

PR DIGEST

A PUBLICATION OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF KENYA



THE ROUND UP EDITION

CHANGE YOUR MIND TO SUCCEED*
PUBLIC RELATIONS' LESSONS FROM SA

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REDISCOVERING HOME SCHOOLING IN 2020
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Editor's Note

Take a break, you deserve it.

It feels like we have been running a nine-month long marathon, doesn't it? We are almost closing the year and you deserve a pat on the back for a marathon well run despite the extreme conditions you have faced such as the virus and, much as some of us have lost their loved ones, income, we soldier on with optimism that better days are coming.

This year's events have not only disrupted but challenged us to embrace the massive technological advancements- that have become part of our daily lives- and diversify our skills-set to remain relevant: the many webinars we attended weren't in vain!

This edition marks one year since its birth and we're excited as the Editorial Board that we kept our promise to keep you engaged and informed through the written word. The thinking behind the Round-Up edition was rather deliberate. It's an edition borne out of tireless work of the Editorial Board whose selfless support has been incredible. We can only promise to do better in our subsequent editions. We wanted to give you an outlook of how 2020 and a peek of the coming year. As we work on rebuilding our lives, I challenge us to take an early opportunity to reinvent ourselves for the many business opportunities that have come with Covid.

The support of the President and the Council is beyond words. We honour you.

We have a special interview by the Chairperson of the PRSK College of Fellows, Mr John Mramba, whose interview was as enlightening and bubbly like his personality. We also featured Dr Nancy Booker, a woman who is on the wheels of leadership, family, administration and academia at the peak of her career. Don't miss these captivating reads.

We have also chosen a host of interesting reads from writers locally and internationally and hope that this edition will make for a good read. Take your time, flip through the pages, share your feedback with us and within your circles as we look forward to walking this editorial journey with you in the coming year, Insh'Allah!

Feliz Navidad and happy reading!

Maureen Koech, MPRSK
Editor

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Former PRSK President appointed to Maathai Board



Former President of PRSK Ms Jane Gitau, has been appointed to chair the Late Prof Wangari Maathai Green Belt Movement Board.

Ms Gitau, who served at the apex of PRSK leadership for two terms before passing over the mantle to Dr Wilfred Marube, will join this Board whose main mandate is tree-planting as an entry point to better environmental management, community empowerment and, livelihood improvement.

"Colleagues in the Profession, I am because you are. I step on your shoulders and the opportunity that you gave me to serve you, the journey that we walked together. We continue this journey, greening our spaces and communicating

about it. Asanteni sana," Ms. Gitau said.

In his congratulatory message, PRSK President Dr Marube acknowledged Ms Gitau's commitment to environmental conservation. "We are confident that you will endeavour to use your strategic communication skills in the quest to making Kenya a green Nation," he said.

The Green Belt Movement was founded by Nobel Laurette Professor Wangari Maathai in 1977 under the auspices of the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) to respond to the needs of rural Kenyan women who reported that their streams were drying up, their food supply was less secure, and they had to walk further and further to get firewood for fuel and fencing.

PR honcho joins CS Treasury advisory team

The Cabinet Secretary (CS) for Treasury, Mr Ukur Yattani, has appointed Mr Paul Oyier to join his advisory group as a senior communication advisor.

Mr Oyier, a seasoned communication practitioner with over ten years' experience, previously worked for the Media Council of Kenya before his appointment. He joins a team of advisors who will give the CS strategic guidance on different issues.

Paul is the Director for Eminent Business Group Ltd and has previously worked for Aga Khan University, The Sterling Quality Company, Ramco Group Limited just to mention but a few.

He is the Chair of the PRSK Crisis Communication and Management Panel and was among the special taskforce that delivered the high-level communication strategy to the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife when the pandemic hit in March this year.



PRSK Fellow makes history in football fraternity



PRSK Fellow and Chairperson of the Football Kenya Federation (FKF), Kenticé Tikolo, made news when she became the first woman and public relations professional to not only run successful FKF elections but also chair a board of a men's football team.

The hotly contested elections, first of a kind, were delivered sans drama, an almost-constant feature in the football elections. "I worked with a fantastic team of professionals, with different areas of strength, all of whom were so focused on ensuring a credible election. We had great teamwork. I'm proud of the fact that we delivered a world-class election with no

drama," Said Kenticé during an interview with Standard Media after the elections.

Kenticé credits the success of the elections to not only the great team of board members working under her but her experience in strategic communication that enabled her to plan the whole process with precision.

Ms Tikolo is former PRSK Chair, has served at the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA) as the delegate-at-large for Africa and is a member of the PRSK College of Fellows.



Crisis Management During Corona Virus Pandemic: An Internal Communication Perspective

By Margaret Mtange

In response to the Covid-19 Pandemic, institutions in Kenya both profit and non-profit -making have had to review their crisis management plans. The review, a three-pronged approach, would be focusing on safety, security, and reputation management in response to the pandemic. The Institute for Public Relations states that crisis management process includes pre-crisis, crisis response and post crisis.

The pre-crisis involves decision-making and forecasting by the institution's board to safeguard corporate resources such as human, financial and image through policy framework. During crisis response, a cross-functional management team implements institutional policy and operations to safeguard the corporate resources. The post-crisis period is about reviewing policy framework, rebuilding resources, and reputation and image management by all internal stakeholders. Having outlined the structured approach to ensure adequate governance and operational structures in a crisis management plan, this article outlines internal communication protocols at the tripartite crisis levels and the challenges corporate practitioners should do to evaluate their role in crisis response.

Internal Channels Communication

In response to Corona Virus pandemic, the mass media was awash with World Health Organization safety protocols. Institutional leaders, in line with the safety protocols, outlined preventive protocols to the employees through emails and internal memos.

At face value, the employee safety and informational needs were addressed through written communication and provision for remote working. However, the informational needs seemed silent on the provision of resources and support for employees when resuming productivity. PWC (US), an international consultancy firm, advocates for empathetic communication and policies, communication of new corporate strategy which aligns to the remote workforce plans. The communication of corporate strategy and policies creates an opportunity for communication practitioners to provide governance advice, spearhead the repackaging of corporate culture, and promote corporate reputation to employees as they work remotely.

Leadership Lead Communication

In response to the pandemic, leadership may manage employees' security created by physical, psychological, financial, technological uncertainty as they work remotely. Tactful decision-making by the cross-functional management team and compassionate communication may facilitate employees to cope with the uncertainty. Paul Argenti, a corporate communication scholar, proposes that the management team, be the main source of information to employees to demystify the situation, provide hope for the future, provide physical and virtual location to ease anxiety.

In addition, Paul White in the article, Do remote employees prefer different types of appreciation than employees in face-to-face settings? states that leaders must be proactive in interacting, meaningfully, and verbally appreciating

long-distance workers (remote workforce). Communication of appreciation, verbal interaction, and frequent updates through templates ease physical and psychological uncertainty.

Crisis Team

When an organization experiences any kind of crisis, there is need to set up a cohesive crisis team. The team is responsible for packaging and releasing strategic communication for managing employee uncertainty. It also handles elaborate crisis management, communication planning, coordination and dissemination of crisis related information. The communication coordination process creates opportunity for communication practitioners to enhance governance skills.

Corporate Identity Management

In response to the pandemic, the management of internal cohesion directly impacts on corporate identity and reputation. Internal cohesion involves a delicate balance of personal identity, corporate identity, and reputation. It is accepted that each employee has more than one identity, that is, work identity, family identity, online political identity, among others. These identities should be distinct and separated from the organization's corporate identity through clear guidelines and policies.

Employees switch between these modalities which may provoke cognitive dissonance. Furthermore, the ideas and beliefs in the work life may vary from the ideas accepted in the household. Therefore, Ethan McCarty in the article, Identity: the forgotten challenge of remote work, states that institutions may gain an enormous strategic advantage by fostering cultures, workflows, technological and organizational systems, artifacts and leadership practices that enable the workforce to co-create a new culture through artifacts, behavior, symbols and rituals. Consequently, the communication practitioners have the challenge of working with board and management as they reestablish the governance, communication systems, behaviors, supporting technologies, and relationships.

Post Crisis Communication

The post crisis phase will provide an opportunity for communication practitioners to position themselves to provide governance through advising the leadership team. Having worked through the two crisis management phases, the communicators work towards ensuring that they are part of the executive team to formulate and communicate the institutional strategy and long-term goals. The articulation of the strategy and long-term goals provide effective strategic communication between board, management, and employees.

Thus, the Covid 19 pandemic provides an opportunity for practitioners to work towards new skillsets and competencies that enhance their strategic position and leadership in the institution. Hence, this article has summarized internal communication protocols at the three levels of crisis management and challenged corporate practitioners to evaluate their role and skills.

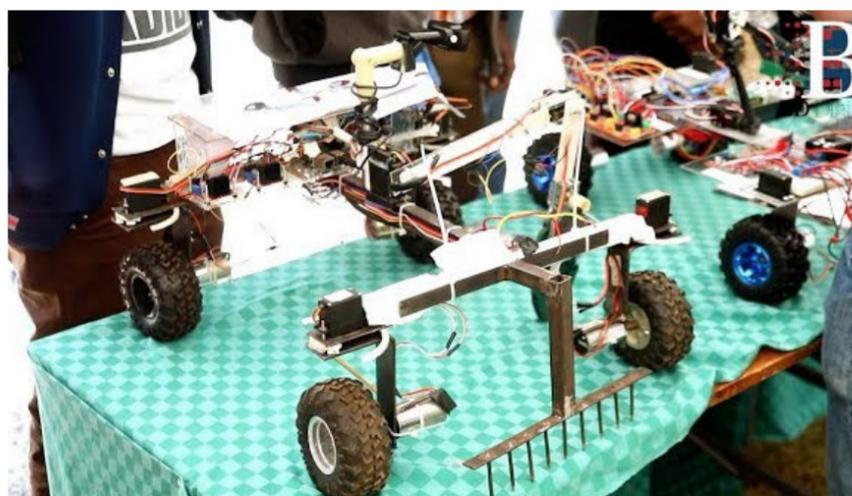
Lessons to carry to the future

By Macdonald Ogambi, AMPRSK

Despite 2020 being a tough year, there are lessons I believe we have learnt at a personal, corporate and national levels. The following are the lessons I have picked that in one way or the other will influence our lives now and in the future. Communication is an important component of our lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic has reemphasized the importance of communication in every aspect of our lives. For instance, individuals all over the world had to be updated on what the respective governments are doing to ensure that the virus is put under control as well as informing the citizenry about the stimulus packages that have been put in place by the different governments to cushion them from the effects of the virus. Researchers and doctors worldwide have also had to give updates on the updates as regards the search for vaccines as well as any information that the public may need to know about the mutations as well as the new symptoms that may have been discovered.

From the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kenyan government has had an opportunity to talk to the citizens during the daily media briefings. If there is a time that Kenyans have heard from the government is during this pandemic. Moving forward, the government should continue with this trend even beyond the pandemic.



A weeding robot by students from JKUAT

At the corporate level, companies have had to make tough decisions as a result of the ravaging effects of the COVID-19 virus. Some of the decisions included closing down of their branches or in some situations a total halt of operations. These decisions if not communicated in a humane way can easily cause more harm other than the good that was to be achieved. It is important that organisations carry lessons they have learnt even beyond the pandemic. Particularly organisations that may not have policies on crisis communication can look at best practices in communication and handling crisis in developing blueprints that can take the companies to greater heights.

At an individual level, this pandemic has

had devastating effects on people's lives ranging from losing livelihood and even some losing their lives. In such situations communication plays an individual's life as they need an assurance that all is well. To demonstrate the importance of communication during a pandemic, this professional association Public Relations Society of Kenya initiated a drive that was aimed at ensuring that members taking individual responsibility of checking on the wellbeing of at least five people in their lives. In all aspects of communication, accuracy, consistency and clarity need to be taken into account.

Sound Leadership.

Sound leadership is important for smooth operation from an individual, family, corporate and even at governments levels. During this pandemic, the President of Kenya His Excellency Uhuru Kenyatta and the Cabinet Secretary for health Mutahi Kagwe have demonstrated sound and effective leadership during this pandemic. This lesson in particular should be taken seriously by other sectors in government especially those that have been mismanaged in the past. Key components of leadership include presence, decisiveness and incorporation of experts in their areas especially those that relate to the task at hand as has been exhibited by President Kenyatta and other leaders around the world.

Transitional Leadership

COVID-19 brought restrictions that

in one way or the other affected the operations of companies. For example, during the initial stages of the pandemic in Kenya, employees above 58 years were encouraged to work from home. This restriction in particular came with challenges as relates to the day to day operations of organisations whose top managers fall within this age bracket. From such interruptions of operations, it is my hope that companies will invest in mentorships programmes and most importantly senior managers training the younger staff on the best practices for the purpose of continuity and avoidance of over reliance on them.

Technology and Innovation

The COVID-19 has brought out the best of Kenya in terms of innovation. From the invention of a ventilator by students of Kenyatta University (KU), to the creation of automatic hand washing machines by students of Multimedia University of Kenya to the development of a weeding robot by students from JKUAT is a clear indication that with support and funding, this nation can churn out more innovations thus creating more jobs for the youths.

Companies and entrepreneurs have also taken advantage of technology to come up with Apps to sell and their products and services. In the education sector institutions of higher learning have strengthened their online platforms which in future will create opportunities for people who may wish to advance their studies but are not able to attend face to face learning because of their busy schedule.

As we work towards bouncing back from the effects of the pandemic, it is important that the government and other corporates continue supporting innovators as this will spur the economy a great deal.

Unity and Humanity

Just as Kenyans have stood together during adversities, the COVID-19 was not any different. The government through stimulus packages and tax exemptions, donations by large, medium and small companies as well as donations by individuals who shared the little they have with needy once again amplified our oneness and humanity in us. Even as most restrictions have been lifted, let us



Creation of automatic hand washing machines by students of Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology

continue observing the Ministry of Health guidelines. Be your brother's keeper, sanitize and social distance.

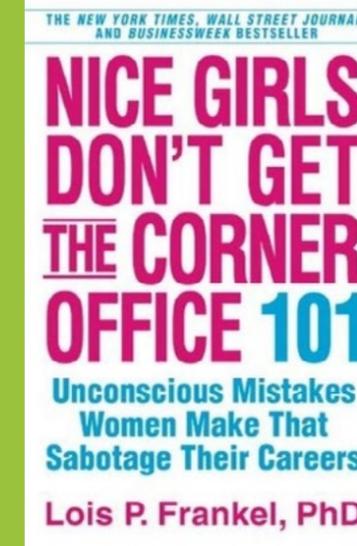
God bless Kenya. Wishing you all a blessed New Year.

The writer is a Masters in Corporate Communication Student and an Employee of Multimedia University of Kenya.

BOOK REVIEW

Good girls will not always get the coveted office

By Catherine Awuor



It is said that in every woman there still lives the little girl she used to be. Why do you think that is? Because thinking like a little girl will affect your professional judgement.

In this book, Dr. Frankel explains that girls are not traditionally raised to be tough players in the competitive workplace environment. They learn from a very young age to sabotage their success by undermining their values and capabilities in the eyes of others. To overcome this behavior, one needs to become self-aware and be intentional to correct the negative effects.

Unmasking the top ten mistakes made by nice girls:

We all to some extent have a nickname and whenever called with your nickname in an official setting, then you are subtly being relegated to a childlike status. As a rule, when you introduce yourself, she advises that you make sure to use your full formal name. She goes ahead to unmask the top ten mistakes made by nice girls.

This is a must read!

"No one can take better care of you than you yourself" - Dr. Lois P Frankel



Communicators have earned a place at the high table, nobody should take the glory away - Dr Booker

By Maureen Koech

Dr Nancy Booker is not your ordinary university professor. If you rely on media stereotypes when looking for her at the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications (AKU-GSMC) where she serves as an Assistant Professor and Director of Academic Affairs, you might just miss her.

She neither wears thick glasses nor quotes communications scholars as a typical professor would do. Not even Marshal McLuhan. Her responses are thorough, fairly philosophical and largely practical. In her pin-stripe suit, shiny dreadlocks and ready smile, one may easily confuse her for a career civil society professional who are often more liberal in talking and dressing than the average professor.

As one who has been in communication throughout her professional life and taught a number of successful communicators, she is also quite comfortable in front of cameras.

'Daddy's girl'

"I'm a daddy's girl," says Dr. Booker as she settles into the interview, adding that she sees a lot of her parents in her. They were high achievers in their own right, and believed in impacting those around them in whatever way they could.

She spent her formative years with her father, as her mother was away in college at the time and this made them very close. "It was just the two of us. He checked my homework and even taught me how to cook," says Dr. Booker, smiling fondly at the memory.

Credits her success to parents

Dr Booker credits her success to her parents. "My father, for example, transferred me to a different school because I was number one thrice in a row," she recounts. He felt that it wasn't a highly competitive environment and she wasn't challenged enough hence her performance. Her father believed that excellence is borne out of a challenging atmosphere. "My mother on the other hand woke up very early during my primary school days and made me write a composition, which she would grade

before I left for school.

Ever since her father passed away 15 years ago, the first born in a family of five has taken up a co-parenting responsibility. Dr Booker combined efforts with her mother to educate all the siblings to university level. She has a simple explanation for taking over parental responsibilities: she was simply completing what her father had started.

"It was not easy and I had to make several sacrifices, but it was worth it. I look back at what we accomplished with pride and satisfaction," she adds.

Distinguished career

Dr Booker has had a distinguished career as an academic, teacher, researcher and media practitioner. She does not only practises communications in class. As a lecturer at Multimedia University where she was head of the Department of Journalism and Communication and at Daystar University and ABC University in Liberia, she follows her students beyond class as much as is realistically possible.

"I am proud of my students and try as much as possible to find out how they are progressing. I believe our job isn't just to teach but to guide and advice even after our students leave school," she says.

"For most lecturers, teaching starts and ends at the class. Seldom do they build a relationship and follow up with their students post-graduation," she adds. Dr Booker on the other hand, made a deliberate move to follow her students beyond class because communications is part of human life and does not happen in isolation.

Daily routines...and a life lesson

We were curious to know what a day in her life looks like.

The alumna of Daystar University starts her day early on certain days, with meetings at the Complaints Commission of the Media Council of Kenya (MCK) where she is a member. They were recently appointed through a merit-based process by the ICT CS, Joe Mucheru. "I start with a word of prayer. I have come to appreciate that life isn't guaranteed, so waking up is the first blessing of the day," she says. And she should know, having lost her mother three months ago.

After being diagnosed with fatigue last year, she's also learnt to make resting part of her routine.

"I learnt the importance of having a sanctuary and finding personal time away from work," she says, deep in thought. She was admitted for a couple of days and this was very hard for someone used to having a structured way of doing things.

Reading Culture

An avid reader of biographies such as *This Child will be Great* by Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, *The Audacity of Hope*, *Dreams from My Father*, *Michelle Obama's Becoming*, *The Promised Land*-Obama's latest book, *Gabrielle Union's We're Going to Need More Wine*, Dr Booker loves the written word. Much of her leisurely reading happens during her travels, something she loves so much. The 15 countries she has travelled only offer a peek into what's coming in her world of reading.

Her love for movies and tv dramas is exemplified in her thesis dissertation in which she analysed sexual messages and behaviour change communication in the *Shuga* drama, a local content drama which aired on NTV a few years back.

Women and Leadership

Having worked in Liberia during Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's presidency while setting up a communication department for a university, Dr Booker built a deep sense of admiration for the former president of Liberia. She believes that Africa has been leading in electing women to leadership positions. Joyce Banda (Malawi), Ameenah Gurib-Fakim (Mauritius) and Sahle-Work Zewde (Ethiopia) already set the pace when they defied odds to assume highest offices in the land.

"These examples only go to show that if you put your mind to it and believe it, you can achieve anything in life," she adds.

She deliberately took up a leadership course at the Harvard Business School. "I wanted to know how best I can exercise leadership in the spaces that I serve in," she says. To her, leadership is the rate at which you disappoint people without them bumping you off. One can't help but marvel at how intelligent and beautiful her thought process is.

Dr Booker doesn't hold a fanatical view on anything, not even the Bible, though she prays daily. She doesn't identify herself as a feminist but a big champion of women



and leadership. She was among the first persons locally to fete Kamala Harris, US's Vice President- elect, election.

"Forgive the cliché but her win shattered the proverbial glass ceiling," she says. Kamala's win has been considered monumental in history when in January 2021, she becomes not just the first woman to be elected Vice President, but the first woman of colour to hold the second-highest political office in America.

Communication during the pandemic

While we acknowledge that corona virus pandemic exposed our strengths and weaknesses alike, we have to give to Caesar what belongs to him. We were able to seize the opportunity and proved that communication is at the centre of everything, it was a blessing in disguise for communication professionals.

"There is always room for improvement, because we didn't get everything right," she says.

Digital profile

The digital space is fragile. It's easy to make mistakes online and sadly, such errors have a way of catching up with us because the internet never forgets. "Be very careful with your social media engagements, there is no privacy online. You have to constantly ask what you would like to be remembered for," she advises. Employers now check your social media track record. You have to be careful of your digital footprint. "Can your posts speak for you without you necessarily defending them?" she poses.

Virtual Learning

Most institutions picked up virtual learning during this pandemic as a necessity. However, for the Aga Khan University Graduate School of Media and Communications, this was an element that was incorporated a while back. So the transition was rather smooth as they had both physical and virtual learning options even before. "As to whether this is an effective mode of learning is a different discussion altogether and we can only tell that with time," she said. She admits to missing the physical interactions with her students. Humans, according to her, thrive in physical environments and the virtual space limits this.

Future of Communication

Having served as a juror for the Annual Journalism Excellence Awards organised by the Media Council of Kenya and as the current treasurer of the East African Communication Association, she is involved in harnessing regional synergies and capacity building for media and communication scholars in the region. Dr Booker posits that our roles have been

cemented more due to this pandemic and that communicators have earned their seat at the table and are no longer just functionaries. "Let's do what we are doing the best way we know how. No one can take that glory from us," she concludes.

The interview for Dr Booker was done by AG Awino



By Christopher Maero

Change has been the only constant this year with the populace being forced to adapt to the constant evolution for relevance and business.

Social Distancing

This has adversely affected the event planning and management sphere. Before COVID, there was much more physical stakeholder engagement in planning and implementation, much of this spun right from vendor contracting, to guest management and subsequent event programming among other activities. The need to keep apart now has thrown a different spanner that may require us to rethink how we engage stakeholders for events. Of course, with the advent of virtual meeting platforms, much more has been surpassed but much more thinking goes into agreeable numbers and arrangements for concerts, conferences among events.

Digital evolution

The pandemic has changed how audiences perceive and apply relevance to messages. This may be relative; however, it is tied to how digital communication channels operate. The 5 C's of communication have inadvertently been affected and brought

in a new angle of stakeholder engagement. In addition, there is a whole universe of practice that the digital channels have brought. There have been far much more engagements on such platforms that have taken out conventional public relations with a diversity in audiences, timelines, scope, locations just to mention a few.

Time

There has been a lot of time on our hands despite the negative dip in business and physical engagements. The overall feeling is, come 2021, we have to account how we spent the huge amounts of time contained in our homes. We may have to consider whether communication and public relations experts and scholars contributed to the profession especially towards researching new trends and techniques that may be employed during or post COVID.

Skill Integration

Graphic designers have added video production under their sleeves and creatives have gone a notch in considering strategy for their work. Therefore, such integration is key in not only enhancing workmanship but efficiency in the various outputs for communication and PR. At

the end of the day, maybe such integration may come in play when sourcing for workforce.

Dependence on research

More audience engagements are being led by continuous research and this can be picked from the advertisements and marketing activities that have been conducted so far during the pandemic. There is a growing need to understand how messages will resonate with audiences and therefore, this has triggered a need for each and every communicator to conduct some research.

Personal livelihoods have intertwined with office work and business during this period. I believe these may be useful experiences that will shape narratives for communication and PR away from the office while still avoiding "the briefcase office" notion. The creativity and innovativeness that has been brought up in different sectors is something that our profession can leverage upon to come up with new ways of sharing meaning and breaking traditional barriers to the practice.

Your plans may not always materialize, one step at a time

By Lillian Mathu

“What are your plans for the year 2020? Why don’t we plan for a getaway at the Maasai Mara for the Easter weekend in April? How about next Christmas in Zanzibar?” My brother Levis asked us during the 2019 Christmas family gathering.

As it has been the norm, we brainstormed on different excursions for the year and each one’s goals and resolutions, including personal development. While we all shared our plans, we were all optimistic and excited to enjoy the New Year with zeal.

In came the ‘infamous’ 2020 and all seemed normal, or so we thought, especially the first two months. Little did we know that the new normal was to be everyone’s cup of tea, not just in Kenya, but worldwide.

March 13, 2020. I was in the office with my colleagues when our Chief Operations Officer announced that the first case of the corona virus patient had been reported in Kenya! As we checked the news updates, my colleague Grace and I left hurriedly to a nearby Naivas supermarket to buy hand sanitizers. The store was unusually crowded as people shopped for foodstuff and toiletries in bulk. Amazed, we went into a panic mode, wondering whether we should also join the bandwagon or just stick to our main objective – buy hand sanitizers in bulk, perhaps.

“You are the 1000th customer to ask for sanitizers, zimeisha (they have run out of stock),” one of the Naivas attendants told us when we inquired.

As we went back to the office empty handed, it was clear that the corona virus outbreak was a disaster in waiting. Sadly, it was. World News about death in countries such as Italy

was quite traumatizing. While the government back home ordered for closure of schools, work-from-home, hand washing and social distancing, confusion and uncertainty and curfews became a daily norm. Who would have known that Easter Holiday, our much awaited family trip to the Mara would pass by in the melee of the COVID- 19 confusion?

Thanks to the internet, adapting to work-from-home schedule was relatively smooth albeit hiccups of online meetings of ‘can you hear me?’, ‘unmute yourself’, or ‘please mute yourself we can hear your baby crying’.

Most parents and guardians I know had mixed feelings about the whole concept. My neighbor Lucy has three children, 14, 11 and 8 years all enrolled in the online classes. “I had not budgeted for extra computers for e-learning. Each child required a gadget to use since their respective classes ran concurrently. It was tough yet the school did not provide us with any gadgets,” lamented Lucy when we shared ‘notes’ of coping with the dreaded corona virus in May 2020.

In June, I was among the PR facilitators for an NGO that was donating food, hand washing and sanitary facilities to the vulnerable young girls in Kibera slums, Nairobi. The targeted beneficiaries were teenage mothers, who ‘traded sex for sanitary pads’. As the media crew and I made our way through the densely populated neighborhood, we noticed that there was no observation of daily government protocols of social distancing or hand washing. Very few residents wore face masks.

“Karibuni sana nyumbani. (You’re welcome to our home),” said Deogracious, father to 15-year-old Hazel* one of the 200 teenage mothers

we had gone to visit for an interview and donations. They live in a one-roomed house. Deogracious told us it was not easy to spend the whole day in the house as he had to create space for his wife, son, daughter and his newborn grandson. He had also lost his casual job at a construction site due to COVID- 19.

The pandemic has greatly affected the social-economic sphere. Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS) survey estimated the percentage of population in active employment, whether formal or informal fell to 65.3 per cent of men and 48.8 per cent of women, a disruption caused by the virus pushing employers with no choice but to develop coping mechanisms.

Lessons learnt

Every new day comes with its unexpected fortunes or challenges. As of today, the death cases resulting from COVID- 19 in Kenya are almost hitting the 50,000 mark, according to Ministry of Health. No one knows what today or tomorrow brings. Appreciate life each day.

Be grateful for all the extra necessities you have. Someone else is wishing to have the basics. Resolve to reach out to those in need frequently (if you haven’t).

While the future is digital meet-ups for many organisations including learning institutions, the government should implement online learning to accommodate all pupils as a business continuity strategy for preparedness in such calamities.

Get-togethers, hugs, hand-shakes, old routines and work environment may never be the same. It is not guaranteed, one step at a time.

Of Tooth Ache and Dental Care

By Elizabeth Mulae



Two weeks ago, a friend suffered from an extremely painful toothache which gave him sleepless nights before he could access a good dentist for treatment. After going through that painful tooth experience, he decided to share insights on dental care with me.

We have all heard of seen the statement “Your smile is your signature”, your overall appearance is enhanced by how you smile, your personality is best described by how you smile or laugh, your confidence is enhanced if you can smile comfortably without feeling shy. As communicators, a bright smile is a great asset in our work.

As professional experts in the field that involves a lot of speaking, how frequently do we book an appointment with a dentist? Especially in a time like this when everyone is trying as much as they can to avoid the hospital due to the phobia of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Infections

I was surprised to learn that just like the rest of the body teeth get serious infections that cause fever, shaking, serious throbbing headaches, swelling and jaw pains. The painful episodes are frequently experienced in the evening when the body rests. It like the bacterial infections that arise and shine in the evening to actively attack the teeth causing serious pain. My friend ‘s infections were so serious that he was put under strong antibiotics for a whole week and three injections to minimize the pain. I later came to learn that this treatment is normally done when

doctors detect an infection, before and after extraction to avoid further infections.

The Root Canal

This procedure is normally performed when the dentist removes the infected pulp and nerve in the root of the tooth, cleans and shapes the inside of the root canal, then fills and seals the space. After the serious tooth ache, my friend underwent a tooth canal to save the tooth from cavitory that might lead to extraction.

The Crowning Experience

To save the tooth from sensitivity, Dentists recommend crowning of teeth which are permanently placed on weak or damaged teeth to protect and cover the tooth. After the root canal experience , my friend further underwent crowing for two teeth whose enamels was exposed and already causing sensitivity.

The Dreadful Extraction Experience

All of us have experienced extraction of primary teeth, the lucky ones in our midst are yet to experience the removal of the secondary or permanent teeth. This is the most dreaded experience but if the dentist recommends it as the result, gather your courage and get done with it! The modern dentist provides a relatively better experience compared to previous years. It is imperative to prioritize your dental health to ensure you don’t encounter similar experiences of midnight toothaches.

Here are a few recommendable things we could consider: -

- Annual Teeth cleaning: - Most of us have insurance covers that factor in dental care. Make a point of scheduling annual teeth cleaning appointments to remove tartar and stains caused by coffee, smoking and other stain-prone drinks or food.

- Sensitivity: - When you notice any sensitivity when taking cold or hot drinks, consult your dentist for an examination, you can also buy toothpaste that protects your teeth from the sensitivity.

- Braces: An observation from the current environment, shows that more people are embracing braces to correct their dental structure. Identify a good referral for best experiences. Follow the guidelines and you will greatly reap the results.

- Tooth whitening : As you move around various shops downtown, you will notice a lot of advertisements of teeth whitening. To be on the safe side, be cautious and ensure credibility and experience before allowing anyone to temper with your teeth.

- Off the toothpick, in the floss: Before I made it a habit to visit the dentist on a yearly basis, I used to pick my teeth with toothpick every time after a meal, however I am now informed that this destroys your gum and exposes your teeth to cavities. Shift to dental flosses which are currently available in supermarkets around you.

- Dental Culture management

Just like we are encouraged to visit doctors for physical examination annually, also take it upon yourselves as professionals to schedule dental appointments every year. Building a positive dental culture starts from our families. Acquire the right toothbrushes and toothpastes for your children and, introduce the morning and night tooth brushing habit that will keep off cavities and promote good dental health.

Lastly, let us be informed that our dental health is connected to our heart health. Don’t wait for a tooth ache to visit the Dentist

Elizabeth Mulae is a communication Manager at the Kenya Export Promotion & Branding Agency

The changing face of Public Relations in the disruptive world

By Wausi Walya



The world is facing the longest crises in recent history. The COVID 19 pandemic has forced individuals, businesses and countries to make significant major social and economic adjustments to survive. Sadly, the world has lost more than a million lives to the virus, in addition to the job losses, foreclosures, financial drain and massive disruption of the interactions and interpersonal communication.

The pandemic has threatened to disrupt the world order as hitherto strong economies waded through difficulties that were a preserve of the developing world. What seemed like a virus domiciled in China in the year has since translated to a mutating crisis that is not predictable. The PR profession was not spared.

At the start of the pandemic, most

countries, exercising their sovereign power, closed the air space as a priority measure to curb the spread of the virus. Self-preservation took precedence, no prior communication, only announcements, as part of an obligation to protect the countries' own citizens. The move did not take consideration of any existing agreements or diplomatic relations. It is right there that communication became complex and the PR professional had to change strategy for effective communication.

As a result of the minimal human interaction dictated by the panic of a fast spreading virus, the solution has been to stay at home. The print media suddenly lost its customers, and the radio did not have the usual number of listeners or adverts to support its programmes.

Online platforms and TV suddenly became the preferred medium for audiences. This is was a significant shift for PR practitioners had to adjust to reach their audiences with targeted messaging. Media is a formidable stakeholder who has served the PR profession over the years and rethinking the ways of engaging has been inevitable. Some organizations found themselves starting to embrace the use of social media from scratch especially those that had previously been reluctant to use the platforms. There has been a need to spruce up websites with relevant content and consistently manage information and content on social media. This perhaps would not have had such a high acceptability if we were not in the current crisis and would perhaps have been gaining ground in another five years. Indeed, a flurry of fake news in online

platforms has thrown many organisations off balance, threatening their brand value and equity. This makes brand reputation management a top priority for every PR practitioner. PR and communication management seem to occupy a special place in management counsel through crisis communication. The more than six months of the COVID-19 crisis has created new habits among audiences, which have to be tracked.

The PR practitioner had to rethink the presentation of content. Information overload online, increased fake news and more interest in the evolving crisis are some of the challenges that had made it difficult for organisations to catch the interest of their audiences. For audiences to digress and get interested in corporate information, the content has had to be not only compelling but also connect with their emotional inclination. Visuals in images, short videos, collages, and storytelling have taken preference. Brands have had to tweak content and connect with an audience that is now more preoccupied with their health as a priority. The content has also had to be factual and open as part of building trust.

Earlier, it was possible to rely on a five-year communication plan and implement the same systematically without disruption. This is no longer the case because trends are no longer predictable. Corporates must keep changing their strategies and seeking quick wins based on how the pandemic

has affected their staff, stakeholders, and the business. Quick wins have been a key solution and more communication targeted at where PR support will gain ground faster. In a sector like tourism for example, it has been more practical for Kenya government to woo the domestic traveler, appealing to them to explore the magical nature and tourism destinations in the country. Previously more marketing campaigns targeted the international market because it was assumed that the domestic traveler was already aware of what their country had to offer.

Events are core in generating news and have been used by many organizations to connect to the public. In the absence of such events that have been used to launch products, announce key milestones, address shareholders and reconnect people with brands, PR is dull. These are a major source of news and COVID-19 has deprived corporate brands of a key avenue of telling their story and leverage in terms of brand awareness. PR practitioners should, therefore, take advantage of the few opportunities that have begun to present themselves.

Recently, Kenya was privileged recently to host part of the World Athletics Continental tour - The Kip Keino Classic on October 3, 2020. Participants from over 30 countries converged at the Nyayo National Stadium for the event. It is no wonder that the organisers partnered with corporates to showcase the country

beyond branding, including holding their event conference at the national park, as well as facilitating a game drive to the participants who were only in the country for not more than three days. This was an opportunity for PR practitioner's milk maximum advantage for their clients.

What does all this mean for us, that we assess the environment that we operate in and make the necessary changes, generate, and implement PR strategies that resonate with the times. The balance between supporting businesses as the PR contribution to the bottom line and appealing to empathy of our publics must be perfected. The emotional support to PR audiences must be demonstrable to allow a connection between organizations and their target audience. This requires a mix of facts, we must be honest in messaging, and curve out messages that enhance credibility while at the same time maintaining compassion within both internal and external publics. It is evident that PR is expected to inform businesses more and lead marketing in terms of interpreting the readiness of publics to receive services and /or goods. PR practitioners must lay ground so that marketing messages suit the changing consumer needs which are now more complex. All this calls for us to re-position ourselves and take the central position we have always deserved in the institutions we serve. PR too has evolved, for the better.



We became entrepreneurs, thanks to corona virus

By Eunice Chege

Prior to the Covid 19, it was life as usual for some while for others life was fast moving and when the pandemic began their lives took a sudden halt. Children with absentee parents adjusting to having their parents in their space. Parents who had little time for their children were surprised at how little they know their children. Spouses have been forced to spend more time with each other. Employers too are realising how unprepared they are to crisis.

For the PR industry this has been a revealing moment on how unprepared the industry is for a crisis. Maxwell Maltz said, "Close scrutiny will show that most 'crisis situations' are opportunities to either advance or stay where you are." Some businesses have had to make rapid digital transformations to better serve their target market. For example, Nation Media recently launched Nation Africa to respond to the global trends driven by Covid.

Most businesses would have all closed if they had to wait for the pandemic to end. What is impressive is the way companies have navigated this uncertainty and turned unpredictability into resourceful innovation. Innovation and creativity during the pandemic have resulted to better productivity, some businesses already achieving their target annual revenue. But now more than ever before, companies are using video conferencing software to connect with employees, clients, and business partners both locally and globally. Even though nothing can replace the face-to-face meetings especially in organizations, these virtual connections have ensured business make sure that tasks and projects are completed. However, a look into the future and video conferencing is the way to go.

At least one million Kenyans lost their jobs or were put on indefinite unpaid leave, forcing Kenya into one of the worst employment crises it has ever faced. But our strengths lie in finding opportunity in the crisis. Hundreds of Kenyans started selling farm produce from the boots of their cars to make ends meet. This became a livelihood for people who have lost their jobs to the crisis. It is also during this period that some decided to diversify their skill sets by taking up online courses in different fields. Others opted to begin a journey on healthy living.

No doubt the crisis has dealt us a blow, but it has also made us stronger. We have discovered entrepreneurial skills that we did not even know we had. We have become better innovators. It is time to blow out the candles of the pity party cake and take the next step.

Chege is a Client Relations, Bright Spark Media

'Change your mind to succeed'

By Victor Sibeko

"You are your greatest asset. Put your time, effort and money into training, grooming, and encouraging your greatest asset." - Tom Hopkins

As aptly captured in Hopkins quote, grooming enhances the personality of an individual. It generates an improved version of you because image is something. A boost in self esteem allows you to be more comfortable and enables your true personality to feature large.

There are contestable meanings attached to grooming. In simple terms, it refers to an art which enables individuals to clean and maintain personal hygiene. According to Jorien Van Paasschena, a semantic scholar, "self-grooming occurs as a form of impression management to improve one's physical appearance and social perception." It isn't about application of excessive makeup or wearing expensive clothes. It is about maintenance of cleanliness for a pleasing appearance. This is essential in the practice of public relations. No one likes to associate or engage with a person who is unkempt.

Not long ago, former US first lady

Michelle Obama reminded us that success is determined by "your own confidence and fortitude." Dressing well, therefore, creates an impactful impression that allows one to stand out. It enhances the personality of an individual and shapes the perceptions of the people you meet.

"If you don't look the part, no one will want to give you time or money," says Daymond John, an American businessman, investor and media personality.

Looking neat and respectable is an extension of professional behaviour and ethical conduct. It helps one appear more persuasive, reliable and trustworthy. It enhances the senses of sanity which translates into quality output at the workplace. It provides a distinctive and recognisable personal brand to PR practitioners.

In this case, the personal brand is the sum total of the manner of your dressing, speech, academic qualifications, skills and experience, and overall achievements. Personality, attitude and approach to life define the personal brand of an individual.

The perceptions you create will shape how others treat you.

In advanced economies, the society intimately scrutinises people, especially in the public sector. You are watched, praised and judged at the same time. Maintenance of hygiene in your social media handles is also important for PR practice. Accepting to groom one or to be groomed is about the best decision you can make in order to manage perceptions. It is important for reputation management.

Life is about perceptions, perceptions are based on opinion. Opinions based on thought. Thought comes from the mind. Change your mind your mind change your life.

Victor Sibeko is a Chartered Public Relations Practitioner, Fellow of PRISA, Ambassador-at-Large and member of the Institute of Directors. Past president of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA); current Chief Executive Office (CEO) and member of the African Public Relations Association (APRA) Advisory Committee.



One-on-one with John Mramba, Fellow who has been with the Profession since 1970s

By Maureen Koech and AG Awino

Our interview was supposed to begin at 2pm at the agreed venue. Maureen and I were at the venue earlier as is usual with us when we have an interview with a news source. At 30 minutes to 2pm, John drives in and walks to the lobby. He is polite and refers to the staff of PRSK by name before scribbling something in his diary. He puts it back in his leather briefcase and glues his eyes to the TV to watch Aljazeera.

At 74, just like the US President Trump (a character he has least admiration for because of his disruptive and roughshod approach to issues) he is rather in a good form. He cares about his image and asks the photographer, Moffat, not to accentuate the size of his belly. Poised, eloquent and elegantly dressed in an Ankara shirt, Mr John Mramba, the PRSK College of Fellows Chairperson isn't your ordinary man. He prides himself in having over four decades of experience in Public Relations practice. The alumnus of the University of Nairobi, Columbia University, New York and Ebert-Stiftung in Germany has so much in his plate during his 8-5 or 5-8 schedule in a day. He chats with us about his formative years, family, work experience and well, politics too.

Who is Mramba?

An old man (chuckling). I am a son, husband, father and proud grandpa. I am also a member of the PRSK College of Fellows and I sit in many other boards. I'd like to think I'm still active in life and very passionate about sharing the little knowledge I have acquired over the years. I was among the pioneers of the School of Journalism at the University of Nairobi –where he met his Ethiopian wife-in the early 1970s. I then proceeded to build my communications career by working at the British Council in Kenya, ICIPE, AMREF among many other organizations.

Tell us more about how you met your wife?

While at the University of Nairobi, I spotted her but our relationship only grew



when I went to pursue my Masters at the University of Columbia. She was living in Boston then and when it was time to come back home, I told her I wouldn't want to come back without her. The rest is History. We are blessed with three girls.

Do you have a work-out routine?

As a matter of fact, we have a fitness instructor who comes to work us out at home. We're oldies and we wanted someone who will be patient with our pace of doing things. My daughter and son-in-law join us for these sessions and my wife and I look forward to such sessions because we get to do two things at the same time. Exercise and spend time with our daughter.

Do you read?

I don't read as much as I did back then. My focus now is on the news. I religiously read the newspapers, every morning. I watch the news as well, from local stations to international ones. I like being in the know of what's happening.

You sit in many boards; how do you find time for all that?

I am retired but not tired (chuckling). I have a very flexible schedule, with some days busier than the others. I do all this as a way of my giving back to the Society and it gives me so much joy.

How was life at KICC?

Well, good. I think we did lay a lot of

ground work to making it the dream conferencing and convention centre it is today.

You mention the College of Fellows in your intro. What is this College?

The PRSK College of Fellows is the Chama cha Wazee (laughing). As you can see, I have no hair but that isn't why I'm a member of the College. The College of Fellows is the gold standard of public relations professionals and the apex of PRSK leadership comprising of colleagues whose contribution to the PR industry is significant and worth noting. Most of us aren't in active practice but our role is to offer guidance and advice the Council. We are a reference point. We are 14 now. We sadly lost one of our own, Keli Kiilu, in June this year.

How can one join the College?

Well, the process is initiated by the Membership and Professional Development Committee. And a rigorous peer review process singles out professionals who fit the criterion and the list of final candidates is submitted to the Council and the College in that order for approval.

Do you believe that wazees should go away and pave way for the new blood?

Times are changing and truthfully as you age you can barely keep up with the new

trends, but just like wine matures with age, our experience in practice is what makes us indispensable. I have over 40 years' experience in practice. I can't be in the same competing space with a budding professional.

You are the pioneers of the PR practice in Kenya. That must have been difficult.

We started off the industry at a time when it was believed the only recognisable professions were medicine, engineering, architecture. So it wasn't easy convincing people that we deserved the same operating space but we are in the business of persuasion. We did the little we could and that is how PRSK was born. We are awed by the transformation in the profession and commend the PRSK Council for being aggressive in the quest to anchor the profession in law. It's about time.

What do you miss about your active years in practice?

We did a lot of physical interactions and we knew each other. Not just with fellow practitioners but with colleagues in other industries. But right now with over 4000 active practitioners it will be unrealistic to know every one of them. With the advent of the corona virus, we are likely to see less physical and more virtual events. I miss that.



How has the profession changed over the years?

It is not just the profession but the environment in which we practice in that has changed. The revolution and disruption of the industry owing to the fourth industrial revolution is rewriting the rulebook. You now have to bend; ensure you don't break and move with a speed of light. We didn't have the technological investments we see now and relied much on face-to-face interactions. I think the modern professional is lucky.

You sit in many recruitment boards. You have seen job adverts that on the face are asking for a Public Relations executive but the job description is that of a marketer. What is your view of this?

I think it is a classic case of ignorance. Much as I advocate for the modern practitioner to reinvent themselves and diversify their skills gap, it is professionally wrong to have such adverts flying around. Our role and that of marketers might be related but are very different. I believe the Council should be more aggressive in its consumer education to stakeholders on the role of a PR professional. Ours is a

profession of repute but it is misconstrued to mean propaganda. We have done much but there is much more to be done.

We have just a handful CEOs in Kenya who have a background in communication. Why do you think it is difficult for PR professionals to ascend to positions of power?

Most organizations believe that our role as PR professionals is to guide and advice the CEO but not assume the role. I think we are better placed to lead organizations because ours is an all-rounded approach to leadership. It has nothing to do with whether or not our profession has come of age but it is a classic case of individual incapacitation. If you believe you can do it then you can because in essence your role as a PR professional prepares you to such an eventuality.

A lot of communication professionals are taking up Law degrees now. Is there any link between the two?

That is such a commendable move. It's all about diversifying your skills set and adding your competitive edge. I believe communication can co-exist with any profession and I think more professionals

should be encouraged to take up courses in other fields as well.

How do you think PR professionals performed during this pandemic?

The government wouldn't have made the strides we did were it not for communication professionals. The pandemic caused a lot of confusion initially because none of us knew what we were dealing with, we still don't understand the virus in totality. Communication professionals really did a good job in educating the public on how the virus can be prevented, spread and what to do in the event you showed any of the symptoms. Much as there was infodemic at some point, I would rather that than lack of information. And even the transition to working from home among other policies was done so seamlessly thanks to communication. I think now organizations better understand how important the communication function is to their smooth running.

Any advice for budding professionals?

Never get comfortable in your current position. Constantly reinvent yourself with the world so you remain relevant



PR Landscape: Comparing Kenya and TZ

By Loth Makuza

The strategic communication initiative (PR) in Tanzania started in 2002 during the late President Benjamin Mkapa's second term in office. President Mkapa was determined to lead the war against corruption and to coordinate decision making process governed by professionalism, objectivity, integrity, impartiality, transparency and good governance.

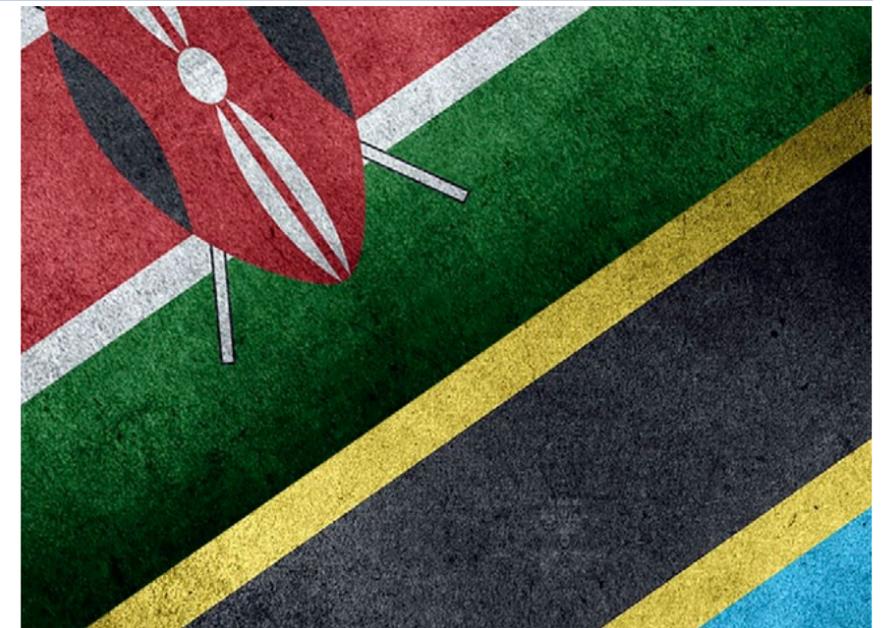
The overnight explosion of the media resulted in a situation where allegiance to the government was no longer a given. This was contrary to the media environment of the 1980s where two or three state owned print media ensured that government was portrayed in a positive light.

In view of all these changes, President Mkapa was concerned that government's success stories were not being heard. It was also concerned with the capacity in government offices in the areas of information, communication and outreach. It was thus the government commitment and tireless efforts that drove the initiative to increase and improve communication with the Tanzanian people.

Though at first it has been very difficult to get Ministerial buy-in for the Communication. Strategic communication has played a big role in convincing many government sectors and departments that the Communication Initiative is indeed important. As political figures, the Ministers also understand the need to communicate different initiatives and policy implementation processes that are ongoing in their ministries as well as the danger of not communicating to the people.

The deliberate actions taken by the government of United Republic of Tanzania to initiate the prosperity of communication field (PR) has been supported fully that's why in doing so we have championed the establishment of regulatory body responsible to uphold, oversee, regulate the practices of PR profession in Tanzania, that is Public Relations Society of Tanzania (PRST).

The Tanzanian Government



Communication initiative is one of the best successful stories one can loud and learn a lot from it. The digital communication management software is something everyone can not forget to mention. It is something that has changed the national professional way of looking at handling communications.

The analysis of the history of PR in both two countries Tanzania and Kenya is based on major and influential historical events which have shaped these two countries. The status of PR in Kenya is closely tied to key events that took place mostly after attaining the independence from the Britain in 1963. But moving away from this colonial mindset, the establishment of the regulatory bodies like Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) in 1971 with the aim of not only bringing together PR practitioners in Kenya but also to foster professional development of PR and Communication management basing on Kenyan environment in East Africa has expanded communications space in Kenya.

Kenya is ahead of Tanzania when talking about development of PR and is termed as the early adopter of PR and communication management in East Africa. It has many PR firms compared to Tanzania and this gives a chance to Tanzanians to learn and even hire professional communications experts from Kenya in some various

roles in different sectors particularly private sector. There's an increase of number of PR firms that help professional development of PR in Tanzania and Kenya. The handling of the reputation of many companies through owned, earned and paid communication has been done effectively. This is doing well in brand awareness and reputation management in various sectors.

The close collaboration of Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) and Public Relations Society of Tanzania (PRST) in upholding the status of PR in the region (East Africa) through a legal body the East African Public Relations Association (EPRA) will make this profession visible at the moment where it's gaining traction in both private and public sectors.

The East Africa Community (EAC) should be guided on how to establish policies which will foster economic and political growth in the region by utilizing the communication professionals from well legal recognised firms and professional communication field in Tanzania and Kenya without forgetting other member states like Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and South Sudan.

Loth Makuza is a leading Communication and PR Strategist. Loth is the Co-Founder and current President of Public Relations Society of Tanzania (PRST)



New skills and mindsets needed in the next-level leadership

By Kerry Sheehan Chart, CIPR

This year has taught us that the future is unpredictable and leaders will increasingly face challenges that have no solutions. But they will have to make decisions anyway. The uncertainty and complexity we have all seen and been part of in 2020 are unlikely to go away. Confusion is likely to remain a constant. As we approach 2021, next-level leaders must do more than just respond to the whirl of events, though respond they must. Next-level leaders must be positive change agents in the midst of chaos, creating the future.

The future is full of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA). Sadly, it won't be getting easier. Leaders must accept this reality. 2021 could be exceptionally volatile, with many make or break decisions to be made and with next-level leaders having to find a way through and bring people along with them.

New skill set

The coronavirus pandemic accelerated change, pushed and created a definitive mandate for adapting or failing. The challenge is less about learning something

completely new and more about leaders giving themselves permission to embrace a different way of leading. This requires letting go of the way things were and opening ourselves up to aspects of leadership and being human that we've been trained to avoid at all costs. These skills include a combination of the tangible skills and new mindsets.

In a world where innovation is the lifeblood of any business or organisation, we have to think differently about reimagining the future. Rather than just thinking about the problems we will solve after today, evaluating the past and present and putting together a list of things to do, we should shift our mindsets to creating something that doesn't exist yet.

It begins with embracing that there is a new direction of leadership that forces us to step out of our comfort zones, learn from each other, not worry about perfection and make paced collaborative decisions.

Embracing change

Next-level leaders should also embrace change. As we have seen throughout 2020, change is no longer done in silos. It is across functions, levels, with internal and external stakeholders, partners and vendors. This doesn't mean next-level leaders should be the 'know it all' leader. But they should be great at clarifying what the situation is, what needs to be solved, creating the urgency to change and identifying who you need to work with to make it happen.

Rapid Prototyping

Leaders who can accelerate success but, importantly, those who learn from failure at an accelerated speed will be able to drive their organisations to success and out-pace the industry they operate in. This means a growth mindset and using lessons learned from those failures to drive the improved option at pace.

Real-Time Decision Making

Next-level leaders must use data more and use it for researching best practices or reinforcing the tried and tested way of doing things. Leaders must be able to reference trends and themes that are

surfacing so they can make tough and immediate calls that require informed risk-taking but probably with less guarantee of success. Well curated and tracked data can be used to support dynamic change and rapid prototyping.

Constructive depolarising

Next-level leaders will require an ability to bring people from divergent cultures toward constructive engagement to calm and improve tense situations where people cannot agree.

2021 could be exceptionally volatile, with many make or break decisions to be made. Next-level leaders have to find a way through.

Commons creating

New leaders will need to be able to sow, nurture and grow shared assets that can benefit other players. This will be done through next-level leaders creating settings within which both cooperation and competition may occur.

Navigating ambiguity

2020 has been a complex year for most businesses and organisations. Next-level leaders must be able to read the room and assess when to listen, to push back and when to compromise.

The idea that only one person has the all-encompassing decision-making power has shifted to one that is focussed on collaboration. Effective collaboration can be full of ambiguity but it requires wisdom in balancing the art and science of decision making.

Humility

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the leaders who have led with humility have been seen to be 'winning'. Next-level leaders will prioritise the best solution over trying to be the best person. They will inspire others, foster commitment and set everyone up to do their best work. They will admit to not having all the answers, enabling others to be part of the solution.

Vulnerability and empathy

Next-level leaders will breed a willingness to let others contribute to helping, trusting

it will make you all better off by the trust and growth that comes from working in a partnership.

This is a marked shift from the former 'all-powerful' leader. New leadership style is also dictating to showing authentic empathy, allowing leaders to help struggling employees improve and excel. Empathy allows leaders to build and develop relationships with those they lead.

Next-level leaders will also need to show bio-empathy, the ability to see things from nature's point of view, to understand, respect and learn from nature's patterns and use that wisdom to inform your leadership.

Next-level leaders will need to re-focus away from the being in control, avoiding mistakes and being perfect. We will require the ability to feel anxious and possibly even fearful of the unguaranteed future and trying our hardest, through all of the above attributes, to move forward. And, importantly, taking people with us with our new style of leadership.

Rediscovering home schooling in 2020

By Michael Ochula, MPRSK

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the way of life we previously took for granted – going to work, attending weddings every Saturday, going to church, seeing friends and wandering aimlessly down fully-stocked supermarket aisles. However, one of the biggest changes for many parents is that kids were urged to stay and learn at home. Overnight, parents had to transform to teachers, alongside everything else on their plates, they had to create time for teaching their children regardless of their parked work schedules.

For many years home schooling was a vague and unfamiliar concept in Kenya, it however became the new normal for the past 8 months. Most parents scrambled to find a new routine where children were at home while continuing their education. As a parent of five school going kids, husband and professional facilitator who runs a series of webinars from my lounge, I struggled to do the same.

To a greater extent, what's happening was not home schooling, it was crisis schooling. In countries where there exists an established home schooling framework, parents who home school have made a conscious decision to educate their child at the comfort of their home. Those parents have spent time organizing their resources and routines, deliberating over how to ensure an optimal learning environment for their child, specific to their own needs. Indeed, home school parents often have networks of other parents who have also chosen this option, and together, they collaborate and socialize their children.

What we had in Kenya was crisis schooling which is different. With very little notice or choice, suddenly kids were home. Faced with this dilemma, inadequate resources and limited know-how, parents found themselves in very unfamiliar territories. Crisis schooling opened a range of dilemmas which parents faced, including:

- “How to prioritise between helping the child to learn and continue to do the job?”

• “I’ve always tried to teach my kids health and fitness and limit screen time, but giving my child a device is now the only way I get a break.”

• “My wife and I are both working full time while the kids are at home, now one of us must sacrifice our work time to learn with the children?”

Most of us have been taught that, there are no ready-made answers to ethical challenges. Instead, we have to respond to the circumstances and relationships at play – which will be different for each of us – and try to balance these with our personal ethics; our purpose, values and principles. It may help to keep in mind some advice from Greek philosopher, Socrates, who maintained that in order for education to occur a person must accept what they do not know. It is an acceptable fact that most parents don't know how to be teachers, except for those who are trained to be so. Let's not pretend to ourselves or our kids that we're fully equipped to do this. We're not.

Therefore as parents, we can use the resources that teachers have readily made available. We can admit to our children that there are some things that we don't know how to do, and that we need to figure it out together.

What parents do know is how to love and care for their children. Parents understand their children better than



anyone else in the world and can provide them with the love and support they need. 2020 has been incredibly uncertain and anxious time that really is their most important need. Rather than being overly concerned with how much they have learned, whether or not they're read enough, practicing fractions or working on their fine motor skills, let's focus on our children's mental wellbeing.

The world is in a stressful place right now and the anxiety is getting contagious. Children need to feel supported and comforted. Home is supposed to be a safe space for children, regardless of what is happening outside in the world, and this applies today, more than ever.

So, let's throw out the rule book on home schooling. Let's remember we were in a crisis and although we have moved rapidly to this point, we do not have to adjust with the same speed to a new home-based education system. Do what feels right for your family, even if that means throwing out the schedule. Try not to compare what you are doing to others posting about their experience on social media. What works for one family, might not work for yours.

Human beings are incredibly resilient, and so are our children. We'll all adapt... and soon, our normal life will resume – with a much greater appreciation for the things we took for granted. What our kids will remember is the extra family time they got to spend with their parents, the extra cuddles, the extra stories and more so the horrible teaching methods.

For now, let's all take a deep breath and cherish the closeness that comes with distancing.

Authentically Kenyan



Interviewing For That Big Job: Are You Underselling

By Lillian Ngala



How did I do? This is a common question after every interview session. Even though most executives are experts and specialists in their own areas, many are yet to nail it when it comes to clinching that big role. Why is this so?

Having participated in many interviews, I can say that often, failing to clinch that prize has little to do with the competence of the candidates; usually it is because they are unable or unwilling to tell their success stories, accomplishments and experience.

In fact, it is often only after you nudge them outright do many interviewees begin to show enthusiasm and confidence – and flaunt some of their important achievements.

Unprompted, however, many would-be successful candidates shy away from bringing out their best. This denies them opportunities that are theirs for the asking. Institutions also miss out on some of this latent talent out there because of failure of executives to sell themselves successfully.

Yet interviewees can hardly shoulder all the blame. We have grown up in societies that frown upon bragging about our

achievements. From a young age we hear sayings such as: ‘Never blow your own trumpet’.

However, interviews are a different ball game altogether. Indeed, a healthy dose of pride – the confidence to explain clearly your achievements and what you can do if given an opportunity, even as you acknowledge the role of others – is what you need to get to the next level.

As an HR practitioner, I assure you that if you don’t feel like you are bragging, you are probably underselling yourself, this is the plain truth.

Achievements and capabilities

When we feel uncomfortable talking about our achievements and capabilities, we end up looking incompetent and not fit for the big job. Without interviewees confidently selling their abilities, the C-suite will always elude even the best among us.

To be fair, there is actually a very fine line between confidence and bragging, making one to try not to come off as showy during the interview. Yet as you censor yourself you may end up underselling your capabilities and come across as someone who lacks confidence for that big job.

Plan, Prepare, Perform

Many of us ask ourselves, how do you get ready for that big job? When it comes to acing your next interview, the 3Ps are essential: Plan. Prepare. Perform. What the 3Ps simply mean is that you must do some research beforehand; put in some time to practise answering questions that you anticipate, and show up on that big day with a performance that leaves no doubt at all in any member of the panel that you are the best fit for the job.

Research

Most companies have the ‘About Us’ section on their websites. This is the smartest, yet most basic place to start your pre-interview research.

If you are an executive, go line by line through your resume, detailing your projects and accomplishments. Document your capabilities and be sure to look at them objectively even as you recite them with ease, enthusiasm, and confidence.

Tell your Story

Design your story into categories of achievements in specific functions such as finance, management, or operations. You can have all the stories batched to make them easy to remember and structured. This is the secret to keeping your listener engaged. An engaged listener wants to hear more. Remember to practice it till it flows. You must constantly remind yourself about your accomplishments. You must also redefine your story to suit your target audience and your story needs to match your goals. Most importantly, your story should reflect what you are aiming for without putting a lot of focus on your past.

Brag your accomplishments

You may not believe it, but maligned though it has been over the ages, bragging in an interview is the game changer that you need to get ahead! Even if initially it may not feel natural or comfortable, be intentional about it and go about it like a pro. It will put you ahead of the pack.

You must be able to articulate your accomplishments convincingly. Remember that you are before that panel in the first place because they have gone through your papers and you have ticked all the boxes of prerequisites. All the interviewing panel is waiting for is to confirm your suitability for that role.

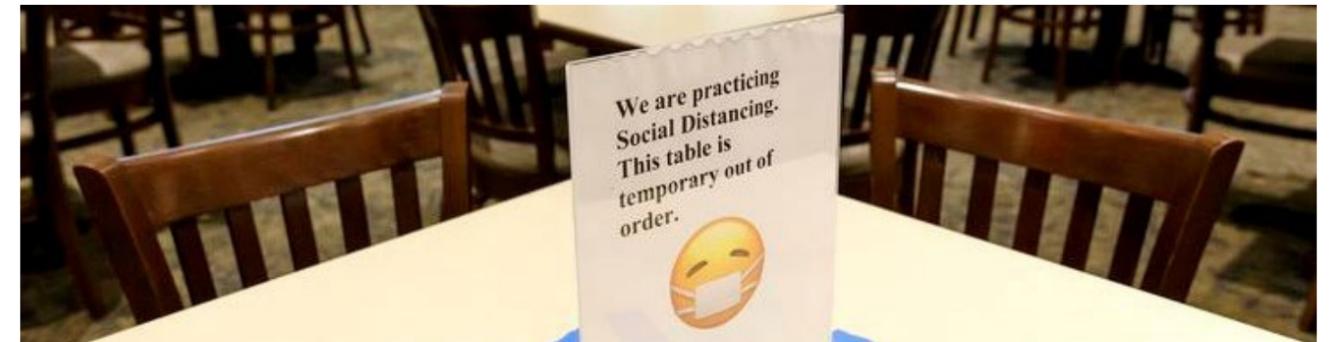
Confidence

Confidence begets confidence. Like much else, it is infectious. Ask yourself: If you can’t be confident enough about your achievements and capabilities, why should you expect the panel to be confident about your suitability for that big role?

From today, be intentional about being loud and proud to get what you deserve.

All the best in your next ‘big’ interview!

Ms Ngala is the head of human resources at Diamond Trust Bank.



Businesses must act in the interest of individuals, society and the environment

By Josiah Mwangi

According to Apex Porter Novelli’s (APN) COVID-19 Tracker Survey conducted by research firm Trends for Insights Africa (TIFA) in June 2020, Kenyans expect corporations to play a bigger role in addressing societal challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The survey explored the perception Kenyans have towards corporate response to the pandemic and was designed to help the business navigate the current crisis and work towards a new norm.

The study revealed that purpose-driven companies are more likely to enjoy business and reputational success from their initiatives that addressed the needs of their stakeholders and the community occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the survey showed that 79% of respondents would want to work for companies that provide coronavirus support, 89% more likely to purchase from these companies and 85% likely to invest shares in them.

Company’s success

The metrics used by consumers and employees to measure a company’s success are changing quickly, and most forward looking organisations and CEOs are focused on implementing solutions that benefit people, society and the planet – while still making a profit. There is a growing belief that businesses

should better serve all stakeholders – customers, employees, communities, as well as shareholders. In other words, business should have a Purpose. Purpose-driven businesses have managed to pull through by putting people ahead of profits, creating partnerships, redesigning products and supporting communities.

The lens we look through today shows that business must act in service to individuals, broader society and the environment, and this must remain the lens moving forward. Because of the heightened expectations for businesses to be responsible corporate citizens and leaders, solution providers and force for good will not fade as the pandemic does. There has never been a more critical time to lead with Purpose.

An organization’s image and reputation is heavily pegged on its leadership. There is a direct correlation between the perception of Kenyans towards purpose-driven businesses and its leadership. In line with this, 83% of the respondents from the survey said they will remember business leaders who stepped up during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose is central to organizational effectiveness because it appeals emotionally to employees, customers, investors and other stakeholders. Corporates should pay attention and

take note of the needs of the publics that fuel the profitability of the business. As responsible corporate citizens, the spotlight is on interweaving their business and operations decisions with social purpose, and steering their attention towards supporting relief efforts facing ordinary Kenyans. This will have a positive effect on the profit margins.

Additional takeaways from the COVID-19 tracker survey are trusted sources of information, an important insight for media houses who command 83% of Kenyans’ attention as an authentic provider of the latest COVID-19 updates. This is useful information for companies aiming at increasing visibility of their social programmes, activities, initiatives or innovations.

Business plays a fundamental role in shaping and creating the society of the future. Using our capabilities, we work with organizations to help them find their purpose and bring it to life. As the pandemic progresses, there is need to conduct other waves of the survey to keep tabs on how Kenyans view the overall response to the pandemic from the corporate world, the philanthropies and the government at large.

Josiah Mwangi is the Director in charge of client development and strategic services at Apex Porter Novelli.



Year was devastating; but all's not lost

By Malesela Maubane

A lot of people usually set goals at the beginning of each calendar year, read “new year resolutions.” In South Africa, just like in other parts of the world, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic sent 2020 into a tailspin just as most of us were reviewing the first quarter in terms of progress against the set goals, with President Cyril Ramaphosa announcing the initial 21-day nationwide lockdown on 23 March. South Africa is currently at Level-1 lockdown of the national state of disaster, as it continues to respond to the pandemic and exploring the road to economic recovery.

The outbreak has further exposed fault lines in terms of socio-economic inequalities. As the national state of disaster continues, late South African President, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela said, “A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world a better place we so passionately dreamt of.”

The Cambridge dictionary defines a ‘crisis’ as “a time of great disagreement, confusion, or suffering.” As the world is still in the midst of a health crisis in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for us not to let our guard down. Though fatigue might be setting in due to restrictions on movement, we should continue to constantly follow health protocols set by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

German-born theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein “In the midst of every crisis,

lies a great opportunity.” On my part, the pandemic-induced lockdown was an opportunity to do more reading and writing. I immersed myself in writing, mostly social-commentary and thought leadership on topical issues such as fake news, crisis communication, Ubuntu, Africanism, electoral reform and heritage. On the matter of Africanism and Ubuntu, I was reminded that African communities have always displayed their collectivism through ‘letsema’ in the Sotho languages, ‘ilima’ in isiXhosa or its close link ‘ujamaa’ in Kiswahili for the people of East Africa. It was not unusual for a group of men or women in a village gathering to build a house for someone in need, a school, constructing a livestock dam or cultivating and harvesting the fields.

Marcus Mosiah Garvey Jr., Jamaican political activist, publisher, journalist, entrepreneur, and orator once said “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.” On that note, the lockdown was also an opportunity to use the time to discover more about one’s family lineage and heritage.

Technology effectively enabled me to be a panelist during the Zambia Public Relations Association (ZAPRA) webinar on “Crisis communication in Southern Africa - the case for COVID-19” during the hard lockdown.

Being part of Covid Comms SA, a group of public relations and communication management volunteers, enabled one to be at the forefront of ensuring that

information on the pandemic is translated into indigenous languages; including curbing spread of misinformation.

Looking at activities that I was involved in during 2020, I was able to grab an opportunity to put Ubuntu and the spirit of service in action. Invitation to my alma mater Dr MJ Madiba Secondary School to motivate the matric class of 2020 learners was thus a welcome move. My message to them was on the theme, “Learning in crisis, reimagining the future”, this in line with the theme for 2020 International Teachers Day.”

It was befitting that I share with the learners a Swahili proverb translated to mean, “Wealth, if you use it, comes to an end; learning, if you use it, increases”, simply put, look towards education to guide the path to your future, not money. The secondary school was named after Dr Moses Josiah Madiba (1909-1985), a linguist, author, educationist and community leader. In what was the clearest evidence of his commitment to community service, Madiba was quoted to have said “Service to one’s people is the rent you pay for your stay on earth.”

In summary, even though the pandemic caused untold devastation and literally turned 2020 upside-down, there were important lessons to learn. Yes, there is still plenty to celebrate this year.

Maubane CPRP is founder and Managing Director of Oo Mokgatla Media and a former President of the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA)



Entities Should Prioritise Brand Trust

By Gilbert Manirakiza

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it’s that brand consistency and a people-focused approach is what will give a company mileage and longevity long after the virus is contained.

This narrows down to the level of trust consumers attribute to a certain brand. Arguably, customer experience forms the very foundation of trust. A customer’s recollection of the experience that is associated with a product or a service they consumed eventually becomes a key driver of future purchasing decisions.

The brands that survive (or are surviving) this crisis are those which are able to place people at the core of their thinking. In efforts to comprehensively understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer brand trust, Newmark Analytics, a practice of the Newmark Group conducted a survey to test key factors contributing to brand trust among Kenyan consumers, and published findings in its’ 2020 Brand Dashboard report.

A shift in consumer behaviour

Unquestionably, the consumer is the greatest asset for any organisation. Since the novel virus became a global pandemic, content consumption among consumers has drastically morphed from a physical to an online/virtual experience.

This research found that 61% of Kenyan consumers have an increased interest in locally available goods during this crisis. In understanding why there was more consumption of local products, the study found that 59% of respondents shifted to a new brand because they exuded empathy. A further 76% suggested that they would turn to brands they could trust during the crisis. Inferring from the

research findings, Kenyan consumers are less concerned about product experience and are now more keen on customer experience.

In the case of consumer brand perception of the COVID-19 response, research findings indicate that 89% of consumers are dissatisfied with how brands are handling the pandemic. In the midst of a crisis, consumers expect brands to play a leadership role when it comes to actively fighting the virus and championing safety and self-preservation.

Furthermore, 71% of respondents indicated that they are likely to purchase a product from a brand whose crisis response was effective with 66% of them conclusively indicating that any brand that focuses on profit rather than people will lose consumer trust forever.

How then can brands create consumer brand trust?

Transparency is key. This is edified by the findings of this research which indicate that 94% of consumers are more likely to be loyal to a transparent brand. This ultimately means that brands must evolve from the profit motive and maintain transparency in disclosing measures they have put in place to ensure consumer and employee safety. According to the research, 82% of consumers are more interested in the measures being taken by brands and businesses to ensure their safety during this pandemic.

Secondly, brand trust has been influenced by an organization’s decision to be either proactive or reactive in responding to the crisis. This pandemic has witnessed a myriad of brands partnering with other entities including the government to ease the devastating effects of the

virus. Brands that have taken a proactive approach in pioneering initiatives that build community resilience have excelled and earned the trust of their consumers compared to their counterparts who have taken a reactive approach. This is evidenced by the research findings which suggest that 98% of businesses can increase consumer brand trust, by undertaking initiatives that alleviate the suffering occasioned by the pandemic.

Lastly, this crisis requires brands to forge communication that empowers, encourages and demonstrates empathy to individuals. Why is empathetic crisis communication important? 90% of consumers want brands to communicate measures they are taking towards the safety and well-being of their clients and employees. Moreover, 85% of consumers believe that brands MUST be empathetic in their mode of communication.

The core of every brand success

According to the findings, 44% of consumers have ceased from using a brand solely based on their COVID-19 response strategy. What does this imply? Consumers are more inclined to place their trust in brands that value people over profit. This is because at the nucleus of every brand success is TRUST. Any business that can maintain transparency, empathy and people - focus will be successful. Consumers are looking for brands that can help them mitigate the effects of the crisis by offering solutions. Only by doing so will a brand thrive during and after this pandemic

Mr. Manirakiza is a Passionate Entrepreneur, Strategic and Multilingual Communications Specialist, and a Pan-Africanist. He is the CEO of the Newmark Group Ltd.

Embracing Change is no Longer an Option, it is a must for all of us

By Ngulamu Jonathan

With less than 60 days to the New Year 2021, it's undoubtedly that 2020 will go down in history as a year of change for many people. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought forth a mix of experiences to both individuals and corporates. Having looked at how these experiences are playing out amidst the pandemic, the words "embrace change" will carry enormous weight beyond 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected many people but there are those people who saw the silver lining, embraced change and seized the opportunity in the adversity. Since then, they have kept moving on and from their actions, we draw our key lesson of the year: embracing change is no longer an option but a must for sustainability.

Across board, corporates as well as individuals are asking themselves, how do we enhance our sustainability in this adversity? Can we overcome the unforeseen impacts of pandemics? And if so, how do we nurture this culture to ride over any disruptions like the one we are in?

While these questions may be answered in many ways, our take away lesson of embracing change remains a key pillar in every answer.

According to Campbell Macpherson, an international business adviser and the author of *The Power to Change: How to Harness Change to Make it Work for You*, one of the greatest gifts you can give your people is the power to change. Probably, in our context, one of the greatest gifts to give your clients are the ideas to lead change and embrace it.

Indeed, in the absence of a vaccine or a quick solution to the COVID-19 virus, majority of individuals and businesses are going through some tough times. But, has COVID-19 not taught us that businesses

can be done online? Have we not seen that working from home is possible? Maybe everything is possible, we are just not trying or taking the risk. Maybe we are just afraid of change, and there are many benefits on the other end.

Today, many people are working from home, conferences are being conducted online and businesses are all shifting online. That's change, and it's through adapting it that we can enhance our sustainability.

As the English writer named Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) wrote, "A self that goes on changing is a self that goes on living." This realisation has come true and the need for corporates to adapt with changing environments remains imperative, especially in this era of the 4th industrialization.

For instance, this year, the PRSK published dozens of articles. Whether it's one of the Association's ways to keep its members close or increase its voice across the globe, a vivid lesson on embracing change is reflected in the Association's move. Through an online publication, thousands of individuals can access it compared to a scenario where the association would have only printed 1,000 copies and distributed them. The reach is totally different.

Currently, majority of businesses have shifted online. It's an area with a promising future and businesses should seek to explore how their customers can be served well using innovation and technology.

Data from the E-Marker 2019 Global Ecommerce Report indicated that by 2021, the expected global ecommerce will approach \$5 trillion. These statistics have already been accelerated by COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for entities and individuals to seize the

online opportunities remains critical for sustainability.

As the unprecedented COVID-19 Pandemic continues to affect millions of people, organisational leaders must also be at the frontline to nurture this change. Not everyone will be willing to embrace change. Hence there is need for leaders to lead change and enable either their employees or clients embrace it.

In the 4th Issue of the PR Digest Magazine, Kerry Sheehan, Chair of the AIinPR Panel pulled a good point in regards to change and development. She noted that in the new normal, there must be new habits, which are nurtured and supported with integrated systems of measurements by the change makers.

The change makers are the people who will drive businesses in 2020 and beyond. For communicators, this is the tagline that will drive clients businesses amid the adversity. From the formulation of our communication strategies, to their implementation, it is good to consider what the world is changing in both the social, economic and political environment.

Cognizant of the fact that life is changing in all spheres, business too must seek to look beyond short term profits. Rather, it will be good for businesses to look for financial, environmental and social sustainability through adapting and nurturing change.

This said, communicators shall be on a vantage position to tackle any disruption faced while ensuring that the businesses sustainability is secured not only now, but also for the future generations.

The writer is a MPRSK and a Communications Consultant at IMG Kenya (PR & Events)

Mentoring Leadership Persuasively

By Jane Gitau F.PRSK

In every public gathering, promises of a brighter future are made to the coming generation. Many hang onto those promises but many more, disillusioned with unfulfilled promises over the years, want instant returns. This kind of cycle has built the culture of handouts.

However, away from the crowds, a few learn the lessons through mentorship. Professional organizations attempt to put in place mentorship through internships and other learning spaces for students. Often, finding a willing mentor is no mean task. Some associations like PRSK offer reduced fees for students to access events and seek out the professionals that can mentor them.

In *The Lord of the Rings*, a novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, Gandalf is the leader and mentor of the Fellowship of the Ring. Despite his great power, he prefers to work by encouraging and persuading. He possesses great knowledge, and travels continually, always focused on the mission to counter his enemy, the Dark Lord Sauron. His is Narya, the Ring of Fire, and he both delights in fireworks to entertain as well as a weapon.

Through him, the roles of a mentor are visible. The first is that mentoring is a relationship between two people with the goal of professional and personal development. The “mentor”- an experienced individual shares knowledge, experience, and advice with a less experienced person, or “mentee.”

Secondly, mentors are trusted advisers and role models. They have “been there” and “done that.” They support and encourage their mentees to improve their skills and advance their careers. A mentor offers grounded encouragement necessary to push through the mental roadblocks of the mentee and set them back on the path to success.

Third, mentoring is a partnership based on mutual trust and respect. It offers personal and professional advantages for both parties. A mentor or a guardian prepares the mentee for the mental, physical, or emotional challenges they will face in their journey to overcome an inner

conflict and achieve their life goal. This includes building of social capital.

Indeed, it is the role of the mentor to help the mentee settle, calm down and focus on their goal even when they feel like a fish out of water, in desperate need of some support or in learning a physical skill or a new body of knowledge.

Research confirms that quality mentoring relationships have powerful positive effects on young people in a variety of personal, academic, and professional situations. Ultimately, mentoring connects a young person to personal growth and development, and social and economic opportunity.

Being a mentor is an active commitment to one of the most impactful things in the life of a young person: a relationship. Mentorship was inspired by the character of Mentos in Homer's *Odyssey* who advises a young man Telemachus, in his time of difficulty. Telemachus, a figure in Greek mythology, is the son of Odysseus and Penelope who on the advice of Mentos, king of the Taphians, goes out in search of his father. Odysseus left home for the Trojan War nearly two decades ago and the son on the advice of Mentos restores his parents' marriage after he finds his father and they together eject the suitors who had crowded the house seeking the hand of Penelope in marriage.

When young people have an advisor they can trust and look up to, they gain more confidence and are more daring in trying out new things. Indeed, according to Mentor Washington, more than half of

youth (52%) who are mentored are likely to stay in school compared to their peers. They also experience fewer symptoms of depression and 46% of them are less likely to use illicit drugs.

Mentoring relationships are opportunities for learning and growth both ways. It is also a time for creating and having fun, learning more about each other, improving self-esteem and enhancing social relationships.

A good mentor takes time to get to know their mentee, their likes and dislikes. They engage active listening skills, show empathy and flexibility so that they can meet the needs of those under their charge. A mentor chooses whether they want to help a youth learn a specific skill, pursue an interest, help with schoolwork or just be a caring adult friend.

This creates elements such as feeling valued, improved self-esteem and a feeling that they are making a difference. For both, especially if it is cross cultural, they gain a better understanding of other cultures and develop a greater appreciation for diversity. This in turn generates more productivity and a better attitude at work.

The Biblical Paul had Timothy as a mentee and half the New Testament is produced by Paul. He lived his word and was brave enough to say ‘Imitate me as I imitate Christ’. His words were authentic, that honesty could only have yielded trust from Timothy. Who are today's Pauls, Mentos and Gandalfs? And are the mentees available?



The year that was! Ready to bounce back for new business opportunities?

By Benson Adavagana



A lot has happened since January 2020. Much that was to happen didn't happen either. It has been a year of mixed fortunes. Some will leave it reveling a psalm, others will be writing their lamentations. Am eager to see how it eventually folds up. Then I can sit at the furthest corner and count my blessings; one by one.

One thing that stands out for this year is the Covid-19 pandemic, 'Rona'. At first it was all about a distant Chinese city – Wuhan, unknown to most of us. Then we witnessed it creeping into Europe and America before eventually docking home. We felt the fear and desperation it brought along. Within no time, our workplaces were no longer safe enough, we were walking with faces partially covered, and social distancing was the new norm. Some of us really struggled turning down those extended handshakes. Now extending a handshake feels stranger. We have evolved.

I don't recall a time in my lifetime where office introverts have had the chance to shine. We were working from home, away from the tumult. The crowds. The prying eyes. The office bullies. We were finally getting the space to be creative and show the world our stuff. I would cherish to see the innovations that were sired during this period. Unless of course your home is like mine... well, I will leave that at that. I always had to plan my way to the office as usual, and beat the curfew while at it. Working from home was hardly an option.

These new dynamics will definitely impact the workplace in the long run. Depending on what the Organisations will have experienced and learnt. We are now meeting virtually and cutting on the time and cost spent navigating the City to pitch to a client/prospect. Training budgets have been slashed with online sessions. It is convenient for business. This practice won't go away any time soon. Maybe

it will evolve. We may see other re-organisations. We have certainly learnt a lot. I have identified the things I need. I have noted what I don't. I have learnt where I can cut my operational costs, yet have the business running efficiently. Thanks to the unprecedented Rona crash program.

That was just the silver lining. The cloud itself hung low and dark. We lost businesses, we lost customers, we lost income, and lost a lot of potential opportunities that were nigh. At some point we were left clinging on hope. Then there are those accrued liabilities from unmet obligations, creditors etc. Of course, many employees were laid off. This was probably the worst manifestation of our being as a business community.

As leaders, we carry the people's burden within our Organisations and Companies. Many times, we have to balance the scales, to the interest of the business. Yes, we play the devil's advocate. We did it during this Rona. Many people lost their livelihoods as a result. At the end of the day, we have to live with the decisions, good or bad. There was no immediate fix. Even with the easing of restrictions later on. Yet here we are today.

Some of the customers are gradually returning; thank heavens! New leads are on the horizon. Many employees have been recalled. Unfortunately, some are still waiting in limbo (I cringe at the thought of this). But this is a reality that many in this country and the world at large have lived through in 2020. Maybe into the next year...? I fear we may not have seen it all.

2020 definitely goes down in my diary as the year lost. It will be that terrible referent period when digging up some old memory from this era, eons after today.

I am optimistic though. We are a resilient people. We've always bounced back from tough situations. We don't stay down. We will forge forward gradually. One year at a time.

Professional bodies have a role to play in preparing the learners for future opportunities

By Nancy Marangu

Formal education and training systems often do not reach marginalized youth or cater for young women, rural or indigenous youth, or youth with physical, sensory, or cognitive disabilities, leaving them without basic skills needed to realize their potential or aspirations.

Yet the youth continue to be an essential ingredient in creation of opportunities and recognizing them creates an opportunity for professional bodies to bridge this gap by developing strategies that can be employed at grassroot levels to ensure that all youth earn skill/professional-based education that can be applicable in the competitive job market.

Because most professional associations are domiciled in cities such as Nairobi, Kisumu, Mombasa with very few of them having charters in other counties to carry out community engagements. There is need for transitional gaps into the job market among the youth and the disabled living in rural areas. This an avenue for the professionals to choose which form of education they would wish to support the youth and the disabled for ease transition. The proactive participation of professionals is an essential element in the eradication of poverty and ensuring that quality education embraces the diversity of livelihoods and in so doing address gender inequalities and the needs of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

By implementing community engagement strategies that align with the principles of corporate governance, professional bodies, through the talent pool of their expertise can impart learners in transition with career and life skills, social norms, values that will sharpen strategic and independent thinking. What is more these bodies, ought to devise mechanism in addressing disparities in educational access and quality in collaboration with key stakeholders within the sector. In the long-run this will curtail transitional barriers of many young people – including the disabled, young refugees, and young women.

It is unfortunate, that children with disabilities have a lower probability of enrolling and continuing with their education than those without disabilities according to the World Bank & World Health Organization report 2011. Among youth living with disabilities, dropout and illiteracy rates are disproportionately high, and relatively few progress to secondary and tertiary education. Further, the World Health Organization 2009, indicates that, instead of attending school, children and youth with mental and intellectual disabilities are institutionalized in facilities that do not offer education.

Consequently, professional bodies should create a bridge for youth in supporting aspiring young entrepreneurs to acquire industrial-based education to equip them with requisite acumen to navigate the world of business creation and development.



2020 From The Diaspora Lenses

By Frank Ojwang, (Kenyan living in the diaspora)

The adaptation to the new normal due to the coronavirus pandemic is still underway, but the effects and impact will continue to be felt for the next decade as industries realign with the new realities and dynamics in the world of work. The 'working from home' (WFH) model adopted by many organisations, especially the multinational organisations and companies has revealed the need and impact of international travel for some roles and industries. When the second wave dust settles down, many industry players and sectors will re-write the rules affecting their industries and WFH will be a central component that comes with the new normal phase.

Adapting to a new normal

The Africans including Kenyans in the diaspora have also had a taste of their ability to cope and adapt to the new normal way of life beyond work, as the pandemic presented a review of the work-life balance. This includes the capacity to cope with the stress and anxiety of the pandemic, reduced income or lost revenues among other challenges. The closure of borders in March, 2020 in many countries globally triggered conversations around the safety nets in the diaspora for many Africans including Kenyans that could not travel to their countries.

Many never, heard or even imagined of some incidents and experienced them for the first time in a century. Examples are like the grounding of airplanes and ships. Curfews featured in the governments' direction to citizens and residents in many countries were put under lock down.

The World Health Organization (WHO) became a key agency for Kenyans in the diaspora to analytically review the situation and mutation of the coronavirus, and use the information to make useful decision regarding their life abroad. Additionally, Kenyans kept tabs with news from Kenya's authorities regarding the situation in Kenya, government's level of preparedness and other advisory in relation to the pandemic.

Many Africans including Kenyans abroad increased their usage of technology to keep relatives and friends close and to keep in

touch. In addition, technology has enabled work to continue in many industries abroad thus sustaining livelihoods for some Kenyans abroad. The Kenyans in the menial jobs' sectors that diaspora governments considered a high-risk, lost their incomes and livelihoods leading to frustration, depression and stress while far away from their motherland.

Vulnerability of Kenyans abroad

The coronavirus exposed the vulnerability of Kenyans in the diaspora, especially in the menial jobs sector such as cleaning industry, hospitality and food industry, entertainment, tourism and many other sectors.

Majority of Kenyans in the diaspora migrate for economic reasons, and as such are in employment in various industries with many being in the menial jobs sectors. The coronavirus exposed the government's lack of capacity to airlift and assist Kenyans in the diaspora in the event of a distress situation like the pandemic.

Many Kenyans especially in various gulf countries, China, Middle East and even Europe appealed for repatriation, as they were helpless with their livelihoods lost and felt that Kenya was the safest haven they had. But for a better part, the repatriation flights did not come through, and where they did, the costs were so high. Other governments had repatriated their citizens in a systematic and orderly manner. Germany for example, had a very well-coordinated repatriation plan that many other citizens including Kenyans in the diaspora, had thought would be executed by their governments.



The pandemic revealed the socially constructed realities of Kenyans in the diaspora and further lifted the veil of reality for many Kenyans in the diaspora that they were on their own. The year 2020 came with lessons and realities that will determine the return or stay decision trajectories for many Kenyans in the diaspora in the months to come. Whereas the decisions will depend on many factors including the socio-economic opportunities available for the immigrants, political environment and social support system, the experience will make the Kenyans in diaspora to deconstruct their fears and face the realities with pragmatism and innovativeness.

The year 2020 has challenged the Kenyans in the diaspora to have an economic back-up system in Kenya as the diaspora has many nuanced challenges as in Kenya, but there is a sense of security and reprieve in being in Kenya. Kenyans in the diaspora, but with modest or reasonable investment in Kenya find it easy to make return decisions, and are brave despite the impact of the pandemic.

2020 has challenged Kenyans in the diaspora to be agents of change in Kenya, as Kenya is the safest nest for all Kenyans from all walks of life spread geographically across the globe. The pandemic shook the diaspora community, but the spirit of resilience and capacity to survive any challenging situation has kept the diaspora community standing strong and braving through the second wave. We shall indeed overcome!

Cut flowers exports - Corona Virus Disease pandemic, where are we?

By Dr Wilfred Marube

According to the Kenya Flower Council, our flower exports grew both in volume and value by 10% each year for more than three decades, placing Kenya as Africa's lead cut flowers exporter. Ranked the 4th largest exporter of flowers behind Netherlands, Colombia and Ecuador, Our cut flowers, especially roses, are among the most in demand flowers worldwide.

Kenya's primary export destination for cut flowers, especially roses is Netherlands. Other key markets for our cut flowers include United Kingdom, Germany, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Over the last five years, cut flowers demand has grown faster in China, Oman, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates than in other countries. These are markets for which Kenyan exporters

may consider diversifying into or increasing engagement with for enhanced export trade relations.

The Horticultural Crops Directorate note that about half of Kenya's exports of cut flowers land in Netherlands for the Dutch flower auction before being sold across Europe. Direct sales to the export markets occur at a lesser extent.

Impact of the pandemic on the flowers sector.

It is no secret that the Covid19 pandemic occasioned a multitude of challenges to the sector. Demand for the commodity had declined rendering a massive blow to the local farmers and exporters. The containment measures employed by

various countries also reduced the high demand for the flowers.

Most European nations faced rapidly growing number of COVID-19 incidences which prompted application of interventions meant to curb the spread. Most of the flowers exported in Europe in the beginning of the pandemic were destroyed as the markets for the commodity and borders were closed and, logistics priority given to food and other essential items

Travel bans to Europe adversely affected the supply chains and demand side especially where direct marketing was involved. Airfreight cancellations owing to increased incidences of the disease also hurt the industry as flowers remained

unsold. As a result, the value of Kenya's total exports to her lead flower export destination, Netherlands, declined to Ksh. 8.8 billion between April and June 2020 compared to Ksh. 11.4 billion in the same period in 2019.

Fighting against the economic adversities of the pandemic

The country remained committed to bring the sector back to its vibrant self. Interventions such as allowing air freight and tax restructuring were successfully taken up to cushion the sector players. The recent ease of lockdown by European countries has rejuvenated the demand for flowers and breathed hope for full recovery of the industry.

According to the Kenya Flower Council, the demand for flowers has started picking up and is expected to be near normal levels in good time. Holding other factors constant, the industry is expected to fully bounce back by early next year. However, the expected stimulus package to the horticultural sector should improve

on the competitiveness of the sector by stabilizing national production.

If anything, the pandemic has taught us how resilient our flower sector is. By July, cut flowers exports had picked up. Exports of cut flowers were estimated at Ksh. 15.5 billion between July and September 2020; Ksh. 2.8 billion higher than the export values of 2019.

The next chapter for Kenya

The country's commitment to facilitate trade remains steadfast. As witnessed, investment into logistic support has been prioritized. This is with the aim (among other goals) to enhance trade.

The Kenya Export Promotion and Branding Agency assists producers and exporters to navigate the export sector and to position ready export products in 22 key markets with the aim of achieving increased export growth. The support to exporters includes capacity building trainings for exporters; Product development through instructive

programs; Test marketing of export ready products and the Kenya Export Development program that identifies events, expos, trade missions etc to provide visibility for our export products.

Currently, the Agency has partnered with stakeholders in the Horticulture sector where flowers play a critical role, to develop a go to market Integrated Marketing Communication strategy that will work towards achieving a coordinated communication programme that is customer focused and consistent towards achieving a competitive advantage for the horticultural produce.

However, all this is threatened by a second wave of the pandemic that continue to threaten our traditional markets in the UK and EU. This concern accelerates the need for the horticulture sector to diversify into new markets including Africa, and work towards a more competitive logistical infrastructure.



This is the time to pay attention to ethics

By Kerry Sheehan



In public relations (PR) and marketing, ethics, honesty, openness, loyalty, fair-mindedness, respect, integrity and forthright communication are values that are at the forefront of our practice. Ethics in communication and marketing requires adherence to the core values and are critical to build and retain the trust of those we communicate with, retain employees and can lead to greater innovation in our disciplines.

It is important we continue to think about the responsibility we have in guiding ethical behaviour of our audiences. Questions of how to guide behaviour and differentiate between right and wrong have intrigued humankind for thousands of years. From the ancient philosophy of Socrates, through the moral codes of major religions, to the enlightenment and modern-day philosophy, we explore the questions of right versus wrong, good versus evil, light versus darkness.

A PR and marketing professional has a huge responsibility when it comes to defining and implementing the ethical conduct in their area. We must research and identify potential problems and find viable solutions in an ethical manner. Therefore, ethics can be defined for communicators as how we ought to

decide, manage, and communicate. Ethical considerations are also a vital part of executive decision-making as communicators move more into the policy advisory role to support the government's key objectives.

Providing an objective ethical analysis to senior management is when one-way communicators can add value to the effectiveness of the organisation. However, as the communications and media landscape becomes more crowded with 'dark actors' at play, misinformation and disinformation being deployed at a rate never witnessed before, accelerated during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it's even more important for communicators to uphold ethical standards.

An effective government communication relies on trust which can be built and maintained across all of its audiences. This is even more so the case now with the increased use of data and artificial intelligence (AI) within communication.

As government departments and organisations are becoming more digital, data-driven and agile in response to stakeholder expectations and the COVID-19 pandemic, more focus is being

placed on AI and its role in organisational systems, ways of working and decision-making. But before communicators begin to play with all the new, shiny automation and AI tools that are available to us, we must consider that AI can have ethical challenges which we need to understand. Communicators are trusted advisors not only on communication, but about the purpose and values of our organisations. As we transform and look to utilise AI, there is a huge opportunity for us. Ethical and reputational guardianship should be at the heart of how our organisations approach and implement AI.

AI and machine learning can generate challenges. This requires the human mind to focus on ethics at every turn of activity because every mistake will be perpetuated and amplified in the data 'algorithmic universe'. Trust in ethical AI is paramount for audiences to realise its true potential. Poorly designed and executed AI projects will ruin reputation. To gain trust, communication professionals must ensure transparency and inclusiveness in governance, design, testing and deployment and be aware of our biases (both conscious and unconscious), of diversity and privacy throughout the process. Communication professionals need to be involved in all stages of development.

We must learn about AI and its ethical dilemmas, in addition to ensuring our high standard of ethics in our communication continues and to help with identifying ethical challenges in AI, the data ethics canvas from the Open Data Institute has been utilised and the sixteen public relations ethical principles come from the Global Alliance's Code.

Communicators are now considered some of the best professionals to consult and advise on ethical behaviour in the instance of a dilemma. Communicators should be the ones to alert senior management on ethical issues and also know the values of both internal and external publics, using these in astute analyses and ultimate resolutions of ethical dilemmas.

Kerry Sheehan is PR Global Panel Chair



By Joy Ochuka

There is no debate about the significant turbulence that the aviation industry continues to experience since March 2020 exacerbated by COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic has globally pushed the aviation industry towards the worst crisis, affecting air passengers' travel behaviors thereby causing mobility by air transport to fall precipitously. Finding solutions designed to restore air passenger confidence remains a priority for the industry. However, it will require a concerted, focused effort by key industry leaders on reshaping perception on air travel.

According to World Tourism Organization a specialized United Nations Agency, a majority of destinations around the world (53%) have now started easing travel restrictions introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March, 2020. However, there is indication globally that passenger air travel is not picking up as fast despite the rigorous measures that the industry has put in place to safeguard passengers' health in-flight.

Touch-points

The question begging an answer is, what is driving this slow uptake that continues to hurt the bleeding industry? Well, during these unprecedented times air travel can be fraught. Any trip will have several possible passenger touch points, from airport security, to boarding, the flight itself, baggage collection and transit. Hence, travelers are now more cautious about their health and safety, which to a great extent remains a personal responsibility. These potential air travelers are dreading

to be confined with fellow travelers with unknown travel history; they are fretful at the role aerosolized micro-droplets play in the spread of COVID-19 especially on long haul flights and are uncomfortable because of risk and exposure if social distance is not observed in-flight.

Airlines and Airports are under severe scrutiny to ensure the virus is contained and have put in place a number of enhanced measures to safeguard would be travelers. For instance, civil aviation authorities, airports and airlines demand for valid COVID-19 certificate before departure – this for most countries should not be more than 72 hours on arrival. Other countries demand for testing-on-arrival to remove undesirable quarantine deterring many would be air travelers. Aircraft disinfection after every flight, contactless passenger check-in, constant temperature checks, easy access to hand sanitizers and soap dispensers; mandatory mask wearing for travelers and crew through-out the journey are some of the stringent measures put in place but the sector is yet to make tangible traction from these efforts.

Communications campaign

As a communications practitioner, it's worthy to state the notable challenge in the industry is not only to make traveling safer, but to find the most effective way to roll out a concerted global communication campaign that creates awareness about the measures that are in place and educate the air travelers on valuable information about safety measures, such as, how aircraft air gets automatically cleaned

and the effectiveness of certified High Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters installed in most modern commercial aircrafts.

According to Tony Julian, an air-purifying expert with RGF Environmental Group HEPA filters "block and capture 99.97 percent of airborne particles over 0.3 micron in size. Dr. Bjoern Becker of the Lufthansa Group of airlines during an interview with National Geographic also indicated that "Air is pumped from the ceiling into the cabin at a speed of about a yard per second and sucked out again below the window seats." About 40 percent of a cabin's air gets filtered through this HEPA system; the remaining 60 percent is fresh and piped in from outside the plane. "Cabin air is completely changed every three minutes, on average, while the aircraft is cruising," says Becker.

It is paramount for aviation industry leaders to understand that easing of restrictions will not necessarily lead to automatic increase in demand by air travelers. The potential passengers will need to be assured that the air in an aircraft cabin is safe. Rebuilding passenger trust in air travelling is doable, but will require the industry leaders to leverage on concerted through joint communication campaign to drive awareness to favorably influence air passengers' travel behaviors and end the emerging aerophobia.

Ochuka is content strategist, brand marketing & communications enthusiast and a distinguished Bloomberg Fellow and a former airline staff



Public Relations' lessons from SA

By Prof Rene Benecke

Answering the question as to what is the effect of Public Relations (PR) on society has never been more important than in 2020. Like the rest of the world, South Africans had to make life-changing decisions as to how they are going to deal with the COVID-19 lockdown, social distancing and major economic disruptions. PR should not exist to only promote an organisational focus (Holtzhausen, 2012) but PR professionals should become symbolic intermediaries who assist fellow citizens to make sense of the uncertainty and disruptive environment they are finding themselves in (Benecke, 2019).

The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) has taken the past eight months (April to November 2020) to actively support their members, build networks, provide strategic leadership with various thought leadership articles, developing new skills and engagement platforms.

Building relational networks

Crisis situations such as what society had to, and still has to deal with require a different mind-set than in normal situations. The network perspective proposes a future focus on PR research that involves a broader approach to networks such as community and social networks, actors and nodes within networks, network structures and messages used in meaning making. With this in mind PRISA embarked on developing networks with Not-for-Profit (NPOs) organisations specifically dealing with health communication. The aim with this collaboration was to research community networks, the influence of community members and the media

platforms and messages they use to lead their members. Various regional structures as well as academic institutions are involved in this ongoing study.

Strategic leadership during crisis

Meng and Berger (2017) in the book Social media and crisis communication, build on their earlier approach of an integrated model of leadership to further motivate for strategic leadership during crisis. Their model includes various constructs but those especially crucial during crisis situations include strategic decision-making capability and communication knowledge management.

During the Covid-19 vast amounts of information was distributed by the World Health Organisations (WHO), national governments, organisations and civil society. To local communities the relevance and meaning of these messages became clear and they started asking critical questions like the origin of the virus, the effects on their community and how they are going to survive the economic consequences. The media played an important role in setting the narrative which was evident in the weekly media reports Ornic (an international Brand Intelligence company) compiled for PRISA members. These reports were shared with members to assist in strategic decision-making and preparing them for crisis situations emanating from the pandemic and lockdown.

Recognising opportunities and building new skills

Being faced with disruptive situations such as the total lockdown had diverse effects on PRISA and its members. Overnight the administrative staff had to

be equipped to operate remotely, have access to data and keep the operational aspect of the organisation in motion. This was not always possible which led to our CEO, Mr Victor Sibeko to taking on many of the operational duties on him. He did not only maintain the website but also saw the opportunity to reach out to various regions and establish or re-establish relationships with especially SADAC countries. He further explored the various online platforms and ensured that PRISA could continue presenting online webinars, discussion forums and even present our annual PRISM Awards. Changing adversity into opportunity ensured that many of the planned events for 2020 still took place.

Build the concept of 'tertius iungens' (the third that joins)

But the work is not yet done for 2020. A general comment from most people is that they are working much harder by being at home than what would have been the case if they were still at the office. For us at PRISA it allowed for more research and exploring interesting new approaches in our discipline. One such a concept is the 'tertius iungens' which means 'the third who joins'. The public relations industry has the opportunity to fulfil that role by cocreating links between publics and organisations, organisations and society, individuals and networks in an ethical and transparent way which will benefit everyone (not just organisations or certain 'connected' individuals – for the greater good!

Prof Benecke is the immediate Past President PRISA

What Covid-19 reveals about work place digital personalities

By Paul Juma



It has been one year since the first case of Covid-19 was reported globally, and eight since Kenya announced its patient zero. The period following the announcements has been characterised by unprecedented government-spelt out guidelines aimed at curbing the spread of the novel virus. The measures, which have drastically changed life the world over and the disruptions that the Covid-19 pandemic occasioned in its wake have necessitated a new way of doing things – the "new normal".

A notable feature of the "new normal" is the rapid adoption of new internet-based communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom. Zoom meetings – as online meetings have become generally known due to the exponential popularity of the American platform – have brought out different digital personalities at the work place.

The chief contributor

This is the colleague who dominates meetings. He or she aggressively contributes to every agenda to the point that the meeting leader or moderator restrains him/her so as to give the others a chance.

The silent listener

This one promptly joins the meeting then remains silent the whole time. While digitally present but with the microphone muted and camera turned off, this participant most likely will be doing other assignments not related to the meeting. Whenever the meeting moderator checks if the silent listener dropped off, he or she quickly types, "My microphone has a problem, but I'm following."

The summariser

This is the fellow who will seek to conclude every agenda, by summarising what the other contributors have said. Summarisers do not have ideas of their own but ride on what others have said by paraphrasing and summarising them.

The digitally handicapped

The first 30 minutes of the meeting will be wasted in trying to help this one to connect. It becomes even more frustrating because someone has to call them to offer a step-by-step guide on how to connect to the meeting platform. They are among the main reasons online meetings start late.

The fixer

The fixer in often not from the IT

department, but tends to quickly troubleshoot technical hitches during the meeting. He/she will decipher why the echo doesn't go away and instructs the rest of the participants to mute their microphones unless they are speaking. The fixer will also remotely assist the digitally handicapped to ensure their video cameras and microphones are functioning.

The chit-chatter

Think of that colleague who is normally very vocal before the formal meeting begins, as early participants wait for the rest to join. The chit-chatter is the expert in small talk, greeting every participant and engaging them in informal discussions, about how the departmental party went down last weekend; or exciting them about the upcoming teambuilding activity. When the meeting is called to order, the chit-chatter goes silent and remains quiet to the end.

The time keeper

If the meeting is scheduled for 10am to 11.30am, the time keeper will sign in at 9.59am. Thereafter, he/she will pressure the convener or chairperson to start the meeting as soon as a quorum is achieved. Should the proceedings overshoot the allocated time, the time keeper will apologise and leave at exactly 11.30am, the time the meeting was scheduled to end.

The stealthy latecomer

This one hardly joins any meeting on time. He will sneak into the meeting long after it has started and follow the proceedings quietly. But unlike the silent listener, the stealthy latecomer will seize the earliest opportunity to make a contribution, not necessarily because he has a valid point but to ensure that his presence is registered.

You may have noticed these digital traits at your work place. That is a mere possibility. However, what is for sure is that Covid-19 has uncovered the dynamism and diversity that make up the beauty of our work places.

Does any of these describe you or your colleague? Or are there some that we have left out? If you would add to this list, leave a comment or send an email to pjumah@gmail.com.



Running Successful Digital Campaigns, is the future of PR in Digital Campaigns?

By Patience Nyange

Since the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, it has proved to the world that 'normal' is not permanent. The pandemic has granted us an opportunity, whether at a personal, family, institutional, national and international levels, to pause and reflect while making adjustments as part of our survival tactics.

The Communications and Public Relations (PR) industry has undergone real challenging times. Those who have weathered the storms have had to get creative and innovative in a quick span because you never waste a crisis. Those who put their act together, invented themselves, learnt new skills, enrolled in a few online courses and learnt the trick of digital communications have remained afloat.

While most PR clients still use the traditional media coverage in promotion of their goods and services, a key area of global communication that is fast-growing and gaining traction is digital communications. Therefore, the big question begs, what aspects of digital communication should today's Communication and PR professionals be

alive to?

Digital Campaigns

Digital campaign, as the name suggests, involves online tactical strategies used by individuals or companies (private or public) in driving a specific agenda with the aim of positive customer experience, awareness creation, creating engagement, boosting traffic and ultimately revenue generation.

During my one-year sojourn as an International Public Relations student at Cardiff University, UK, digital communication management is a course that I truly enjoyed. Drawing examples from international digital campaigns to local campaigns in Kenya, a successful digital campaign must be conducted within set objectives and key performance indicators (KPIs). Some key considerations include the following;

a) Understanding and defining your target audience.

Understanding the range of existing, current, and potential customers is a sure way of targeting the right audience. A quick survey or research will tell you what your audience is looking for, what

their interests are and the best way to communicate with them. Without this understanding, you will be wondering where your customers are and if at all, your investment in digital campaigns is worth the sacrifice in terms of money and the time invested. Here is a great lesson we can all learn from Susan Chritton, A Master Personal Brand Strategists and Coach – "One of the biggest mistakes we do in relation to our audiences is trying to appeal to everyone. Think about this as the game of darts; You have to aim harder to hit the board. If you let your darts go without aiming them, you probably won't be making any sense. If you hit the board, you score. And if your aim is perfect and you hit the bull's eye, even better."

b) Review your content, from which, develop the most effective campaign messaging and appropriate and catchy hashtags.

Well, if you are in an organization that has been in existence for a while now, you probably have enough content that you would like to promote through a digital campaign. The temptation to put everything out there is one that faces many organizations and individuals in the promotion of their products. However,

carry out a successful digital campaign by focusing on one agenda, one product, one messaging per campaign. One way of doing this is to conduct a content audit. If done well, a content audit will help an individual or organization identify relevant content, matching it with the needs of the target audience while crafting sensible messaging and appropriate hashtags.

Make sure to seize the moment by finding a hook in each of your digital campaigns. Ride and leverage on an already existing frenzy and buzz, especially localized campaigns that have an international outlook. When riding on other existing hashtags, contextualize your hashtag so that it is searchable and trackable by your target consumers. For example, during the 40th London Marathon held in early October, Kenya Export Promotion and Brand Agency (KEPROBA), leveraged on the #LondonMarathon digital campaign, to market and brand Kenya as the worlds largest exporter of black tea. In addition, this was a perfect time to endorse the UK Prime Minister, Boris Johnson's sentiments early in the year during the UK-Africa Summit, "every one in two cups of tea drunk in Britain is from Kenya."

Therefore, the choice to brand Kenya's tea and put appropriate content out there with the hashtag #MakeItKenya when the world was watching the international marathon, in full acknowledgement that Kenya is the #HomeOfChampions, was an excellent digital campaign by KEPROBA.

c) Choose the most appropriate digital platforms.

Before embarking on a digital campaign, it is important to understand how your target audience uses social media. According to 2020 Social Media Marketing Trends report by the Global Web Index, "The most influential brands know that they need to stay on top of customers' social networking needs. And one way of doing so is by engaging your community and consumers through social media activity; however, this can only be achieved through knowledge of your consumers behaviours and trends online." It is, therefore, important to tap into the digital consumer survey as a sure way of gauging which social media platform is the most appropriate for a given digital campaign.

Other considerations in running a successful digital campaign will require

an individual or organization having an adequate budget for it, which could be key for content creation. Creative and innovative content sells. Never underestimate the power of imagery, videography, and infographics. Invest in content creators who understand your brief and your consumers. To use or not to use influencers in digital campaigns is an unending discussion within professionals in PR and Communication industry. Should you want to use them, be sure that they stand for what you believe in, they have an influential digital footprint and are ready to get creative with the content given to them.

Though designing and articulating a complete digital campaign might sound and look like a daunting task, when planned and implemented effectively and efficiently, the benefits are worth the pain the gain. Over and above, strive to build trust with your customers even before you need them. A brand is as good as what the consumers say about it.

Patience is a member of PRSK and digital communication expert currently at Cardiff University, UK



The magic to winning and retaining customer's loyalty in a competitive corporate environment

By Ruth Dero

A customer is the most important visitor in our premises. He is not dependent on us; we are dependent on him. He is not an interruption in our work. He is the purpose of it. He is not an outsider on our business. He is part of it. We are not doing him a favour but he is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to serve him - Mahatma Gandhi.

In practice, effective customer service is a basic prerequisite for the attainment of organizational strategies and managing organizations productivity, but it has remained one of the greatest challenges facing modern management. Ineffective customer service is detrimental to any organization; it can lead to poor performance, strained interpersonal relations and high level of stress both for employee and the customer. Employees at all levels need to be good communicators in order for them to be highly engaged in their tasks while diligently executing their duties and responsibilities to satisfy the customer needs.

A recent research by Ernst & Young (EY) on customer's experience in the financial sector in Kenya indicated that customers have the most problems when dealing with their banks compared to their global peers. The report further points out that 'More than ever, banks are under pressure to not only retain their customers, but also to grow their customer base. While

60 per cent of survey respondents did not have definite plans to open or close accounts in the next year, this should not be interpreted as loyalty'.

Any organization, large or small, should embrace effective Customer Relationship Management (CRM). In today's business environment there is increased competition ideally in all sectors and industries not only to win customers but to retain them. With the shift in customer retention strategy an organization should ensure that customers are satisfied with the past performance and be confident that the organization will meet their future requirements.

Customer Relationship Management refers to the management of all interactions with the customer that an enterprise indulges in. Its focus is on managing and optimizing the entire customer life cycle.

Customer satisfaction is key in delivering quality customer service. A customer experience will make them loyal to their service provider, customer satisfaction requires that an organization meets the customer's expectations fully and ensure the customer is happy. It is worth noting organizations should know that customer satisfaction increases their business profitability by increasing its realization. This further helps in securing premium

on its products.

Measuring customer satisfaction is essential in today's globalized economy and competitive business field. By measuring your customer satisfaction an organization will be able to judge the effectiveness of its business plan and provide information on how customer-centric it is. A satisfied customer will be an organization's marketing arm. An unsatisfied customer is more likely to speak often on the subject than a satisfied customer. A single unsatisfied customer could undo the effect of three satisfied customers.

'Anyone who thinks customers aren't important should try doing without them for a week.'

Fierce and increased competition is the order of the day, customers on the other hand are so informed and much more demanding. In order to stay ahead of the competition organizations should help improve their customer experience, customer retention, loyalty or acquisition. In order to win and retain your customers, first; an organization need to understand and Know Your Customer (KYC), there is need to understand what motivates your customer.

Feedback and effective planned

communication

Every organization that is involved in customer experience should lay down a planned feedback mechanism and complaints management. Through this channel an organization will have information, ideas and suggestions on how to improve their services to suit their customer's needs. The content, quality and time taken to respond to the customer is what determines the quality of feedback.

Employee motivation

Well-motivated and trained employee

will always ensure customers get the best services. It is necessary that an organization develops an atmosphere of training its employees and invest in their career growth.

In every business setting a customer is the King, and always considered to be right, employees should have the attribute of being the solution finder rather than problem creator. Quick and positive thinking is also a vital attribute when dealing with customers.

Finally, we are living in the digital age and

are well versed with the massive impact and potential of social media in relation to customer experience. Organizations that want to excel in provision of quality customer service should harness the importance of digital media. Technology has closed the wider gap between an organization and its customers, to win your customer's confidence ensure your social channels have updated content and information relevant to their needs.

Ruth is the head of Corporate Communications at National Industrial Training Authority (NITA)



The cursed 2020- blessing or curse?

By Ummekulsum Bohari

While sitting on our couch bingeing a local series with my parents, my dad suddenly looked out the window and said 'Never in my 48 years of life did I ever imagine the possibility of having to wear a mask everywhere I go'. No one could ever fathom flights being shut down, hotels closing or even a total lockdown!

The entire 2020 has felt like a recurring nightmare. The leaders of the world have had to make decisions based on something they have never experienced

before and the choices they are making will be footnoted in history.

As much as people have been forced to cancel plans, make permanent lifestyle changes, and engage with new ideologies, there are a few who have accepted the pandemic and turned it into their capitalist miracle.

Degree without cause

In the very first months of the virus' arrival, the graduating class of 2020 was

not only filled with excitement and anxiety but downright fear and stress. Businesses were barely surviving. It didn't seem like the best time to be graduating when the unemployment rate was peaking.

Internships were still open however, many companies postponed the starting dates and delayed physical meetings. This had the young adults feeling deeply disturbed and worried regarding the value of their fresh degrees.

What lessons are you taking into the future after a difficult year?

By Nelson Opany, MPRSK

As the curtains fall on 2020, it's a time to reflect on some of the lessons to carry from what has been in many ways an extraordinary year. At the beginning of the year, none had an idea that the year would turn out as it did. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused one of the greatest interruptions to life in recent times, there is so much people can learn from the experience in order to emerge better and stronger next year. For me, and hopefully, for many others, these are my five key takeaways.

You can't plan for everything even if you wanted

We always start the year with high hopes, setting goals and well worked out plans of what we intend to achieve. In some instances, people have to the extent of undertaking a risk analysis and putting in place mitigation measures against perceived and potential risks. However, as 2020 has shown us, we can never be well prepared for everything. A crisis can come in any form and when they do what matters most is not how well we are prepared but how flexible we can be to changing situations. So, if there is a skill we need to master more its "adaptability".

Invest in building strong relationships

When COVID-19 struck, we all went into a situation of confusion and panic, unsure of how to navigate through. We had to get accustomed to new ways of working and staying away from our family, friends and colleagues for unusually long periods. Stress, fatigue and worry set in leading to an increase in mental health issues. Without a good social support system, it became very difficult for many people to cope. Learning from this, it's high time we invested in building good relationships with our colleagues beyond just work, reconnecting with family and creating a close circle of friends. For corporates cultivating good relations with strategic partners could be the difference between you staying afloat or going down.

Take personal financial planning more seriously

From my leadership position in a savings and credit cooperative society, I have seen first-hand how many people have lost their jobs, and many others who have closed down their businesses. This difficult period of financial stress I believe has reawakened us to the need for personal financial planning. Those of us who never really paid attention to where their money was coming from and going to now have reasons to be keener. Expenditure should no longer be just about the availability of money but more about necessity and value. We need to be more aggressive in pursuing investment to create multiple income streams, more prudent in our expenditures, and prioritize saving. Earn more, spend less, borrow wisely, invest more and save regularly should be our mantra.



Social responsibility is not for corporates only

The effects of COVID-19 have reminded us to be grateful for what we have as many others don't have even that which we consider unsuitable for ourselves. As usual, corporates have come out with programmes to support those affected by the pandemic. Equally, we've seen more individuals and organized citizen groups increasingly getting concerned about the well-being of their neighbours, colleagues, friends or even total strangers. Be they short, medium, or long-term interventions, these initiatives help to alleviate suffering and give the effected people some hope. In the spirit of being our brother's/sister's keeper, we need, as a people, to practice more regularly community service and private

philanthropy. People face misfortunes every day, and we need to stand with each other more as individuals and not just wait on government and corporate CSR programmes.

Embrace technology or risk being obsolete

The power of technology has been realized in 2020 more than ever before across different sectors of society. Virtual working and business automation is taking shape in many parts of the world where they were never even thought about before. Individuals and organizations are turning to technology for innovative solutions to personal and business needs. Post-2020, we'll continue to see growing demand in IT equipment, infrastructure and solutions to power businesses, increase productivity and solve emerging personal and business challenges. We have to be open to embracing technology or we'll become obsolete in a matter of time as the tech revolution continues.

The 2020 experience will undoubtedly affect our corporate and personal behaviours for many years to come. It would be very unfortunate if we fail to learn from its challenges and tap into the opportunities it has also created for innovation. Only those that are keen and intentional about embracing change will emerge better, stronger and relevant post-2020.

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The author is the Manager, Communications and Partnerships at the World Scout Bureau Africa Regional Office, Nairobi.

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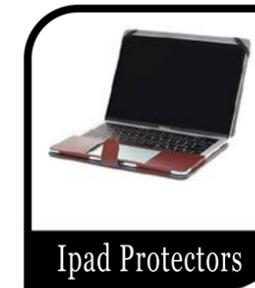
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