



EXCEPTIONAL WOMEN'S COACHING

## The Tiara Spotlight

Shining our light on inspiring women around the world.

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**Chingwell Mutombu**

Founder and Executive Director, First Step Initiative  
[www.firststepinitiative.net](http://www.firststepinitiative.net)

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### Who are you?

I am a collection of my life's journeys – my name is Chingwell Mutombu, founder of First Step Initiative and soon to be an author of a memoir, *Remember for Me*. Born in Iowa to Congolese parents who were studying in the U.S. through the coordinated efforts of a faith community. I returned to the Congo with my parents at the age of two, growing up in a small rural village with no plumbing, no running water and no electricity. At 17, I returned to the states to avoid the dangers of civil war and to study, completing my studies and earning two master degrees in Public Administration and International Relations. Six years ago, I started First Step Initiative, a nonprofit organization that helps women in the Congo build small businesses as a way to sustain them and become economically independent. This mission is dear to my heart! Today, I spend my time uniting cultures and resources to improve upon our global community. This is my story and this is part of who I am!

### What are you passionate about?

Creating a platform/environment in which every woman and girl can thrive and feel that she too matters and she has something to offer to this world.

### Why are you involved in your business?

I want every woman to see herself as being as intelligent as anyone else and to recognize that she is powerful and has a unique opportunity to shape her own future.

### How did you end up here? What's your journey been like?

Having grown up in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I understand firsthand the value of opportunity. I was given a unique opportunity – without which my life would likely have been similar to that of the women we support. My mother was a strong, entrepreneurial woman, and I knew that women in my community had tremendous potential. All that was needed was to remove some of the barriers that held them back. My goal was to create a program that the women could use to realize their dreams. So, the story of our organization is simply their story.

### How do you recharge your batteries or nourish yourself?

I have struggled in this area, but I have begun to learn how to listen to my body, which always gives me signals when I'm about to go off balance. One of the best decisions I made this year was to incorporate photography into my professional life. This practice has become my walking meditation and the best way to recharge my spirit.



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**As a woman leader, what are your unique strengths that help you succeed?**

I find that humility is my greatest asset. It is when we take our ego out of the way; give each person room to be their best and help everyone see that their contribution matters, that is when we begin to produce the best results.

**What are you grateful for?**

I am grateful for everything: my life, family, and the many experiences I have been given. In reflection, I feel this deep sense of gratitude knowing that I have been given the opportunity to follow my “bliss.” I keep meeting people from all walks of life who have opened up many doors for me to be able to follow and achieve my dreams. I am even grateful to have this opportunity to share my thoughts with you.

**Why are you a member of the Tiara community?**

This was the first time where I felt a sense of belonging. Tiara helped me discover the leader in me; it helped me connect with my true self and feel comfortable with the notion that I am powerful (in fact, I just wrote – “I am powerful!”).

**What inspires you?**

I am inspired by the resilience and determination of the women that we work with in the Congo. I am inspired by how they make something of nothing. I am reminded that sometimes what it takes is for each one of us to do our small part to make a difference.

**What's next for you and the organization?**

In February of 2012, I began writing my memoir to honor my mother, who is losing her memory. At this point, I am looking for an agent or publisher who might be interested in the subject matter of my story. For those of you who are reading this and might be able to connect me to your agent/book publisher, I would very much appreciate hearing from you. To learn more about the memoir, you can visit me at: [www.chingwell.blogspot.com](http://www.chingwell.blogspot.com)