

How leaders' insecurity begets 'big dog' management syndrome

Over the past week I had the opportunity to meet an acquaintance at a private business function hosted by his employer. He had been with this leading local organisation for six months at a senior management level and as far as I was aware, he had a great future with the company.

However, to my great surprise and bewilderment, he indicated that he was planning to leave the organisation as he felt that he did not "fit" in with the existing culture.

Over and above this, he felt that the department that he had been brought in to set up needed more time to get established and start delivering results.

This situation is all too common place in our local corporate scene, but my acquaintance's scenario was somewhat unique in that he was apparently very excited when he first joined the organisation in question and felt at one and in sync with the company's vision and mission. However, disillusionment



RICKY'S MYTHS
RICHARD GITONGA



soon set in when he realised that there were other underlying subtle factors that would play a significant role on whether he survived or thrived.

When the excitement had worn off and reality checked in, he began to discover an underlying unity within the organisation in a set of phenomena that initially seemed completely separate.

Having been hired from an organisation where department camaraderie and bonding was paramount to performance, he walked into this company with the same mind set.

To his chagrin, colleagues in the department had no concept of "oneness"

and their loyalties within the organisation were directed at other centres of power and influence.

It started becoming apparent that he was an outsider when he failed to be invited to the launch a critical product.

Those who had been invited to the function were hand-picked across different layers of the organisation, and from a casual observer's point in view, they did not have any mandate to attend the function due to their specific responsibilities.

At this point, whatever blurred vision my acquaintance may have had, became quite clear when he realised

that the CEO preferred to have "loyal lieutenants" around him rather than independently minded corporate achievers.

Though he had a personal hand in hiring the achievers, he preferred keeping them at arms length in daily dealings. Word has it that other high flyers have since left the organisation to pursue career opportunities elsewhere.

Leadership lessons

As far as leadership lessons go, the CEO in question has failed to build a sense of community within the organisation, which ideally should have helped overcome the pervasive sense of alienation and distrust so prevalent in the contemporary workplace.

After rounds of layoffs and management lies, people feel that they have to watch their backs. This vigilance is both psychologically tiring and stressful.

With this state of affairs, it is no wonder that many corporate types are facing roller coaster lifestyles of alcohol abuse, diminished life and job satisfaction, exhaustion, depression and physical ailments.

Due to the insecurity of some business leaders, they have taken the stance of a "big dog" syndrome where the largest dog in the pack prefers to share his space with the smallest dogs

in the kennel. As human beings, our ability to imitate the behaviour across the rest of the mammalian kingdom is quite profound. A leader's job should be to reduce uncertainty, not create it, for those around him or her, and to project confidence that the task ahead is doable.

In this regard, managing companies as communities is effective for several reasons. First of all, people are essentially social, affiliative creatures who enjoy being with others.

That apparently is one of the reasons that prisoner-of-war interrogation often entails social isolation and why social ostracism is such a severe penalty at institutions such as military schools.

Making sure that people's natural social inclinations are nurtured by the organisation's basic management practices is simply consistent with fundamental human psychology.

All in all, I am seriously considering reviewing my small portfolio of stocks by taking a keener look at the leaders at the helm of listed companies at the bourse. This scrutiny may well be the magic required to make long term gains in the unpredictable capital markets.

You can blog this article at www.elimishaonline.com