



## LAURA EKONDE & STEPHANIE ETTIEGNE

**Laura Ekonde** moved to the US 10 years ago at the age of 18, to study International Political Economics. She has always been passionate about society and how to better her peers' lives. She obtained her bachelor's degree at the University of Texas in Dallas and she has been ever since in the professional world. She built her career in Management and Marketing.

**Stephanie Ettiegne** is originally from Cote d'Ivoire and moved to Texas in 2012 to pursue her Masters' Degree in Business and Administration with emphasis on Human Resources. With 8 years of experience in Client Care, paired with a knowledge of Real Estate Processes and Relocation Services, she is motivated by challenges and passionate about interacting with people from different backgrounds, and how to leverage their rich and diverse background to positively impact their environment.

### 1. When did the entrepreneur big bite you?

**Laura:** Passionate about entrepreneurship since a young age, I always saw business owners as idea innovators and problem solvers. I was inspired by different successful entrepreneurs. In my mind, I always knew that I had to create a legacy as well and one that will always help others as a mission.

**Steph:** Since I was in college, I always dreamed about having my own placement agency to help people find the right job and for companies to find the right talent. This was the definition of entrepreneurship for me; doing something that makes a difference not only in someone's life, but also in businesses.

### 2. What can we know about Smart chill and what's your End Goal?

Smart Chill is a community organization that encourages unique uplifting and intellectual conversations via casual networking events.

Our platform aims to educate, share knowledge, inspire mentorship, solve challenges and strengthen relationships.

Our End Goal is to become one of the largest organizations that empower young adults.

### 3. What podcasts do you listen to get inspired or learn from?

TED Podcasts, Uplifting Audio Books related to finding your purpose and human connections. Alison Stewart, Guy Raz, Jen Sincero and many others.

### 4. What do you do for encouragement

### or to be motivated?

**Laura:** I meditate and pray for peace. I try to stay away from distractions. I always seek to see the world from a different angle offering another perspective. What motivates me the most is knowing that I am having a positive impact on someone's life through my work.

**Steph:** I am normally someone that has a lot of energy and wakes up every day with a list of things to accomplish; that alone keeps me motivated. Having a clear plan and set of goals keeps me engaged and productive. I plan my days in advance so I can be productive and manage my time, instead of going through the motion.

Also, I dedicate some time to meditation, worship, prayer, and working out, so I can nourish my soul, body and spirit.

### 5. What is the most difficult thing about building a brand from scratch?

At first, it was challenging to introduce this new concept that combines those two words: "Smart" and "Chill" in our community. People were not very familiar with this approach and were reluctant to give it a try. We remained focused and persevered as the purpose was to shift the conversation and foster interaction within our community.

Bringing awareness to the brand and finding partners & sponsors has also revealed to be a difficult task. We try to find innovative ways to reach our targeted audience and we attend a lot of networking events to gain more exposure and experience. We also under-

stand that we are in our early stage and we have faith that the organization will grow to its full potential.

### 6. What type of person do you think should be an entrepreneur?

Anybody with a dream, vision and passion to help others. Someone who is a visionary, fearless, who has wit, determination and likes to get things done. Someone with the drive, purpose and desire to make a difference. Someone who has discipline and keeps pushing when everything seems to be falling apart.

### 7. What advice would you give someone who is interested in starting their own business?

Do not be afraid of failure but embrace it as a learning experience. Success comes after a couple of failures.

Stay focused on your vision, don't let yourself be distracted by white noise such as life hurdles and negative thinking. Make sure to use resources around you.

There are a lot of organizations that assist new entrepreneurs for free, take advantage of it. Attend networking events in your area as you may find opportunities and contacts for your business. Don't be afraid to think big, *a dreamer will always find a way to achieve his goal.*

You may not have exclusivity in your niche, but you need to find your competitive advantage and capitalize on it. Entrepreneurship is 10 months of hardship for 2 months of reward.

**keep pushing and enjoy the ride!**

Emmanuel Kalumbata