

Dealing with conceited new employee drains my energy

'Listen Jose, some guys cannot deal with someone who is smart, young and on the upward move like me,' says Salim

OFFICE DANDY

MAN - ABOUT - TOWN

Despite the fact that I sometimes drink too much, issue bouncing cheques, and think murderous thoughts regarding family and friends, deep down I am a good and decent human being.

This is mainly and only because my mother raised me well — with the cane in hand and the word and fear of God in the other. She was always going on about being my brother's keeper (I guess it was her way of making sure I watched over my siblings).

I have been battling with whether to let my inner morality reign when it comes to dealing with a new colleague.

There is this bloke who goes by the name Salim. He has joined us as business development manager. The only reason I gave him a hearing was because he claimed to have been a year behind me at college.

However, his CV indicates that he has done more job-hopping than I have and from the way he dresses and talks, I think he has made way more money than I have. It is clear that this guy rates

himself too highly — as an employee and as a person. Since he joined our organisation two months ago, he has been using all manner of tricks to get noticed.

At the very first meeting, Salim could not keep his mouth shut. Instead of sitting back and waiting to learn, he kept interrupting others to make his opinion heard. Most of the time his so-called opinions were just an excuse for him to brag. He kept going on and on about projects he had worked on, people he had met and ideas that he had. At a certain point, I was tempted to tell him to shut up.

The other day, I heard Peninah talking about the way Salim treats her, as if she is his house-help. She said he likes to send her over to pick some cappuccino and health juice blends from a café around the corner.

To make matters worse, the man never tips her. He does not offer to buy her even a slice of bread. Does this guy understand that tea girls and messengers have been known to end very long and distinguished careers?

Stories are already flying around the office about how annoying and obnoxious he often is.

I am sitting in the office wondering whether I should have a big brother

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Salim says all sentiments against him are fuelled by jealousy.

chat with this bloke, when he strides in. Instead of giving me a handshake, he makes an attempt at giving me a

macho hug. I politely decline because I do not want to be caught in any form of embrace with the most unpopular

employee. The guy moves on, clearly oblivious of the negative vibes that I am furiously emitting.

He goes on chatting about how well connected he is. He starts name-dropping, popping up names of powerful men and women who are, in his words, "bosom buddies." Finally, he gets to the reason for his visit.

Hard times

Salim says that he can save the company lots of money, especially in these hard times. He says he has noticed that we are being ripped off by stationary suppliers and those who do catering for our canteen.

I can almost predict where this conversation is heading. He puts forward two business cards for some guys who, he says, are "simply the best in the industry." He says I should try them since they are good for us.

He forgets to add that it is also good for him since it is obvious that the guys are his buddies. At this point, I cannot hold it any longer. I decide to tell Salim exactly what I and other employees think of him. I tell him that his proposition indicates that he has integrity issues.

I tell him that he is too abrasive, is self-obsessed and only a handful of people like him. He says that all the sentiments (mine and those of others) have been fuelled by jealousy. "Listen Jose, some guys cannot deal with someone who is smart, young and on the upward move like me." I cannot believe my ears as he says, "I am not changing a thing, whoever cannot hack it *ajipange*." With that he strides out of my office.

Forget politics of maize, we are yet to exploit the full potential of the crop



RICKY'S MYTHS

RICHARD GITONGA



Over the past couple of months the country has focused on maize due to the intrigues surrounding the harvesting, storage, delivery and marketing of the crop.

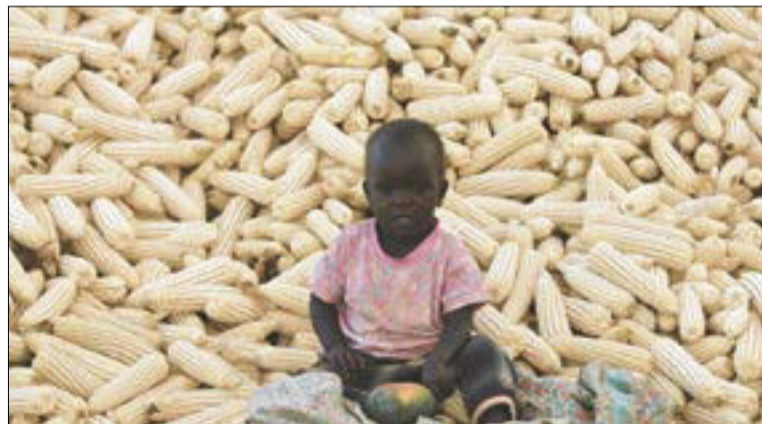
However, few of us have probably stopped to reflect on the importance of this crop in our daily lives. To some, maize is simply the source of our staple food, ugali. To others, it is the roasted snack that is eaten during the work day to keep the weary body nourished. To others still, it is a source of fermented alcoholic brews that provide temporary reprieve from daily struggles.

The maize story started centuries ago in the Americas where native American Indians domesticated the plant for consumption and sustenance. Today, the maize plant is grown all over the world with the United States lead-

ing in annual production at 332 tonnes, and China at over 150 tonnes. Ostensibly, our country's total annual output is in the single digit range. Over 90 per cent of local maize production is used for domestic consumption.

Looking at the wider context of the maize universe, this crop probably has a greater impact in our daily lives than we would care to consider. It is the staple in the country and thousands of farmers depend on it for their livelihood.

It is also a main source of fodder for dairy and beef cattle, which has an impact on milk yields and other dairy output. It is a key input in the fermentation process of traditional alcoholic brands. The maize story, however, cannot be simply looked at from the domestic economy alone. That would



Food industries rely on maize kernel extracts as key inputs in their production processes. FILE

trivialise its importance in modern economics and industry. As we may be all aware, it is the key ingredient in the production of cooking oil, called corn oil in some quarters. Our largest food based industries rely on maize kernel extracts as key inputs in their production processes.

Key ingredient

For those who may not be aware, it may also come as a surprise to you that since the 1980's, virtually all sodas and fruit drinks sold in supermarkets have been sweetened with high-fructose corn-syr-

up. Grab a beer and you will be drinking some brands that are primarily made from alcohol fermented from glucose refined from maize. Looking through the ingredients of many items on our supermarket shelves, it will be interesting to note that corn starch, which is a derivative of maize, is used as a key ingredient in hundreds of items including coffee sweeteners, ketchup, soups, snacks, cake mixes, syrups and hot sources.

It is also used in margarines, shortening, salad dressings and relishes. You may be surprised that it is used in non-

food items as well such as toothpaste and cosmetics, disposable diapers, cleaners, right down to the shine on the cover of the magazine that catches our eye at the checkout counter.

Starch from maize can also be made into plastics, fabrics, adhesives and other chemical products. Maize has extended its reach beyond the nourishment of our bodies.

Fossil fuels

It is increasingly used as a biomass fuel, such as ethanol, which is increasingly being researched as an innovative and alternative way of reducing dependence on fossil fuels, which have become relatively costly. Ethanol is also used in low concentrations as an additive in gasoline for motor fuels.

We are what we eat. Any kind of knowledge gives a certain amount of power. Knowledge of details has served in many a crisis. Knowledge of details has also often caught an error before it became a catastrophe. Within this context, let's not trivialise the issue of maize in this country, bearing in mind the important role it plays in our sustenance.

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