

# Playing pseudo-king of the castle in Mombasa

If I speak my heavily-accented Kiswahili in public, I am afraid I will lose face

**H**ad I known that Mombasa offered so much fun and ease, I would have moved here long ago.

I am the most senior company official here so I get treated like a pseudo-CEO. People here are also very respectful, always referring to me as 'sir'. Also, as a result of my pseudo-CEO status, I get invited to a host of corporate functions.

Needless to say, I'm not one to look a gift horse in the mouth so I am out almost every other night mingling with important people and consuming free food and wine.

I now realise that I need a new set of business cards that accurately reflect my improved status so that I can flash these around during cocktails.

As you all know by now, food warms my heart. I absolutely love the food around here. There is a tea girl who goes by the name of Asha. She is not only a sight for sore eyes, she is also a pure delight to work with.

She brews delicious tea and makes tasty *mandazis* that come in handy when I need to suppress the effects of one too many cocktails.

The only hitch I have had during

## MAN-ABOUT-TOWN

### OFFICE DANDY

my sojourn at the coast is a somewhat embarrassing incident last week.

I was asked by the head office to make a presentation regarding the state of the business to staff at the Mombasa office to give everyone an overview of where things stand and what the future looks like.

### Snazzy presentation

As the bona fide voice of the company, I set to work preparing a very snazzy PowerPoint presentation complete with diagrams and generously peppered with your regular management mumbo jumbo.

I even got my secretary (yes I have one at my disposal now) to hire an overhead projector. So there I was making my presentation when I heard a strange noise emanating from the back of the room.

Upon closer inspection, I realised that it was the station accountant, snoring in his sleep. "How dare he?" I



thought. After working so hard on my presentation, I felt the least I deserved was an attentive audience.

I decided to give the staff a break before proceeding and went back to my office to respond to my email in the interim. While I was there, Asha walked in and asked, rather shyly, if she could speak with me. Although she was clearly uncomfortable, she

managed to communicate, in her very particular mix of English and Kiswahili, that she and a number of others could not understand a word I was saying.

Apparently many of them would rather that I speak to them in Kiswahili. Voila. At last I had the answer to the mystery of the dozing accountant.

Asha was a little apprehensive so I

reassured her that I appreciated her feedback and sent her on her way.

But, now that I had identified my problem, what was I going to do? My Kiswahili is not only severely limited, it also encumbered by my mother tongue pronunciation. I therefore feared that I would lose my official standing if I dared speak Kiswahili in public.

As if on cue, the now wide awake station accountant walked into my office. He said that he wanted to beg leave from the remaining part of the presentation since he had some urgent numbers he needed to work on.

### Kiswahili lessons

By now, however, I knew better. I told him that I actually needed his help, explaining that I wanted him to translate my presentation into Kiswahili for the staff.

You should have seen the look on his face when I said this. I quickly interjected that it would be a way of building his leadership and presentation skills. With his ego sufficiently stroked, I summoned everyone back into the meeting room, for a bilingual business presentation. Now how on the earth do I get private Kiswahili lessons?

# Will the installation of CCTV cameras help reduce crime?



RICKY'S MYTHS  
RICHARD GITONGA



**O**ver the past couple of months, the incidence of crime in our capital city Nairobi appears to have increased at an alarming rate. Reports carried in the media of the hijacking of high profile individuals that have given the city's residents cause to worry.

The repetitive but shallow rhetoric from those institutions charged with the responsibility of ensuring our safety is that "all is being done" to manage the situation is no longer of any consequence.

Those citizens who have given the situation a little more thought and recognise a smoke screen when they see one will be sceptical about the ability of the highly publicised CCTV security system due to be installed in the Central Business District technology to reduce the incidence of crime altogether.

It's like saying that the problem of traffic congestion in the city will be solved increasing the number of traffic lights. On the surface it may sound like a good plan but it is hardly a com-

prehensive strategy.

It may be of interest to the proponents of CCTV technology to note that one crime is solved a year by every one thousand CCTV cameras in London. There are apparently more than one million CCTV cameras in that city.

In this regard, London police have been advised to take remedial action as the public is fast losing confidence in all the expensive gadgetry that has been installed in the city to fight crime.

If the CCTV system has not been very successful in other big cities, what will we do differently to make it a successful investment at here?

For a start, we will need to be absolutely clear what parameters will be used to determine the success of technology in fighting crime. Call them crime metrics if you will. Ultimately there will be a need to fuse security metrics with more advanced concepts in risk identification and analysis. The installation of CCTV cameras may deter criminals from breaking into vehicles or snatching handbags, but may by no



Nairobi residents will soon need to get accustomed to getting caught on camera, but will increased surveillance lead to more criminals being brought to book? FILE

means reduce the incidence of bank robberies.

We should avoid falling into the trap of becoming a 'surveillance state.'

### Technology strategy

We will quite likely be caught on camera as we go about our daily chores and reasonably expect that such surveillance will result in an increase in the number of criminals brought to book.

However, we should remember that a business strategy is required before a complementary technology strategy is

developed. Starting off with a technology strategy or implementing one without a clear direction is akin to putting the cart before the horse.

Bad workmen never have good tools. If we invest in technology to fight crime and do not reap positive results and outcomes, expect the people responsible for implementing the project to focus on the supposed flaws of the technology rather than on flaws in their planning.

Expect them to use technically confusing jargon such as "system complex-

ity" and "video quality compromises" rather than focus their excuses on "short-sightedness" and "poor vision" on their part.

Despite the huge investment and the project complexity, chances are that very few citizens of Nairobi will bother to track its progress, even though they are likely to be paying for it through their taxes.

As a great philosopher once said, "the stagnant waters of indifference are deep; we don't want to disturb the bovine tranquillity of our rosy existence."

### Impact and consequences

Without necessarily pointing fingers, it is during times like these that we expect to hear and learn a lot more from so called Chief Security Officers whose main mandate is to establish systems and processes to protect the assets of the organisations that they work for from both internal and external threats.

Just as Chief Financial Officers came out of the woodwork to explain the impact and consequences of the global credit crunch on the local economy, it's high time that their counterparts who manage the security docket stepped out of the shadows and shed some light on how we should assess the latest developments on the security front.

We might yet be able to stop a white elephant from being built!