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## Questioning could lead to growth and progress December 21, 2011

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One recent evening, our daughter who is a legal scholar came home from her daily routines wearing an unusually broad smile. Right at the door, one could easily tell that she was excited about something, which we were all eager to unearth.

Luckily, she did not keep us in suspense for long, as she quickly shared her experience. “In the mats (matatu), I was sitting near a lady who was accompanied by her young son of about three years. I was attracted by the innocent but numerous questions that the young boy kept asking his mother. The same (giving examples) were based on what he was observing, both within and outside the mats. You could actually read some frustration in the mother’s mind as she was kept busy by her overly inquisitive son. Mom and dad! Did I use to ask such questions when I was that age?” Our daughter enquired enthusiastically.

Though there was no immediate answer, the enquiry prompted long laughter amongst us. Nonetheless, the same brings to mind something that happened on Jamhuri Day. The Business acumen or entrepreneurship spirit of Samuel Macharia, Chairman of Royal Media Services was finally recognised through award of a national medal.

To crown it all, Samuel Macharia earned an Honorary Doctorate degree from Kenyatta University, at about the same time. Notably, he did not have to sweat it out in class. Naturally, the recognitions must be befitting for one whose business leadership is being felt within East and Central African as well as Southern African region, where the Royal Media has already established its presence.

Many others were equally recognised but that of Samuel Macharia stands out. Those who may have been keen could remember Samuel Macharia fighting many business battles, which seemed to have political undertones, especially during the previous regime. As a diehard entrepreneur, he refused to be cowed by the numerous challenges. Most likely, that is the endurance that has led to the success that he has now been recognized for. Obviously, he has without doubt questioned his way to greatness.

Ideally, there can be no progress anywhere without questioning the viability of existing processes especially in light of continuing change. There is persistent need for seeking improvement alternatives. Never mind that in our society, there is a tendency of those who question to greatness, to be initially labeled as controversial especially by sections of the media. Apparently,

that is common in collective societies where everybody seems to emulate and sometimes even think as everybody else.

Perhaps, it may be consoling to realise that even the Son of The Most High prayed for forgiveness of those who were tormenting Him – yes “forgive them for they know not what they are doing,” He pleaded. Where then and when does one start the questioning process? The least that one can do is to engage in self questioning as a guide towards continued progress. More appropriately, we may all need to learn the Socratic wisdom of bringing change and progress.

Socrates, a Greek Philosopher of yore, taught the ordinary citizenry how to bring progress through the process of questioning. The same is in academics now known as the heuristics or H and 5 Ws. Though Socrates was for his teachings, sentenced to death through poisoning, his spirit never died. Actually, it is advisable for anybody to use these heuristics, whenever seemingly in a cul-de-sac. Why say this?

The heuristics present us with easy tools of unlocking the creative thinking process that is inevitable for each of us, especially in a dynamic world. These tools become handy particularly with regard to innovatively managing business or careers. The same prevent (or could prevent) us from falling into sometimes dangerous complacencies, both as individuals and organizations.

In fact, the tools are very appropriate whenever dealing with forces of change. The forces are today addressed through what is commonly referred to as business strategy. The strategies borrow from the art of war, which was hardy in the world wars of the 20th Century. When the world gained peace following the end of the Second World War, it was realised that the war strategies could help in addressing forces of competition, especially in business. Why not?

The competition presents situations where one has no alternative but to seek ways of sometimes literally fighting for continued survival. The better alternative is achieving the much desired maintenance and continued uptake of the market share. And since these feats are not always mean achievements, it is a welcome move to recognize and reward those who have questioned their way to success, either as individuals or even organisations.

Indeed, the citizenry need to associate with such role models who may eventually inspire emergence of critical masses of others that may fight to achieve new levels of growth and development. Consequently, no progress oriented person should ever fear being labeled as controversial just because of questioning behavior and excesses of organizations and other societal structures.

It is only through the questioning process that progress can be achieved in any situation. Therefore, learning to question for those who don't could be a fundamental personal strength especially in the New Year and beyond. Ultimately, “the difference between what we are doing and what we are capable of doing would solve most of the world's problems,” Mahatma Gadhi.

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