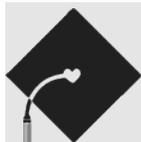


# Consultant

Founder & Principal Consultant of Impact Advisory Services: Investment, Corporate Finance and Economic Development Consulting



**Mwenda B. Albert Kazadi Jr.**

Emory & Henry University, Class of 2009

## **Describe your current position and the journey that led you here.**

I majored in Business and minored in International Studies during college. I worked for EMC Corporation, a technology firm near Boston. Then I wanted to move down to the D.C. area and worked for CSC, another technology firm. The jobs I had were great, but something was missing. I wanted the kind of meaning that Bonner service had. I started looking for a job on the African continent and landed one in mid-2012. After that company closed, I stayed in Monrovia, Liberia, and worked for Adam Smith International on agriculture and development in 2013. Adam Smith International was a shift in career because it was not strictly in the private sector.

I ended up liking the fit of economic development and agribusiness. In 2014 I decided to open up my own consulting firm, Impact Advisory Services, and I have been working through my company ever since.

## **What makes your work meaningful?**

I love the experience of being able to help farmers, businesses, and governments in developing and prospering. One day I could be meeting with a government official, and the next day I could be talking with a farmer on their fields. The week after that I could be meeting with a major industry exporter. The variety of work, both in contract and location, helps to create new and interesting challenges. The fact that I can do all of this and have a positive impact on the people I work with is what makes it fulfilling.

## **What does an average work day and year look like for you?**

Since I work by contract I spend about 10% of my time reaching out to potential clients. I limit my contracts to one or two at a time to make sure I can give my best. Then the process goes to researching and understanding the problem, gathering and analyzing data, managing information and making recommendations that can be understood by the client. After that, we implement changes based on the advice I provide. The last step is gathering data that I can use to discuss the impact of the changes with the client in order to follow-up and make sure they have gone in the right direction.



**What are the 2 best and 2 worst things about working in your sector (role now)?**

One of the perks of running your own advisory firm is that one has the opportunity to only accept and pursue contract opportunities that really peak one's interest. This allows me to accept only opportunities that fall in my areas of passion. Another benefit of my current role is that I am provided the opportunity to meet and work with many interesting people from diverse backgrounds.

After my advisory firm wins an opportunity and begins a consultancy engagement, there is a lot of pressure to complete the research and submit final reports as soon as possible. So, effective time management and planning is key in my current role. The second biggest challenge is balancing and completing active consultancy engagements—all while continuously working on business development and seeking new clients.

**If you had to name one decision, positive or negative, that has shaped your path, what is it?**

The one decision that has positively shaped my path is when I decided to become an entrepreneur and build my own consulting firm, instead of just being satisfied with always working for other institutions. This decision, although it was a challenging one, has been well worth it. I have learned a great deal about running a small business. My experience has also opened more doors for me to grow professionally.

**What was the most important factor in landing the job you have now?**

I did not wait around for a job, I created my own! I took an entrepreneurial approach to starting Impact Advisory Services. I created my own website, edited my LinkedIn, did my research, and started reaching out to clients. Having the confidence to try and the persistence to keep going was crucial.

**Do you feel like you have to financially sacrifice to be in your field? Are you happy with the pay?**

I did have to miss out on opportunities while I was starting my company. However, I knew I would not be happy at those opportunities so it has been worth it to turn them down. I am not rich by American standards, but I am very well-off in Liberia. For me, it has been worth the trade-off and I have not had to sacrifice too much.

**What have been the biggest impacts Bonner has had on your life or work?**

It helped me build the habit of giving back. I became more conscious of social justice and issues around civil justice. I also developed leadership skills that can be applied anywhere. Those are the three most important. The habit of giving back is so important in life and can be practiced at any stage. An awareness of what people are going through and how they are hurting can help you to connect with them. And if you can understand an issue you can make solving it a part of your work.

**What do you wish you knew as a recent Bonner graduate preparing for this field?**

I think having friends older than me was helpful in mapping out how to be successful and fully utilize my degree. I had time to research what was possible and what would be a good fit. I also did not go straight to a four-year college from high school, which gave me the opportunity to explore different career options. Recent Bonner graduates should take the time to explore and keep talking to their friends and connections to learn from them as well.

**How would you recommend students get involved in this field? What resources or opportunities could you share?**

I would recommend students interested in the international economic development field to maintain a ferocious reading habit and maximize the opportunities you have to learn about other communities.

As an economic development professional and as a consultant broad knowledge bases are important. Quite often when I accept an engagement I might be moderately familiar with the issue, but most likely I am not an expert or thought leader on that issue. So, I spend the first few days performing research by reading reports or books written by thought leaders and interviewing experts. I feel that the liberal arts education I received from Emory & Henry really helped develop my passion for learning, reading, and research.

My second recommendation is for students to learn by reading about and experiencing different cultures. This is valuable because it helps you to comprehensively understand the context of the countries and the communities that you are working in.

