The False Promise of Good Jobs

For many, the point of a college education is to get a well-paying job. But in this bad economy, hundreds of thousands of young graduates are unable to find jobs. These are their stories P.4&5
Podcast Review

Blessing Lung’aho is a talented actor, TV commercial model, storyteller, and fitness enthusiast. Born in Uasin Gishu County, Blessing attended Kakamega High School before joining the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Blessing has appeared in several local and international TV commercials and starred in popular Kenyan television shows such as Netflix series Country Queen, Zora, and Untying Kantai. In this interview, he talks about the challenges that come with being a celebrity, and how he refused to let his academic background limit his dream of becoming an actor.

1. What did you study in school?
   Everyone in my family excelled in school. I have four siblings and including my mother, we have 27 degrees. My mum is a professor who believes in working hard in school and getting a sustainable nine-to-five job. The first time I was on TV, I was extremely happy and excited, and she called and asked me if I was working from an office. I said, “It’s called a set,” and she said, “That is not a job.” I feel like art is like a curse which you can’t run away from. It will find you in whatever age you are. I studied accounting in school and I wanted to work in a bank, but God had other plans for me. I have been in the industry for 14 years. I used to act when I was younger, but I didn’t expect to continue into adulthood. 14 years later, I’m still here. The industry is growing. I have the opportunity to play different characters every day. I can also dramatise tough roles. I’m not struggling to get gigs, which means the industry is expanding.

2. Tell us about the role you are playing in Untying Kantai...
   First, I am honoured that God has allowed me to showcase my range in this new role. I am playing “Rob” in the series, and I don’t want people to confuse it with my real-life persona. I don’t think there’s any similarity between my acting roles and who I am. In some of the roles, I really have to put in a lot of practice and take a lot of guidance from the directors because I’m not perfect. I get on set, rehearse and do my best. I can’t wait for my mother and my fans to watch this show. My mum always said I had no talent, but in this instance I did my best. Funny enough, right now, my family is my biggest support system. They go above and beyond to support me.

3. Acting is what you do most of the time. How do you unwind and detach from the various characters you portray?
   De-roling for me means watching films. I sit in my house for days watching other actors, and that helps me get away from the characters I have played. I don’t have a specific method, I usually like sitting with my fans to watch this show. My mum always said I had no talent, but in this instance I did my best. Funny enough, right now, my family is my biggest support system. They go above and beyond to support me.

4. How do you handle social media pressure, and what is the worst thing anyone has ever said about you?
   As a public figure, I’m vulnerable to pressure. I have been in the industry for 14 years and I’ve seen it all. I have auditioned for roles and failed. I have also been denied roles I hoped to scoop. When I started, I used to make like Sh6,000. Over time, I realised that all the rejection I faced at auditions built up, leading me to doubt myself and develop anxiety. In our industry, there are no structures to share these anxiety stories. I needed to work on it, and even today, I actively manage it. When I get overwhelmed, I know how to handle it.

5. Can you share your experiences with auditions, particularly in instances where you didn’t get the role?
   I have seen it all. I have auditioned for roles and failed. I have also been denied roles I hoped to scoop. When I started, I used to make like Sh6,000. Over time, I realised that all the rejection I faced at auditions built up, leading me to doubt myself and develop anxiety. In our industry, there are no structures to share these anxiety stories. I needed to work on it, and even today, I actively manage it. When I get overwhelmed, I know how to handle it.

This reluctance, compounded by victim shaming, leads many journalists to self-censor, threatening the fundamental right to freedom of information.

The digital rights researcher By Digital Dada Podcast produced and hosted by digital rights researcher and security trainer Cecillia Maundu, focuses on online violence and digital security. It emphasises how essential digital technologies are to journalism while exposing the increased risks of surveillance, identification, and harassment journalists face from various actors. The podcast addresses the issue of online violence, which often goes unnoticed by mainstream media due to societal reluctance to recognise it as “real” violence. This reluctance, compounded by victim shaming, leads many journalists to self-censor, threatening the fundamental right to freedom of information.

The podcast was started in 2019 and has over 50 episodes.

MyNetWork

Elizabeth Ngigi

Show Biz

Blessing Lung’aho

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The Hustler’s week of dead ends

Following the sudden appearance of my cousin Safari (in bed-sheets) from under my bed, Desiree silently dressed and swiftly fled, especially after I just shrugged when she asked, "What was that Mike?" Safari did not show up again that weekend, but someone else did.

My ex-wife (now baby mama) Laura at my door on Sunday at noon, wearing a Spiderman T-shirt and spotting a cute new haircut, started with formula, staying overnight to change my baby boy’s diapers, "I’m at Mater, becoming the mother to your son."

I had simply called me and said: "I’m at the hospital just in time for Neo’s birth, and almost by accident I had dashed to the hospital just in time to by time." Laura’s religious parents had simply called me and said: "I'm at Mater, becoming the mother to your son."

I was so stressed about this that on Monday morning, I actually went to Gang Mall to seek a small loan from the DCI on Wednesday, upon hearing our complaints alongside Omwenga, with a Lai, Muandu and Anindo also raising concerns about the 'Alba & Larri' procure- ment firm, said the plan for their prosecution was moving along. If I recovered out, I would just have to wait it all out. ‘So you will hold onto my Sh1.6 million claim for Safari’s policy (Sh1, 589, 398).’

The pleasant insurance chap, Joe Njoroge, politely informed me it took SEVEN years for a ‘presumption of death’ to be made, and since Safari’s body hadn’t been recovered, or death certificate made out, I would just have to wait it all out.

"But that will be in 2031 AD," he said. "I almost wished to borrow 50." He smiled pleasantly. "I cannot go against the algorithm sir; I could lose my job."

A frustrated Mike Safari

For sure on Tuesday Laura called to say Neo had been sent home from school for lack of the fee balance, and instead of being happy for the break, he was crushed! "Daddy" he wailed on phone, "I want to learn. Please get my fees, pleeeeeeaseee!!" Tuesday I was at Ensign to present the claim for Safari’s policy (Sh1, 589, 398).

The pleasant insurance chap, Joe Njoroge, politely informed me it took SEVEN years for a ‘presumption of death’ to be made, and since Safari’s body hadn’t been recovered, or death certificate made out, I would just have to wait it all out. ‘So you will hold onto my 1.6 million shilling claim for seven years!’ I asked. "The good thing is we compound it, so it will be closer to Sh13 trillion, sir," he said.

"But that will be in 2031 AD!" I almost yelled, then just stormed out of the firm.

Time for Plan D – Desiree Simaloi. She ran her own agency, heweu kosa 30K. But all Simaloi said on the phone was: "Wachana na mimi. Ata hipo tablet sitaki. hewewe kusolo na uchawi zenu. Umsuu, ati ghost inokoleleza chini ya kitandu?" A dead bed bad end!

Then, that evening, the last nail on the coffin. Caretaker Nicholas coming to my door at 7pm to say: "Your rent is a week overdue. You have 72 hours to clear; plus the delay penalty So 25 plus five – thirty K. Or else owner has said I padlock." There was only one silver lining in the cloud…

Investigating officer Kangethe at the DGI on Wednesday, upon hearing our complaints alongside Omwenga, with a Lai, Muandu and Anindo also raising concerns about the "Alba & Larri" procurement firm, said the plan for their prosecution was moving along. If I recovered even a third of that Sh142.5 K asap, I’d be home safe…

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Movie Review | By Michael Ochieng

A CHEF’S DEADLY REVENGE

Where: Amazon Videos

Genre: Action, Thriller

In the dimly lit kitchen of cinematic thrillers, A Chef’s Deadly Revenge, simmers with intrigue and suspense. The film introduces us to Lucy Gerhard (played by Kathryn Kohut), a resilient woman who files an abusive relationship and sets up her own gourmet restaurant in a quaint town. Her culinary creations become a canvas for healing, but little does she know that danger lurks in the shadows.

The chemistry between Lucy and Tomas Chovan’s enigmatic character adds depth to the narrative. Their exchanges, sometimes tense, sometimes tender, keep us guessing. Is he friend or foe?

The suspense builds as Lucy becomes the target of relentless harassment from a jealous man. The stakes rise, and we’re drawn into a deadly game of cat and mouse.

While the film’s pacing is generally swift, there are a few scenes that feel incomplete or unnecessary. Perhaps a tighter edit could have intensified the tension. Still, the overall experience leaves a satisfying aftertaste. The soundtrack, a blend of haunting melodies and heart-pounding beats, underscores the emotional rollercoaster.

The movie deftly balances moments of brilliance with a solid foundation. The scenes where Lucy crafts exquisite dishes are a feast for the eyes, capturing the essence of her passion. The camera lingers on vibrant ingredients, their colors popping against the muted backdrop. The attention to detail, the play of light on a perfectly plated dessert, the steam rising from a simmering saucepan, is a visual treat that mirrors Lucy’s artistic soul. The film’s commitment to uniqueness, avoids the usual suspects, those overused actors, and introduces fresh faces. Chelsea Muirhead and Bridget Wareham shine in their supporting roles, adding layers to the story.

Overall, A Chef’s Deadly Revenge serves up a tantalising dish of suspense, seasoned with ambition and resilience. It’s a recipe worth savoring, even if a few ingredients could use a pinch of refinement.
Picture this, you finish university and graduate full of hope and excitement at the future. You dream of launching a successful career and eventually clinching that C-Suite job. You struggle through unpaid internships to ensure you acquire the much-needed experience.

But once you get out of university, the cold reality hits you as you meet an insurmountable and hostile job market. You make countless applications and attend tens of interviews, but the response is always the same.

This grim picture is captured in the latest data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) released in April this year which shows that 1.9 million unemployed people in Kenya are youth aged 20 and 29. Further, the unemployment rate has risen to 13.9 per cent from 13.3 per cent last year.

This week, four recent and soon-to-be graduates share their disheartening experiences while job searching.

Victoria Mwangi, a Clinical medicine graduate from Kenyatta University, Nairobi

Degree in clinical medicine

I felt so proud after getting my degree from Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) in June 2023. After years of hard work and focus, I couldn’t wait to launch my career and help people as a clinician.

In the first few months after graduating, I tried to make ends meet through various temporary jobs, first at a salon, then online writing and thereafter I found a real estate job through family connections.

At first, the online writing gigs seemed promising, as I earned Sh350 per page for academic essays. But the assignments dried up after the university holidays, leaving me without an income source.

The real estate hustles brought me a meagre Sh1,000 per day, but I had to pay high transport charges since I had to travel long distances. This ate into my earnings.

When my internship placement finally came through at Nakuru Provincial General Hospital, I was relieved. At least I would begin getting clinical experience or so I thought. But the reality of the broken Kenyan public health system quickly set in.

I found out that there is chronic medication and supply shortages especially in public hospitals, and clinical officers are often forced to tell patients to purchase basic supplies like gloves and cotton wool from clinics outside the hospital.

Frequent strikes by clinical staff protesting lack of risk allowances, stagnant wages, and poor working conditions have also become the norm in our industry.

It is a harsh reality at throughout university we are told that our qualifications will help us get stable well-paying jobs. Now the passion that drove me to this career is gone. Can I really justify the sacrifices and risks I take every day working in such an understaffed and underfunded system?

Many of my classmates, even those with exemplary academic results and advanced degrees, face the same hurdles when looking for employment. Often it comes down to connections. Nepotism and tribalism, rather than merit, play a huge role in determining who gets the few clinical roles.

I have been told more than once that there are some hospitals that won’t take you in simply because of my tribe.

I’ve come to accept the reality that I may never build the rewarding career I once envisioned. The future looks bleak, so I am trying to raise capital from my side hustles so that I can start my own business, which will have nothing to do with healthcare.

I graduated just a few months ago and my vision of becoming a healer has largely faded due to the struggles I have faced trying to find a job. While I still hope to put my education and training to use, I’ve realised I can’t cling to that dream. I want to take control of my future, and that includes exploring avenues outside of the clinical path.

BY THOMAS BOSIRE

Many young people apply for the few available jobs with the hope of getting one. But often, all they end up with is a rejection email.

The feeling of a loser starts to creep in. Despite being qualified, facing rejection becomes a tough pill to swallow.

Well-paying jobs. Now the passion that drove me to this career is gone. Can I really justify the sacrifices and risks I take every day working in such an understaffed and underfunded system? Many of my classmates, even those with exemplary academic results and advanced degrees, face the same hurdles when looking for employment. Often it comes down to connections. Nepotism and tribalism, rather than merit, play a huge role in determining who gets the few clinical roles.

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As the rejection letters piled up, I started questioning everything. Did I waste four years on the wrong degree?

Merry Kate

customer service job. It is as far from my journalism degree as it can get. It was a lucky break, being able to sell my communication skills in the interview round, but it is not what I envisioned for myself after university.

My situation is not unique. So many of my peers have struggled with the same unforgiving job market that seems to value connections over competence, at least for entry-level opportunities. We did everything we were told—study hard, get a degree, build experience through internships. We did it all only for the door to slam shut in our faces. I haven’t given up on my dreams to join mainstream media. I still apply for production roles, hoping that eventually someone will see my potential. But I can’t ignore the countless rejections, dismissals and lack of guidance I faced as a fresh graduate. The sad truth is that the Kenyan job market puts young, skilled, passionate youth at a disadvantage by demanding that they have experience, even when they don’t have professional opportunities.

As a student who is about to graduate from Moi University, I’ve had unique insights into the changing views about this field of actuarial science. When I began my studies, actuarial science was not deemed as marketable anymore. There is a growing perception, especially in Kenya, that this once highly-coveted profession has lost its lustre. However, my perception completely shifted when I joined various professional groups. While many are shunning actuarial science and branding it an "outdated and unexciting career path," I began to realize that this is not true.

From the onset, I was determined to gain exposure. I joined relevant student associations, forged connections with industry professionals, and actively sought opportunities to hone the skills employers value. This proactive approach paid dividends when the time to secure an internship came. I didn’t struggle because I had the required skills. In contrast, many of my classmates struggled to find internship opportunities as they lacked fundamental assets, including a polished CV. I don’t think it’s about connections. Most of my classmates don’t have CVs, so that is a problem on the student’s end, not the employers.

My internship experience further solidified my belief in the robustness of the actuarial job market. The opportunities haven’t decreased. As a matter of fact, they have increased. The field’s diversification into areas like climate change analysis and sustainable development has catalysed unprecedented demand for our expertise. You can work anywhere.

However, I understand where the skepticism is coming from. Often, students come from university ill-equipped for the professional realm.

As I prepare to transition from internship to full-time employment, I remain optimistic about my prospects, despite the prevailing cynicism. The actuarial science market is booming for those willing to equip themselves with the requisite technical and soft skills employers crave.

CYNTHIA WALUMBE, 22
Actuarial science student

EDNA MWENDE, 25
Diploma in film

My first encounter with the harsh realities of the communication and media industry came when a respected airline advertised paid internships. Excited, I meticulously followed the application process, only to have my joy shattered. They asked me to submit my papers, which I did, and they told me I got the position and that I would be paid.

I even received a start date, only for the HR department to contact me later informing me that I had not qualified, and that they had chosen someone who had a better grade than me in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Their unprofessional handling of the situation left me feeling misled, betrayed and disheartened.

I have often found myself at the mercy of an industry that values connections over merit. It doesn’t matter how much you spend time on, sometimes what matters is who you knew. These frustrations extend beyond the application process. Recalling interviews in which I shared my work experiences, I was surprised to hear the interviewers expressing more interest in what their family members had done in the past.

As my degree programme nears its end, I find myself grappling with the same uncertainties that have plagued me since my days as a diploma graduate. As graduation day nears, I have often found myself at the mercy of an industry that values connections over merit. I can’t help but feel a sense of rejection. The stories I’ve heard from countless others only make my journey more difficult.

Employers are often intimidated by new ideas and innovative approaches, and prefer to maintain the familiar even if it means stifling growth and progress.

As I prepare to venture into the job market once again, I can’t help but feel a sense of resignation. The stories I’ve heard from countless others only make my journey more difficult. While I remain hopeful that my skills and determination will eventually open doors, the reality is that the path to success in this industry is fraught with obstacles.

It is a harsh truth that many graduates must confront. We are armed with knowledge and ambition, yet we find ourselves at the mercy of an industry that at times appears resistant to embrace the very talents it claims to seek.
An MVP’s story. The teacher who now shines in rugby

Q&A

When did you start your rugby journey?
I started playing in 2011 while in high school. I was inspired by my classmates. Rugby players in my school had some privileges. For instance, they were not required to do manual work. After high school, I played for Kisii RFC from 2013 to 2014 and then had a short stint with Catholic Monks rugby team in 2015 before going back to Kisii RFC from 2016 to 2019. I joined Nakuru RFC in 2019, which is where I am now.

At Rueru, I led my team to the nationals as the captain for the first time in 2014. I captained Kisii RFC when we were promoted to the Kenya Cup and was named best player of that season (2016/2017). With Monks, I managed to play for Kenya Under-20 team Chipu and won Masaku Sevens (Division II) in 2015.

Why did you choose rugby over other sports?
I found the game interesting. I have never tried any other sport.

Who is your role model?
I look up to South African national team captain Siya Kolisi, both on and off the pitch. I like his leadership qualities and style of play. Off pitch, I like how he is close to his family and the love he shows them.

How would you describe your rugby journey so far?
It has been progressive and very fulfilling. I have been working hard and I am proud of what I have achieved, but I still want more.

What challenges have you encountered along the way?
Rugby is a contact sport and I have suffered physical injury at various stages of my career. I broke myibia bone in 2020. In 2021, I had surgery and spent nine months on the sidelines. In 2021, I had surgery and spent one year and three months away before playing my first game. Fortunately, my insurance covered the hospital bills.

While in school, my parents once came to see the deputy principal to ask him to make me stop playing.

Amos Obae Nyamanya

Are there any benefits you have seen from the game?
It is because of rugby that I received a full four-year scholarship from Nakuru RFC to study at Kenyatta University. I am currently working at Nakuru Level Five Hospital as a clerical officer with the radiology department.

How do you juggle work and rugby?
I wake up by 5:30am, hit the gym by 7am and then report to work by 8am. In the evening, I leave work at 5pm and start my training by 5:30pm.

So far, which moments would you consider as the best and worst in your rugby career?
My best moment was being selected for the Rugby Super Series and being named Most Valuable Player of the tournament. The cherry on top of all this was a call-up to the national team, Kenya Simbas. My worst moments remain in 2020 and 2021 when I got injured and spent many months out of action.

How did it feel to be voted MVP at this year’s Rugby Super Series? What does it take to become an MVP?
I didn’t expect it. It caught me by surprise, but statistics don’t lie. I scored the most impact points. Until now I can’t tell how it feels. I have been working hard and staying disciplined. I never miss any training sessions.

Handling fame can be tricky. How did you deal with the attention and privileges that came from being named the MVP?
That came with a lot of expectations. Being a top competition, people assume the award came with lots of money, but I received absolutely nothing. I just try to maintain my cool.

Did your parents always support your forays into rugby? What about your spouse?
Lastly, what life lessons have you picked from rugby?

I have learned that every good thing takes time. Rugby has helped me to be honest with myself, stay disciplined and maintain a go-getter attitude.

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In Brief

Amos Obae Nyamanya was named Player of the Tournament at this year’s Rugby Super Series tournament.

Amos, a father of two, was born on August 29, 1996 and raised in Kisii. He schooled at Itierio Boys High School, Asumbi Teachers College (Homa Bay County) and Kenyatta University (Nairobi).

His younger brother Enock Obae plays rugby too. Enock played for Kenya Harlequin and is currently with Nakuru RFC, like Amos.

In Rugby Union final staged at Cape Town Stadium, Kenya Rugby Union captain Amos Nyamanya (with ball) gained ground past Lions defence during Kenya Rugby Union Super Series tournament finals on May 25, 2024.

PHOTO| CHRIS OMOLLO

Kenya Rugby Union chairman Sasha Mutsai hands over the Rugby Super Series Trophy to Cheetahs Captain Amos Nyamanya (right) after defeating Lions 18-10 during the KRU Super Series tournament finals on May 25, 2024. PHOTO| CHRIS OMOLLO

Accomplished Amos Obae was named Player of the Tournament at this year’s Rugby Super Series tournament.