



INSTAGRAM LIVE WITH  
CHRISTINE THIKUSHO FOUNDER  
“**RAPID LEARNING AFRICA**”

7PM WAT, 8PM CAT, 9PM EAT

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**10 COMMANDMENTS OF  
START UP SUCCESS INSTA  
LIVE TRANSCRIPT WITH  
TOLANI THOMAS**



### **TOLANI THOMAS:**

Tolani Thomas is a Business Development Consultant, writer, Entrepreneur and the Principal Consultant at Halisi Consulting Company, a business development consulting agency based in Lagos, Nigeria.

With over 7 years of strategic marketing experience in tech, media and oil and gas industries, Tolani has focussed her career on building sustainable businesses and creating real strategies that convert to sales for her clients. Her passion for building sustainable businesses led her to pursue a master's degree in International Business and Management at the University of Bradford, UK. She holds a BSc in Chemistry from the University of Lagos.

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### **CHRISTINE THIKUSHO:**

Christine Thikusho is founder and CEO of Rapid Learning Africa – a digital education platform based in Swakopmund, Namibia. She holds a BSC Hons in Geology from the University of Pretoria, South Africa. She has worked in the mining industry (Zinc and Uranium open pit mines) with over 6 years working experience. She is passionate about education and making a difference on the African continent, which inspired her to start her company. Through Rapid Learning Africa's platform, her goal is that it becomes a hub where corporates and entrepreneurs can gain practical knowledge to excel in their careers and businesses.

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**CHRISTINE:** How is the weather like in Nigeria? Is it not cold?

**TOLANI:** Aah, it's okay. It's like 30 degrees

**CHRISTINE:** So Tolani, you told me you have a Bsc in chemistry and an Msc in international business and management, can you take us through your education background?

**TOLANI:** My name is Tolani Thomas, I'm a business development consultant. I create business development strategies, marketing strategies for startups here in Nigeria and I have done for a few in the UK as well. So I studied chemistry at the University of Lagos and then I did my masters in international business and management at the University of Bradford in the UK.

**CHRISTINE:** Alright that's so cool. So you had a full time job at some point, right?

**TOLANI:** Yes, when I moved back to Nigeria after my masters I first worked in a startup as a business development manager and then I worked for about a year as a business development consultant at an oil and gas company. It was a small company about 20 – 30 staff, so yeah that's basically my experience. When I was working in oil and gas I kind of realised that I knew quite a bit about business development and marketing and I felt like it was something I wanted to do on a broader base...like I wanted to do it for more companies as opposed to just working for one company. So then that kind of led to me starting my consulting company. Initially I started a website, our website is [www.tolanithomas.com](http://www.tolanithomas.com) and then it kind of went from there. I used to post articles about business and management and used to give away free social media calendars on my page for entrepreneurs. It kinda started from there like slowly. Slowly I transitioned to the point where I left my job in oil and gas and then I started working full time as an entrepreneur – as a consultant.

**CHRISTINE:** Wow!! I think you have already answered the first question I was going to ask. What was your thought process from being an employee to being a full time entrepreneur – how long did it take for you to leave your job and what sacrifices did you have to make to prepare yourself?

**TOLANI:** Okay that's a very good question, first of all working in lagos is..well..I will say hell.. but it's very stressful because we have a lot of traffic, so first of all getting to work in the morning I spent two hours maximum, 1 – 2 hours before getting to work. So I get to work at 8 in the morning, I had to do my 9 – 5 job normally and close at 4:35, so once I close at 4:35 pm I kind of step out of my 9 – 5 pm role and put on my entrepreneur hat and you know move into running my own business. So I would do that from 5pm – 9pm and I used to do that everyday before going home. So I was sitting in the office working, I did that everyday for a very long time I can't remember how long to be honest. Sometimes I would be so exhausted and just crash on the couch. I made it work. I was doing it everyday and I didn't mind. I didn't really want to work in the weekends, because weekends was when I started seeing the few clients. During the week I would do research on

business development, research on topics I wanted to write on my website and just develop myself as a person. Yeah, those are the challenges I had to face before I could go full time as an entrepreneur. And then when I got to the point that I decided I wasn't gonna work 9-5 anymore it just came to me while I was working at work. I was just working and then suddenly it hit me that I didn't I wanna do this anymore like it's someone's else's dream. I felt really demotivated because it was getting to the point where I wasn't focused on delivering my best at my 9-5 job and I was kind of distracted by my business. I felt it wasn't fair to my employer so I just decided that day that you know what, I am quitting, then I told my friends, they went all crazy, they didn't believe it.

**CHRISTINE: So you decided it's done and then you just left?**

**TOLANI:** Yeah, I thought about it. The salary I was earning from a 9 – 5 job, I was making almost twice as much from my business already. But I felt like I want all the money so I didn't want to leave, but I got to the point where I decided to do my own thing.

**CHRISTINE: Yeah, because you can't wait forever right? At some point you need to take a leap of faith and move on.**

**CHRISTINE: So I have gone to your website you've written about how startups can position themselves for the Nigerian market. What are some things small businesses should do to stand out?**

**TOLANI:** Okay first of all, you shouldn't see yourself as a small business. You should see yourself as a growing business because what you are essentially doing as a startup business you are a small fish in a really big pond and these big companies are like sharks. So you have to navigate your way through literally. So what you should do as a startup in the Nigerian business environment is first of all don't see yourself as a business that's struggling. You have to position yourself as equals to the big businesses. So you have to say, okay what do these big businesses like global businesses like PWC do that makes them stand out and you look at that and try to emulate that in your business practices. And that will essentially make you stand out among other small business

**CHRISTINE: So you should never see yourself as a small business**

**TOLANI:** You are a global business, you are getting there

**CHRISTINE: That's right, That's right..so having worked with startups what are some of the mistakes that startups do that lead to business failure?j**

**TOLANI:** What I have learned is that most startups they overspend at the initial stage of their business and they don't have to do that, because most people don't want to start small or they don't want to be seen starting small, so they end up spending thousands of dollars on a business that you haven't really proven the concept. Do you understand? What essentially you should do when you have an idea is that try to prove that the business idea is needed

by customers first of all and when you do that you can start building the business slowly by slowly. But most people don't do that. They start and just go and take a loan of thousands of dollars. You go and take a loan of 10,000 dollars you are not sure how you can repay and then you quit your job you don't have any source of income. It's just little mistakes that add up to your business being more difficult to run or you having issues as an individual. Entrepreneurs need to have a certain mindset when they start their businesses.

**CHRISTINE: Yeah you can't go out there and take a business loan without knowing how the market is going to respond to your business idea**

**CHRISTINE: Okay that's awesome. On the 10 commandments of startup success, can you just share those points, what can a startup do to guarantee success in their business?**

**TOLANI: 1) LEARN TO ACCEPT REJECTION OR LEARN FROM EVERY NO:**  
The first thing you need to know as a startup is that you're going to get a lot of NOs. You have to learn to accept rejection. Don't let that demotivate you from approaching the next customer. For instance, maybe you have a product you trying to sell. Can you give me an example of a product Christine?

**CHRISTINE: Hair products perhaps..**

**TOLANI:** That's a good one, perhaps you are selling hair products and the first person doesn't buy it – the next person says no and the same goes to the third, fourth and fifth person..and then you start thinking maybe my idea is a bad idea, it's not a bad idea, as a startup you have to understand that you have to get to a certain number of nos before you can get a yes. Do you understand what I'm saying? So as a startup, you need to learn to deal with rejection essentially. When a customer says no, it really hurts, and demoralizing, it makes you feel like maybe I shouldn't do this business anymore. So what you should do instead in that situation is, that you would ask your customer what went wrong? Do you understand? You make sure every no you get you're asking questions like for example you pitch your hair products to someone and the person says no I don't want it, and then you just say thank you whatever bye...nah..don't do that. So what you need to do is ask why, is there anything wrong? You don't like the packaging? You don't like the product and how it looks? And the person tells you I don't want hair extensions like this I'm a naturalista – I don't like hair extensions. Every no, try to learn a lesson from it, don't look at it as defeat like your business is failing.

**TOLANI: 2) LEARN TO DELEGATE EARLY ON:** You need to learn that you are not super man or super woman

**CHRISTINE: Sorry to cut you short, but how do you delegate, when you have got no money to employ people?**

**TOLANI:** Yes, what you doing is that you are running a one man business, it's just

you. So you are your own HR, accountant, lawyer, marketer – you are making executive decisions and so forth. What you need to do is to find creative ways to automate your processes. For example if you need to do accounting, get book keeping apps to help you track your expenses. And if you need a lawyer, there are lawyers online just for startups that charge a stipend. I have a lawyer friend, she is a startup lawyer, she helps small businesses. She charges like 10 000 naira per hour for legal documentation. And that's about \$30. So you have to like find creative ways to delegate your passion and your time. And also, as soon as you are profitable enough to hire, appoint someone. Even if it's going to take a bit from the money you would take home, just hire as soon as you can. So you can focus on what is real. For example, when you start a business, you have to do your own content strategy and you have at the same time focus on talking to clients, if you can afford to hire somebody to pay them \$30 to do content strategy for an entire month, do that as soon as you can. And then focus on developing new ideas for your business. If you don't delegate as soon as you can, you will hold on to your business and you will be so immersed in your business that your business doesn't grow beyond you.

**CHRISTINE:** Cool stuff..

**TOLANI:** **3) LEARN WHY PEOPLE SAY YES TO YOUR PRODUCTS:** Learn everything about a client that makes them say yes I'm gonna go with Rapid Learning Africa or /I'm gonna go with Christine's products. Do you understand what I'm saying? It might be that a certain client comes from certain class of society, might be that the client is female. Might be that maybe this client doesn't like doing things by themselves. There are different reasons why clients choose your products, you need to learn every client's reason and then you need to take that reason and put it in your marketing -that's how you sell yourself as a business. Like for example, I have a client, who works 9 – 5, but he is an offshore engineer on an oil rig, I do business development consulting for him. He has an app, that he developed. So I run his marketing for him. Right now we are working on getting new clients.

**TOLANI:** **4) DON'T BE AFRAID TO SEEK FUNDING:** When you have customers coming in, you have to try to raise money to get your marketing as viral as possible. Raise money as soon as you can. I would not advice you to take loans, because loans are a bit tricky. There are tons of grants you can apply for. There are tons of Venture Capitalists out there that are looking for businesses to invest in. And obviously you have to be careful who invest in your business. You have to make sure that you are not just taking their money, you are delivering value. They also have to ensure they are delivering value to you. It's a mutual beneficial relationship.

**CHRISTINE:** **How does one go about finding VCs, let's say you have no idea where to start?**

**TOLANI:** For every country it's different. But the rules stay the same. You have to be as creative as possible, there are lots of resources on the internet. You have to find time within yourself. I have a friend, he runs a startup company. He told me something I found very interesting. He dedicates an entire day

every week to apply for different things. He applies for grants, he applies for fellowships, he applies for as many things as he can. That you need to do, because you need a lot of money when you starting a startup. Everybody wants a million dollar cheque. So you have to exhaust resources available online. There are tons of grants online. Exhaust that first of all and then start looking into networking into your community. So there are small communities for different kinds of businesses. Fashion people have their own community, tech people have their own community. Find out how you can engrain yourself in that community and start networking gradually. When you're networking, don't go to people and say I need a million dollars..no no no!!..you need to network and build relationship first..find out how you can help the person before you can ask for help. With VCs they are out there, but you just have to be creative about it. So if you are really looking for money, Christine you will find money

**CHRISTINE:** **hahahaha..yeah, I guess I'm not looking. I guess if you really want it, you will get it**

**TOLANI:** **5) RELEASE YOUR MINIMUM VIABLE PRODUCT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE:** Don't try to be a perfectionist about your product. Do you understand? Release the most viable product you can produce as soon as you can and get off the market and start testing your product on the market, just to get customer feedback. Just to know if the product would actually sell. I have had a client who spent \$300 000 creating a product, it's been a year, he is still trying to figure how to market the product

**CHRISTINE:** **You spend so much time trying to perfect the product, by the time you release it, no one wants it. So might as well go out there and try and test it.**

**TOLANI:** Yeah, release the minimum viable product as soon as you can.

**TOLANI:** **6) MAKE SMART DECISIONS QUICKLY:** The thing about startups is that you are growing fast and you don't have time to drag your feet. If you feel like this is not going to work for your business, just move on as soon as you can. Just make smart decisions as quickly as possible. When you make smart decisions quickly, you have to deal with the consequences as sometimes they are good, times they are bad. So you just have to move on and go with the flow. I'm not saying you should run of course, make smart decisions quickly

**CHRISTINE:** **Because you can get to a point where you basically just thinking the whole time and not making any progress..making smart decisions faster so you can move forward**

**TOLANI:** **7) PREPARE TO CHANGE PLANS:** So when you are starting your business, you write this 40 page business plan, you write this 30 page marketing plan, you write everything about your strategy. You feel like yes, this is going to work. I have done all the research. But then you start the process of running the business itself and then you find that what you put in the plan is not really working, some people get very sentimental about stuff like that and they kinda hold on to what they have planned, oh this is my plan I'm gonna stick to it. This relates to the point I made earlier about making smart decisions quickly. But you need to learn that plans can change. You know if you are running a startup in a fast growing

organisation, plans will change at some point. So don't hold onto plans like that

**CHRISTINE:** I think part of being a startup is basically you looking for a viable business model, because as a startup you don't know what's gonna work what's not going to work

**TOLANI:** That's a very good point Christine, I need to add that to my points

**TOLANI:** **8) DON'T MICROMANAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES:** Don't micromanage your staff, let your staff have power to do what they want. Learn to let your employees innovate, and you kinda manage it hence forth. Let them be in charge of their own decision making. First of all it helps them grow as a person and as an employee. Second of all it takes like a load of burden off you. So even if things your staff do make them kinda look stupid don't make it like this is my plan. Let people be creative with your business. Because every one has a different idea as to how things should work. We all come from diverse backgrounds. Diverse backgrounds lead to a variety of ideas and different opinions and with that your business can grow. Because one idea is not enough to make a business grow or one person is usually not enough to make a business grow. It takes a team, it takes a village. For some companies it takes like 10 000 people to help them grow. Don't micromanage your staff. Let them innovate. Let them give you ideas as well.

**CHRISTINE:** And besides if I can add on to that, I think once you have gotten to that point where you have employees you don't want to be the only person that gives ideas into your business. So what would then happen is if you not there, then there is no one to make decisions in your business

**TOLANI:** I feel like people should have businesses that can run without them. Because when you're making all these decisions, it kind of puts you in a box, you won't have a life, you won't be able to travel

**CHRISTINE:** hahahaha...If you are gonna be working all the time, then it becomes a job. That's the whole idea of going into business. You don't want another job

**TOLANI:** **9) YOU HAVE TO STEP OUT OF YOUR SHELL:** with startups because you don't have as much resources as large companies have. Step out of your shell from time to time. And integrate yourself into a startup ecosystem. So you have to learn to network, you have to learn to socialize if you don't have social skills, you have to get out your shell to look for opportunities that will help your business grow by meeting up with similar startups. For example, I think there is thing called Naija Beauty Fair – where all the Nigerian hair beauty products people all come together and meet up quarterly. And they share ideas, they network, there is no rivalry. Everyone has their products on display. And you know those kind of things present opportunities for you to learn as a business owner. When running a business, it's very easy for you to just put your head down and work work everyday not socializing and networking – that might not be the best for your business.

**CHRISTINE:** I read a point somewhere where the person was saying, if people aren't engaging in your content, you need to go offline and talk to real people



**TOLANI:** Yes, you need to go out there and talk to people

**TOLANI:** **10): HAVING A BRANDING STRATEGY:** You have to create your own brand story and you have to stick to the story. And this story is what will direct you to know how you do your marketing. For example, I have a story, I was working 9 – 5, I had a really nice job, my job was having me travel all over the world, I was travelling to London for conferences, it was a great job, but I didn't really find fulfilment in it. I find fulfilment in running my own business and providing my service to more companies as opposed to just working for one. So that's my story. So I don't know where your story is right now Christine,

**CHRISTINE:** **hahahahah...No I am still crafting my story, I don't have an interesting story right now. I'm still working full time, so I think if and when I leave so maybe I can talk about it**

**TOLANI:** But right now you are working on developing your brand story. Which is important. Every company should have a brand story. I want to hear how your company started. What prompted the idea. Everyone wants to hear, everyone likes a good story. Everyone knows the facebook story, everyone knows how the Instagram guys started, everyone knows how the whatsapp guys started, do you understand? These are stories that tell your products that go beyond. Even KFC, Coca-Cola they all have stories they tell – this is how we started. And this is why we started. So you should have a brand story. You should craft it to your audience and use that in your marketing to make more sales.

**CHRISTINE:** **My story is that I work on a mine,**

**TOLANI:** Which is amazing, I have never met anyone who works on a mine

**CHRISTINE:** **hahahaha...That's so funny, you've never met anyone who works on a mine?..Well now you know someone who works on a mine, so no it's not easy, you have to wake up at 05:00 and be on the bus at 06:00 and back home at 05;30 in the evening. That's not easy.**

**TOLANI:** It's interesting and you are a woman, I find that interesting

**CHRISTINE:** **In Namibia, there are a lot of women who work in mining. It's just tiring – that's what it is..**

**TOLANI:** **11) BONUS TIP: SALES IS KING:** You need to market your products properly. With startups I find that the founder is usually the person running the operations of the business. Sometimes as entrepreneurs, we get so lost in the daily grind of building a company that we forget to actually market the product we are working on. What I usually advise is that you have a chief selling officer – someone whose job is dedicated entirely to thinking of how to sell your products or service. Most people think they can market their products themselves, that's great if you can, but as your business grows, it is best to appoint someone that would dedicated entirely to creating opportunities for sale.

**TOLANI: 12) POINT NUMBER 10 IS FOR ENTREPRENEURS: YOU HAVE TO LIVE LIFE OUTSIDE YOUR BUSINESS.**

It's very easy to get wrapped up in what you doing, you're waking up at 5am everyday, you taking three cups of coffee, from 5pm – 9pm at night. You have to take a step back because as an entrepreneur what if something happens, what if you have a health crisis. It's your dream, so essentially for you to keep living your dream you have to stay alive, right?

**CHRISTINE: That's so true, you need to stay alive**

**TOLANI:** You need to stay healthy, take a break from time to time. Don't kill yourself, socialize, breathe fresh air, go outside and leave your office. Take a walk. It's great to have a business that's a success, but how successful is your business if don't have good health to enjoy it?

**CHRISTINE: Tolani, it's been so great. I had so much fun, I should come to Nigeria...I will chat to you about that...Thank you so much everyone for watching. cheers**

**TOLANI:** Thank you guys for watching bye bye.

