


EXECUTIVE EDGE

A portrait of Kofo Akinkugbe, a Black woman with her hair in a bun, wearing a bright pink high-collared jacket. She is smiling and looking to the left, with her hands clasped in front of her chin.

Mastering Visionary Ideas With Consistent Execution

11 Lessons from Kofo Akinkugbe, One of Africa's Leading CEOs.



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Introduction

Kofo Akinkugbe is a name that commands respect across the global business and technology landscape. Renowned for her groundbreaking entrepreneurial journey, she has distinguished herself as a pioneer in Africa's tech industry with a reputation built on innovation, resilience, and strategic leadership.

As the Founder and Group CEO of SecureID Nigeria Ltd, Kofo has grown the company into a continental powerhouse in smart card technology and digital security, placing Africa firmly on the world stage of advanced manufacturing.

Speaking at the 13th edition of BusinessDay's CEO Forum, themed "*Builders of the New Nigeria: Stories of Scale, Grit and Innovation*," she shared key insights behind SecureID's rise to prominence as the only smart card production plant in West Africa, and one of just six fully certified by VISA, Verve, and MasterCard across the African continent.



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2. Spot and Seize Market Gaps

Great CEOs don't chase crowded markets, they identify unmet needs. Kofo built her company by entering a space that others ignored, the lack of secure, locally produced smart cards in Nigeria. She didn't just fill a gap; she redefined a market. As a leader, train yourself and your team to listen actively, assess market inefficiencies, and deploy solutions that create new value. The next growth leap may lie in what your competitors have overlooked.

1. Cultivate a Mindset That Drives Growth

As a CEO, your mindset is not just an internal asset, it is your organization's compass. Kofo emphasizes that expansive thinking, clarity under pressure, and belief in long-term outcomes are non-negotiables for sustained growth. The ability to see beyond the noise, act decisively without a complete roadmap, and turn obstacles into strategic opportunities is what separates reactive leaders from visionary ones. Your mindset sets the tone for your company's culture, resilience, and innovation.

3. Lead with Courage, Backed by Purpose

There's no playbook for pioneering work. When Kofo founded Secure ID, she faced an industry with no local precedent. Yet she forged ahead, anchored by clarity of purpose. For CEOs, courage is essential, but it must be aligned with a deeper why. Purpose fuels endurance, shapes decision-making, and helps leaders remain steady when certainty is absent. Your team will follow bold leadership, but they'll stay loyal to meaningful vision.

4. Invest Early in Global Standards



Kofo positioned her company for global relevance by pursuing international certifications early, VISA, MasterCard, and Verve. This opened doors beyond Nigeria and validated her company's credibility. CEOs must think beyond compliance and local benchmarks. Global standards build trust, enhance competitive advantage, and create pathways to larger markets. Excellence must be institutional, not aspirational.

5. Embrace Reinvention as a Leadership Strategy

For Kofo, growth is not a one-time win, it's a mindset of constant evolution. She urges CEOs to be ahead of market shifts, continuously refine processes, and refresh offerings. Disruption is inevitable. The question is whether it comes from within or from a competitor. As a CEO, you must lead reinvention efforts and create space within your organization for innovation and agility.

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6. Build on Values, Not Just Capital.

Capital powers growth, but values sustain it. Kofo is clear; vision, integrity, and perseverance are what carry a business through economic downturns and market shifts. CEOs must model values-based decision-making. Investors, clients, and employees are more likely to align with leaders who prioritize long-term value over quick wins. When values lead, trust follows.

7. Strengthen Culture and Internal Systems

SecureID's success across more than 20 countries is rooted in strong internal systems and people-first culture. Kofo emphasizes that talent, when empowered with the right tools and support, becomes a company's most powerful asset. As CEO, your role is to ensure systems are scalable, teams are trained, and communication is clear. Operational excellence inside determines performance outside.

8. Think Globally, Act Strategically.

Kofo's leadership is shaped by her awareness of global trends. She understands that international dynamics affect local markets, technological shifts, regulation changes, and consumer behavior. CEOs must stay globally informed and locally responsive. Future-proofing your business requires aligning strategy with global movements while customizing execution to your immediate context.

9. Be Strategic About Partnerships and Investors

Choosing the right stakeholders is a strategic act. Kofo warns against aligning with investors who prioritize short-term profits over shared vision. As CEO, your duty is to build a table of partners, investors, board members, even clients, who align with your mission and support your trajectory. These relationships can accelerate growth or derail progress. Be intentional and discerning.

10. Compete Confidently on the Global Stage

Kofo's story affirms that African companies, when led with excellence, can compete globally. CEOs must shed limiting narratives and instead lead with confidence, quality, and strategy. The global economy is not out of reach. With intentional leadership and world-class standards, African businesses can set benchmarks, export innovation, and shape global markets.



11. Balance Boldness with Discipline

Vision starts movements, but discipline sustains them. Kofo's leadership reflects the balance CEOs must strike, courage to innovate and discipline to deliver. Big ideas are only as valuable as the systems that bring them to life. From strategy to execution, risk management to consistent quality, CEOs must lead with both heart and structure. Success isn't just about launching, it's about staying the course and finishing well.

Conclusion

Kofo Akinkugbe's journey is more than a tale of entrepreneurial success, it's a masterclass in visionary leadership.

For CEOs navigating today's complex and competitive business landscape, her principles offer a practical blueprint, one built on mindset, strategy, discipline, and global thinking.

The future belongs to leaders who are not only bold enough to dream but disciplined enough to build, reinvent, and sustain.

As you lead your organization forward, let Kofo's story remind you that excellence is not accidental. It is engineered through values, executed with courage, and sustained by a relentless commitment to growth. Whether you're building in Lagos, London, or Kigali, the standards are the same, world-class leadership, backed by purpose and strategy, will always stand out.

Now is the time to lead with intention, to scale with integrity, and to compete confidently on the global stage.

Disclaimer

The insights and points shared in this edition of Enterprise-CEO EDGE, a digital publication by EnterpriseCEO, are attributed to Mrs. Kofo Akinkugbe. These ideas were originally narrated by her during a panel discussion at the 13th edition of BusinessDay's CEO Forum, themed "Builders of the New Nigeria: Stories of Scale, Grit and Innovation." EnterpriseCEO does not claim ownership of the ideas or content shared; full credit belongs to Mrs. Akinkugbe and BusinessDay Media. This content is shared strictly for educational and inspirational purposes.



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