

Out and about

Weekend with the CEO

Eric Kimani: 'I want to be remembered as a good man'

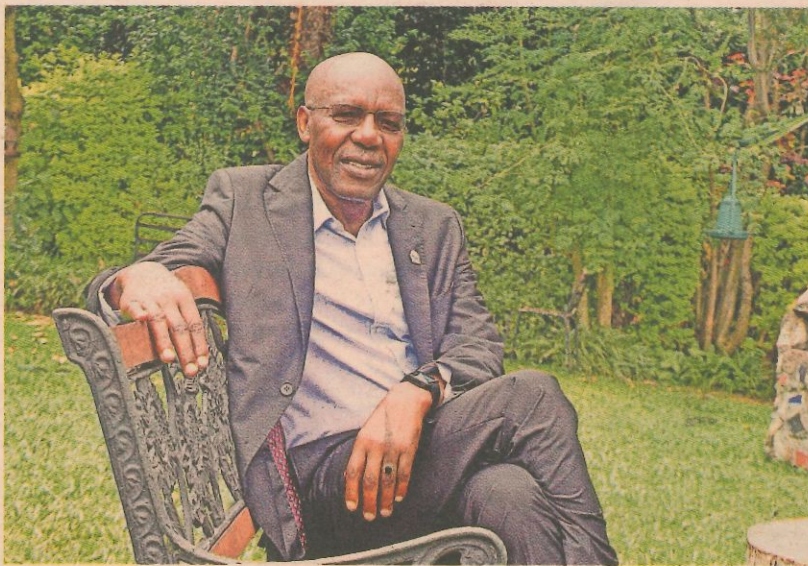
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In a world of superlatives—the biggest, the brightest, the rarest—Eric Kimani chooses a life of asceticism, a hedonist on the pilgrimage to dervishhood. Wealth was wind and he was the wind catcher. Having spent half his life making money, he now dedicates the rest to giving it away, in Rotary, in philanthropy, and in mentorship.

Tall, broad, and erect, Kimani, now 67, is still buoyant and playful, and only one thing seems certain—he had known hard work, and it showed in face and body, with wrinkles sieging the bland smoothness of the face beneath. "Sixty to 70 is the most productive age group," he says, "And I have never felt younger."

It's hard not to believe him. He still cycles. Can kick a ball hard, but, "Mostly I'll miss the ball"; does regular stretches here and there, does this and that. But his true luxe tableau of indulgence is sitting on a boat and fishing, thinking about his cenotaph, "I want to be remembered as a good man."

At his residence in Runda, his true inheritance is what he leaves in you rather than what he leaves for you; Life is abundant, he says, there is enough for everyone. Up in the grey creasing sky, the birds chirp and sing, threatening to swing into points of conversation.



Palmhouse Dairies Executive Director Eric Kimani during the interview on July 22, 2025. PHOTO | FRANCIS NDERITU

How do you talk about yourself?

I describe myself as an entrepreneur, a philanthropist, and a business leader. On the sidelines, I am a motivational speaker and mentor to young people, but that is part of my philanthropy. The words that describe me are entrepreneur, business leader, and philanthropist.

What led you specifically to philanthropy?

I really don't know. I just fell on a good idea and was brought up in a philanthropic family. My mother, who is still alive, is very philanthropic. Maybe she influenced me. I joined Rotary 36 years ago, and I learned, organised philanthropy and saw how world-class philanthropy works. And from that, I founded the Farmhouse Foundation, which has been very successful as a local philanthropic organisation. I sit in an advisory capacity on the boards of many philanthropic organisations, now and in the past.

After all these years in business, entrepreneurship, and philanthropy, how do you define ambition now?

Ambition is identifying something you want to do and doing it to your satisfaction. The problem is that we define ambition like it were something for people who live in places like this [points to his house]. Ambition can happen even to people in the slums; it is really getting what you desire. I always quip and tell people I consider myself the richest man in the world because I've achieved my ambition [chuckles].

You say it's that small, but it doesn't look that small...

I'm sure to somebody it looks big, to another it looks very small, especially to a lot of people chasing billions. But that's my ambition.

When did you know it was enough?

It's not enough, and it's never enough. If you give me Sh100 million today, of course, I would distribute it to a lot of people because that's what I enjoy doing. But it will never be enough, even if I add another zero and two more zeros. If you ask me when I knew or how I know, I think it's just God's blessing. I know that I don't have to wake up chasing the world or cutting corners to make it in life.

Did you have a number in your head that you said if I reach this amount, then I'm good?

I did not have a number, and even now, I continue to work very hard. I wake up every day at 5:30 am. I've been in this office where you found me for 17 years. I wake up every day to work, and I make money every day; and I touch lives every day in philanthropy. I'm not suggesting that I've made enough to get into a plane and never work again in all my life. Work is godly. Whether you have money or not, you must continue working. So the question of enough is never there. But you have to realise also that money cannot buy life, it cannot buy much.

Where does your sense of achievement and meaning come from?

What I call the abundance paradigm,

which is an understanding that there is enough for everybody. We cannot exhaust the world's resources or the provisions of God in this lifetime. I do not need to put you down for me to be up. I do not need to have more for you to have less. We can all have more and still be enough—for my children, for my great-grandchildren. I do not have to wake up every day to make money for my grandchildren. That's absolute stupidity.

But the Bible says a good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children...

Precisely. And I've left an inheritance, but the problem is that you define inheritance as money. It's not. What I've planted in my children is much more than any billions I would have left them. An inheritance means giving them the ability and opening that abundance paradigm of life. It's teaching them how to make the money themselves. Teaching them how to be philanthropic themselves, and how to care for other people in the world and the environment.

Did you grow up like that?

To a large extent, yes. My parents were Christians. My mother is 90 today, and I think in the last two to three years she has paid school fees for her relatives. She was a primary school teacher, and it's not that she has a lot of money, but she showed us how to do it. I have learned more than I have inherited from my parents. I went into the world with my eyes open. And that's what a lot of people don't do, to see the opportunity.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Githunguri.

What do you remember most about your time in Githunguri?

It's hard to remember. This weekend I attended a funeral of a woman who was a helper in my mother's house as we grew up, and I met her son who told me he remembers that I caused him to injure his leg chasing him. I am now 67 years old; I can't remember such things [laughs]. What I remember is that in my youth, I was an obedient child. That doesn't mean I wasn't errant, haha! I reared rabbits and chickens, and grew tomatoes, which laid the groundwork for my understanding of business.

What do you miss about your childhood?

I am a very playful man. If I had the opportunity, I would have time to just go out and play football with you, with children. I love children. I wish I could live among children and just play with them every day. I miss enjoying life as a child. You cared less. Today I wake up every day with a long list of things to do [chuckles]. I wish we would live like childre, just wake up and your parents provide. Children are lucky.

How are you remaining childlike in your life?

You'll find me cycling a bicycle. When I was young, I almost died. The biggest accident I've ever had involved a bicycle. I was going down a hill, and this thing just got out of control, and I injured myself badly. I keep fit and exercise. Exercise is very kiddish, especially for me as I do it by myself, and if someone caught me on camera, they'd be wondering what is wrong with this *mzee* haha! You won't find me in the field except when golfing.

What are these exercises you do?

I think people call it yoga, but I don't understand yoga. I only do it for fitness. I stretch, you'll find me lying down, or upside down. If I found young people playing football, I'd be tempted to get onto the pitch and play, of course, I'd miss the ball, haha!

How do you take care of yourself as a man?

I believe in spirituality as the foundation of everything, and that helps me to keep the river coming back to the course. Also, I'm very structured, driven by an almost a formal framework of life, basically what I want in my life in terms of my mission and vision. So I'm very focused, wealth-focused, philanthropy-focused, and intellectual-focused.

What will people mourn about you when you are gone?

Just a good man. And I work every day to protect that epitaph on my grave, that he was a good man.

What's a good man?

A good man cares about other people, everything around him, not about himself. I give my best to everything I do.

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