

# Owning It: Construction company leader overcomes the doubters

By [Keila Torres Ocasio](#)

<http://www.ctpost.com/business/article/Owning-It-Construction-company-leader-overcomes-11242452.php>



Vincencia Adusei is an open book — until she is asked her age.

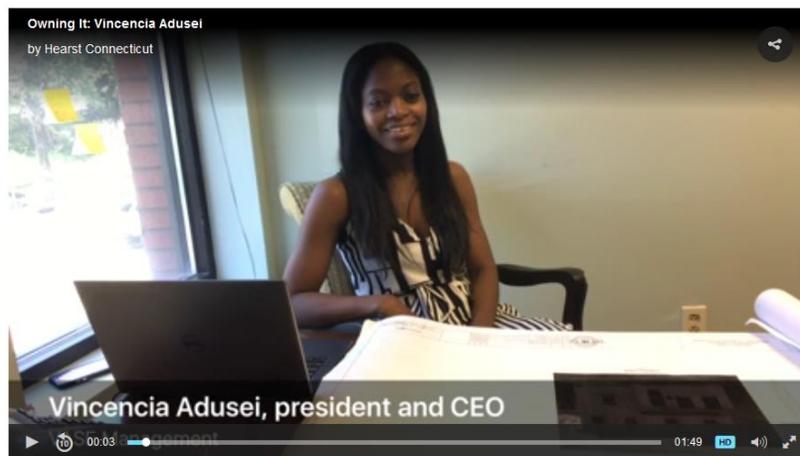
She's in her 30s, she reluctantly acknowledges. She has tried to avoid the question for years because, as a native of the West African nation of Ghana and as a woman running a construction company, the last thing she needs is another reason for people to doubt her.

"When I first started, not that everybody would say it out loud, but it was clear I faced stigma because of all of those things," Adusei said. "When you show up, all eyes are on you at first. When a man shows up, it's business as usual."

At first, Adusei admits she was a bit self-conscious. It didn't help that for years after she arrived as a teenager in New York City her accent was much more pronounced. "People kept asking me, 'What? What?'" she said.

Then, when she started her consulting business, Vase Management, a decade ago, and later the Vase Construction division in Bridgeport, she found herself the only woman in most meetings. This often led to inappropriate comments about her looks or a woman's place in construction.

The comments bothered Adusei, but she said she's too busy to have time to worry about what others think about her.



“I don’t have the luxury of thinking of that,” she said, while sitting in her sparsely decorated office on a recent weekday.

## Family history

On that particular day, she had visited a construction site in Bridgeport by 10 a.m. before changing into a black and white maxi dress, because jeans and boots may be necessary for a construction site but aren't as fitting for a consulting gig. She would later change back into jeans before visiting a second work site in Milford.

A construction zone is where Adusei is most comfortable. The youngest of seven children, she was happiest growing up when her parents, who to this day own a construction company in Ghana specializing in road work, would let her sit in the company pickup truck's bed and go out to a job.

Before starting Vase Management, Adusei, who obtained her business degrees from the University of Bridgeport, planned to stay out of the construction industry. Each of her siblings had also gone into construction in Ghana and she wanted to branch out away from the family business.

An assignment on entrepreneurship during her years at UB led her to legally establish her own company, which she named Vincencia Adusei Special Events, or VASE, due to her interest in event planning.

But she soon found that her passion was in renovation work and vertical construction. "I guess it's in my blood," she said.

One of Adusei's first event planning clients was Fred McKinney, who a decade ago was running the Connecticut Minority Supplier Development Council. When he met her, through a mutual friend, McKinney said he was impressed with her planning skills and her construction knowledge.

He hired her to consult his organization on their plans to host a construction expo. "She did a fabulous job," said McKinney, who is now managing director of minority business programs at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College. "She's sharp. She's tough, too. ... She's not just a young businesswoman. She's a really sharp business person."

## Making connections

Through the construction expo, Adusei met Karen DuBois-Walton, executive director of Elm City Communities, New Haven's housing authority, who hired her to do consulting work — again relating to construction.

McKinney said he wasn't surprised when Adusei expanded into construction management just a few years later, in 2012 and 2013, by earning a contract to oversee the demolition of the Riverside Apartments in Ansonia. "In the process, good entrepreneurs learn where the markets are," he said. "The general contractor has to be a good manager. (Adusei) is a good manager."

Although Adusei, who moved into downtown Bridgeport after falling in love with the city while studying at UB, doesn't do the hands-on work, as head of her own company she is responsible for the dozens of people who work on the 50 or so simultaneous projects that Vase Construction has in the pipeline at any time, from office renovations for clients like Yale University to extensive work on homes affected by Hurricane Sandy.

Adusei said she hopes that in five years, her consulting and construction businesses and a third division — an online membership-based service where subcontractors are matched with general contractors and government entities — will grow enough to warrant a separate department head for each.

This, she said, would finally allow her to stop worrying so much and spend more time — the dreadful winter months, mostly — in her native country, which has warm weather year-round.

### **Personal touch**

Adusei said although she loves her job, it keeps her up most nights. With each job, she tries to give her personal cell number to the homeowner and meet each one before the job begins.

This often leads to calls at midnight from clients or, more often, just her own worrying. “When things aren’t perfect, I can’t sleep,” she said. “I’m not at ease until it’s resolved. ... It’s easier to work hard and keep the clients you have than to get new clients.”

In one recent company meeting, she said, some of her workers criticized her for spending more time setting up a new office in New Haven instead of making herself available to them in Bridgeport. It happened to be a particularly stressful day, said she, and after she dealt with their concerns she felt overwhelmed and frustrated.

“As soon as the last person left the office, I cried,” she said, with no trace of embarrassment. “I don’t know if men do that, but sometimes I just cry.”

Perhaps because of the complexity of her everyday work, Adusei likes things simple in her personal life. She’s the opposite of a hoarder, keeping her office and home sparsely furnished.

In her company’s downtown Bridgeport headquarters, above Joseph’s Steakhouse on Fairfield Avenue, the certificates, degrees and awards hang in the hallways only after she caved in to friends’ insistence that spaces need to be decorated.

Her office, though, is off limits. There are no pictures on her walls. Her desk features only her laptop and office phone. The rest of the room consists of a few rolled-up site plans on the window sill, a refrigerator, table and two chairs.

She recently opened an office in New Haven and plans to move her residence to that city soon, although she will keep her company’s Bridgeport headquarters. She estimates it will take her just two hours to shuffle all of her belongings from her home of a decade in Bridgeport to her new home.

### **Support for women**

Adusei said she’d encourage more women to go into the construction business. She recently joined the board for Fairfield County’s Community Foundation in an effort to help encourage and assist women interested in the field.

“I would like to see more women in the industry,” Adusei said.

Although she has one of few female-led general contractors in the area, Adusei said that with time she is finding that her company’s work can speak for itself.

Now, when people ask for her age, Adusei said she gives them her qualifications and certifications to show Vase Management and Vase Construction are equipped to handle most projects — and, Adusei hopes, major residential and commercial developments someday.

“I have a wall of awards to prove it,” she said. “What do you care how old I am? Do you want to work with me or not?”