



Leadership strategy

Embracing transformation for progress

By Mwangi Wanjumbi

IF YOU DIDN'T know, the heavier you are the more you are a threat to global warming. This is especially so if you travel by air. The more weight you exert on an aircraft, the more carbon dioxide it emits into the air. You must certainly be aware that carbon emissions are the main contributors to global warming, thus posing a great danger to the ozone layer. We should for these reasons certainly embrace holistic measures of ensuring that we are carbon neutral in the medium term. Let us lead by example in transforming the environment for a better future.

But, never mind; this is not the only issue that came to light during a British Council leadership forum whose guest speaker was Titus Naikuni, Chief Executive Officer Kenya Airways. Above all, do you know what it takes to become a transformational leader? Naikuni is cited by many as a good example of a transformational leader. Adoption of transformational leadership style could without doubt create a difference in all spheres of management. But what exactly is it all about?

Transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. One key attribute of

transformational leaders is that they establish long term visions. Notably, vision is a dream and it is not likely for anybody to dream for another. But then, when such CEOs dream, they share with others. They influence others to see things their way. They set off to achieve this or that goal.

Integrity

These leaders create a climate of trust. They treat everybody as a team player in whatever small roles they are playing. As a result these leaders effortlessly and naturally endear themselves to their people. They even empower these people by giving them a free hand to control themselves. Why then do our leaders have a problem or find it difficult embracing transformational leadership?

In Naikuni's view, transformational leadership style calls for great integrity. "You must first and foremost respect yourself. Your guiding principle should be honesty in whatever you do. When you are honest the people below you will trust you. You will easily and naturally influence them. They may even see you as their mentor," he intimated. Apparently, the two attributes are part of the seven pillars of leadership character.

"Simplicity is another value that many take for granted. Forget about huge titles following you all over;

some right from your parking bay all the way to your office," said Naikuni.

Incidentally, some bosses even have their own exclusive pathways. Could some of these titles be extra baggage? Yes indeed, they may sometimes make you as the boss seem to be un-natural, such that nobody would want to be like you. To that extent they become liabilities. The end result is natural loss of the power to influence others.

Your commitment to a cause, duty or whatever you endeavor to do is on the other hand a huge asset when it comes to influencing others. Staff will strive to be like you especially in performance of their different roles. The end result is full commitment to the organization by all. It is imperative however, that once you decide to embrace integrity, a natural expectation for all leaders, go all the way. "There should be no favouritism in employment, tendering system and any other situations that frequently fall into this trap," added Naikuni.

In the meantime, it looks like we need to understand the cultural attributes of high versus low power distance as fronted by Gheete Hofstede. According to this culture expert, power distance relates to the extent to which the led and the leader are close or far from each other. Notably, the closer the interactions with wielders of power and those that are led, then the lower the power distance. Simplicity of power structures is also an indicator of low power distance. Americans for example have a very low power distance especially in the workplace. They interact easily and freely at work. They refer to one another by first name irrespective of seniority. They mostly operate from open offices. How does this compare to our African situation?

Ivory tower CEOs

Sadly, most operate from ivory towers in form of offices, making bosses to be seemingly beyond reach most of the times. In many cases, one would have to go through many stages to ever reach or interact with the CEO. In most work situations, it perhaps only happens during Christmas parties, or



other isolated official functions. When will the CEO then have a chance to personally influence the driver, the

office assistant, receptionist and even many of those directly below him in this high power distance situation?

Apparently, Kenyans who are well known for copying and pasting from one another in many day to day attributes should borrow a leaf from Titus Naikuni. They should actually benchmark some of the leadership attributes from this CEO. In fact, if I had my way I would implore upon Kenyans to copy and paste and largely adopt at the minimum, the leadership attributes as espoused by Naikuni.

We need to be transformational in our approach towards management and leadership right from our own personal situations. That is the only way we can successively manage changing circumstances in our various facets in life. We will along the way transform our lives, businesses and even our country progressively. ■

Mwangi Wanjumbi is a Management/Entrepreneurship trainer and strategist based in Nairobi

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