

Sigi Osagie – Author and Procurement Provocateur (part 1)

PETER SMITH - October 29, 2014 4:31 AM

Categories: People | Tags: Book, Interview, Li, People



Sigi Osagie's story is an unusual one for a senior procurement and supply chain executive. He came to England from his native country of Nigeria, and found a job "cleaning floors in Häagen-Dazs" in Leicester Square. He paid his own way through university (in Greenwich) and a

degree in Manufacturing Systems Engineering. Finding the "business" elements of the course, around process, logistics and supply chain, more interesting than the more purist engineering elements, he got a job as Materials Manager in a small manufacturing firm, with the task to implement an MRP system.

From there his career blossomed, with Supply Chain Director roles ultimately at Marconi and a string of high-profile interim director level roles, and a blossoming career as a coach and speaker. He's now written his first book, *Procurement Mojo – Strengthening the Function and Raising its Profile.*"

As he says, "this is not a book for beginners. It is aimed at where most procurement functions are today, established but struggling to step up to the practical challenges that many face – getting stakeholders on board and achieving change."

We will be reviewing the book soon, but in the meantime, he agreed to be the latest in our series of "Procurement Provocateur" interviewees.

When did you decide procurement was for you?

I started studying production engineering in Nigeria, really because my Father directed me that way. In England, I quickly decided I enjoyed the systems and process side of my degree course most, so when I got my first job, implementing the MRP system, I was confident, I thought I knew it all. But I quickly realised that academic knowledge does not give you credibility with the shop floor! I got demotivated to begin with, but as I learnt more about handling people and those soft issues, I realised that I loved the combination of process and

people in procurement and supply chain roles. I am a six sigma black belt, I enjoy the left brain activities, but the soft side of achieving results is just as important to me.

Who has been the biggest influence on your career?

My boss in that first job, Hugh Humphrey, was very important. He let me get on with it, but when I ran into problems, as I said, he mentored me and helped me connect with people and learn how to influence and work successfully with people. It was a small business and he showed me that it is results that count – I left there with the focus on delivery and people I have kept all my career.

Then Ray Packe at Marconi helped me master organisational savvy in a much larger company. He schooled me in organisational dynamics and how to leverage relationships in large firms to achieve results. But I have also learnt a lot from various books. My favourite is Paulo Coelho's ***The Alchemist*** – I still go back to that regularly.

How did you become a successful procurement professional?

I think that ability to balance both sides of the job – the analytical and the people-related – helped me succeed. Determination plays a large part too. I was ambitious and wanted to do well, I had an ambition to be a Supply Chain Director by the time I was 35, and at GE Marconi I made it. So then I felt successful – but I would say that defining "successful" is an interesting question. What do we mean? Is it your bank balance, how big your car is?

I don't now believe that it is. I believe it is about living every day to the fullest and trying to do your best in whatever you do. We only have one life, we have to make the most of it. By my own definition, I have always been successful, because that is what I have always tried to do.

On that philosophical note, we will leave Osagie for now - we'll continue our Procurement Provocateur interview with him tomorrow. And you can buy his book, **Procurement Mojo, here.**



Sigi Osagie – Author and Procurement Provocateur (part 2)

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Here is part 2 of our Procurement Provocateurs interview with Sigi Osagie ([part 1 was here](#)). His book *Procurement Mojo - Strengthening the Function and Raising its Profile* has recently been published (and will be reviewed shortly here as well).

What advice would you give a young procurement professional?

Well, first of all, I will say that you should take what I say with a pinch of salt! Any advice, wherever it comes from, is not applicable to everyone. So let things percolate in your brain. Try things out, form your own opinions. But here are my thoughts - five points.

- Be clear on your own career goals - if you don't know where you are heading, you could end up in Brighton when you wanted to be in London. Have a clear sense of direction.
- Embrace the principles of effectiveness. You must understand what needs doing to get from a to b. That concept of effectiveness is at the core of my book too.
- Learn new skills, relevant to your goals, seek out opportunities, and be proactive - don't wait for things to happen to you.
- Invest in yourself - most people spend more money on their Sky TV subscription than they do on their own career development! Think about how important that development is to your future - it is worth investing in it.
- You have to believe in yourself - without being arrogant, you must know that you have what it takes to succeed. And don't let anyone tell you different; not even yourself.

Why should organisations care about procurement?

Procurement people and the function have a big role to play in making sure the organisation cares. Procurement PR I call it, having ambassadors who can represent procurement. You might have a good product but if nobody knows about it... Relating procurement to the strategic objectives of the business is vital. When I worked at BAA we were going through big corporate changes, so I used the language of EBITDA and profitability in my communications, talking about what the business was concerned with. Of course, more and more of the value chain lies outside the organisation now in most firms, there is more outsourcing, so procurement is now often the biggest impact on a firm's profitability. That should make people care!

Where is procurement going?

We are seeing broader business thinking in procurement. Apple is an example, getting a robust and aligned supply chain that is core to their success. If you consider successful businesses today, they tend to have enhanced and advanced procurement practices. The recession helped in some ways, putting the focus on procurement and the contribution to the bottom line, but there are also the growing issues of reputational risk, ethics and CSR which have also increased procurement's importance. I believe the trend will continue, globalisation keeps shrinking the world, technology changes faster - all factors that help procurement to show its value. The procurement profession has come a long way but not all procurement functions will shine. The ones that do will take the right actions and focus on effectiveness. They will invest in talent, help their people sharpen their skills, and they will make sure they are organisationally savvy. Others will struggle. -----

Thanks to Sigi Osagie for his insights and thoughts - his book *Procurement Mojo* is now available. It looks very good at first sight, but look out for our full review shortly, and thanks to him for sparing the time for our conversation.

