

Reflect objectively on your abilities and skills in appraisals



RICKY'S MYTHS

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It is that time of the year again when most companies conduct their annual appraisals to assess and reward their staff. For some employees, it is a time of intense anxiety as they size up themselves against their bosses' expectations.

For bosses or leaders for that matter, it is a time to reflect on their leadership skills and be able to be mature enough to accept criticism from their subordinates. Unfortunately, in the African traditional setting criticism is rarely accepted by most leaders. More often than not they will respond with anger and are unable to distinguish whether

the criticism is constructive or destructive. The current ongoing debate about the issue of settlement in the Mau is a case in point. It is difficult to distinguish whether the criticism is constructive or destructive on the ongoing discourse for the simple reason that the ongoing discussions are cascading between broad spectrum. On one dimension of the spectrum is individual personalities and on the other is conservation of the environment.

As business leaders facilitate the appraisal process within their organisations, they will need to psychologically prepare their employees so that

they can have a higher tolerance level for constructive criticism and view the appraisal as a positive assessment rather than a condemnation. Those being appraised will have to handle the criticism positively.

A colleague and I were discussing this issue a couple of days ago and reflected on a certain organisation where we worked together. At the time, we had a very high sense of worth of ourselves and when it came to appraisal time, we gave ourselves excellent ratings. Unfortunately, our boss who was much more experienced in these matters and very objective in her assessments, gave us a rating that was summarised in the appraisal form as "currently performing below expectations but demonstrated great potential!"

As you can well imagine, our response was one of anger and disap-

pointment and the boss became our public enemy number one.

But after the anger had subsided and calm returned to our emotional state, we were in a better position to reflect on the appraisal more objectively and were able to extract a few learnings from the experience.

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Firstly, it gave us an opportunity to gain a better understanding of ourselves. As far as we were concerned at that point in time, we were the hottest thing in the market since sliced bread. Well, our boss thought otherwise and we had to take a more pragmatic and realistic view of ourselves.

Secondly, we had to train ourselves to take the high road by striving to know ourselves and be able to distinguish between criticisms of our work versus criticism of our personalities.

Thirdly, we had to learn how to change our ways after receiving constructive criticism. This was obviously the most difficult part of the whole process as we had to embrace humility by not being defensive, making the necessary changes in our perceived personal flaws, and taking the high road. It was through this process that we were able over time to learn things about ourselves that formed the foundation and bedrock of our budding leadership skills.

As our business and political leaders continue to be criticised for every little move they make, whether it is perceived as intelligent or stupid, they need to be aware that "being kicked in the rear is an indication that they are out in front".

The public's appraisal system is loaded with a mixture of both positive and negative criticism and the leaders need to take the high road and focus on what is for the collective good.