

## Life: Weekender

# Josphat tries to worm his way up the rungs by pleasing the boss

As he kow-tows to authority, yours truly goes in quest of a few more university papers to boost his chances of promotion

The acting CEO is really on a roll to prove that he is the head of this organisation. Every morning he sends us what he says is his "Rev-up" email. He said he thinks it is his job to get us up and running with positive managerial thoughts and tips.

Yesterday, he sent something about how successful employees are the ones who do not quit. Today it was an anecdote from Peter Drucker about enhancing team spirit.

Ordinarily, I would delete these messages without giving a second thought but I must remember that I am on a mission to please the new boss. I am cramming all these quotes so that when I next bump into the guy, I will have fodder for conversation. I cannot believe just how much time I spend figuring out what the boss is thinking and how to please him.

Today, I am busy filling out some forms for a university evening course. I have decided that I must gain additional papers if I want to get anywhere in life. I have also noticed that all the new recruits to this company all seem to have zillions of papers. Many of them

## OFFICE DANDY

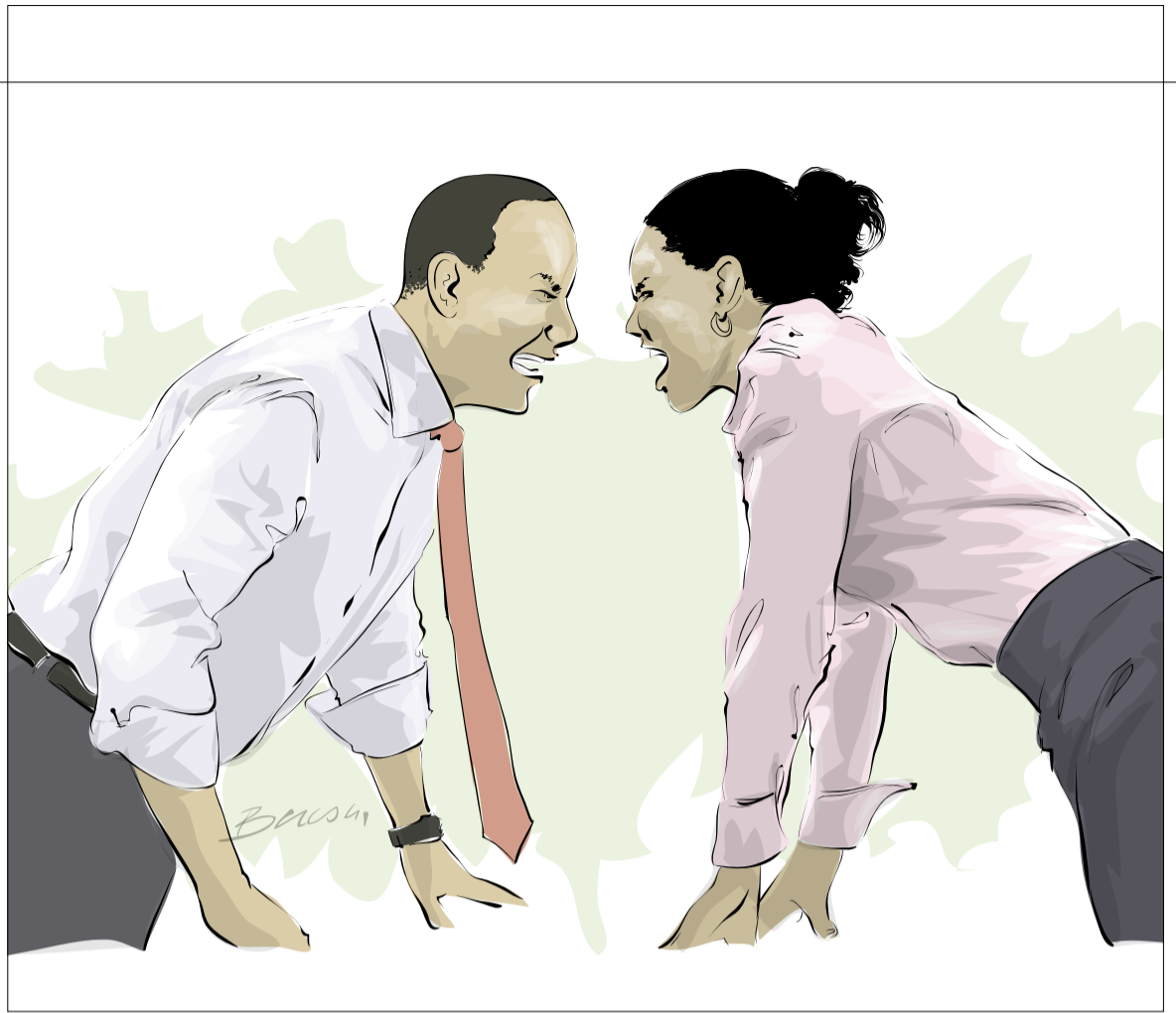
MAN - ABOUT - TOWN

are not yet even 25 years old, but they have bachelors, masters, ACCAs, CFAs the works. After a lot of consultation with many of my colleagues in and outside the office, I have opted to take an MBA in strategic management. Already, the title sounds lofty. I also had extensive discussions regarding price options, and which "uni" demands lot of course work and assignments.

Better still, which has flexible and accommodating lecturers. Some guy in the customer care department had proposed that I study via correspondence from a college in the UK.

For a moment I had thought that a course from the UK could improve my prestige ranking. However, when I noticed that I was expected to pay in Sterling and what the resultant damage would be to my pay cheque, I just gave up that plan.

As things stand, I have decided to take yet another loan but this time from the Sacco. I have been making



I am required to sit in almost all manner of meetings where I spend half the time arguing with colleagues.

good progress with the loan repayments for the Beast. Short of starving myself and living out in the open, there is absolutely no way I would be able to pay for further education—so loan it has to be.

Once I get the final bill from the university, I will march to the Sacco to get sorted out. I am sure my pal Musa will not be amused to learn that I have disregarded his opinion and advice on the purchase of land. But right now, I want more money so that I can buy some real prime land and upgrade my car to something more serious.

In the meantime, my workload has just been growing day by day. Nowa-

days, I am required to sit in almost all manner of meetings and offer what I have been told is the procurement point of view. The problem is that in most meetings, very few people are willing to listen to my point of view. They think that I exist to make their life totally miserable.

They refuse to accept that my job description revolved around ensuring that procedures are totally adhered to. Half of these meetings are spent with me arguing with the rest of my colleagues. The other half is spent listening to the trading of gossip and insider information that my workmates always seem to have.

Thanks to these meetings I now know who is up for firing, who is rising and who is going down. I hate these meetings, I truly do, but I have realised that office gossip keeps the corporate world moving. As I am shutting down my computer, an email from the Acting CEO's PA comes through. As usual, my heart has not become accustomed to receiving such mail from the top guys. I read the mail hurriedly with my heart pounding.

In the email, the lady tells me that her boss wants to see me first thing tomorrow. All I can think of as I leave is why would he want to see me and what have I done?

# How to avoid cost-cutting measures that can't work



RICKY'S MYTHS

RICHARD GITONGA



A couple of years ago, a leading multinational organisation that I was working with was undergoing a rough financial performance patch and a memo was sent out by the global CEO requesting all operating units around the world to stabilise revenue growth, manage and adjust costs downwards, and motivate and retain key staff who had started leaving in droves for greener pastures.

The CEO, who was known to be more of a man of action than of planning, immediately launched an internal cost rationalisation programme with the sole objective of ensuring the company's profit margins were maintained.

His first initiative that was on top of his cost rationalisation agenda was to reduce the amount of money spent on tea and other condiments. To demonstrate his commitment to the whole affair, he immediately ordered the cancellation of tea deliveries to his office and obliged his visitors to be content with a glass of water. Other seemingly ambitious cost-cutting measures that he initiated included increasing scrutiny on how junior managers like I were utilising the company cars and what travel allowance we claimed during our out of station business trips.

Without a doubt, these initiatives were in every regard well meaning. However, despite all the effort and



Several months later, we were back to being served with tea and 'mandazi'. REUTERS

energy expended, the impact of these reforms turned out to be minimal. Several months later, we were back to being served with *mandazi* and *samosas*, washing them down with large cups of over-sweetened tea. The CFO should have pointed out to the CEO at the onset that the cost of serving beverages and snacks was of no consequence to the bottom line. If anything, it served as a motiva-

To demonstrate his commitment, he ordered the cancellation of tea deliveries to his office

tional tool for staff. With some prudent and smart advice from his lieutenants, the CEO would probably have taken a different pathway to achieve the same objective.

For starters, he could have called the company's bankers and requested them to consider reviewing the interest rate charge on the company's outstanding loan and overdraft facilities. Assuming the interest rate charged was somewhere around 22 per cent at the time, reducing it to

around 20 per cent would have had a significant saving bearing in mind that a two per cent saving would have been a substantial sum when looked at in absolute terms.

Alternatively, he may have considered reviewing the lease arrangements the company had with vehicle dealers for the large car pool that was primarily used by the sales and marketing teams. Most of the cars, which happened to be higher end brands, were purchased new from the show room and were used by several staff to show-off their new found social status. It may have been prudent to consider getting into a lease arrangement instead. The company consistently incurred a large monthly bill in communication costs and was always in dispute with telephony and Internet service providers.

Presumably, he may have considered getting everybody connected to a virtual private network that would ensure that all calls and other communications within this private company network would be heavily subsidized and calls outside the network would be tracked and recorded. There were probably numerous other avenues, both direct and indirect, such as rationalizing health insurance plans with a view to reducing identity theft and double medical billing.