

Nominee: *Joseline Kateeba*
Company Name: *Crest Foam Limited*
Plot M464 Ntinda Stretcher Road, Ntinda Industrial Area
Industry: *Manufacturing*
Years in Business: *29 years*

Introduction

My name is Joseline Kateeba, Managing Director Crest Foam Limited. I joined Crest Foam limited few years back in 2004, started from the junior level as a business analyst where I worked for one year and had to join Harvard Business School for further studies. I then worked overseas in the USA, South Africa and Nigeria.

I came back to Uganda in 2009 in a General Manager position worked for a shorter period of time but I felt I wasn't ready professionally to join the business. I then worked in South Africa in more senior position until October 2014. In February 2015, I returned and took on the role of Managing Director and basically replaced my mother who had been in that position for nearly three decades.

Crest Foam is a family business. The company has significantly added to its fixed assets as well as its production capacity although we had an unfortunate incident in February 2015 when we had a fire outbreak that gutted the factory and we lost six employees, assets worth six billion including finished products, work in progress stock machines and also physical buildings really setting us backwards. We have since received machinery as we wait for more coming from Europe and we are hoping to start re building the factory in March 2016. We are trying to make sure we complete the rebuilding process so that we can get our growth in the path that we need it to be.

What would you describe as your biggest achievement?

A few weeks into my tenure as MD, Crest Foam Ltd had a major fire incident that resulted in the loss of six of our employees and a loss of assets worth UGX6B. I worked closely with my leadership team to start the process of rebuilding our operations. We cooperated with the authorities to investigate the incident, determine required corrective measures and obtained permission to resume operations.

We were able to reach a settlement with the families of the deceased employees. We resumed operations six weeks after the fire incident. In addition, we retained all our employees and paid their full salaries on time. We are determined to rebuild our company into a stronger company and are very optimistic about the future.

Crest Foam is the only female led mattress manufacturing company in East Africa and has survived through competition.

How is your product/service unique from others in the same industry?

The strength of our brand based on a track record of excellent customer experience as superior product quality. We continue to strive to provide value for money. We offer different product qualities to meet customer needs. We believe that our premium products (high density mattresses) are the best in the market because of their durability. We also offer products for our highly price sensitive customers.

What would you say are the major challenges experienced by your business and how have you managed to overcome them?

Growing competition is of concern. Every couple of years, there are new entrants in the market. The cost of raw materials keeps going the wrong way which affects our forecasts especially the bottom line.

We strive to be consistent with regards to product quality but also being able to offer a spectrum of products that can at least meet the needs of the customers depending on what it is they are trying to buy.

Where do you see your business in the next 3-5 years?

This business was started by my late father who passed on while I was still young. My mother has dedicated her whole life on this business and has made it what it is. I hope to start from here and see Crest Foam grow to a much bigger company because I strongly believe we have the capability to promote our brand.

We intend to use innovation and make stronger and better products, have better presence of our brand in the market and stronger geographical coverage in DRC and South Sudan. We also intend to move further regional wise to Rwanda and Burundi.

We also hope there are a lot of opportunities that we can explore by listing on the Uganda Stock Market, there are a lot of companies that have listed on the stock market and this will provide us an avenue to work more with public in funding and become even a lot bigger. So I think I want to see for us being a home grown company that is making a strong presence on the continent in general. Any obstacle usually has a silver lining. The fire outbreak affected us a lot, but as we rebuild, we are more determined to rise from it as a stronger and more resilience in terms of risk management processes and governance.

Apart from providing the product/service offered by your business, how has your business contributed to your community?

- In 2015, we sponsored KCCA Education Stakeholders Forum
- In 2014 we donated mattresses to Seeta Junior School (Mukono)
- In 2013 and 2014 we sponsored the Young Entrepreneurs Programme for Rotaract Club of Kampala Central

- We continue to identify noble causes to support so as to change the lives of our community

What have you done to develop/empower other women?

Considering the nature of our production process work, we employ about 28% women in the company and my major concern is mentoring, it's something that I really spend a lot of my time with. Given manufacturing and labour intensive nature of our business operations, 28% is a high number compared to peers who are profit oriented alone.

Advice to Women

- My first advice is you have to be very clear in what you are trying to achieve, in life you have to set out your goals before you can come out with a plan of how you want to get there so my mum always says set up a very big plan, try to make sure it is realistic, be very SMART in terms of how you come out with your initiatives make sure they are specific, measurable, and can be achieved in reasonably descent time etc. so I think being able to define your goals and being able to come up with a plan to help you get your goals is critical.
- The second aspect is you really have to be resilient. Failure is part of the journey and along the way you are going to meet quite a few stabling blocks. So resilience is critical
- Make sure you surround yourself with the right people, you need support, there is no way you can get things done your own, recognize very early on what your weaknesses are, what your strengths are and ensure that you have built in your networks how to fill those gaps surrounding yourself with the right people is true in terms of who is mentoring you but also more specifically who is on your team.
- Hard work pays, you have to put in the work, there is no free lunch you have to put in the work and hopefully if you do, things will play out in your favor

How has MTN Uganda contributed to your achievement?

MTN provides a reliable service that we use on a regular basis to communicate with all our key stakeholders. Our customers across Uganda place all their orders via their mobile phones. The reliability of MTN's service enables us to keep in touch with our sales force in the field. We use data on our mobile phones to access our emails which enables a fast response. All we can say, our partnership with MTN is great.