



WANJA MICHUKI AND THE HIGHLAND TEA COMPANY

- *Note to Instructors* -

D R A F T

I. CASE ABSTRACT AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Case Abstract

The Highland Tea Company is a socially-minded business founded by Kenyan Wanja Michuki that retails and distributes Kenyan specialty teas in the United States. Kenya is the source of the world's finest quality black teas – a fact frequently obscured because teas from Kenya are usually sold in bulk to large multinational corporations and blended with lower-quality teas from other origins. With a family history in tea farming, an education in finance and a passion for economic development, Wanja Michuki perceived an opportunity to create value in the retail tea market and established The Highland Tea Company. The Highland Tea Company's high-quality teas created demand for premium Fair Traded Kenyan teas in the United States. By doing so, The Highland Tea Company creates direct financial and non-financial gains for Kenyan tea farmers, who represent 10% of the Kenyan workforce.

Learning Objectives

Critical analysis and discussion of this case can help students achieve the following objectives:

- Understand how the following are linked to entrepreneurship:
 - Identifying and seizing opportunities;
 - Taking calculated risks;
 - Constructive reaction to and perception of failure; and
 - Ongoing search for improvement.
- Understand that one can leverage personal networks and experiences to reach goals.
- Understand that opportunities exist to launch new, profitable ideas in a global marketplace.
- Understand how one approaches developing and marketing a new brand.
- Evaluate how socially-minded businesses can have impact on the communities they serve.

Wanja Michuki also serves as a strong entrepreneurial role model whose story can inspire students to generate, evaluate, and pursue their own ideas.

Recommended Usage and Format

We believe a discussion-based classroom format with associated out-of-class activities is best for achieving the above learning objectives. The degree of teacher involvement will vary according to student background and desired objectives. Depending on the objectives sought and student background, an instructor may use this case for anything from one to five classroom sessions. Possible questions for discussion and assessment are described on the following pages.

This note was authored by Pallen Chiu and Chris Bradford to support instructors. It is meant to illustrate a series of discussion questions or activities that may support student learning. It is not intended to be a comprehensive study of the case, and many instructors may develop different activities for their classes according to their individual goals. We encourage instructors to share their feedback on the case and on this teaching note with the African Leadership Academy Case Writing Office at casewriting@africanleadershipacademy.org



II. LEARNING FROM THE CASE

The Case Learning Process

For effective case-based learning, we recommend moving students through a series of question types that build upon each other to inspire understanding of the desired learning objective. These questions may be approached with a variety of pedagogical techniques and formats to allow for effective assessment of student growth. Large and small-group discussions, individual pre-work, and summative individual or group exercises may all be employed by the instructor according to his or her goals.

Question Type	Goal
Warm-Up	Stimulate discussion and dialogue; allow students to demonstrate that they have read the case.
Basic Understanding	Demonstrate knowledge of key facts in the case and clarify possible misconceptions.
Critical Analysis	Challenge assumptions underlying the case; evaluate decisions made by the protagonist or factors critical to success or failure.
Hypothetical Scenarios	Encourage students to brainstorm and evaluate options and forecast the outcomes of these options and their consequences.
Self-Reflection	Reflect upon personal leadership styles, strengths, and weaknesses and how those might have played out in a similar scenario.
Inspiration and Impact	Assess how the case affected each individual student (e.g. by opening them to new ideas or solidifying their confidence in their own capabilities).
Big Picture	Relates concepts and situations in the case to issues directly impacting students in their daily lives.

Warm-Up Questions

Warm-up questions are not specific to any learning objective but are used to stimulate discussion and dialogue. These generally form the first few minutes of case discussion and may also be assigned to students as pre-work before the case.

Sample Warm-Up Questions

- What is the case about?
- Do you think Wanja/The Highland Tea Company was successful? By what measure?
- What surprised you about the case?

Basic Understanding Questions

Like warm-up questions, basic understanding questions may not be specific to a particular learning objective. Instead, they challenge students to synthesize the key facts and develop a working understanding of the case. These questions may form the second layer of class discussion or may be assigned to students as pre-work before the case is discussed.

Sample Basic Understanding Questions

- What were the key actions Wanja took as she moved Highland Tea from an idea to an operating business?



- What is the business model The Highland Tea Company uses to make money?
- How does The Highland Tea Company have an impact on Kenyan development?

Critical Analysis Questions

Critical analysis questions challenge embedded assumptions and ask students to evaluate decisions made in the case. The critical analysis questions chosen by an instructor should reflect that instructor's desired learning objectives. While some critical analysis questions may be assigned as pre-work, it is important to treat these questions in the classroom and encourage multiple viewpoints to emerge, as students will learn from other perspectives. Critical analysis questions are also excellent platforms for classroom debate and discussion.

Sample Critical Analysis Questions

- What character traits allowed Wanja to succeed? What did she do that exemplified those traits? Which trait do you believe was most important and why?
- What resources or assets allowed Wanja to succeed? Which of these do you believe was most important, and why?
- Why did Wanja choose to establish a business in the tea industry? What information would you want to see before choosing an industry in which to build a business? Do you think the tea business is a good business?
- Why establish her business in the United States? What information would you want to see before launching the brand in the United States? Do you believe she made the right decision?
- How did Wanja maximize the impact she would have on Kenyan farmers?
 - Why was it important to Wanja to build a brand? What value did it add?
 - Why was it important to Wanja to launch a teabag line?
- Do you believe The Highland Tea Company's estimation of its impact on Kenya in Appendix 8? Why or why not?
- Do you think The Highland Tea Company would be more or less successful today if a partnership had formed with KTDA? What would be different?
- What are the pros and cons of moving production to China? Would you have made the same decision Wanja made?

Hypothetical Scenario Questions

Hypothetical scenarios encourage students to think through a unique situation for which there is no answer already provided. Students should first brainstorm possible solutions to a problem and then evaluate each option by forecasting the outcomes and their consequences. From this process, students develop and gain confidence in a robust decision-making process. By working through such scenarios with other members of their class in small or large groups, students will learn from different viewpoints and discover the value of diversity in generating unique, strong solutions to challenging problems.



Sample Hypothetical Scenario Questions

- Suppose KTDA came to Wanja today offering the following partnership opportunity: KTDA would provide money and marketing support to bring Highland Tea to the European market, take over all manufacturing, and take a fraction of all future sales. If you were Wanja, would you accept? Why or why not?
- Suppose you were searching for a business to launch that would support the development of your own country or community. What industries in your country or community might have similar opportunities for impact? In which industry would you choose to build a business, and why?
- Suppose Whole Foods had rejected Wanja again rather than asking for her distributor. If you were Wanja, what might you have done next?

Self-Reflection Questions

Self-reflection questions challenge students to consider how they might have reacted to situations like the ones that face the protagonists in a case. Would they have made the same decisions? What values or beliefs underlie the decisions they would make? Reflective exercises allow students to gain a sense of their own leadership style, strengths, and weaknesses. They can be effectively employed in the classroom group exercises or in journaling assignments outside the classroom.

Sample Self-Reflection Questions

- Imagine that you are starting up a company similar to Highland Tea, faced with opportunities and setbacks similar to those that Wanja experienced. Which aspects of the process would you have found most exciting? Which would you have excelled at? Why?
- If you were Wanja, which challenges would have been the most difficult for you to overcome? Why?
- When faced with opportunities and setbacks, how are you different from or similar to Wanja? Are there character traits of hers you aspire to? Did any of her actions or traits concern you?

Inspiration and Impact

Inspiration and impact questions challenge each student to consider the deeper impact of the case on them. Did the case open the student to a new idea? Did it solidify confidence in his or her capabilities? Did it affirm or challenge a student's pre-existing assumptions or values? What questions did it raise? These questions may be addressed in classroom or small-group discussion or in written work done outside of class. If assigned as written work, we recommend that students consider their answers to these questions after experiencing a class discussion of the key issues in the case, as the viewpoints exposed in the classroom are likely to impact each student.

Sample Inspiration and Impact Questions

- Do you believe that The Highland Tea Company will have a positive impact on Kenyan economic development? Does their model of development make sense to you? Why or why not?
- What do you consider the major lesson or lessons you learned from Wanja's story?



- Do you believe you could launch a new business, as Wanja did? Why or why not?
- Did reading this case have any effect on what you might want to do with your life?
- If Wanja were here, what questions would you want to ask her?

The Big Picture

Finally, big picture questions relate concepts and situations in the case to issues directly impacting students in their lives outside the classroom. They are often effective questions for closing a classroom discussion or beginning a later day of discussion of the case (such as the second class of a two class unit on The Highland Tea Company).

- What are other examples of people starting similar ventures?
- If each student in this class launched a venture similar to the Highland Tea Company, what might be the impact on the economy or society?
- Does launching a new venture like the Highland Tea Company have any negative consequences on society, the economy, or the environment? If so, what are they?