

# Why every COYA participant is a winner

*Mwangi Wanjumbi tells you why participating in COYA is worth the effort*

I AM SEATED in the fancy boardroom of a service company asking senior managers questions about the organizations marketing and human resource plans. One of the managers has just taken us through a detailed presentation and my colleagues have been busy jotting notes. This scenario is familiar as it is repeated in several companies that participate in COYA every year.

The climax of the COYA process is the gala night where companies are publicly recognized and awarded. As much as getting the coveted awards is the icing on the cake, for those companies that do not get awards, they do not go home empty handed either. The COYA process is similar to refining gold where the procedure must be done precisely and methodically so that the end product is pure. The objective of COYA is to ensure the organization has the best management practices and standards. The winners will tell you, they too have a few things to polish up.

Whether a blue chip company, medium or small enterprise, in COYA, company size or the number of employees does not matter. The principles of management do not discriminate between big and small businesses. The main difference between the two is organizational culture and resource base. Differences in organizational culture occur because every organization has its own norms, values and way of doing things while differences in resource base occur because management is about manipulation of organizational resources with the main aim of achieving desired objectives. The stronger the resource base, the easier the chances of achieving these desired objectives,

but then the harder it is to manipulate those resources. At the end of the day, COYA assessments look into how these resources are managed in: big, medium and small companies. The assessment parameters for all companies in the manufacturing and service sectors are



Brookside Dairies team poses with the Supplies Chain Management Award during the COYA gala night, 2007

similar. Nevertheless, each category poses different challenges to the consultants making every experience unique in its own way.

## Intense assessments

The assessments are normally very intense and sometimes managers are concerned about the amount of time spent in discussions. During one of the assessments, the directors of one company said their schedules were very tight and it would be very difficult to get all the managers in one sitting. We then agreed that each departmental head would meet the assessors then return to work - to save on time. However, as the managers came in one by one, they did not return to their offices. Instead, they sat and listened to the discussions with the other managers. Finally, almost the whole team had assembled and it became a learning session for all. The consultants were learning about the company while the company was learning about good management practices in each sector of its business operations. At the end of the session, the managers realized they were not

prepared for the awards but were very grateful for the lessons learnt. This demonstrates how interesting participating in COYA can be especially for first timers.

The COYA process is a holistic approach to application of best management practices in organizations. The practices are dynamic in nature as they change with evolving circumstances. A few years back, company chief managers and departmental heads would have an out of town retreat every five years to work on what was seemingly a static five year development plan. Strategic plans today are very different, they may be for five years alright but then, never static. The plans are regularly modified to take into account the changing operational environment.

COYA has assessment tools that recognize changing circumstances in all organizational dimensions. This makes the process practical and realistic to local (Kenyan) circumstances. The COYA evaluation process is modified annually to factor in the dynamic business environment like: consumer trends, technology, government policies and political climate, geographical factors, economic trends and more prominently, competition. After discussions, COYA participants get a detailed report about the organization and how other participants have entrenched best management practices. This report card helps companies improve their strengths and minimise on their weaknesses.

Participating in COYA is certainly worth the effort. There are no losses but gains. There you go, see you in COYA 2008! **M**

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