

Employers “failing” training test

By Mwangi Wajumbi

Some employers religiously remit their monthly statutory training levy but never take advantage of the requisite benefits. Sadly, it is not out of ignorance for some, but rather seemingly a deliberate effort to suppress the personal development of their employees. Unknown to them however, these companies fail to add value not only to themselves but also the entire economy. The same firms also miss out on growth opportunities. This came out clearly during one of the stakeholders meeting conducted by the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT), which took place at City Hall last year.

One disturbing case is that of Deborah who has been begging her employer to use the DIT managed training levy to help her improve her skills. The employer has so far done nothing not only about Deborah's request but also those others made by other progress-oriented employees. According to Deborah, it is not clear why the employer persistently turns a deaf ear on such requests.

In fact, one wonders why some employers just decide to withhold training of their staff. Inquiries, however, indicate that some of them fear the chance of losing good employees, once they become more skillful and competitive. They somehow forget that the competitiveness initially benefits the immediate employment situation. This makes the benefiting employer work out ways and means of retaining these competitive employees. During the time that a company retains competitive employees, it also maintains competitiveness in the market. It follows therefore that a company is as competitive as its workforce.

Another excuse given by training-shy employers is that of budgetary constraints. Training is certainly one of the first budget



Technical students at a training workshop.

items to be revisited by most employers, particularly during lean times. In fact, when economic factors are unfavourable, the training budget is cancelled almost instantly. Tom Holden in his book titled *“Training Needs Analysis”* states that when the business environment is unfavourable, it is time to strategize on the next course of action. If knowledge or understanding of the prevailing situation is challenged, and training is not embraced, there could be sure signs of trouble.

It is sad therefore for companies to continually withhold training and development of employees, especially in an era where the Government is doing everything possible to encourage development of a knowledge-based economy. To that extent, the director can be forgiven, for having advised Deborah to immediately sever links with her current employer and seek opportunities with progress-oriented employers.

Meanwhile, achievement of Vision 2030, which is geared towards making Kenya a middle-income country, will be through embracing this inevitable knowledge as was eloquently espoused by the Director of Industrial Training, during the said stakeholders' meeting. No employer should therefore be left behind in not only improving employee skills but also improving their attitudes.

Impact of training: Notably, focused and properly conducted training not only improves behaviour and therefore culture in the work place, but also performance

skills and attitudes of the employees. That is why the Government has been keen in the promotion of the training vocation into a profession. This will indeed enhance the chances of not only self regulation of trainers but also encourage high standards of workplace training. In that regard, it is worthwhile noting that the Government through DIT has keenly supported the take off of the Professional Trainer's Association of Kenya (PTAK) which is now officially recognized as the key driver of workplace training in Kenya.

In the meantime, the business environment continually keeps changing. This is as a result of the ever dynamic technological developments, especially in the case of information and communication technology-oriented businesses.

Mobile telephony business is, for example, highly affected by technological changes. Manufacturing equipment and technology in the industrial sector also keeps on being updated. Even consumer behaviour keeps changing in line with economic factors and social cultural trends.

Government regulations, on the other hand, keep changing to address changing needs. Some employers have even now yet to come to terms with new regulations, such as the extended maternity leave for working mothers, coupled with the newly introduced paternity leave for employed husbands.

Even the recent budgetary provisions brought to a halt the exportation of scrap metal, making some businesses to instantly glide to a halt. On the other hand, stiff competition in a dynamic economy, calls for continually improving skills geared towards customer retention, thus maintaining, if not increasing, the market share of future-oriented businesses. Social cultural changes experienced by complex consumers who keep changing patterns and behaviour should also be clearly understood by the investing public and activate institutions.