

Leadership in a different league

Global leadership is about inspiring, aligning people and establishing direction

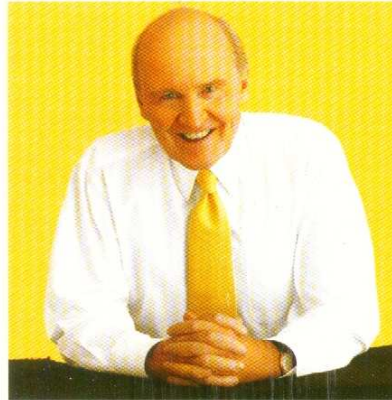
By Mwangi Wanjumbi

THE GOOD BOOK says we shall eat what we sow, however, the opposite is the norm - we often eat where we have not sown. Mugo Kibati, Chief Executive Officer East African Cables and one of the 2008 young global leaders calls it "eating what you have not killed."

During a Kenya Institute of Management Public Lecture held last month, Kibati gave an inspiring presentation on what it takes to be a global corporate leader. Kibati highlighted several issues that are important in leadership: benchmarking, inspiring change, integrity, people and balance.

Graft as it is officially known is a big issue in Kenya. You can also call it corruption or sleaze. It simply means acquiring benefits from no efforts at all. More often than not, the benefits involve accumulation of wealth which cannot be legally or ethically accounted for. Why is this phenomenon so entrenched in our country? The answer is simple and precise.

It is without doubt poor leadership, starts from the national level flowing all the way to the organizational and finally individual level. It does not matter whether big or small organizations. Big organizations outsource corruption from small organizations or individuals. This is so because results have to be achieved which must reflect improved share holder value. Nevertheless, this sleaze monster is certainly feared. It is no wonder that walking around the city, you are likely to notice huge billboards or sign boards inscribed "this is a non corruption building (or



Jack Welch, former Chairman and CEO of General Electric. He is a highly-regarded figure in business circles due to his innovative management strategies and leadership style

zone)." Sometimes that is the best and only effort of fighting corruption in the organizations concerned. This is seemingly a situation of shadow boxing corruption. Why is this so?

Fighting corruption requires structures and systems which not only prevent it from happening but also provide punitive measures whenever it happens. Billboards and suggestion boxes for reporting corruption on their own cannot do much in addressing this monster. How then does poor leadership contribute to this menace? Even without going into intricate leadership lessons, we must realize that lack of integrity; poor performance standards coupled with poor work ethics contribute greatly to this scenario. To this, we should add limited global leadership knowledge or thinking amongst ourselves.

Integrity is one of the seven pillars of leadership character. It involves being truthful to ourselves and to

others. That way, we can effortlessly influence others to do as we do. It should be noted here that influencing is a great tool of leadership. In reality however, most people especially those in leadership positions are incurable liars, even to themselves. Such people cannot be expected to inculcate the value of honesty in their followers.

Poor standards of performance are another great undoing to leadership in whatever you do. There is no attention to detail whatsoever. This is so because most people are able to manipulate their way out of mediocrity. Even where performance standards are set particularly in the government, no attempts are made to reinforce the requisite performance. Notably, poor quality goods and services are not sustainable for long anywhere. Their market eventually diminishes leading to all manner of manipulations to ensure continuity which again must naturally come to an end.

Poor work ethics is on the other hand a great undoing in our society. Americans for example have well developed work ethics. People are known by what they do for a profession, a trade or occupation. In our society, people are mostly known by what they have/own. What they do or how they acquire what they have is irrelevant in our circumstances. In simple terms we can say that people live not to work but to acquire wealth. And the faster, the better. No wonder an incurable disease called "grabiosis" struck us many years ago. Others were bitten by the corruption bug. Many are therefore

suffering in one way or the other. Can these societal imbalances in our country be cured through leadership? Yes, they can.

Global thinking is one major step that would address some of our ills as advocated by Kibati. We must learn what others are doing outside Kenya's geographical borders. We must benchmark from the rest and apply what they are doing to our own circumstances. We need not be globe trotters to do that. We only need to adopt a culture of learning what is happening out there, through reading. We must read books and literature about the world. Let us learn how the World's richest men like Warren Buffet acquire their wealth. Apparently, none of them gets rich through corruption. They get rich as they help others to become rich too.

Let us learn what fortunate 500 companies are doing and even how the

developed countries have managed to overcome their problems. Let us learn how to take bold decisions which may seem risky today but which will have great payoffs in the future. A great example is borrowing to develop our infrastructure. Let us be visionary- we must work towards achieving cherished goals and dreams.

Let us be creative and therefore stop copying one another. Through this we can overcome the scarcity mentality. This mentality entails rushing into doing the same things, the same businesses sometimes elbowing one another into irrelevance, as if there is not enough for everybody. Let us be tenacious. We must stay on the course in whatever we do. We must patiently but aggressively pursue the rewards of our efforts. Doing this persistently will ensure that we reap from where we sow or eating what we kill to quote Kibati. Apparently, this

could gradually push the corruption monster into irrelevance.

Meanwhile, we should all take the initiative of implementing those bold steps. We should not wait to be instructed by anybody, not Condi Rice, not Kofi Annan, not our political leaders or even our bosses at work. We will in any case eventually be responsible for our own destiny. Let us strive to be global leaders even from humble beginnings. Small beginnings eventually lead to big endings. In fact, grab leadership by becoming the best in whatever you are doing today. In any case, leadership can never be handed over to you. Without doubt, you must earn it. **M**

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What it takes to be a global corporate leader

By Mugo Kibati

1. Be a leader who motivates and inspires people
2. Go beyond staffing to aligning people according to their competences, talent and drive
3. Establish direction by planning and budgeting
4. Benchmark against global standards. Work to be as good or better than your peers by comparing your company with the best in the world
5. Sharpen your soft skills - Keeness to detail, be productive without wastage, have initiative and integrity
6. Be technologically savvy - let technology work for you
7. Inspire change with both a sense of urgency and a passion: Show urgency, develop great passionate teams, have a clear and compelling vision, help people see that changes are beneficial and stay the course
8. Be a person of integrity - Consistently, generate confidence, be willing to admit mistakes. eat what you kill
9. Work with people who buy into the company's vision and take ownership, who are smart. Give your employees freedom to maneuver and give them room to fail - only once
10. Create a balance - Be patient to develop people who share your vision and be impatient with procrastination. Cut the Gordian knot.
11. Get global exposure - Travel, read widely and talk to resourceful people
12. Be open minded to new ideas and be willing to discard hardline positions
13. Believe in the abundance mentality - You benefit when others also benefit. There is enough for all of us

KIM Public Lectures

These are monthly talks organized by the Institute where leaders from various sectors of the economy give presentations on various topics. The event is open to all KIM members and the public. Lectures are free of charge. For a copy of the presentation by Mugo Kibati and information about the next public lecture, news and events, log on to: www.kim.ac.ke

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