

Shock transfer as firm moves to 'nurture my talent'

Grappling with financial woes, decision to send me to the company's Coast branch is set to compound my problems

OFFICE DANDY

MAN - ABOUT - TOWN

When I was in primary school, my parents always told me that education would guarantee me a better, richer and fuller life. Right now, I think my education is not giving me the life that I deserve. To begin with, my power has been disconnected for non-payment and I must wait for payday to get it reconnected.

You may wonder how a gainfully employed man can allow this to happen, but there really is an explanation for all this. When these power guys introduced the new tariffs, my power bill tripled. It also does not help matters that I can no longer stand cold showers and have to use my instant shower and also heat the water to wash dishes. All these things mean that my power bill is astronomical. Last month when the bill came I was in so much shock that I could not pay.

I wanted to go to the power guys and query the amount but somehow I never got round to doing it. Come the second month and the bill was too high. Once

again, I made a mental note to make a query but I never got round to it. To be on the safe side, I gave the caretaker something small to ensure that the power guys do not get into the compound. It would appear that my something small was too small to warrant serious consideration from the guy.

I was shocked to come in yesterday evening to find my power and that of four others off. When I asked the caretaker what happened, he claimed that he was unable to send the power people away since he feared being arrested. How can anyone on a motorbike cause fear? So I went to my house and braved the chilly night using candlelight and my torch. I even took a cold shower.

Thankfully, payday is today and I am really hoping that the money is in the bank before lunch time. I will have to find a way of leaving my desk to go and sort out the power. On the work front, I hear that our new CEO is reporting in two weeks. I also hear that the acting CEO is so disappointed at his failure to get the job that he is going to quit and join another organisation.

Frankly, I feel nothing for the man.



Ever since he started acting, he has been a constant thorn in my flesh as he demands all manner of reports and analysis for everything.

Sometimes he asks me to do analysis and scenario setting where a simple decision could suffice. This makes me

think back to the days of Mr Tumbo who operated without the benefits of PowerPoint and Excel.

For all his faults, the man must have survived that long because he had something to offer to the business— it sure did not include flashy presentation and

detailed debate. Just as I am getting ready to play truant, I get a phone call summoning me to HR. I must say that all phone calls from the HR department cause my heart to tremble because they could bring bad news such as termination and dismissal.

Good sign

As I walk into the HR office, my heart is threatening to leap out in fear. The sender of the summons asks me to take a seat and even offers me coffee. I would generally consider that to be a good sign but perhaps she is fattening me for the kill.

She makes me a cup of black coffee with two sugars and then takes a seat and gives me some long winded talk about talent development.

She tells me that our organisation believes in people growing through rotation and movement. For that reason, she says that the business has decided that I should move and grow by moving to another branch.

I am not sure that I want to cry or laugh for I know we have only one branch that is outside the city. With a big smile she tells me that they need me to report as soon as possible to our branch at the Coast. I am too baffled to say a word so I just stare at her and continue to sip my coffee.

Self destructive attitudes that send companies tumbling



RICKY'S MYTHS
RICHARD GITONGA



It is a well known fact that most big business tend to fail when they embrace hubris which is created as a result of success. Hubris can be defined as excessive pride and the misplaced perception of indestructibility and immortality.

The great Wall Street giants like JP Morgan Chase, Bear Sterns and Lehman Brothers that dramatically collapsed were all known to have some degree of hubris which had crept into their cultures over the years. This self destructive attitude was further exacerbated by the undisciplined pursuit of super normal profits and bonuses at whatever cost.

Hubris comes with its accompanying baggage in the form of expensive and lavish lifestyles, high credit card balances, and the competition to show who has the biggest heart by publicly giving away large sums of money to favourite charities and other philanthropic activities.

In this regard, it has become an interesting hobby to follow up the lives of

these former hubris infused top flight associates whose lives have changed dramatically.

A story is told of one former currency trader who was described as a high roller used to dining in expensive restaurants, driving the latest Italian sports cars and sporting the most flamboyant designer clothing.

At his current age of 37, this former Wall Street achiever is now a doorman at a high class restaurant that he enjoyed frequenting with his former work colleagues. He is honest enough to admit that the tips he gets from diners are now a crucial part of his income bearing in mind that he has two school going children to care for as well as a stay home wife.

Presumably the impact of this state of affairs may have been somewhat minimized if the leaders in these companies had taken cognizant of the bootstrapping tactics their forebears must have endured to build such admirable enterprises. Without a doubt, they were most probably far more fru-



Mr Mo Grimeh, a former managing director at Lehman Brothers, addresses journalists after the firm's collapse in last year. The company tried to finance too many risky assets with too little capital. REUTERS

gal than their present day successors. This situation can be mirrored in our business environment in Kenya where some long established companies seem to be slowly creeping towards a similar situation where hubris and self-indulgence is ingrained into their value systems. Needless to say, this state of affairs is not necessarily as visible or discernable in annual reports.

These companies should take some time out to reflect on what they would be doing if they were to rewind the clock

and go back to the times that they were in the start-up mode. For one, they would aggressively strive to keep the size of their payrolls down to an absolute minimum. As entrepreneurs like to say, overhead walks on two legs

A realignment of their organisation structures with core profitable business segments may help them realise some gains through the reduction of staff costs. Some of these companies have also signed long-term leases for up-market office space which in most cases

does not add any value whatsoever to the bottom line since these "corporate headquarters" are not customer facing. Having a cool, modern well designed office is the preference of every business leader as it enhances their self image and positioning in the business community. However, closer scrutiny should be given to this expense to ensure it does not compromise potential revenue generating agenda items.

Issuing staff credit cards, company mobile phones or cars is any small businesses Achilles heel and usually ends up in another "winding up" story.

They may be described as business or motivational tools. However, bottom line is that they will always invariably have a significant contribution to expense line items.

Leaving lights, computers, printers and copiers on overnight is just plain stupid. Driving around Nairobi City late at night, you will be amazed by the number of companies that leave their office lights on all night for no apparent reason other than simple negligence.

This negligence is a clear reflection of the cultures of these companies where in all likelihood staff travel and entertainment claims are not necessarily scrutinised with eagle eyes.

big companies should try and emulate the values of small growing companies as the inability to reflect on the frugal past will only result in an indulgent but short lived future.