

Kiswahili is top on my orientation list in Mombasa

I have decided the only way to learn the language is to use it as often as I can

I am slowly becoming a coastal resident and I am loving it. To begin with, I have finally found a house that is not too far from the office. My household goods from Nairobi have been in storage for the last two months and I am so glad to finally have them out of that space.

The house that I moved to is way too big for me

(three bedrooms) at the same price that I paid for my bedsitter in Nairobi. Once my stuff was moved into this house, I realised that I do not have much of earthly possessions.

My sitting room looks rather empty since all that is there is my television set, the music system and two plastic chairs.

Only the master bedroom has any sort of furniture and even then – my bed only occupies a tenth of the entire bedroom. Even my clothes look minimal since the wardrobes are so huge.

MAN-ABOUT-TOWN OFFICE DANDY

For the first time in my life, I can say that I have too much space and very little to do with it.

I have also decided to make a drastic decision and sell The Beast. It doesn't make sense for me to keep it since I walk to the office and I am yet to get who I need to impress with a car. Just last week, I called the bank and informed them about my intention to sell the car (since they still hold the log book).

They really gave me a hard time about it, one would think I want to trade in body parts. My bank manager read me the riot act telling me that by selling the car, I would attract all manner of charges and costs. I really do not care at this point in time all I want is to sell my car and get on with my cost-saving life.

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Slowly, I am becoming a coastal and now with my core business team, we are preparing to host the CEO.

I have also made some headway in the Kiswahili department- or so I think. I have decided that the only way for me to learn the language is to use it as often as I can in every way possible. That has meant speaking to my workmates and every one I encounter in the language.

There are times when my mother-tongue gets in the way, causing me to utter words that leave my audience baffled and without any understanding of my intentions. I have refused to get discouraged and so I am soldiering on in my quest to learn the Kiswahili language.

My learning on the dynamics of working outside the head office is also going on very well. I have become

very elastic in mastering HR, finance and even security issues. Every week, I am required to email a status report to the Nairobi guys, telling them about what is happening on the ground. Many times, I try to make it sound as exciting as possible though in all honesty not much really happens this side of town. It seems my reports are working for I have received some very interesting feedback from the HR Team.

Just this morning, I received one saying that the CEO will be visiting the Mombasa office. According to the email, the man wants to get a first-hand view of the operations here and I am supposed to come up with a programme.

Therefore, I summon what I call

my CBT (core business team) – I read somewhere that such names are great for building group morale. Summoning all the Kiswahili I can, I decide to explain to my colleagues about the CEO visit.

Sufficiently equipped

After the first five minutes, I realise that I am not sufficiently equipped in Kiswahili to convey the ramifications of this strip. So I revert to my usual *modus operandi* and use my resident translator (my secretary) to explain about the visit. Thankfully, for all of us, the visit doesn't happen for another two weeks. During this time, I must get my Kiswahili up to speed so that the CEO can see just how well I have settled in.

Look for a job armed with courage and imagination



RICKY'S MYTHS
RICHARD GITONGA



The dynamics of the labour market have changed. Until recently, people sought jobs and employers to work for an entire lifetime. It is, therefore, not surprising to meet folks today who are in their 50s, 60s and 70s, who have only worked for one employer. Their ultimate goal was to work diligently with a view to a comfortable retirement. However, for most, the realisation of their dreams of the so called "golden years" has been a disappointment.

For reasons beyond their comprehension and control, most retirees did not anticipate the effects of the depreciation of the local currency against their fixed earnings. The annual inflationary adjustments in their salaries were unfortunately not in tandem with the increase in the rate of inflation. It is no wonder they always received final

dues and pensions with profound shock and amazement seeing the cash in hand could only give them mileage for a maximum of five years. Some slid into depression, others resigned to fate.

Presumably, the nemesis of this problem could be attributed to their circumstances and attitudes towards work. As they were building careers and loyally serving employers, other greater risk-takers were trying their hands in self-employment and entrepreneurship. Although the latter struggled with the allure of secure employment, their personal visions were filled with images of independence and self-actualisation that fuelled their drive to succeed and thrive. They took their destiny into their own hands and leaped into the giant abyss of potential opportunity and failure.

Back at the employment ranch, the



Queuing for a job: The so-called secure job can be described as appealing to those without courage and imagination. REUTERS

candidates for secured retirement income were listening to their employers' canned speeches and memos talking about the great future of the company. The awe-struck employees were taken for team-building that served to reaffirm their belief and loyalty towards the employer. A party would be hosted by top management to reward the most "hard working and loyal employees." Over time, these loyal employees literally lost their personal identity and were always addressed by the public as Mr So

and So from Company X & Y.

As it were, these otherwise pleasant but mostly ignorant employees got caught up in a culture of "mushroom management" where they were kept in the dark and fed with a lot of compost. This kind of rarely publicised but effective managed style is analogous to the story about the pompous turkey. Having been pampered and fed on best grain from the farm, the turkey started exuding a sense of self-importance and entitlement. However, the gravy train

(or grain train for that matter) came to an end one Christmas celebration when the overfed turkey was selected as the meal for the farmer's family.

Poor managers

With this context in mind, it is not surprising to find that employees of organisations who project a sense of arrogance and ascribed authority usually are the poorest managers. Rather than encourage, they discourage. Rather than develop, they derail. Is it no wonder, therefore, that work environments that provide the lowest risk for consistent career advancement also have the lowest moral amongst staff? Was it not interesting to note in recent articles that SMEs are becoming more attractive work environments than established corporates?

In the modern day and age, we need to be clear on ambitions and career options. Despite the government seeming bereft in the face of economic problems, a career with GoK is still perceived as stable and risk-free. In the same breath, government jobs can be described as appealing to the job holder who is bereft of courage and imagination and basks in a regulated life.