 8 am the next day. The first speaker was Catherine Njeri who spoke about passion for engineering as a student. She will be studying engineering at the African Leadership University in Mauritius, which is the only Ivy League University of Africa.

Ernest Ochieng then talked to us about how he was able to become one of the top candidates in KCSE. He told us about the sacrifices that he had to make to get to where he is now. One of his sacrifices was his August holidays, when he decided to stay in school during the holidays in order to study. He also told us that when he didn't reach the goals that he's set for himself, he would find a way to punish himself. I admired his determination and motivation and that is why he was one of the top students in KCSE. Norah Borus spoke next. Norah will be going to Stanford University in a few weeks. She showed us two videos showing us the prestigious university that she will be attending. She prepared a very informative power point presentation about applying to the USA. Some of the points in the presentation were; why the USA would be a good choice, the recommendation letters that we would need when applying and financial aid offered. We then took a tea break where I had the opportunity to meet with new and different people.



(Ernest Ochieng talking about Academic Success)

Michael Mutie who will also be attending the African Leadership University spoke to us after the break. He told us about his life story which is very inspiring. He is living proof that sometimes you need more than just academics to get to where you want to be in life. He spoke about the different things he made, like the aeroplane he made from a toy car he received. He also made a hot water iron box when he was in high school which he would rent out to other students. We were then spoken to by Ms. Mohammed and Chief Andrew who are both engineers at KPLC. Chief Andrew initially wanted to become a doctor and unfortunately he missed the points he needed. This for him was a blessing in disguise because if he was not rejected, he would not be an engineer which is a career that he truly enjoys. They told us that engineers see a problem and their job is to find a solution that will make our lives simpler.

We then had our lunch break after which we had experiential training where we did a leadership exercise, which was very enjoyable. Professor Mugendi M'Rithaa spoke to us after the lunch break. Professor M'Rithaa is an industrial designer and he is also a professor at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. Professor M'Rithaa presented a very interesting power point presentation. It contained different designs of different objects around Africa. It showed just how intelligent and creative the people of our continent are. I could also tell that he has a passion for Africa which a number of people don't have. He sees the positive side of the African culture and what Africans are able to do and what they can offer to their continent and even to the rest of the world. He showed us the Adinkra symbols from Ghana which are usually used in fabrics, pottery and they are also



(Prof. M'Rithaa showing the Adinkra symbols)

incorporated into walls. He also showed us the different basket weaving techniques in Botswana. He told us that objects are designed for use, which is when the object designed is used for the purpose it was designed for. Misuse is when the object designed is used for a completely different purpose than what it was intended for. Abuse is when the object designed is abused and he showed us an example of a bicycle that was filled with bananas at the back. He also told us about the Joule, which is the first African electric car, which was made in South Africa. He ended his talk with the phrase, 'We did not inherit our world from our ancestors, and we borrowed it from our children.' I learnt a lot from Professor M'Rithaa's talk and I realized that there was a lot that I did not know about my continent and this peaked an interest in finding out more about Africa.



(Prof. Mugendi M'Rithaa)

Dr. Weche then got feedback from the students who had given their expectation at the beginning of the first day. The average score was quite good. The students were very satisfied with the whole seminar. The university students present were called to the front and they were asked to introduce themselves again and to say something about engineering. All of them were female and majority do electrical engineering. The advice given was that for you to succeed in studying to become an engineer, you need to know what you want, be disciplined and you need to know how to plan your time well.

Unfortunately, Dr. Chumo was not able to attend the seminar but he was very well represented by engineer Naomi. She showed us a short presentation on reasons why one should become an engineer. The reasons she gave were as an engineer; you will be well paid, you will get to work with other talented people, you will get exposure and you will get to do cool stuff and she used climbing a pole as an example. Closer to the end, Mr. Chege who is a mechanical engineer, explained the difference between automotive and mechanical engineering. I learnt that automotive engineering is actually a specialization of mechanical engineering. He also listed the different specializations of mechanical engineering.



(Mr. Chege explaining Mechanical Engineering)

Although my passion is medicine, I am glad that I had the opportunity to attend this very informative seminar. I left with so much more knowledge than I had when I walked in. Engineers have the power to make a difference and without engineers we would not be as advanced as we are today. I would like to thank AKAD for having the event and KPLC for allowing us to use their training college and also for sacrificing their time to come and talk to us. This was truly an enjoyable experience.

