

# PR DIGEST

A PUBLICATION OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF KENYA



## RECOVERY & RESILIENCE

SHOULD WE REALLY WORK FROM HOME?  
FINDING HOPE IN HOPELESSNESS

50  
54

STIGMA AROUND PANDEMICS  
A TALE OF TWO RELATED PANDEMICS

14  
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# CPD CALENDAR OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2020



**OCTOBER**  
14<sup>TH</sup> – 16<sup>TH</sup>

## LEADING AND MANAGING STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

 30 Points

 Naivasha (Kenya)



Member: 65,000/=  
Non Member: 70,000/=

**OCTOBER**  
28<sup>TH</sup> – 30<sup>TH</sup>

## STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS

 30 Points

 Mombasa (Kenya)



Member: 65,000/=  
Non Member: 70,000/=

**NOVEMBER**  
9<sup>TH</sup> – 13<sup>TH</sup>

## LEADERSHIP AND CHANGE COMMUNICATION

 50 Points

 Kisumu (Kenya)



Member: 80,000/=  
Non Member: 85,000/=

**DECEMBER**  
2<sup>ND</sup> – 4<sup>TH</sup>

## 2020 PRSK ANNUAL SUMMIT

 30 Points

 Mombasa (Kenya)



Member: 65,000/=  
Non Member: 70,000/=

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# Editor's Note

## Which way from here?

Since World War II, the world has never seen a crisis like what we have experienced in the past 6 months. Locally, we hit the lowest economic altitude since independence. Even though things have been so bad, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a blessing in disguise for Public Relations professionals. The technological uptake that was hitherto disregarded by the many of us has now significantly become part of our daily routine. As the world quickly unfolds into this new technological reality and considering that the COVID situation remains shaky and without guarantee, every one of us must continue to take responsibility as our resilience and tenacity in the face of uncertain times is much needed now more than ever.

This edition speaks not to PR professionals only but to our colleagues in other industries as well. Themed Recovery and Resilience, the stories herein are carefully chosen to fulfil our objective to keep you informed and be part of our editorial journey.

We have a special interview by the President of PRSK himself Dr Wilfred Marube. We share with you a lot more about this man who is pushing the juggernaut of leadership, parenting, administration and academics at the helm of two vibrant institutions. Don't miss this passionate narrative.

We have also carefully woven a tapestry of easy reads on technology to institutional communications in the face of adversity, even as we look forward to navigating into the post-corona period. We don't know when. Remember how Tik-Tok took us by a storm the last couple of months? It did help me stay sane throughout the three-month partial lockdown. Much as I enjoyed the many videos shared on that platform, it was eye-opening for me: our role as PR professionals is well cut out. Are we up to the task?

Bonne September and happy reading!

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Happy Reading!

Maureen Koech, MPRSK

**Editor**

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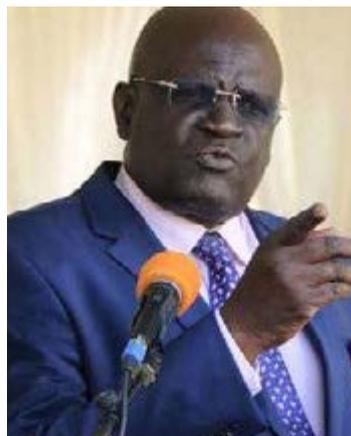
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It is no coincidence that the dominant discriminatory economic patterns and thinking have continued to exploit existing stereotypes.



## Working Group hands over report on certification of PR Professionals

The technical working group tasked with developing a curriculum, syllabus and structure for certification of Public Relations and Communication management professionals has handed over its report to the Council.

In its report, the team proposes recommendations that if implemented will contribute significantly to the professionalization of the practice of Public Relations in Kenya by ensuring professional integrity of individuals and institutions in the profession in Kenya. This sets wheels in motion for plans to roll out a multi-level training, examination and certification programme that will facilitate continual enhancement of skills as envisaged in the Public Relations

and Communication Management Bill, and development of world class institutions and practitioners.

This handover paves way for consultative and validation fora with key stakeholders for two programs: advanced diploma and post graduate diploma in PR.

The working group was inaugurated in July 2019.

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## Communications director appointed Clerk of the Nairobi County Assembly



Ms Pauline Sarah Akuku has been appointed the Clerk of Nairobi County Assembly on acting capacity. Pauline, who was a Communications Director in the county assembly before her appointment, becomes the first woman to assume this role post devolution.

Pauline joins the cadre of women in Public Relations who have risen the leadership ranks in recent months.

In his congratulatory message, the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK) President said that the Society was ready to support her in the discharge of her duties. “We are certain that you will fly the PRSK flag high as you endeavour to use your knowledge, skills and experience in strategic communication to excel in your new role,” Dr Marube said in his message.

# The journey to the top is about those you meet along the way, help always, not when expedient

By Joseph Ndegwa

He is not particularly tall but has an impressive height and an enviable physique from five years of deliberate physical activity and disciplined meal regime. If he has to eat chips, he does it fast and only on Fridays when he can eat junk. He calls it 'cheat Friday'. From his expansive office on the 16th floor of Anniversary Towers, Dr Wilfred Marube has a scenic view of the northern part of Nairobi city, from where he carries out daily administrative duties of Kenya Export Promotion & Branding as the Chief Executive Officer.

Physically, he is the opposite of his former self a few years ago when could fall asleep at every opportunity because of his massive weight of about 108 kilogrammes. He hits the gym at 5am daily, takes the stairs to his 16th floor office except on Fridays. "I quit sugar a couple of years ago," he adds, pouring himself a cup of black tea as we settle for the interview. A smaller table rests a water glass and a pot of honey in his office.

By Class Six, Marube had read all the books in the school library. Chemistry was his favourite subject when he joined secondary. He thought he was going to be a scientist. If he had become a doctor or a pharmacist, he wouldn't mince his words with his patients, I thought. "I enjoyed chemistry and wanted to pursue a career in that area," he says, adding he pictured himself in the labs.

## University in the 1990s

Unfortunately, those who went to university in the early 1990s were never allowed to pursue the courses they wanted. That is what happened when he was admitted to Moi University in 1993 and found himself pursuing Bachelor of Education in English and Literature instead of a Chemistry related course.

As a little boy, he was captivated by the characters in the children's adventure novels such as the Famous Five (novel





## Excerpts: “ PR must go beyond media relations”

### **1. How do you intend to reposition Public Relations as an important management function in the public and private sector?**

It is all about advocacy and showcasing the benefits an accomplished PR person will bring to the table. Many CEOs do not understand the entire breadth of the profession. It is important to show them that PR goes beyond media relations and protocol. That is why PRSK is focusing more on leadership – the ability to influence people to make a decision in all our training courses.

### **2. Now that Export Promotion Council and Brand Kenya are under one roof. Where is the emphasis? Exports or branding of the country?**

We are a marketing organisation for the country. Our main mission is to brand Kenya, buy Kenya and export Kenya. We target to grow our exports by 6.5% every year or Ksh 60-70 billion annually and have recognised the need to develop and diversify our export products and markets. We have, therefore, developed an integrated export market identification and prioritization framework that will enable us direct resources towards markets that portend higher returns for the country. We have, so far, identified 19 key products and 23 export markets. Our aim is to transform Kenya into a top global brand. The philosophy behind the merging of the Export Promotion Council (EPC) and Brand Kenya Board is about self-presentation and positioning the country with its exports, people, products and services and the available

opportunities for investment. It is about promoting the country both internally and externally.

### **3. What’s the synergy between KEPROBA with the Kenya Investment Authority (KenInvest), Export Processing Zones Authority (EPZ) and other trade promotion organisations in Kenya?**

We intend to position and enhance our partnerships with other trade promotion organisations in the country. Mr Jas Bedi, the chairman of our Board, is a visionary leader whose mantra to staff is MAD (Make A Difference). I have added RE-VI-DO (Relevance, Visibility and Dominance). We see ourselves as enablers and have scheduled engagements in areas of mutual interest. As KEPROBA, we want to hunt as a pack and are, therefore, keen to partner with all TPO’s such as Kenya Tourism Board, Kenya Association of Manufacturers, Kenya Private Sector Alliance, Kenya Flower Council and Avocado Society of Kenya.

### **4. What strategies have you put in place to ensure that KEPROBA continues operating post COVID-19?**

From where I am sitting, there is no post-COVID-19; there is in-COVID-19. New Zealand, for example, re-introduced lockdown restrictions in Auckland after 102 days without community transmission. Nobody knows when COVID will end. As an organisation, we want to leverage on technology. We are creating an exporters portal for online

engagement, meetings and exhibitions. In some markets, we shall go virtual, while in others we just need to provide an assurance that the key products are being delivered. We shall also work with Kenya Airways to deliver Kenyan products in the markets they fly to. Again, COVID is giving us an opportunity to make our products competitive. At present, we are working with some tea factories to brand and market their tea. We are also working with the County Government of Nyandarua to value-add their potatoes for export markets and County Government of Kisii to promote soap stones. The more we have finished products the better for the country. Finally, we have also identified Kenyan potential to manufacture and export medical supplies, particularly Personal Protective Equipment’s to the regional and international markets.

### **5. You are the CEO of KEPROBA and the boss of PRSK. Obviously, you are the vision bearer of the two organisations. Where do you see it in future? How do you intend to get there?**

We see Kenya having grown its exports beyond 25 percent annually and this is because we shall have re-energised, re-purposed and expanded our markets. In five years, there will be a lot of positive information in the public and digital space about investments opportunities in Kenya. I hope that we shall continue to provide more opportunities to our members and have the PR Bill in place.

series) by Enid Blyton, Hardy Boys Mystery Stories, and Nancy Drew Mystery Stories. The reading culture was perhaps imbued in him by his parents, who were

teachers. His former colleagues describe him as a worker who expects the best of their juniors and a results oriented communicator

who consults and thinks before he acts. He describes himself as argumentative and generous though he is not willing to speak about the people he has helped. His



personal email account has the following words: Before you speak, ask if it is true and if it's true, ask yourself whether it is necessary to speak and if you must speak, are your words kind. These words are, perhaps, a validation of philosophy of his life. He has many acquaintances, but he maintains that he only has less than five friends. He defines his friends as people he can discuss with anything about him including the most embarrassing things naturally nobody wants to talk about.

### **Kiswahili challenge**

When I challenge him say something in Kiswahili, a language that he is not quite at home with, he just smiles after struggling a bit to explain what he sees around him. In his office, though maintaining a little eye contact, perhaps conscious of the private space between him and us, he referred to each of us by name and offered a crooked elbow greeting due to Covid measures to each of us except the cameraman, Moffat, who was late for the introduction.

When he speaks, his officer pens what he writes. He explains that even though he is at the top, his life is a pattern of reading the Bible, listening to gospel music,

occasional rhumba. He has borrowed money like everyone else, keeps no money in his wallet.

One might be deluded that Marube is like any other common man for he keeps it simple. For a man way better looking than his age, we are surprised when he says he doesn't know what he might do if someone slapped him but "I will take time to think about why he did that," he adds.

### **Publicity and media**

The man from Suneka in Kisii County, Marube's is fairly paradoxical, he is firm but hardly says 'no' in literal sense even when the answer to something is 'no'. He is a communicator but not a fan of publicity and the media. He consults widely and reads less these days but ensures he gets 8 hours of sleep daily. When he set his eyes in the top seat at PRSK, some thought he could not make it but, he easily won, surprising his seasoned opponents who have been in the industry for years. When I sought the view of one of the officials at PRSK just after his election as the President, they quipped: "Ni mzuri, lakini huyu mtu atatupeleka mbio sana." Translated as 'he is a great man but we

know the pressure waiting for us'.

We were looking forward to this interview with Dr Marube to understand a lot about this 46- year old man who wears many hats- leading a member organisation, leading a parastatal, an academia, a parent, politician and a seasoned bureaucrat who has worked in the government all his professional life. When his peers were driving big cars, he sold his only modest premio to complete his PhD and to take care of his ailing father.

His appointment as Chief Executive Officer of the Kenya Export Promotion and Branding Agency (KEPROBA) three months ago was a moment of pride for him and all communication practitioners in the region. He now joins the cadre of Public Relations professionals like Dr Naim Bilal, Dr Ezekiel Mutua and Dr Alfred Mutua who have risen to the helm of their organisations.

### **Balancing act**

He is also the Chairperson of the East African Public Relations Associations (EAPRA) and a board member at the Global Alliance for Public Relations and



*Leadership is the ability to influence people to make decisions- Dr Marube*

Communication Management. How does he balance all these “It’s all about commitment and planning. I know how much time to allocate each and do it diligently though I must admit it is not easy but I thrive in challenges so I’m managing just fine,” he says.

He compares his role to that of a farmer, saying when one does a better job in the farm, the harvest gets bigger. His focus now is to ensure that PRSK develops a certification programme that will add value to the body and profession.

Currently, fully paid-up members of the society are receiving resources from online libraries the organisation has subscribed to. “Our focus is on value-addition to the members,” he said in an attempt to summarise his mission at the PR lobby. “We have developed a post-graduate programme in Public Relations which will be rolled out in the New Year,” he adds.

His love for literature was re-ignited at the university where a fellow student introduced him to an online creative writing course in the UK, where he paid

Ksh5,000 (about \$50) but ended up not pursuing the course. There was no degree course for communication or journalism at the time; it was being taught at diploma level in Kenya. That Dr Marube made a deliberate path towards academics is not in question, for after graduation, he soon enrolled for a Masters in Linguistics at Egerton University before enrolling again in the same institution for PhD. To pursue his Masters, he relied on the benevolence of his Principal who allowed him to dedicate himself to studying.

**Daunting task at City Council**

Marube soon found himself working at the Nairobi City Council which he says was a daunting task. With over 11,000 employees, 75 councillors and two centres of power- the Mayor who was a politician and the Town Clerk who was a technocrat, it was difficult to balance all the political and administrative wings of the equation at a go.

He however made sure that the book, Know Your By-Laws-a book that unpacked the city by-laws in language that can be decoded by a common mwananchi, was published. He says he drew his inspiration

from then Town Clerk John Gakuo (now deceased) Philip Kisia, the last Town Clerk of the City of Nairobi whom he described as a visionary man with a big dream for the city. Dr Marube also served under Dr Evans Kidero, the first Governor of Nairobi County before moving to the Office of the Auditor-General where he worked as the Head of Public Relations and Communications. He describes his former boss Edward Ouko as a great man who made him grow and gave him the space to work.

**People around you**

His journey and success has been about people and he sees himself as a team player.

“I called my secondary school principal to thank him for giving me time and free space to study. He built me for two years,” he said deep in thought. His journey has been about people and great opportunities coming his way.

“When I get an opportunity to support someone, I do it fully,” he said. This bolts the saying: Help when you can, not when expedient for you.



***Dr Marube doing planks at Karura Forest. For the last 5 years, he hits the gym at 5am after having an 8 hour sleep. As a result of a strict diet regime and regular exercises he has a visibly admirable gait for his age.***



# Measuring change for results

By Stephen Gichuhi Njenga

For any organisation or business looking for clues on where to pivot right now, to stay afloat, forge ahead or start up - following the initial phase of the novel coronavirus pandemic - staying close to employees and customers is everything.

Communicators should be at the forefront of the new normal, a new mind-set shift in an enterprise, society, stakeholders and the communication industry itself. PR and communication practitioners should look beyond behaviours to what is driving stakeholder actions during the pandemic as a crucial step forward.

Attitudes and habits across the board are changing at a fast pace than in recent times. For a communicator, these behaviours could be a change for good. It is believed that when COVID-19 dust settles, society is unlikely to resemble what it did before.

It is vital, therefore, for communicators to support organisations and businesses to survive through this pandemic and thrive. They must keep up with the mindsets of their important stakeholders and scan the horizon for where the biggest shifts may be going forwards.

The GlobalWebTrends Index Report, for example, has highlighted some of the areas communicators and organisations

take interest in, including: Data for good, Exclusivity excluded; Life in the slow lane (for consumers and paid for services across all sectors); Tightened purse strings; and Reduced horizons.

Additionally, a country's culture and its government's response to the crisis can create attitude shifts in the public and private sector. But even with a framework in place for your communications strategy, keep abreast of data and stakeholder attitudes to best inform your communication and the continuing shifts in attitudes.

As a result of the pandemic, more people are getting less concerned with private data. Across the globe, governments and local authorities are utilising personal data for contact tracing and safety of their people, it is a public good.

The new sentiment towards data could accelerate the belief in wide-scale data collection, when treated fairly and transparently, bringing wider gains, compliance and behaviour change required by businesses and organisations to continue to operate going forwards. And, of course positive attitudes to data can further support organisations and business to build trust in what they do and their mandatory roles as good citizens.

However, this comes with a warning that people's confidence in authorities and businesses collecting their data waned following investigative reports on the 'transgressions' of Cambridge Analytica in the 2016 US elections.

So, any move by an organisation or business to collect data for artificial intelligence must be guided and done within limits of the law. It is important to always be in the look-out for changes in monetisation of data.

Data ethics, including the huge considerations to data and organisational bias (conscious and unconscious) must remain a focus point for PR and communications practitioners in their function and advisory role to boards, senior management, employees and other stakeholders, even as organisations move towards automation and AI.

Therefore, communicators must upskill into proper data, not only for improved data-led communications, improved outcomes for society and stakeholders - but to support organisations and business to innovate as we go into the new normal, keeping the new and shifting mindsets at the forefront.



# Stigma around pandemics been there for a while

By Caroline Waithira

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about new “norms” in the social, religious, economic, health and political sphere world over. Whilst some of these “norms” are positive and empowering, others are negative and demeaning. One of these negative “norms” brought about by the pandemic is that of stigma and discrimination in various forms against the vulnerable populations.

According to António Guterres, the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, “the instability and fear that the pandemic engenders is exacerbating existing human rights concerns, such as discrimination against certain groups.” The common pattern in discriminatory acts occurring during the pandemic is the targeting of the “other”, that is a foreigner, someone belonging to a different religious or ethnic group, members of certain professions, and more worrying, persons deemed to be infected or recovered from the COVID-19 infection. The latter two are the most at risk populations for stigmatizing and attitudes/actions across the globe.

We have witnessed people of Asian descent being frequently targeted for causing the pandemic and its spread leading to their businesses being boycotted. Social media reports have highlighted people of African descent being targeted in various parts of the world, being denied services including shopping in malls and accommodation. Muslims in India were victims of attacks and other forms of discrimination owing to misconception that the virus allegedly spread from gathering of Muslim faithful.

## Evolution of stigma trends

However, as the virus spread across the world, stigma and discrimination evolved

and new targets emerged. The new stigmatization arose out of the fear of being infected. Today, especially in Kenya, health workers are particularly feared since they are at risk of being infected in their workplace. In fact, the Ministry of Health has noted the drastic reduction in the number of clients attending health facilities across the country and issued an advisory for public awareness. Persons who manifest symptoms associated with the COVID-19 disease such as sneezing, coughing and fever are frowned upon and may even be expelled from public transport vehicles, restaurants and at work places. The worst kind of discrimination has been against the people who have spent time in quarantine centers, isolation wards and health facilities due to COVID-19 related symptoms or illnesses, and their family members. The media recently highlighted the plight of such two families – one in Nakuru County and the other in Murang'a County including the discrimination they were enduring from neighbors, extended family and the community at large.

According to the World Health Organization/UNICEF/IFRC “Guide to preventing and addressing social stigma”, published in February 2020, stigma and discrimination against persons infected and/or affected by the COVID-19 disease results in driving people to hide the illness to avoid discrimination, preventing people from seeking healthcare immediately, discouraging people from adopting healthy behaviors, and forcing workers to abscond duty and being productive.

The highlighted incidents confirm that, in times of crisis and uncertainty as the one brought about by COVID-19 pandemic, people tend to look for scapegoats in order to vent their frustrations, worries and fears. This should not be the case though. Instead, since the virus does not discriminate against anyone, neither should we. Promoting resilience to COVID-19 stigma and discrimination is the way to go, hence the need to embrace “Solidarity Not Stigma” to achieve this.

Luckily, the International Labor Organization (ILO) in a May 2020 brief, laid out simple and practical measures to achieve “Solidarity Not Stigma” for work places as benchmarked on the HIV&AIDS response. Let me share some of them:

#### **Do not be judgmental.**

HIV-related discrimination was caused by fear, misinformation and because people saw it through a moralistic lens. Calling COVID-19 a foreign virus and accusing certain groups of being responsible for spreading it can be detrimental. It increases stigma for some groups, and it makes others complacent as they begin to think of it as someone else's problems. Let it be clear- we are all at risk of COVID-19.

#### **Mind your language.**

The use of stigmatizing words should be avoided. Calling AIDS “a gay people's disease” perpetuated discrimination. Similarly, the message, “AIDS kills” used during the early years of the epidemic, was found to be counter-productive. Instead of referring to “COVID-19 cases” or “victims”, you could say people who have COVID-19. Also, desist from saying people transmitting COVID-19 or infecting others.

#### **Protect jobs and livelihoods.**

Within a short time, COVID-19 has caused a huge economic crisis and dramatically impacted the world. Millions have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to lockdowns and closure of economic activities. As recovery plans are made, it will be important to ensure that those people that were affected by COVID-19 face no stigma in resuming their jobs or economic activities.

#### **Share positive stories and give COVID-19 a human face.**

Behind all the numbers and numerous statistics, are human beings. People living with HIV made a huge difference in the HIV response through sharing their stories freely and willingly; undertaking advocacy and activism for a rights-based response. This approach needs to be applied in COVID-19 as well. It was uplifting to see photos of hospital staff clapping as fully recovered COVID-19 patients were discharged from hospitals. Such positive stories will go a long way in developing a COVID-19 response free from stigma and discrimination.

Five, **respect confidentiality.** An important lesson learned from the HIV response is the right to confidentiality and privacy of medical information. This principle should be guaranteed for people who may have COVID-19.

#### **Combat stigma in all forms and for all groups.**

The HIV response shows that stigma can take place on several grounds and can manifest in several settings. It can also particularly impact certain groups who may find it difficult to access services by virtue of who they are, where they live and work, or their sexual orientation. The COVID-19 response team needs to take this into account and ensure that stigma and discrimination is combatted in all its forms.

I have observed that the level of stigma associated with COVID-19 is based on the fact that the disease is new hence there are still many unknowns. We are often afraid of the unknown, and that it is easy to associate that fear with “others”. I also observe that sufficient public awareness, information packaging and implementation of the aforesaid measures will immensely assist to stem the confusion, anxiety and fear amongst us. This way, we are likely to achieve the resilience desirable to promote a healthy nation and a safe environment for us all.

*Caroline Waithira is a Development Communication and Public Relations Practitioner*



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# Artificial Intelligence required in modern day communication

By Kerry Sheehan

Artificial intelligence (AI) in Public Relations (PR) is key in boosting productivity in all the process-driven areas, freeing PR professionals to focus more on strategy, leadership, ethics and creativity. Artificial intelligence poses one of the biggest reputation risks to businesses, organisations and brands as automation and AI adoption accelerates. In recent years, AI has been positioned as one of the biggest commercial opportunities for global economies.

A report by McKinsey Global Institute in September 2018, indicates that Artificial intelligence has the potential to incrementally add 16 percent or around \$13 trillion by 2030 to current global economic output-- an annual average contribution to productivity growth of about 1.2 percent between now and 2030.

AI is set to be more widely used during the recovery and post pandemic in the UK and across most global economies, including the emerging ones. AI's role and importance will not be diminishing anytime soon.

The current climate has seen more leaders leveraging on the momentum of digital

transformation to reduce costs through automation and looking to gain value from data to stay competitive in the new economic landscape. The industry and sector agnostic nature of AI means the impact will be felt by every area and it is not limited to the companies that develop the AI tools and technologies.

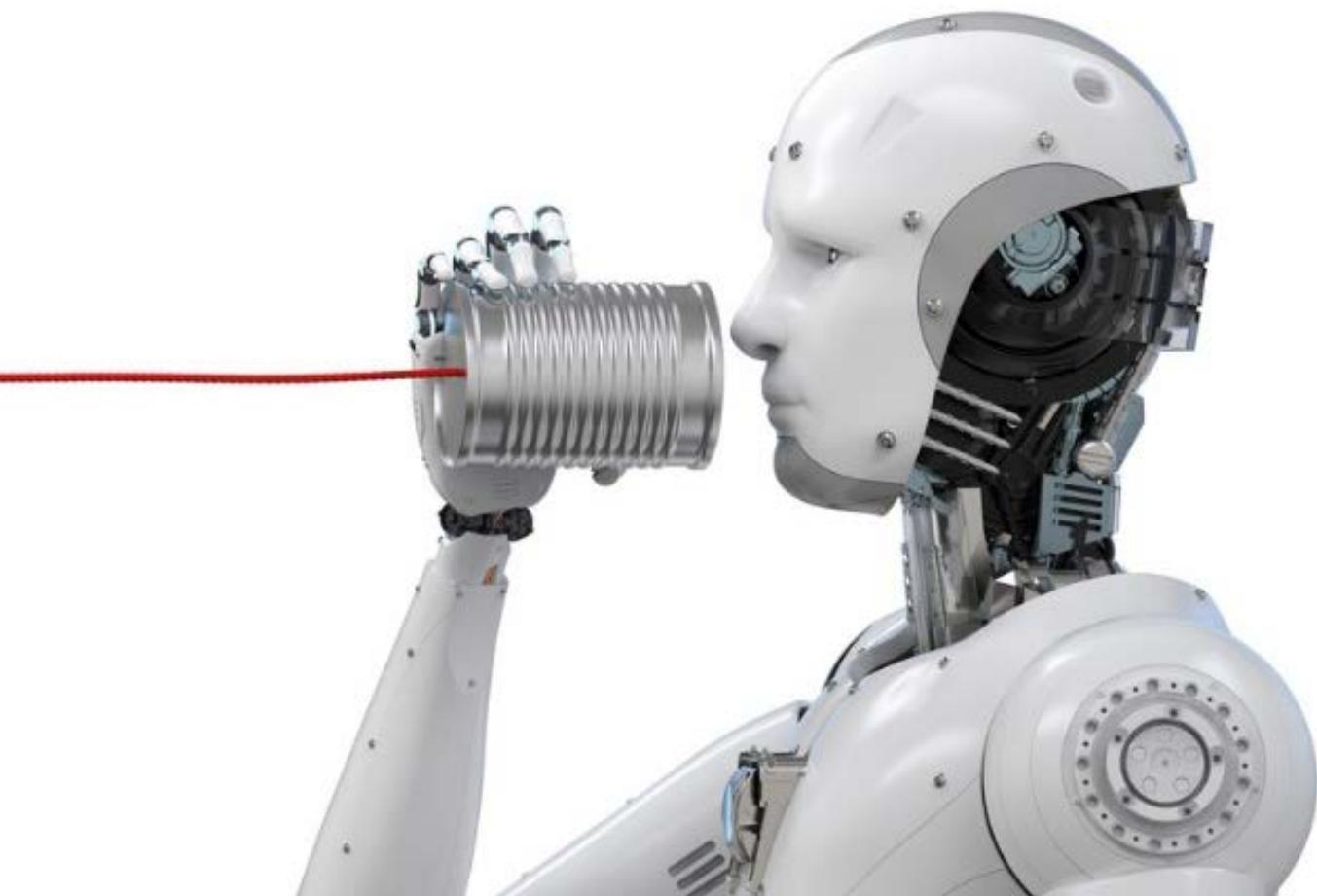
AI is an intelligent assistant and augmented friend, will enable us to increase our competitiveness through the development of new or improved services within the communications and engagement function, enabling us to provide improved services and also better tailored customers, audience and employee needs. This will be achieved through improved automation and AI-enabled tools for media monitoring, social mapping and listening, stakeholder management, programme and project management, automated content for a range of internal and external purposes, moving business, organisations and brands to become content generators and publishers among other functions.

There is no magical AI platform a communicator can purchase or build in-house to instantly do all the process-

driven PR roles. Rather than look for one overarching solution, it's always best to consider specific, component tasks within the process that AI can assist. The most important aspect is to capacity build on knowledge required and identify opportunities for intelligent automation among the PR and communications functions.

The media environment is also changing at pace with more automation and AI-driven content, using AI to scrape trending social content for news items, reading of the press releases and sharing of the content with journalists and editors. We have witnessed massive job losses in the media industry as publishers adopt an automated content approach. It goes without saying that where the media goes, PR must keep up. We must be abreast of these changes to the media landscape by changing the approach to media relations. PR professionals must also innovate to stay ahead of the game in this area.

Despite these well-documented opportunities and AI in PR banging the upskilling drum to the UK and global PR industry for the past three years, 'PR is sleepwalking into AI', we are yet



to see automation or AI tools adoption happening or at pace or at scale. Throughout the history of the industry, PR has always lagged behind other professions in adopting any innovation and technology.

PR industry is already behind other professions in AI education and upskilling and the gap seems to be widening. It's imperative that there is need to close this gap, particularly now that the business mandate globally has accelerated due to the pandemic. For many that will mean automation and seeing what/where AI may be able to support bring down costs and streamline operations.

AI represented a significant opportunity for the PR profession before the pandemic hit. But it is now an accelerated growing market. In addition to boosting productivity and optimisation, the business and organisational leaders are being advised and guided on gaining more insights. In UK, the global workforce is setting ground to gain the key skills to reap the full benefit of AI deployment, likewise, the PR workforce should do the same.

PR professionals need innovators who can work closely with designers, social and data scientists, tech developers from the onset to develop AI-led products, tools, services and process which are not only easy to use but are ethical, socially and employee beneficial and, ultimately, cause no harm.

PRs must be able to engage effectively with AI ethics to mitigate risks and ultimately ensure trust and reputations remain intact and, ultimately, are built. Practitioners must be part of all AI ideas and build teams, holding them to account by asking tough ethical questions on data bias, organisational and individual bias, as well as supporting businesses to upskill in attitude and application.

Increasing diversity in AI needs to move from just talk to actions. This goes beyond coding to becoming a top management decision which ensures the right decisions are made, based on ethics, trust, transparency making sure reputation is at the forefront.

PR Practitioners should confidently and strongly advocate for collaboration in all AI ideas, build and deploy teams in-house

and externally to embrace diversity. User groups should be created for all who are using the AI-enabled products, tools or services as part of the ideas of building teams that are representative and transparency. The Practitioners should also support businesses to understand the need to translate ethical principles into organisational practice. Trustworthy and purposeful businesses, organisations and brands will be those that will clearly and transparently demonstrate they have developed AI responsibly and communicate it effectively.

To be able to lead, guide businesses effectively and elevate PRs role as a strategic management function, we must now become au fait with data, automation and AI in our own roles and within that of the business, organisations and the brands we serve at a detailed level or risk getting left further behind.

*Kerry Sheehan, Chart.PR, FCIPR, is chair of the AIinPR Panel and a board member of We and AI educating on the risks and rewards of AI*

# Continental collaborations key in expediting the search for vaccine

By Mutethia wa Mberia



Information gathered in media platforms show that many countries are at different stages in pursuit of developing an effective vaccine to the uncharacteristically mutating virus. There have been reports that some countries such as Russia, Britain, Brazil, USA, China are very close to producing a vaccine with successful trails done. The search for Covid-19 vaccine has been long and elusive. World over, the strive remains work in progress with no official roll-out so far.

Just like other vaccines, the search for Covid-19 vaccine is promising to be a characteristic one. The rigorous process from the invention, pre-tests, clinical trials and eventually release is a patient affair, for the unrelenting researchers. In Kenya, we have proven fit in world endeavors and recognition having accolades of some of the remarkable inventions and outstanding personalities in different realms for the globe's admiration.

In Africa, it is gratifying that research institutions, universities and partners have made commendable progress that counts in the global prism. There have been efforts in Kenya where top-notch researchers have collaboratively managed to undertake sequencing of the virus that largely informs the mode of transmission. The changing symptomatic manifestations of the virus have also

been combed, comparative studies to extent to which the Ebola and its vaccine, (which is credited to Kenyan scholars) compares with the Covid-19 research. The great research efforts from Kenya make the research output part of the global discourse.

Across the borders, similar efforts have varyingly been registered, notably, in countries such as South Africa, Nigeria but on different focus and milestones from that of our own. The ultimate gain remains in the inter-country collaborations for a speedy destination to the cure. Luckily, there are already existing and functional regional and continental associations, collaborations and memoranda such as the Inter-University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), the Association of African Universities among others. Such structures can be utilized as a framework for joint research, subsequent trials and roll-out.

The search expectedly, is a high-octane affair due to what will be at stake for the entity or country to release the vaccine. Commercially, there is mammoth potential gain as well as huge inter-lateral implications for the country that may "blink" first. Conversely, a pitfall in any way upon release is disastrous not only to the public but also the country's reputation that would be difficult to

repudiate.

The collaboration, therefore, would tap into wealth of expertise across the continent thereby reducing and/or mitigating the said risks of surrounding untimely release or unfinished "product". Such a joint move would also result into a more effective contextualized approach to the African needs and its habitants' unique demographics. Such a pact would also open important research leads into unearthing potentially remedies of existing and looming pandemics if the near future.

A continental roadmap in form of policy intervention would also be explored in the long run. A policy that would be essential for a streamlined and unified handling of such plagues amongst countries owing to similar deprivations we belabor across African countries.

It is worth to note that time is of essence to the search, as the globe's attention and focus is solely on vaccine. In the spirit of driving the Agenda 2063 tagline of "Africa we Want" Let us work together to make in-roads, led by our able scholars. Even if we do not attain Africa-made vaccine, we shall be among the global principals in the roll of its inventors.

# A tale of two related pandemics

By Hellen Omukoko

The context of stigmatization encompasses a broad range of faculties within the society, with healthcare practitioners who are frontline heroes against the covid-19 virus and patients who contract the disease being viewed in all manner of negative perspectives. Unfortunately, the societal systems are continuously becoming infringed upon by this unseen virus, with visible results being inhuman acts against covid-19 patients and even recoveries.

The WHO has to date reported well over 13.6 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 in an estimated 188 countries across the world. The coronavirus holds a mortality index score of about 585,344 deaths; health experts observed models show a

## **The Virus Does not Discriminate, Why should we?**

While it suffices to conclude that the covid-19 pandemic is hard-hitting on health systems across the world, a cropping associative predicament to the covid-19 situation is the increase in stigmatization; patients who fall victim to the grasps of the covid-19 virus are made to contend against two unseen enemies; the virus and the psychological trauma of stigmatization.

Majority of people are slowly but surely coming to terms with the ardent fact that covid-19 is indeed a pandemic. Parallel arrays of the impact of the novel coronavirus across the world show a

The context of stigmatization encompasses a broad range of faculties within the society, with healthcare practitioners who are frontline heroes against the covid-19 virus and patients who contract the disease being viewed in all manner of negative perspectives. Unfortunately, the societal systems are continuously becoming infringed upon by this unseen virus, with visible results being inhuman acts against covid-19 patients and even recoveries.

## **More information on infection, management, and potential recovery**

The World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Mr. Tedros Adhanom, has, on numerous occasions, proclaimed the self-inflicting downfall people are advancing by adding stigmatization amid this Covid-19 pandemic. Cases of stigmatization are ordinarily stemming from the lack of elaborate understanding and enough public awareness regarding Covid-19 infection, management, and potential recovery. As such, a significant percentage of the society pegs on the myopic thinking that owing to the perceived terminal nature of the coronavirus, chances of survival and recovery are almost on the impossible side of the continuum. However, with progressive medical and clinical interventions, the management of Covid-19 shows promising prospects; an estimated 7.8 million out of the about 13.5 million cases of covid-19 have recovered globally.

## **Mitigate stigmatization**

A paradigm shift is necessary to mitigate stigmatization against the covid-19 case subject and our healthcare frontline workers. People must appreciate that even though COVID-19 is a potent pandemic, it is manageable, and foreseeably, a viable cure and vaccine will be discovered. It does not serve any good for people to add stigmatization to the already overflowing problematic pot of Covid-19 impact in the world.

We cannot win this war if we continue to multiply the enemies we face. We can, we will, and we must overcome Covid-19. The world needs to awaken to the fact that we need unity more than ever.



worrying risk of this index surging way higher by the end of 2020 Data shows that at least 7.59 million persons have recuperated and recovered from this highly prevalent and infectious disease.

Apart from the worrying detrimental health effects the Covid-19 is creating in its path, stigmatization is slowly but distressingly becoming an added enemy in the fight against covid-19.

It is undisputable that COVID-19 is the 21ST century pandemic of the moment and requires a 'marathon' mentality as opposed to a 'sprint' mentality.

colossally shared justification-we are all at risk!!!!!!

The popularized adage depicting the covid-19 as an 'unseen' enemy further puts to perspective the magnitude of the threat this novel virus possesses against humanity. The American Psychological Association (APA) in collaboration with the U.S infectious disease center postulates that while epidemiological impacts from a disease warrant as grave outcomes, it is even more detrimental when the psychological systems of people are distorted in the middle of battling an infection or disease.

# The current challenge presents a myriad of opportunities globally

By Ngulamu Jonathan

As noted by Cushla Sherlock of Credit-Suisse, e-commerce is a force that no investor can afford to ignore. Today, amid the disruption occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses have migrated online. This fact, from now on, will also have an impact on how we communicate, plan and evaluate our communication results not only for business development but also for sustainability.

According to data from the eMarketer Survey in the United States (US), the disruption caused by the COVID-19 has largely favoured e-commerce. This is attributed to the large uptake of online shopping from persons staying at home as a measure to curb the spread of the virus. The survey further indicates that 12.2 per cent growth for new online shoppers are coming from people who are 65 years.

As the evolution continues, businesses are adapting to change, a factor that is, and will continue to be propelled by the adoption of various technologies presented by internet. It is good to note that technology development is changing the business sphere and with innovation being at the centre of every emerging product or service, it is now evident that the future of business is online and inevitable.

E-commerce is now the biggest winner as more Kenyans adopt to the the new normal of working remotely from their homes. This has led to a booming rise in online businesses that have positively impacted the ecommerce growth. This trend has accelerated both the existing online businesses and have led to more e-commerce innovations and adoption by most companies.

In May 2020, the Kenya Private Alliance Sector (KEPSA) and Jumia partnered to train and register thousands of businesses online. Within the same time, retail software developer CompuLnyx and

African digital payments company, DPO Group launched e-commerce platforms to help businesses move online. To enhance supplies in the wake of COVID-19, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers quickly joined the pack; they launched an online directory for local manufactured goods to help Kenyan's shop online.



Globally, by July 2020, the biggest e-commerce companies in the world like the Amazon, Google, Walmart and JioMart among others indicated skyrocketing activities in their businesses. Google invested \$10 billion for India Digitization Fund, an indication of a promising digital economy. These favorable e-commerce factors are undoubtedly what we are adapting to or looking forward to incorporate in our existing business operations. Luckily, the environment in Kenya is looking promising for ecommerce growth.

Data from the Communication Authority indicates that the number of active mobile subscribers in the country stood at 55.2 million as at March 2020, translating

to mobile penetration of 116.1 percent while mobile money subscription stood at 29.1 million and active mobile money agents at 201,102. This clearly indicates that for businesses will have a definite tie with the digital sphere. Innovation will be one of the major drivers of business, characterized by seamless and consistent transactions.

The growth of social media trade or social commerce will have an undisputed market break out following the current technology development. The emergence of influential social media apps have also continued to influence the consumer behavior especially for Generation Z according to Big Commerce. This fact, will continue to shape the business trends of the century from now on to the days to come.

In Kenya, the development of technology initiatives is bringing the much-awaited full e-commerce experience at our doorsteps. The launch of Google Loons, affordable data bundles, the e-citizen services, not to mention the ongoing construction of National Data Centre in Konza City is among the big initiatives that will spur economic growth through e-commerce. This means both the private and public institutions will be obliged to adapt to B2B, B2C and C2B online model of doing businesses.

On the flipside, Kenyan e-commerce needs a structure that protects these businesses as well as the consumers. In countries like the United Kingdom, there are existing regulations to safeguard consumers engaging in online transactions. These regulations among include acquisition of affordable smartphones as key tools to build online trust and thereafter propel e-commerce.

It is evident that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a lot of disruptions, the other side of the coin on this is to look at the opportunities in the current challenge, As strategic communicators, the development of e-commerce technology should now, more than ever be a key driver for better performance for our clients as well as our growth and sustainability.

*The writer is a MPRSK, a Public Relations Practitioner at IMG-Kenya and an Entrepreneur at heart.*

# PR: The overlooked profession

By Jessica Nanjendo



Despite an ethical evolution that lasted over four different stages, Public Relations is still a widely overlooked and disregarded profession. In many cases, its practitioners are considered spin doctors who manipulate audiences and spread half-truths to further an organisation's objectives. An actual phenomenon in communication, spin is a form of propaganda, attained through deliberately providing a biased interpretation of an event or campaigning to influence public opinion about some organisation or public figure. Although the profession used unorthodox practices to influence audiences in its earlier stages, the field has since mended its ways to achieve the same objectives through acceptable ethical means. Yet, the industry's problems are still far from over. The technological revolution, through its myriad of dynamics, has brought in a fresh set of challenges that will be discussed in the course of this article.

The issue of fake news and disinformation has been the subject of widespread media attention for quite some time now. Although the concept of fake news is not new, this concern is linked with the weakness of the media whose watchdog role is now questioned by the general public. At stake is what forms the core of the profession's existence, media credibility and trust. Indeed, fake news is a fire that has been fanned by the internet for several reasons. First, it has become incredibly easy cheap to produce fake news or misleading content on the internet. While this was next

to impossible before the age of social media, it has become cheaper because social media platforms have eliminated the logistical and cost barriers that previously made it impossible. Second, social media platforms have exacerbated the fake news pandemic by enabling its fast dissemination. With at least 44% of Kenyans having social media accounts, information spread has become easier. To add salt to injury, a Pew Research survey revealed that at least 62% of adults depend on social media for news briefs.

Fake news is a real problem in the PR industry because it erodes the very credibility that the profession strives to achieve. In essence, PR largely depends on third party endorsements that mainstream media provides for the brands they represent especially because people don't trust brand messaging if it is coming from the brand itself. Today, as the world lies on the edge of a pandemic precipice, the spread of fake news is at its peak. This is because social media use is at an all-time high as a majority of individuals are self-isolating or maintaining social distancing at home.

Sadly enough, the role of public relations in managerial decision making is still trivialized in the corporate world. While media scholars have asserted the role of public relations as a distinctive management function, corporate heads are yet to buy into this idea. Even in the 21st Century, a sizable number of companies and especially established brands still preserve public relations for

reactive purposes, only reaching out to their understaffed departments when a brand issue quickly spirals into a fully-fledged crisis. For example, when British data-mining firm Cambridge was under heat for illegally breaching peoples' personal information, they sought help, albeit unsuccessfully, from several public relations firms. If they had incorporated a public relations practitioner in their strategic planning team, their issue would have been easier to deal with.

Lack of specialization in the public relations educational curriculum also poses a challenge on the quality of practitioners absorbed into the Kenyan job market. At degree level, a career path to public relations can only be carved through a bachelor of arts in communication or journalism. However, the equivalent is available at certificate and diploma level. A study conducted by the Public Relations Society of Kenya (PRSK), revealed that a majority of the practitioners in the country studied in institutions outside the country, highlighting the apparent need to finetuning the curriculum here in Kenya.

Even as the profession steers away from the negative press agency connotation, the need to strengthen the ethical framework of the industry remains apparent. Practitioners must remain true to their clients, adhering to the highest standards of accuracy and honesty. In all cases, practitioners must maintain the confidentiality of their former and current clients. Lastly, practitioners must strive to be competent at all times, maintaining a continued commitment to personal and professional improvement.

With due commitment, the gaps in the public relations profession in Kenya can be easily bridged. With proper information infrastructures in place, fake news can be combated by digital and technological resources. Including public relations in organisational decision making will save a lot of resources, both financial and brand image that is easily dispensed by reactive public relations. The leaders in PR should seize the opportunities afforded by the internet and modern world problems such as the coronavirus pandemic to help achieve their organisational and professional objectives.

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should also ensure to meditate and build their spiritual side.

The writer goes ahead and describes the 20/20/20 formula which he says will help someone master the art of the 5AM Club and get their life in order. This he describes as waking up at 5am and having 20 minutes of moving (sweat breaking workout), then 20 minutes of reflection (praying, planning and meditating) and 20 minutes of growing (listening to or watching things that help us grow). The writer also encourages sleeping early and lays out a step by step program of how one can prepare the day before to make it easier to wake up at 5am everyday. He encourages preparing for the next day every night between 9pm and 10pm. He also suggests a gadgetless sleep. This is clearing off any gadgets (mobile phones, computers, tablets etc) from the bedroom early enough to ensure you do not have distractions as you focus on sleeping. He suggests purchasing an alarm clock for the purposes of waking one up. The writer also encourages arranging of workout clothes the previous night to avoid wasting time in the morning. He also recommends reduced indulgence in social media especially in the morning hours of the day.

I found the book quite practical and engaging. All the tenets that have been set out in the book are practical and easy to apply to one's life. The book does not subscribe to the 'Sleep a pauper wake up a millionaire' kind of strategy that most self help books embrace. Rather, it recognizes long term change as a slow, painful and gradual process but which if embraced, has amazing results. The writer, through Mr. Riley, says the way when he first began the journey to the 5AM Club, he would sleep in his workout attire to avoid wasting time in the morning. He also notes that many were times when he struggled waking up at 5am and considered quitting altogether. He goes on to assure the reader that it would take one 66 days of continuous practice to build the habit that would qualify them to officially join the 5AM Club. I found that I finished all my work by noon on the days that I practiced the tenets of the 5AM Club.

The writer also taps on to the reader's photographic memory to pass on some key tenets through sketches and diagrams. This breaks the monotony of words and

## Review of the 5AM Club by Robin Sharma

By Lina Jamwa

The 5AM Club is a self help book with a twist. The story is told through the eyes of three characters namely the entrepreneur, the artist and the billionaire. The names of the entrepreneur and the artist are not revealed. However, the author introduces the billionaire as Mr. Stone Riley as the book progresses.

The book focuses on imparting knowledge on how people can get a hold of their lives by doing the most during the morning hours of their day. It basically introduces the reader to a liberating regime that begins everyday at 5am and whose subscribers the main character,

Mr. Stone Riley, calls the 5AM Club. The writer identifies 4 main areas of life that we need to work on to adapt the habits of the 5AM Club. These are the mindset (our mind which is our biggest controller); the heartset (our emotions); the healthset (our physical well being) and the soulset (spiritual well being). The writer explains that our minds play a big role in dictating what we do in particular instances. It prevents us from moving from the normal to achieving the 'abnormal'. He narrates that for one to achieve great things, their emotions have to be right. They should also exercise their bodies by thorough working out to jump start the body. They

creates a lasting effect in the reader's mind. This makes remembering easier. The writer gives a timetable of what one needs to do at what time making it easy for the reader to adapt the timetable and incorporate the suggestions in their life.

Creating a total shift in how one handles their business is not an easy task. The writer creates pride in embracing his suggested regime by depicting it as a club. He tells the reader that only a very small percentage of people have managed to adapt this regime in their day to day life. This percentage of people can be identified by their levels of organization as well as the wealth they own. Many

of them have relaxed lives and have mastered an impressive work life balance.

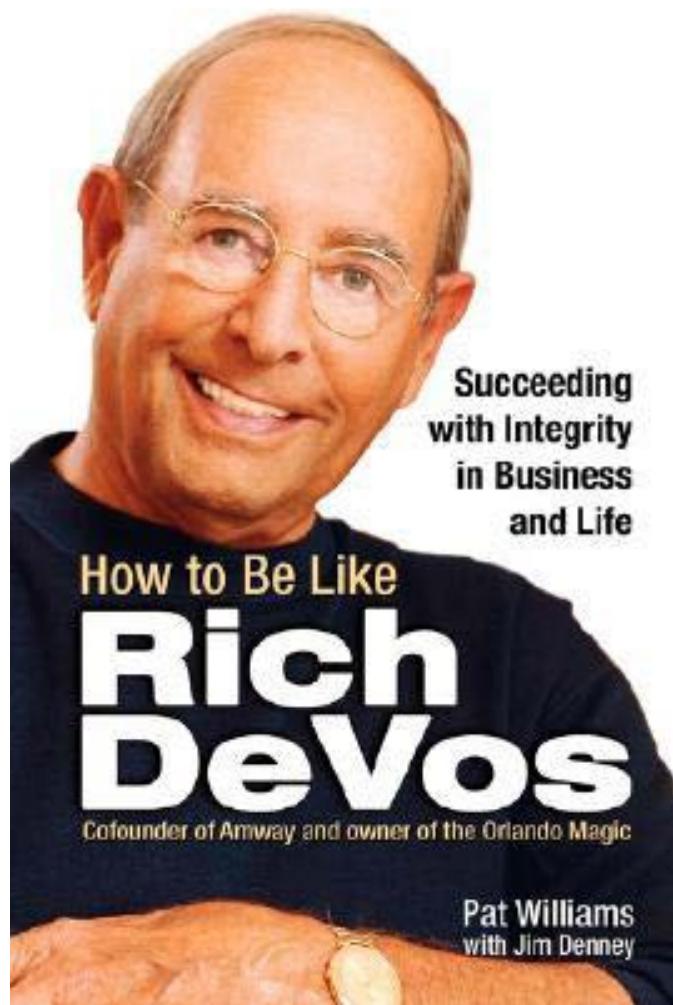
The writer moves from the ordinary way of writing self help books to incorporate the three aforementioned characters. This gives the book a narrative feel making it even easier to follow. The reader is captivated by the characters and the unfolding romance between the entrepreneur and the artist. The writer brings out the tenets quite well. However, the character of the billionaire, Mr. Stone Riley is a bit exaggerated. Mr. Riley is shown to be breaking into jumping jacks or an awkward dance amidst teaching the entrepreneur and the artist their lesson

of the day. He's also pictured as shouting out of the blue while walking besides the entrepreneur and the artist. While there are such characters in real life, and probably the writer intended to entice the reader by showing how easy and relaxed billionaires are, the character appeared a bit exaggerated.

The book ends with the writer informing the reader of what happens five years after the entrepreneur and the artist made contact with Mr. Stone Riley. Mr. Riley dies of cancer and the entrepreneur and the artist get married and continue applying the tenets taught to them by Mr. Riley to take control of their lives.

## How to Be Like Rich DeVos: Succeeding with Integrity in Business and Life

By Kenneth Kimutai Sawe



I read this book around May when the Covid Pandemic was becoming scarier by the day. This is a book full of hope, resilience, determination and razor sharp focus. The author takes the reader through a page by page life and times of Richard "Rich" Marvin DeVos Sr. Simply known as Rich DeVos, founder of Amway short form of (American Way) and owner of the NBA's Orlando Magic. Rich possesses qualities rarely found in business leaders today: leadership, wisdom, patience, selflessness, philanthropy, patriotism, focus on family and above all his consistent faith in God. DeVos and his school friend Jay Van Andel founded Amway in 1959 as a multi-level marketing business to distribute cleaning products, following the business model they had observed in a previous venture together. They ran the business together, expanding it over the decades into an international distributor of a wide variety of products.

Those who share the same ideals as Rich, reading this book will inspire you to believe that it is possible to live a life of integrity and be successful in business and family. If you are in business and would like to have role model, look no further, Rich DeVos has lived a full circle and succeeded in all his business dealings with Integrity and forthrightness. I particularly appreciate the flow of chapters in this book. The author helps the reader to filter and apply the lessons from the life of this great man at the end of each chapter.

At the time of his death on September 6th 2018, aged 92, Rich DeVos was ranked as the 351st richest man in the 2018 Forbes ranking with a net worth of approximately 5.4 Billion US Dollars.

I would recommend this book to professionals in direct sales, public relations and entrepreneurs. Enjoy.



# Integrated communication approach essential in tackling uncertain times

By Elizabeth Mulae

As we continue to battle the Covid 19 Pandemic by faithfully observing the Ministry of Health (MOH) guidelines and the World Health organization (WHO) containment measures. The public among them professionals in different sectors are questioning whether the messages communicated are effective. These is backed by the online database from daily figures shared by MOH officials that show COVID 19 infections are rising higher by day with a reported number of over 31,015 confirmed cases,516 deaths and about 17,900 recoveries at the time of writing this article.

As we ponder on the steps to keep ourselves safe as well as being ‘our brother’s keeper’, the realization that the back of minimising the COVID 19 spread rests on individual responsibilities continues to show different results going by the rising numbers. One wonders if this is the time, we should be asking ourselves whether the current messaging from MOH is working, or time has come for us to rethink about an integrated approach for addressing the prevailing situation. The MOH has been consistent in sharing the common messages that encourage Kenyans to wash their hands, wear masks properly, sanitize and keep social distancing, the same messages have been packaged into advertorials and amplified in different media platforms. The repetition has resulted to more public awareness among Kenyan citizens which has resulted to fear, doubt and negative effects like stigma. It is becoming worrying that even with the repetitive message about observing the guidelines, some Kenyans are still walking in public

without a mask, others are observed wearing the masks below the chin while others can be seen engaging freely with masks under the nose!

Integrated Marketing communication (IMC) is an approach used to promote a message through multiple strategies that work together and reinforce one another. To effectively manage the messaging during the In covid 19 period, an IMC approach can be used to address the Covid 19 infections through the following approaches.

## Reputation Management

As the Bible says, A good name is better than riches and gold, so is the good name of a company, Covid 19 pandemic has affected the lifeline of some of the biggest companies in the World due to hard economic times characterised by lockdowns, closure of business / slowed business returns and jobs losses. As the Covid 19 continues to bite, the reputations of most companies are at stake with eventuality of the sustainability of their brands/products and employees. As we think about staying alive amid the current pandemic fears, we need to build our companies reputation by developing campaigns filled with hope and inspiration for a brighter future .Reputation building takes time, and can be destroyed in one second, during this in Covid period, its highly advisable that a company uses an integrated approach that looks at all issues affecting the company, employees, customers, investors to ensure a win – win situation.

## Crisis Management

As we strategize to keep ourselves safe, worry about our families and friends, we need to create crisis management plans for any unforeseen eventualities that may befall our companies during these unpredictable times. All companies both in public and private sector should be developing concepts on how to handle disasters that may affect their companies or impact on their employees, customers, suppliers and the general public. A well-developed crisis creates applicable solutions that are key when addressing any disasters. Having a crisis team in place will ensure a structured implementation of the same and identification of areas of concerns.

## Social Relationships Management

As human beings, we recognize the power of touch and express it through different gestures which include hugging, holding hands, sitting close to each other, cuddling etc, the current pandemic has minimised the expressions of these gestures of affection key to human existence. As Africans, we have been greatly affected by the small aspects of not being able to shake our hands due to the Corona Virus, however we need to respect the guidelines and realise that our health safety is key. Developing other methods of showing affection like using the social media platforms emoji’s, reviving our writing on stick notes to express our feelings are just but a few of the many approaches we can utilise. Reaching out to each other by video calling, webinars, teams and zoom meetings when we feel pressured or stressed enhances our mental health and keeps us free from depression. Exercise is also very key in keeping us sane.

## Corporate Communication

As companies orient themselves to the new normal, Corporate communication has become crucial in dissemination of information to internal and external clients, as staff resume to work in rotas while others work remotely, the need to communicate the new working modalities needs to be enhanced. Creation of messages that remind staff about the guidelines, mounting of the same in strategic spaces becomes helpful in reminding all to observe the guidelines. Constant updating of information is key to keep all stakeholders abreast with ongoing activities. This departments play a key role in amplifying the MOH and WHO messaging in creative and sharp manner that ensures the message reaches to intended source filled with the emotion intended. Development of client handling procedures and document handling safeguards employees from all external danger and protects them from any possible exposure.

## Media relations

The media plays a key role in informing, educating, enlightening and advocacy of different topics. The media alongside Medical personnel have remained in the fore front in sharing current updates of the Covid 19 situation. Media have gone out to interview Covid 19 patients in isolation centres while dressed in the Protective gears. This has shown their commitment in sharing information about the challenges on the ground. However, there is a huge unexplored opportunity in media networks that can be utilised to enhance the messaging.

## Community Engagement

As a country, we have different stakeholders in each society who play a key role in our communities. There is need to mobilise the stakeholders through a variety of means that are compatible to them. Use of telephone calls or text bulking to share the Covid 19 prevention message in a language that they can understand would be a strategic move. Reaching out to the community opinion leaders and explaining to them how the pandemic affects people's lives enhances believability and builds trust between the community and the person sharing the information. Unfortunately, people in the rural areas still are in doubt about the existence of Covid 19. Through engagement with the opinion

leaders and top leaders, the community will be sensitized by one of their own hence build trust and acceptance of the message leading to behaviour change. Establishment of Community groups (Nyumba Kumi) especially in villages will be important to curb Covid 19 infections. Sharing information with opinion leaders on covid 19 prevention will enhance community policing on compliance of the guidelines.

## Research

To establish ways in which coronavirus spread is pushing PR practitioners to re-evaluate and reposition themselves in terms of adherence to the MOH, WHO guidelines, a research ought to be conducted. This will assist in identifying the gaps which will inform on implementation of new strategies. Analysis of the results will inform the proposals and solutions that need to be developed to address the situation. The information gathered will be helpful in structuring a robust and effective communication strategy that is audience centred.

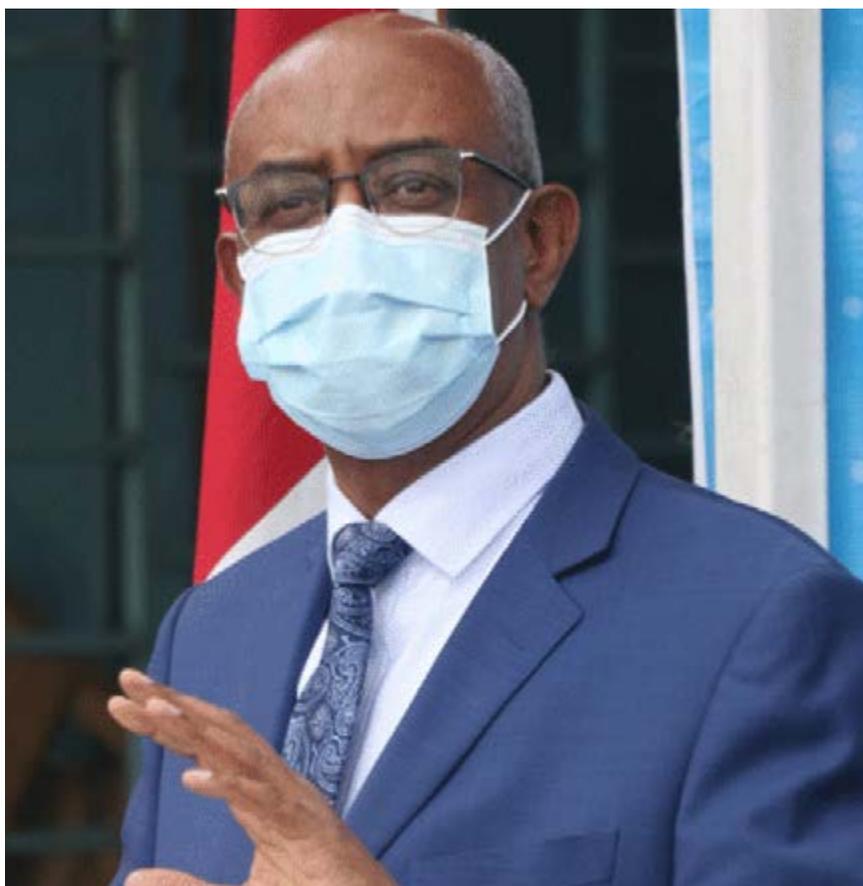
## Sectoral Collaborations

To win this Covid- 19 war, support and synergies from both the public and

private sector will be key in slaying this monster that has affected our way of life. Through private sector collaborations, funding can be generated to support some programmes that initiate the development of fresh creative messaging that pushes the individual responsibility approach to safe guard all citizens. Time has come for both Public and Private entities to relook at all resources from the financial, innovation and human capital that can be of help in creating a new paradigm shift in matters Covid 19 messaging through an integrated approach.

Lastly, let's review the in Covid -19 period with new glasses and a different worldview that focuses on changing the current challenges into opportunities for growing the communication profession. The public and private sector need to join hands and work together by utilising the IMC approach that could be a game changer in the prevailing situation, As Abrahams Lincoln said, united we stand, divided we fall, lets all join hands and slay this Covid 19 monster off our livelihoods!

*The writer is a communication manager at the Export Promotion and Branding Agency*



# Role of ethics in PR and media persuasion

By Erick Muia Wambua



There is an innate tendency in man to do wrong. In fact, it takes effort to redirect one's will to the right path. This explains why the human society has evolved several controls by which it could make doing the right thing more appealing. In personal and professional life, the subject of ethics is quite useful as a guide in decision making. Virtually all professions the world over have ethical standards and guidelines by which their members adhere to as they do their work. It is not out of place to state that public relations is one industry that requires numerous ethical standards.

## Definition of Ethics

There are many definitions of ethics as there are authors and school of philosophy. Generally, ethics is the branch of philosophy that deals with issues of right and wrong in human affairs. Other definitions state that ethics can be described as standard or conduct and behaviour based on moral duties and

virtues derived from principles of right and wrong.

The Greek philosopher Socrates defines ethics as 'How we ought to live'. One of the factors identified by Aristotle as under the direct control of the speaker is ethics which has to do with the character of the speaker. This is the origin of source credibility in modern communication. Aristotle had in his work 'Rhetoric' focused on the persuasive power of an individual's character. To Aristotle the speaker's character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion that he possesses. To him it adds much to an orator's influence that his own character should look right. He recognized that good sense, good moral character and goodwill inspire confidence in the orator's own good character.

Examples of ways in which people have been known to compromise their professional ethics include:

1. Lying for an employer
2. Accepting gifts and or bribes
3. Writing misleading press releases
4. Withholding information,
5. Covering up potentially harmful situations

A practitioner is considered as a thorn among several ends of loyalty. In their book, Public Relations Ethics, Philip Seib and Kathy Fitzpatrick talked about five duties of public relations professionals to - self, client, employer, profession and society. Another author referred to these as the five masters.

• **Duty to Self:** If you will ever deceive anyone, never try to deceive your best friend and that best friend of yours is yourself. Therefore, ethical responsibility is a duty to yourself as a practitioner.

• **Duty to Client:** Your client is the one picking up the bill for your services at a particular point in time. He therefore

deserves the best of service borne on the wings of ethical consideration that give him value for his money.

• **Duty to Employer:** If you are on the payroll of someone, then it is your ethical duty to do him the service as he deserves. Here we are talking of duties that are commensurate to your pay as well as the calling of your practice.

• **Duty to Profession:** You will agree with me that it is your professional duty not only to keep the public relations profession as good as you met it when you joined it, but even to ensure that the standards are improved than it was. This is your duty to your profession.

• **Duty to Media:** No public relations practitioner can be successful without the cooperation of the media. You may want me to put that in caps for emphasis, NO PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONER CAN SUCCEED WITHOUT THE COOPERATION OF THE MEDIA. This does not mean that the media are so powerful that they can hold you to ransom on your job, but they are such partners in progress that you must do all things ethically possible to protect their interest

in given situations.

• **Duty to Society:** The society is to a public relations man what the laboratory is to a pure scientist. Any careless mix of chemical components can trigger such an explosion that can bring down the entire building. This explains why the public relations man must at all times accord the society the ethical duties due to it.

It is the duty of the public relations practitioner to advice management not to pursue profit at the expense of any of these ethical practices.

**Honesty:** To be truthful in all endeavor's, to be honest and forthright with one another and with customers, communities, supplies and shareholders.

**Integrity:** To say what we mean. To deliver that we promise, and to stand for what is right.

**Respect:** To treat one another with dignity and fairness, appreciating the diversity of the workplace and the uniqueness of each employee.

**Trust:** To build confidence through team

work and open candid communication.

**Responsibility:** To speak up without fear or retribution and report concerns in the work place, including violations of laws, regulations and company policies, and seek clarification and guidance whoever there is doubt.

In the words of a renowned American PR scholar the success of public relations in a contemporary society will depend largely on how the profession responds to the issue of ethical conduct. To him, public relations professionals must have credibility in order to practice. They must be respected by the various publics with whom they interact. To be credible and achieve respect PR professionals must be ethical.

In conclusion, the role of Ethics is extremely crucial in the practice of public relations. Like any area of mass media communication, a public relations specialist is guided by some laws and regulations, which every practitioner must abide with to stay out of trouble. Violations of laws knowingly or not will earn the practitioner and his organization sanctions and costly litigation.



# Work, yes, but go for regular checkups

By Editorial Team

Recently a colleague posted in a common social media group that they had been admitted in the hospital abruptly due to body weakness and tiredness. After spending two hours in the hospital, the doctor confirmed that their blood sugar and pressure levels were beyond normal levels.

This brings us to the question that we must all ask ourselves; How frequently do you undergo basic health tests? Do we have to wait until we fall sick to go for medical checkups?

## Our Health, Our Wealth

As professionals, our health is our wealth, we need to be holistically balanced to perform our duties to the best of our abilities. Back in my university days, one of my lecturers Dr. Bertha Kaimenyi, took us through life's lessons termed as balancing our body, soul, spirit and mind. During that time, I didn't really understand how it connects to a person's wellbeing. However, I have now realized that professionals cannot perform optimally without a balance of these four important elements. The nature of our tasks as professionals exposes us to a lot of pressure which if not well channeled can affect our health in a big way.

## Nutrition and Diet

The key focus on our body looks at ensuring that we eat the right diet and quantities. A visit to an expert nutritionist will empower one on how to ensure and observe the right diet. Most of the major hospitals in Kenya have good nutrition clinics, equipped with a modern equipment that informs you about your body fat, your current water intake and what your body requires, your (body mass index) B.M.I, your metabolic age versus your birth age. You will be surprised that your metabolic age is twice your birth age if the visceral body fat is above the required levels. Thereafter the nutritionist will recommend a daily diet to manage the required changes. The quality and quantity of oil used also determines our wellness. To observe and maintain normal levels of fat in the body, we are required to use unsaturated fats which are considered beneficial fats because they

improve blood cholesterol levels, ease inflammation, stabilize heart rhythms and play a number of other beneficial roles. Other good types of unsaturated fats are monounsaturated fats found in olives, peanut, avocados, nuts, pumpkin or sesame seeds while polyunsaturated fats are found in sunflower, corn, soybean and flaxseed oils. The oils should be used minimally to avoid abuse which may cause more harm in the body. For instance, initially I used to buy 5 litres of sunflower oil to last a month; however, after the visit to the nutritionist, I was advised that 5 litres should actually last me 5 months to say the least.

## Traditional Cooking Methods

As we grow in our professions, we need to look back in our cultures and uphold some of the skills and habits of our forefathers. Anyone who grew up in the village knows that there is a difference between food cooked in the clay earth ware pot as compared to the one cooked in an aluminum sufuria. We need to indeed go back to our roots and acquire that clay pot for boiling grains, meat and chicken. This method of cooking uses very little oil/ fat but ensures maximum preservation of the nutrients.

## Exercise and Fitness

Going to the Gym consistently requires focus and discipline. Many activities and events will interfere with your exercise routine. Nevertheless, you need to stay focused to the programme. In the event

that you have not enrolled in any gym, you could the car packed away from your offices, walk for 15 to 20 minutes at most, schedule a jog, swim or cycle, 15 – 30 minutes of exercise makes a big difference in your health.

## Crucial Medical Checkups/ Screening

As we hustle and bustle, lets prioritize the medical checkups and screening. Most of us are lucky to have a medical cover. For the ladies, schedule for that pap smear with a doctor of your preference. Similarly, plan for the mammogram procedures if the doctor advises so. Remember to check your sugar level, blood pressure, BMI tests and so on. As for the gentlemen, lets break the traditional myth that a man should always be seen as strong. Visit the physician / urologist for the routine physical tests and screening. Ensure that you have that prostate gland test that you have procrastinated for years. Check your visceral fat and work towards reducing that potty belly including getting those abs back.

This month let's step up in terms of putting our health first and plan our medical checkups. Our monthly mandatory tests should be blood sugar, cholesterol level and blood pressure tests which are highly contributing to increased lifestyle diseases courtesy of our sedentary and busy schedules that deny us the best of our tomorrow!



# Why COVID-19 heralds a perfect time for rebranding businesses

By Bernard Kimani



There have been many changes around us occasioned by the global pandemic. Health and safety concerns are driving more customers toward electronic payment systems, such as MPESA to pay at check-out without touching a surface. Some of these behaviour changes may be temporary, but many may be more permanent. As people move beyond the current mode of survival, the momentum behind digital-experience adoption is unlikely to reverse as people are forced by circumstances to try new things. With so much changing, what actions can brands take to serve and grow their customer base, mitigate risk, and take care of their people?

Today, COVID-19 remains the biggest challenge to both big and small industries and businesses across the globe. The crisis has left businesses in a position where a rebrand is necessary. Businesses must reorganise themselves during this time if they are to remain relevant. However, rebranding can be risky, customers may not like it and you may lose the brand recognition you worked hard to build. While a brand change also invites a public image reassessment and a perception change, it is important to note during this pandemic isn't a "marketing opportunity" to capitalize on. This

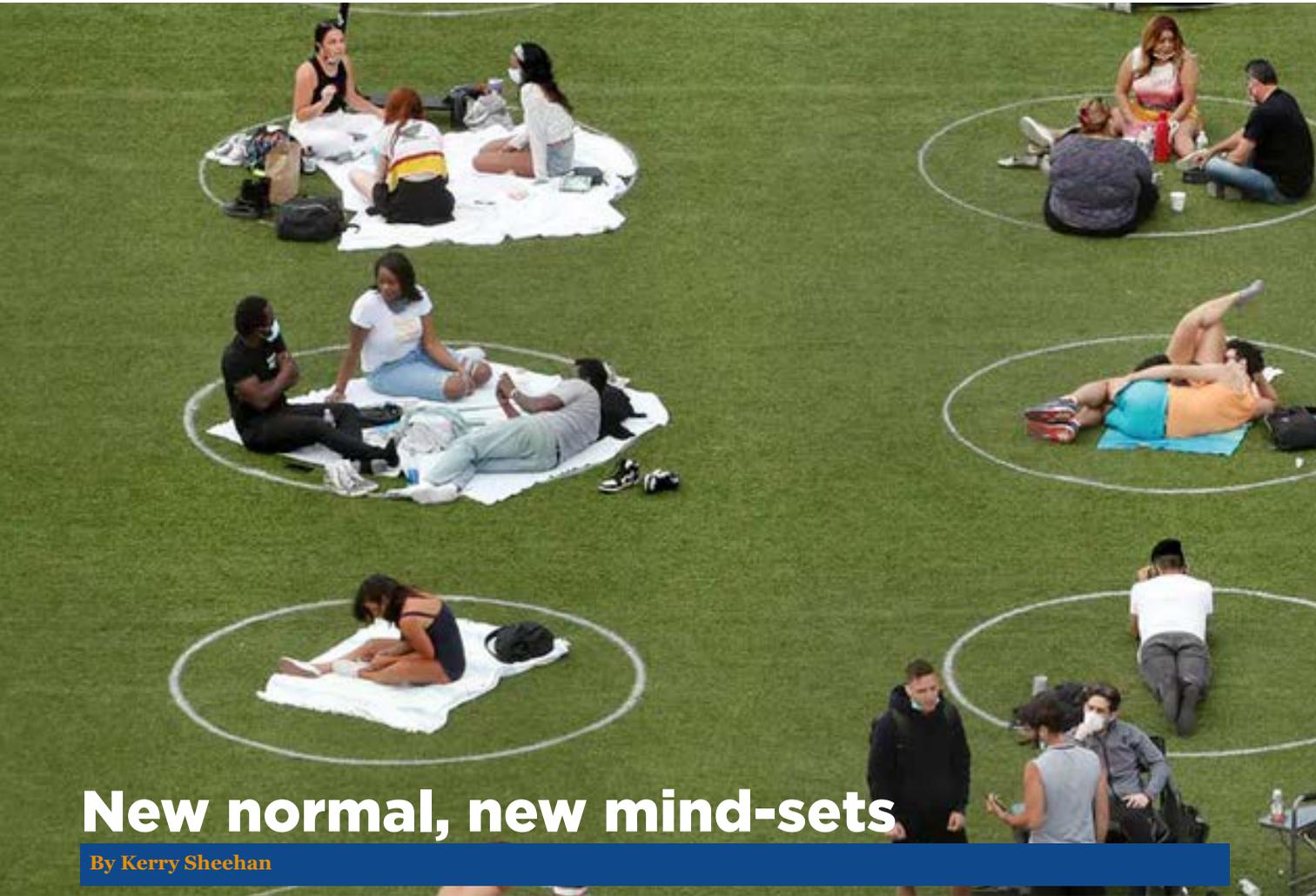
is a new reality and requires thoughtful navigation in order to survive.

A brand is everything about a business as it mirrors the experience your clients expect to have. A virtuous brand effectively communicates what the business does and how it does it while establishing trust and credibility.

The intention of rebranding is to forge a new identity for an already established brand. There are two kinds of rebranding; proactive and reactive. Proactive rebranding is employed when a business identifies an opportunity to grow or to tap into a new market. Reactive rebranding, on the other hand, is in response to a changing situation, whereby a business is forced to rebrand in order to survive.

Rebranding can be a dicey affair. It is therefore important that before embarking on this journey you listen to your stakeholders' feedback so that you don't lose brand recognition.

*Bernard is a Communication Specialist and Certified Public Relations Analyst*



# New normal, new mind-sets

By Kerry Sheehan

Successful change managers integrate systems of measurement in all their behavioral change and communication interventions. They know that when formative and summative measurement components are carefully integrated into behavioral change and communication interventions the probability of success increases.

As a matter of fact, monitoring and evaluation gives a manager an opportunity to build better and improve operations. A change manager would, at the initial situation analysis and needs assessment stage, identify the root cause of a problem, which is normally hidden in layers of symptoms. Application of measurements in defining the key audiences is, therefore, pivotal to the behavioral change effort. Additionally, setting necessary communication objectives to reach the various audience segments depend on the change managers' ability to measure. They are called upon to identify motivational factors central to behavior change efforts and to generate smart communication objectives towards creating awareness, understanding, comprehension and acceptance of the intended change.

Also, change managers utilize measurements to carefully determine and integrate key promises and support points in a monitoring and evaluation grid of behaviour change. Measurability provides the evidence needed to those who doubt the efficacy of the effort engaged in. Again, without an integrated monitoring and evaluation component, the change managers' definition and prioritization of communication approaches would lack clarity in the areas of sources, channels, messages, and feedback if the audience segmentation process is fuzzy.

Change managers' knowledge of formative and summative measurement techniques also aid them in the development of a workable behavioral change and communications implementation plan. It is this plan that informs the change managers what activities ought to be tracked, monitored and evaluated for further refinement of the engaged effort. At the center of any successful behavior change and crisis communication effort is a careful definition of the audience.

## Audience analysis

It is important to analyse target audiences to gain a better understanding of who

they are. A change manager desires to interact and appreciate the observable current behaviors in order to decide which audience sub-segment and also, "primary audiences" are best addressed before designing any social and behavior change communication intervention.

Audience analysis is critical in the review of basic information about the target group. Additionally, change managers use an audience analysis to predetermine segmentation criteria and utilization. They apply these criteria to assess the proposed audience segmentation process before prioritizing on carefully selected segments of the audience. Finally, change managers prepare audience profiles of each critical audience segment in terms of current socio-demographic, geographic, behavioral, and psychographic variables. Some of the variables of interest to the change managers are age brackets, education level, religious affiliation and gender. Others sources of variability are geographic locations and prevalence of the change matter across the audience of interest. More importantly, a review of the audience basic information assists the change managers to consider the key barriers to behavioral change like existing



beliefs, attitudes, knowledge levels and main influencers of change. Further, change managers learn the psychographic data like needs, aspirations, hopes, fears, and habits that could hinder or facilitate behavioral change.

Armed with this knowledge, change managers engage in an audience segmentation process. They use it to categorize target audience into easily manageable groups, commonly known as “segments”. Each segment is made up of individuals sharing common socio-demographic, geographic, behavioral, and psychographic characteristics. The process of segmenting audiences assists the change managers in their appreciation of varying responses to social and behavior change communication intervention effort. It also guides their channeling of meager resources to finely focused “primary audiences” and to target monitoring, coaching and routine support supervision activities. Therefore, where the target audience is found to be heterogeneous in reference to behavioral patterns, needs, values and/or other characteristics then audience segmentation becomes the foundation for successful behavioral change

interventions.

After the change managers have generated a number of potential audience segments they seek to validate the usability of each one of them in reference to the stated communication intervention goal. If a defined segment does not meet the criteria, they replaced it with a more appropriate one. Some common validation criteria include homogeneity, heterogeneity, measurability, substantiability, accessibility and actionability, in addition to the expected responsiveness of the selected audience segment. Once this is done, change managers decide which segments to prioritize and how to approach each one of them. The list of segments is narrowed down to match available resources and set communication goals. Priority is given to those audience segments that potentially satisfy the overall communication objectives. Such segments are easily accessible and ready for the behavior change.

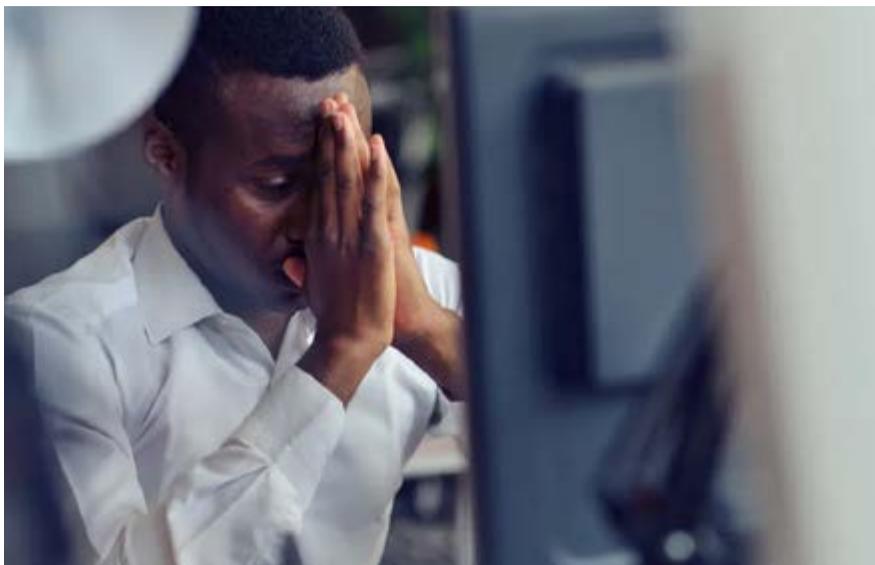
The purpose of audience analysis and segmentation is the preparation of audience profiles that assists the change managers to obtain a more personal

sense of the people to be reached through the change efforts. From each prioritized audience segment a clear description of a typical representation is a primary output. Such an audience profile describes geographic location, gender, age, and socio-economic status. It also describes level of awareness and understanding of the change problem. In addition, it indicates the concerns, current behaviors, main sources of information, change drivers, values, beliefs, and current orientation towards the intended behavioral change pattern. An audience segment profile should also reflect identified barriers to change as well as expectations, opportunities, competencies and motivations.

Additionally, the audience segment profile should include a report on how a typical member spends time, space, and money. Further, an audience segment profile indicates the critical sub-groups that heavily influence the decision making process of a typical member. Where possible a complete profile of these secondary groups that could potentially determine the decision to change or not should be included.

# How to deal with unexpected job loss

By Agatha Waleghwa Lenjou



As the month of March, 2020 came to a close, I lost my job as a TV Producer in a renowned media house due to the effects of Covid-19. It without a doubt came as a shock to me coupled with all possible emotions that one could feel. For a few days I was stuck in a dark spot wondering where to start because I had bills that needed to be taken care of. However, I didn't allow myself to remain stuck in that pit any longer and I had to figure out what to do so that I could raise money to settle the bills. I had to be positive about everything even though it was difficult. I had to put my trust in God because He has a reason for everything that happens.

After so many thoughts on what to do next, I gathered the little money I had in my account and embarked on a business of selling coastal goodies (Mabuyu and Achari). This was to enable me to pay my bills and make some savings, even as I continue to look for a job as a Communication Officer. I am grateful because the business is bringing in some income that is actually more than the salary I used to get before being declared redundant. I am able to take care of my bills and upkeep.

Additionally, to keep myself busy during this Covid-19 pandemic, I also embarked on creating content on amazing recipes. I have been sharing them on my Instagram page, to inspire people to try them out as well as grow an online following.

The fact that I got laid off came with a lot of anxiety and uncertainty about the future. It was such a scary moment but I came to realize there is always a way out of a crisis. No matter how dark the path may seem like, there is always light at the end of the tunnel. There is always something that one can do with the skills or ideas that the person possesses. One needs to strategize and push on with determination, perseverance, faith and hope that things will work out. Another lesson that I learnt is the importance of having alternative sources of income in addition to your monthly salary. It comes in handy during tough economic times.

I would like to share a summary of some of the key lessons that I have learnt and what it took me to get back on track in such a hopeless, fear-filled situation.

## Manage Your Finances

Start by writing down your expenditure and categorize them into 3. These are:

- a) Essentials - include rent, food, water, healthcare, house supplies
- b) Important – Car, salon, gym, loans
- c) Others – Subscription, entertainment, take outs etc.

Once you have that in order, you need to cut out all the non-essentials (important and others) and concentrate on the essentials only. You can also down-size the essentials for example by moving to a cheaper house, buying what you really need, managing food properly and cutting

down on your telephone usage until you are back on track. If you have any loans, you can book for an appointment with your creditors and negotiate with them for a flexible payment plan. Lastly, do not forget to communicate to people you owe money and explain to them your financial situation. Discuss with them a payment plan as well.

Manage your finances. Image courtesy of Google

## Grow Your Finances

While you are still looking for a job, think of opportunities that you could embark on in order to generate income. There are so many opportunities out here that one can get good profits from. You just have to decide what works for you. For example, if you are good at baking, you can start baking cookies, cupcakes, cakes and sell/deliver to people. If you are a good cook, you can cook amazing dishes and deliver to people in offices, at their homes and this can turn out to be a full time venture. Explore your valuable skills and talents that you can monetize. Think of yourself as an asset. Build a company from that.

Grow your finances – Image courtesy of Google

## Update Your CV and Network

Revamp your CV and let people know that you are actively looking for a job. Search for jobs online and apply for those that are in line with your industry and experience. Don't just apply for the sake. It is also important to network with influential people within your industry. Attend free webinars online and ensure that you have done proper research on the topic of discussion so that you can be able to actively participate by either asking questions or sharing key points that can be emulated. This will make you stand out and be heard.

## Build Your Personal Brand and Social Capital

Your personal brand is the unique combination of skills, personality and experience that you have and that you want the world to see. Personal branding is how you promote yourself. The world is going digital. Use social media to uplift your personal brand e.g. Instagram,

LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter. Develop relevant content to get to your audience for example, take good photos, videos and post with captivating captions, write and share articles that are trending that will bring about discussion and engagement and also engage in other people's conversations by commenting and sharing your thoughts about topic of discussion.

### Take Good Care of Yourself

Taking good care of yourself is important to the success of the recovery process. Ensure that your physical, spiritual and emotional health are well connected. Engage in various activities that will re-energize your body and mind. Work out for at least 30 minutes everyday day so that you improve your blood circulation and strengthen your heart which lowers

the risk of developing several diseases as well as improve your mood and give you a general feeling of well-being. You can start by walking, jogging or use work out videos which are available online at the comfort of your home. Another way to take care of yourself is by listening to motivational videos online that will inspire you to be better as well as make you feel better about yourself. Reading books is also important because it develops your thoughts, gives you endless knowledge and lessons while keeping your mind active.

### Tell Your Story

Telling your story can be very uncomfortable. It can bring about fear of how people are going to perceive you. This should not scare you. Always remember that you matter and everyone's experiences are unique. Initially, I used

to feel very uncomfortable being asked how I am fairing on with work as I had to explain that I was no longer employed. As time went by, it became easier opening up to people about my situation. I realised that it helps you connect with people which could in turn spark off an action e.g. a referral. Try as much as possible to go over your story until you can say it well and comfortably.

Losing a job is never easy, it is one of life's most stressful experiences. The stress and worry can be very overwhelming but always remember no matter how bleak things may seem, there is hope. With time and the right coping practises, you can come to terms with the setbacks, ease your stress and positively move on with life.

## Need to prioritise internal communication

By Killian Luhombo

Employees are the best brand ambassadors an organisation can have as they are trustworthy sources of information to external publics. They are in a better position to influence the perceptions held by different publics concerning the organization and this makes them a very resourceful stakeholder group. However, organizations to take necessary steps to ensure that their employees are comfortable and motivated. As Richard Branson, one of the most successful business moguls worldwide once said, if you take good care of your employees they will in turn take good care of your clients. A recent study reported that organizations whose employees who are well informed and connected experience a 20-25% increase in employee productivity. Organizations with effective internal communication strategies have also been found to manage crises better compared those that lack the same. A study conducted by Gatehouse found that 74% of communicators felt that the COVID-19 crisis will have a resounding impact on how they operate as a function henceforth. COVID-19 has shaken most, if not all, organizations driving them to adopt new ways of connecting with and engaging internal publics especially remote employees. While some organizations

especially those that are technologically advanced may have adapted to this switch quicker, a fair share of organizations encountered hurdles and have been struggling trying to manage employees and keep them in the loop.

The report further revealed that even though internal communication practices were improving owing to adoption of sophisticated tools and tactics to plan and execute activities, 62% recorded not having a long term internal communications strategy. Deduced from the report is that internal communication efforts in most organizations remain short term and are mainly reactive rather than proactive. These are just a few of the statistics on the state of internal communication, that were already out there even before the COVID-19 crisis struck. The advent of the crisis, if anything, has further illuminated the room exposing the dire need to invest in and seal the gaps in internal communication.

As communicators we therefore have a formidable task ahead of us; strengthening and revamping our internal communication strategies which we ought to do with the same oomph and dedication that we direct towards

external communication. A fine place to start collecting ideas on how to do this would be the rich pool of recent empirical literature in the communication field. A lot of research on internal communication practices is conducted yearly, tapping insights from these studies may provide good fodder for our mortars and inform us the more on how to embellish internal communication in our organizations for better results.

Considering the benefits effective internal communication stands to offer, from boosting employee engagement, productivity and loyalty to enabling better crisis management, it goes without saying that this is an area that communicators ought to consider pivotal. All in all, let us not forget that internal communication is not the proverbial carrot that is dangled in front of a horse, to be fished out only when need be (reactive) and to steer internal publics to the direction the organization wants. Instead let us look at it as a continuous handshake that nurtures long-term, fulfilling and mutually beneficial relationships between the corporate and its employees enabling them work together towards achieving set goals.



# Let go of what have no control over

By Dorcas Odhiambo

The last couple months have been difficult for many of us. The most unfortunate thing is that you never really know what the future holds, and so when the year started we all said Happy New Year! We set our new year resolutions and then we all claimed that 2020 will be our year. Now, 8 months later we have a lot of memes, going around, some saying “we should not count 2020 in our lives,” or that “maybe this year was a trial run and we would not like to continue.” Kenyans do have a way for making light moments out of difficult times. Bottom line is that this year has been tough.

If you're a parent, you are probably more worried about where the next meal will come from or even what will happen to the future of your children. Similarly, if you are a young professional, maybe this is the time you have experienced a pay cut or a job loss. For teenagers, I'm sure you hate the simple fact that you have to repeat a class next year, which means that if you are in Form three you will have to study the mole concept (in Chemistry) twice and that is not exactly a cup of tea for all of us. It doesn't even help that we are all worried about our health in the middle of this pandemic, this means we are all literally on the edge. Does this mean all hope is lost? Certainly not...

Come with me and let us explore a few things you can do to stay afloat as you check out for the light at the end of the tunnel or maybe the silver lining on the cloud. See, tough times don't last for sure but tough people do and sometimes we hear certain phrases so much that we fail to actually unpack what they truly mean.

## Touch someone's heart

One of the things that has been proven to work towards inspiring hope in life, is offering acts of kindness. Acts of kindness help us to shift focus from us for a moment, they help us to realise that the world

doesn't exactly revolve around us and even though we may be going through a horrible time, we can still extend kindness to other people. Kindness doesn't mean that you need a lot of money, kindness could be buying a loaf of bread and milk for a street child who has not had food for three days. Kindness could be going into your closet to pick out clothes that you haven't worn in 5 years and giving them to someone who really needs them (Please note the clothes should be in good shape). Kindness could be simply checking on a friend or smiling at a neighbour or even visiting a patient at the hospital. When we show kindness, it gives us a sense of inner satisfaction that we have made another person's burden lighter which in turn acts as a motivation for us.

## Identify triggers of hope

For every hopeless situation, there is always something that can give you a reason to be hopeful for tomorrow. It is important for you to identify it. It could be the smile in the face of your child or the excitement of your dog wagging his tail when he sees you. It could also be just the mere thought of being alive or even having a source of income at a time when things are so hard. It could be that in the process of taking care of a sick/loved one they appreciate what you are doing for them. The point I am trying to drive home is basically gratitude. We always have something to give thanks for. It may seem like it is a small thing but it may be the last hanging string that you are holding onto. Whatever you do, do not let go of that string, because when the storm is over you will look back and you will be glad that you held on just a little longer.

Difficult situations trigger in us a lot of negativity, we keep thinking about all the reasons why something will not work or why things will go wrong. It doesn't always have to be like this. Your mind will tend to throw in all these negative scenarios

of what if this or that happens. It is up to you to counteract it with optimism. For instance, what if COVID-19 never ends; what will happen to our lives? You could say what if it actually ends, or what if we find a way around it? For every negative thought, hold your head high and throw in a positive thought.

They say there is power in what we profess, something that psychologists call a self-fulfilling prophecy, of course it may not always work with external circumstances but it works with the things which you have control over. What if I don't ace the interview? Instead say, “What if I actually excel that interview and get the job?” It is fine to be prepared for the worst but is even better to plan for the very best. Stay optimistic, for no situation is ever really permanent.

## Accept what you can't change

One other thing is letting go of things you have no control over. Remember the famous serenity prayer “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.” Sometimes, we are stuck in hopeless situations because we are desperately focusing on things that we have absolutely zero control over. Let them go! Give yourself a break. In the midst of it all, remember to take good care of yourself. Take care of your heart and your health, because you need to be in a good and stable state for you to go through a seemingly hopeless situation. You are your number one fan, never forget that and always remember to look out for yourself.

‘You can cut all the flowers but you cannot keep spring from coming’ -Paulo Neruda. And as the good book says, ‘Sorrow may last for the night, but joy comes in the morning’. Hang in there for this too, shall certainly come to pass!

# Let PR specialists rise to the occasion

By Charity Njeri

Mankind is facing an unprecedented crisis which evidently threatens the very existence of the human race. This is owing to the ramifications occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. Businesses are experiencing setbacks and facing huge losses forcing them to curb their expenses in various ways. Most of the businesses are adopting the 'wait and watch' approach. This is true, even for a service-led industry like Public Relations (PR). The COVID-19 global pandemic has had negative impacts on the Industry.

## Challenges facing the PR Industry

The global market is facing a massive slowdown and most of the industries are virtually striving to survive. The PR industry is no exception. The art of maintaining a close connection with the masses always bears fruits. Creating a longer lasting brand recall with the public effectively aids in marketing and indeed influences the buying decision-making process. The global crisis has created such a negative environment around people that they are scared to trust anything new or unknown.

PR specialists have had to adjust to the new way of life by being mindful of the challenges and sensitivities involved. Now is not the time to be pitching anything self-promotional. Pitching self-serving news will without a doubt backfire. Journalists are working almost exclusively on stories relating to COVID-19.

## Employee Engagement

We've experienced a shift from seeing co-workers every day to now interacting only via online engagements such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. A drastic transformation is already taking place and PR professionals need to rethink the purpose and practice of what makes this discipline so great.

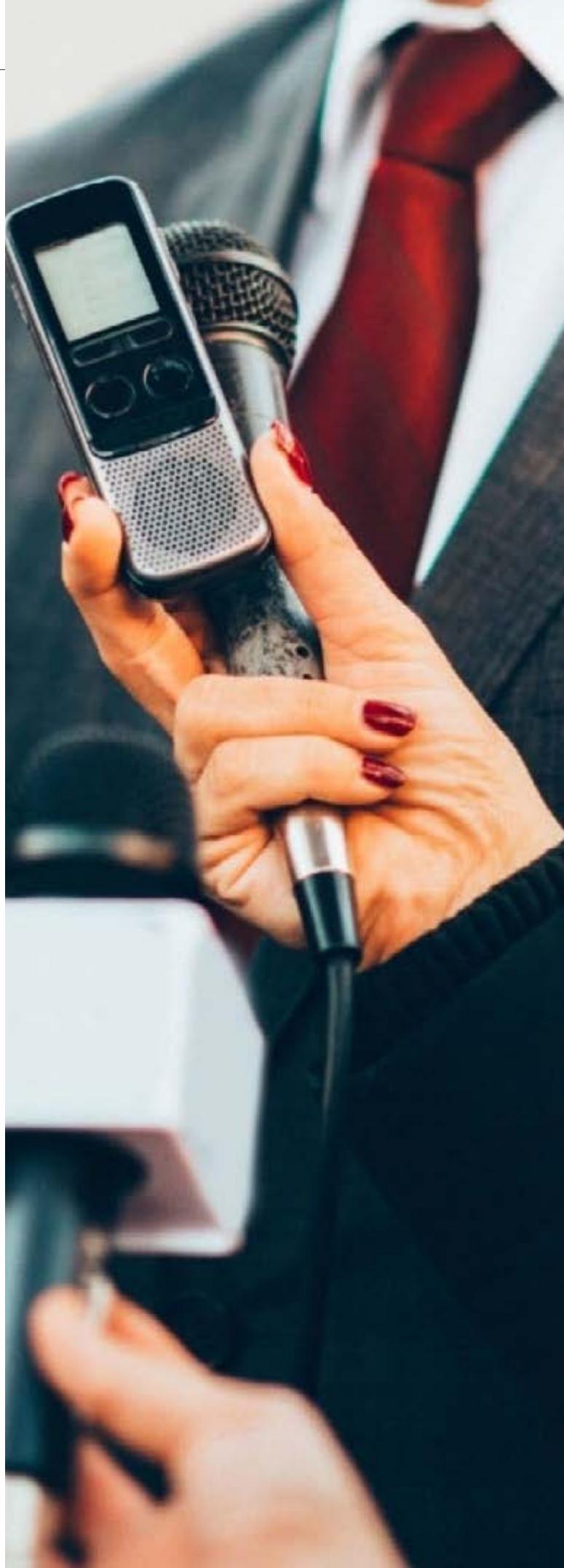
## Emerging gaps

Many agencies have experienced significant drops in revenue as the crisis deepens. Egos and fears are being put on the back seat by rival firms poaching a client. Agency leaders are now recognising that through shared experiences and openness they can devise measures to counter the effects that the pandemic is having on their individual businesses.

## Digital story telling

As PR practitioners, we should use this as an opportunity to focus our creative energies in mobilising wellness and welfare communication as well as in renewing hope and confidence.

For us to continue providing efficient service that our clients could count on, it would be necessary to go that extra mile. To go beyond the prescribed scope of work during this trying times. Let us indeed rise up to the occasion and make use of our expertise to inspire hope in a hopeless society.





# How prepared are you in responding to the current unforeseen circumstances?

By Isaiah K. Cherutich

While the Coronavirus pandemic crept upon humanity unexpectedly and got virtually all of us flat-footed, corporate communications has always prided itself in having a crisis management strategy. For years now, it has been standard practice for PR Departments worth their 'salt' to put in place a crisis communications team, even if on paper alone. The Institute of Public Relations defines a crisis as a significant threat to operations that can have negative consequences if not handled properly and that public relations practitioners are an integral part of crisis management teams.

It further states that a crisis can create three threats namely public safety, financial loss and reputation loss. In short, crisis communication envisages a perpetual preparedness by organisations in case of any eventuality be it crises due to fire outbreaks, an air-crash, motor accidents, economic recession, riots etc. However, for years most organisations have limited plans to the above stated crises even as they set up their stand-by crisis communications teams. None even in their fertile imagination could have thought about an invisible enemy, transmitted through the very air we breathe unless it was in reference to chemical warfare agents. When COVID-19 happened early 2020, how many crisis communications teams around the

world 'clicked' and began quick action to safeguard their organizations, staff and society in general?

## Communication on COVID-19

To declare that this pandemic has taken humanity and especially public communication experts back to the drawing board is an understatement. When news of COVID-19 started trickling in, chief government spokespeople in many nations took over the public communication activities in earnest. But within no time, governments realized the specialized medical language, raw data and other details were overwhelming to public communications specialists in as far as credible, clear and up-to-date information dissemination was concerned.

The responsibility was quickly taken over by senior government officials. In Kenya, just like it happened in other countries, the responsibility of communicating the ravages of the Coronavirus was left to the Executive and Ministers of Health. This was undoubtedly aimed at conveying the severity of the crisis, including policy and containment measures that needed to be urgently put in place to stop the spread of this plague. In the US, Britain, France, Italy, Tanzania, Uganda, Egypt and Kenya, heads of state were the ones addressing Press Conferences and giving

COVID-19 updates.

When Presidents make a State of the Nation address, citizens are expected to pay serious attention to pronouncements as such addresses are official policy statements. Thereafter, the senior Ministry of Health officials lead by Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe himself have had to address Kenyans nearly daily on the unfolding situation and spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. From Mid-March 2020, the Cabinet Secretary for Health, Director of Health Services, CASS, medical doctors, virologists, researchers in the medical field have all become virtual 'guests' in our living rooms as they update the country on the Coronavirus pandemic on television.

## Role of crisis communications

In virtually all Kenyan radio and TV stations, the most sought-after analysts are mainly medical experts while other commentators on political or economic affairs are relegated to the periphery. In fact, experts in the medical fraternity have literally 'stolen the thunder' from public relations practitioners and other public communications experts who are now part and parcel of the general public. What happened to our specialist training, experience and ability as public communicators in this new dispensation? Which other time than during crisis



situations like this are Public Relations experts supposed to be more visible? Indeed, the Coronavirus pandemic has catapulted crisis communication to a life-blood status for humanity. Heads of Governments the world over have taken charge and are now leading the media campaigns to eradicate this virus by providing their respective citizens with current and up to date information.

But even as we count our loses and slowly try to adjust to the 'new normal', where does Coronavirus in its wake leave public relations practitioners? With many businesses around the world shutting down for good, others on the verge of closing down with millions of jobs lost and billions of livelihoods shattered; how are PR experts expected to safeguard the interests of their organisations by communicating effectively? According to IPRA Code on accuracy, Public Relations practitioners as the 'purveyors' of news are expected to take all reasonable steps to ensure the truth and accuracy of all information provided even in times when employees have lost their jobs.

It is often said that information is power and everyone who cares is now searching for information about this 'invisible enemy' which creeps through using the major sustenance of any living thing, air. Without access to air, we cease to exist

and unlike other viruses that have ravaged humanity before, Coronavirus has become the equalizer for all human beings. It does not respect one's status in life, whether you are rich or poor, living in the most developed country or the poorest nation, whether a religious fanatic or an atheist, educated or illiterate, black, white, yellow or brown - all are vulnerable to COVID-19.

Adherence to Ministry of Health protocols Back to when COVID-19 happened and the first case was announced in March 2020, the entire Kenyan citizenry was in panic mode with many going straight into hibernation as they watched the unfolding scenario in the comfort of their homes under the 'Stay Home, Stay Safe' measure. But after many days of self-imposed lockdowns and prolonged periods of a near state of emergency, many Kenyans grew weary and slowly started venturing out. Within no time, anxiety subsided and people became more relaxed and the daring even went about their businesses as if nothing had happened.

Indeed, several months later and with the numbers of fatalities from COVID-19 rising daily, many people walk around without masks oblivious of the danger they pose to others and to themselves. Why do Kenyans continue to flout the set guidelines and protocols by the Ministry of Health? One cannot fathom where this

'don't care' attitude emanated from and who is on the wrong. Is it that the grave danger posed by the Coronavirus has not been well communicated by respective government officials? Or is it possibly because the information on strategies to mitigate the Coronavirus scourge are not clear enough? Could it be that Kenyans are cynical, very difficult people to deal with even when they are staring at the possible loss of their own lives? Or are these messages poorly crafted?

These are critical questions experts in public communication should be interrogating. What went wrong that the old approaches known to PR practitioners failed to work this time? Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the response by citizenry to calls for behaviour change in respect to dangers posed by COVID-19 offer innumerable opportunities for research on the discordance of government communication during crisis vis-à-vis the general public response.

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# Reengineering public service delivery in the 21st century

By Nephath Mbau

Public service is a key driver of change in any society. In deed many of the government's blue print are implemented by the public service, which is bestowed the responsibility of ensuring their success. The sector is instrumental in the realization of a country's economic, political and social goals. Questions have however been abound as to the level of effectiveness, efficiency and overall preparedness of the service to optimize its potential in spurring national development.

Since 1918, a number of commissions have been established to look into the public service but most of them were established specifically to look at remuneration and other fringe benefits for public officers (civil servants at that time) The inquiry never looked beyond the benefits until Ndegwa Commission was established and given a broader scope; to inquire on the remuneration and other terms and conditions of public service and also relook at the structure under which it was built to carry out government functions.

Since independence, the philosophical underpinning in public service has been based on Africa socialism as espoused in the Sessional paper number 10 of 1965. The philosophy ascribes to the tradition that recognizes equality and fairness where each individual benefits in equal measures all the available resources.

Article 10 of the Kenyan constitution espouses fundamental pillars that govern the public service. This backed by other pieces of legislation such as the Leadership and Integrity Act, (2012) Public Officer Ethics Act (2003) Public Finance management Act, 2012, prescribe solid ethical principles under which public service should operate.

These legislations envisage the quintessential public officer, one who exhibits high standards of honesty and impartial when executing their duties. Kenya should endeavor to attain such standards in the public service. Whereas there exist individuals in the service who met the desired standards, a sizeable number will not pass the test and they are the one who bring shame to government. Kenyan need to continually hold an open discussion about how sound ethical principles in the public sector can be promoted and harnessed to inspire confidence to the citizenry. This will help the country to face the dynamic and intricate challenges facing our country such as corruption.

Public officers must also reorient and appraise themselves with view of making themselves better stewards of public resources. The intermittent wastage of public funds under the watchful eye of public officers need to be addressed. Even as the culprit are rounded up in courts to

face criminal charges, there is need for all those in public office to understand that they hold those positions under trust for the Kenyan citizenry and must therefore conduct themselves with utmost probity and not use their positions for personal gain but rather for the common good of our nation.

Digital migration and adoption of technology has characterized public service in the last two decades. Further, globalization coupled with heightened democratic space and civilization has raised the bar under which leaders and public servant are gauged. Societies today require higher standards of leadership than ever before. The novel Covid 19 has further exacerbated the adoption of technology in the delivery of service and has pushed institutions, even those that were opposed to the idea to adopt. These developments have disrupted public service.

To respond to this demand, the public sector is moving away from its accustomed analogue ways of conducting business and handling its customer. Adoption of technology in public service is a major mile stone as it has allowed the citizens to get some services at the comfort of their homes thereby reducing human interactions and reduced the turnaround period required to get government services.

# Why organisations and leaders are so uncomfortable with feedback

By Catherine Ndioo-Ndungu

It is everyone's guess that digital will dominate the post Covid-19 period. Well, we also know that, whether wanted (therefore sought after), or unwanted (therefore deal with it), feedback is unavoidable in any form of digital presence. Most organizations, especially large ones are not very good at asking for, receiving, or utilizing feedback.

Organizations, like individuals, discover their strengths in a variety of ways, but nothing beats the opportunity to be given some strong and helpful feedback. And so, it is highly recommended for organizations and its leaders not to shy away from seeking feedback. Research shows that the most effective managers are not just those who give feedback but those who ask for and utilise it to drive more value.

Learning how stakeholders perceive your business is critical. Feedback seeking should be intentional and a standard procedure.

## Why do organizations fail to ask for feedback?

Negative feedback is not liked. And for obvious reasons – it makes people feel bad. It is important to prepare well before you seek feedback, which may involve anticipating the different angles and ideas and how to respond.

Having a plan is important; because failing to act on feedback is grounds for disengagement or worse, a crisis. There will be some that you will not be able to act upon, so you need to say why. It is also good to acknowledge the time and effort spent by those who respond.

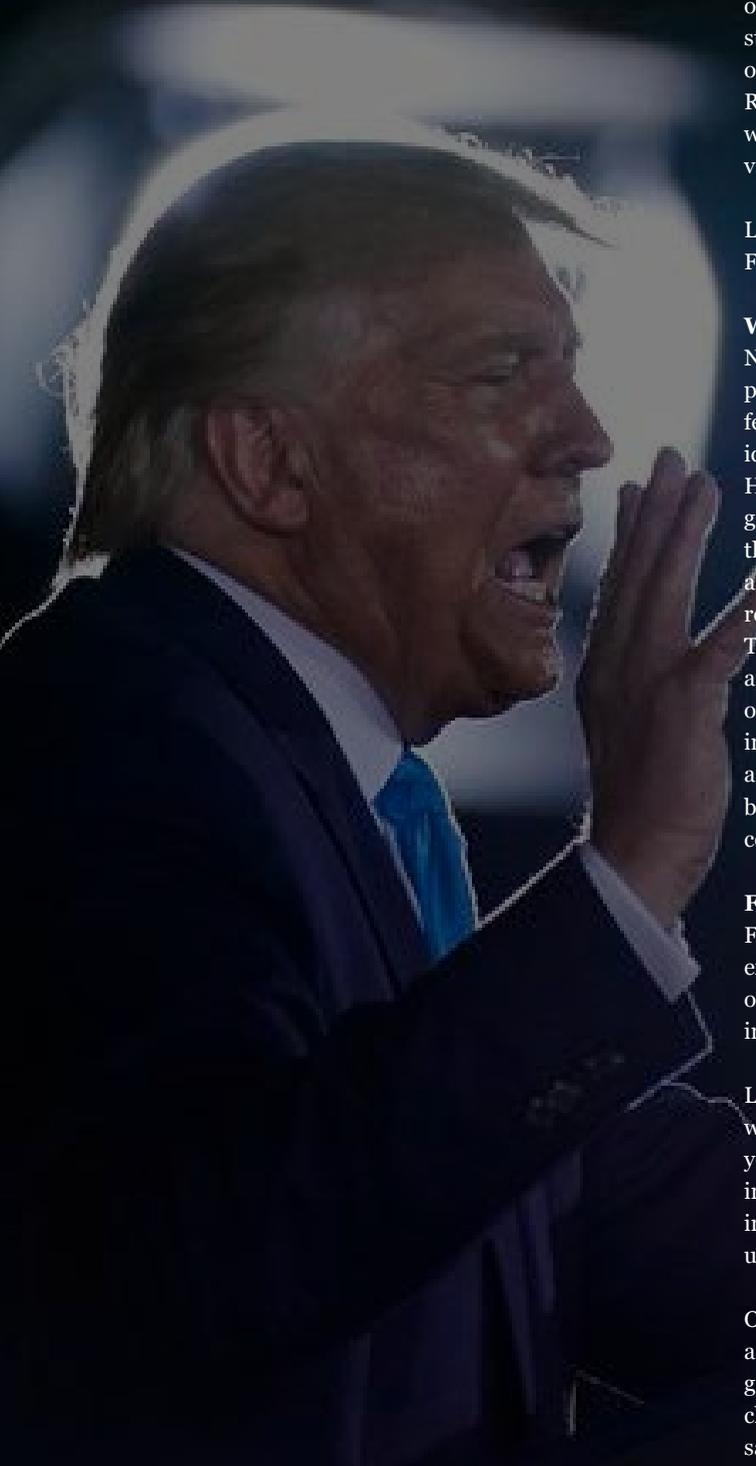
There are those who think that by asking for feedback they will appear as if they are fishing for a compliment. Changing the style of asking for the feedback is one way to resolve this: for example, instead of asking invited guests how “the meeting was” you could ask: What would you have changed in the meeting to make it more beneficial to you? That suggests that you are looking for honest, constructive feedback, and not merely fishing for a compliment.

## Fast changing business environment

Feedback is simply information. Whether shared by employees or external stakeholders. It is not meant to diminish the organization's or a leader's credibility or competence, rather help them do better in future, for bigger accomplishments.

Leadership has also to reach out to people at lower ranks, interact with them and hear what they have to say. Ask a question every time you meet someone; because when you show you are open to getting input, you will find that slowly you get the information coming in. As a leader how will you know that your strategies are actually understood and being implemented on the ground?

Organizations have to keep a growth mentality and take feedback as an opportunity to improve products and services. Rather than getting defensive once they receive negative feedback, it is critical to channel their energies to improvement. Our values are not what we say, rather what we do.





# How businesses can shape the next normal

## *The staircase to the post-pandemic future*

By Nancy Okenagwa

The recent economic prospects indicate that the raging COVID-19 pandemic will leave long term scars on the global economy. Already, corporates and brands have experienced unprecedented changes in their businesses including the collapse of consumer demand, supply chain interruptions and unplanned layoffs. There is heightened concern on how firms will maneuver through current difficulties into the next normal. The road to recovery requires dexterity and skill to cushion the economy and the health sector from possible collapse, and to protect vulnerable populations from despair.

It is inescapable that things will be different in the long and short term but life has to go on. The question asked is how will the recovery look like? A typical crisis plays out in three steps - Respond, Recover and Renovate. Let's have a look at each of the steps and explore the strategies that businesses can employ to get back on track.

### **1. Respond**

The respond phase involves an assessment of the immediate impact of the pandemic on the company and making short term decisions on current business model and operations structure. It includes:

#### ***Prioritizing Employees' Well Being***

The safety and well-being of the employees comes first. Companies should ensure that preventive and protective measures for workers to return back to work are put in place. However, most of the global workforce advisory groups recommend

that firms should greatly reconsider employees working remotely, where possible and this requires firms to invest in remote working tools for efficiency and convenience.

Also, engaging experts to help provide guidelines or update your company's risk assessment policies will go a long way in safeguarding the health of the workforce. It is prudent to highly consider employees who are more vulnerable due to chronic health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, hypertension and other immunosuppression cases as well as pregnancy.

#### ***Customer Protection***

Safeguarding customers' health and wellness is essential to business continuity. Emerging from a lockdown, customers will be hyper-vigilant about their health and increase their demands on safety. Businesses can rebuild trust with their customers by providing goods and services in adherence to strict measures of safety. This process has to involve effective communication that enables customers understand what measures have been put in place to protect their health and why? As a company, proactively communicate to all stakeholders on the visible and invisible steps taken in offices, production areas, storages sites, minimization of human handling and so on.

#### ***Capitalize on "new norm" market opportunities***

It is outright that this pandemic has changed the future of work and thus,

businesses have to position themselves strategically. This is in view of them capitalizing on both the opportunities that have been induced by the crisis as well as the post-pandemic openings. The faster companies realize that we are in a new play field and take time to come up with a plan that caters for the 'new norm' and the markets that will be birthed out of it, the better.

Examine every possibility that you can use to connect and conduct business with your customers especially with the set-out measures like social distancing. You may maximize on online orders or low-contact services. Enable your business even more technically connect with customers remotely and vice-versa.

Keep track on the rapidly changing habits and preferences of consumers and demonstrate that your business is meeting them. Leave no gap that can compromise the connection with your clients by looking into even those communication ways not exploited before and see if they can be utilized. Here companies can consider the many cloud-based peer-to-peer communication technologies in teleconferencing, documentation and support.

### **2. Recover**

In this phase, firms embarks on a journey to comprehend the required mindset shift, identify and navigate the uncertainties and implications, embed trust as the catalyst to recovery and lay-out the recovery plan and implement it.



Here are a few tips on how business can recover;

### **Create a customized relaunch plan**

Establish a clear governance model by setting up an Executive Recovery Committee (ERC). This kind of set up helps to prioritize quick decision making. Ensure every department is represented in this team for the purpose of inclusivity and balance because a department/region is better off represented by their own. Note that there may be models that can be used in general for almost all businesses but the one specifically tailored for your kind of business will put it in a better place to pick up in the new phase. Be exact on what recovery means for your company.

At this point the company can decide on the core operating unit. Which part of the workforce holds the key to kick start the operations? Who are they? Once you have identified, assemble the team and prepare them mentally then run a checklist on the workflow and safety measures. After having the core unit in place, the rest of the departments can resume in different planned phases.

### **Document Critical Gaps**

"I never lose, I either win or learn" you have probably seen this quote by Nelson Mandela severally and businesses can pick lessons from it by seeing the crisis as an opportunity to learn. It is important for companies to document the changes, challenges and gaps that have been induced by the pandemic. Ask yourself what the missing links are and perceive

how they can be used to the advantage of the business. What lessons can you pick? What did you do better or ought to have done better? What could be done different? How effective is your crisis management plan? Will you work with your current strategic plan, a reviewed one or a new one?

### **Consider Government Intervention Schemes**

Most governments across the globe have come up with various intervention schemes that serve their respective jurisdiction on areas of taxation, debt, restriction on foreign investment and economy support packages to cushion the economy from the interferences resulted by the corona virus crisis. Companies can take advantage of these schemes to revamp especially those that have or are at the verge of subsiding.

### **3. Renovate**

This is the phase where an organization prepares to embrace the new reality; away from the routine that has been. Most of the workers may find transformative change difficult and companies should anticipate accommodating divergent expectations and sometimes resistance. For example, some workers will find working from home more productive others will find it destructing and a whole lot of it.

Organizations are now be faced with the obligation of taking a holistic approach in restarting. This is because there may be need to respond to business downtimes, the changing dynamics of business, new

work methods, new technologies, reviving declining businesses, new investments, mergers and acquisitions, the need to cut down costs among other reasons. A good example of an area that corporates may need to renovate is corporate culture.

The workplace culture is defined in various aspects such as organizational structure, management practices, corporate philosophies and policies, and so forth. It is no secret that the pandemic has created a moment of truth for corporate culture hence it is important for companies to decide if they will revise their culture or set out new goals, construct new vision and mission statements to motivate the team and the journey as well. For instance, if your company decides to have most or all its workers operate from home, there may be need for a set of guidelines of how things will be done, including:

- Schedule regular check-ins
- Set real working hours
- Maintain normal working routine remotely
- Track work progress with tools like Trello and Jira
- Have actual rest breaks just as it is done in the office the lunch breaks and the likes.

The dynamics of renovation may vary from company to company. It is a matter of identifying and establishing what works best for your organization.



# How hospitality brands can leverage on telling compelling stories

By Shem Siteki

The hotel industry, which is a significant income generating sector for many countries, has been brought to a virtual standstill. With a record low, and never been seen numbers in almost every metric across the board, the degeneration has been fast, furious and messy.

Industry data, released in March this year, pointed to a severe drop of occupancy rates of close to 96% in the whole global hospitality sector. This was mainly attributed to global travel restrictions aimed at curbing the spread of the virus. Consequently, hotels were left scrambling to ponder how to fill rooms when no one was traveling (no tourist visits).

Kenya just like Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and the Maldives among others depends greatly on the travel and tourism sector. The country's development is majorly dependent on this industry. Reports show that in 2019, travel and tourism to GDP, as a share of GDP stood at 12.5%. However, with the suspension and cancellation of multiple flights, Africa airlines have struggled to cope with falling demand. According to International Airport Association (IATA) African airlines have registered a loss of up to \$ 4.4 billion in revenue since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Kenya's flag carrier airline, Kenya Airways, estimated that it could be losing close to USD 8 Million a month. The China route

is very key for Kenya Airways drawing in about 7,000 passengers in a single month. IATA estimates that the national carrier may handle 2.5 million less passengers resulting in a US\$ 0.54 billion revenue loss, putting in jeopardy 137,965 jobs and US\$ 1.1 billion in contribution to Kenya's GDP.

In July, the struggling airline announced plans to fire an indeterminate but substantial number of employees by end of September. The airline also noted that it will decrease its network and assets until it is able to up its operations. As time went on, hoteliers started realising that travellers were not returning until ease of the lockdown measures (stay at home orders). You started noting a change in strategy. As opposed to paying attention on people that were (had been) traveling and booking their rooms, hotels shifted their focus on people that weren't.

They repurposed their (we will be back or stay safe) messaging and marketing, to travellers or patrons, sitting at home on their smart devices, scrolling through their social media updates, researching and fantasising of all the places they would like to go and enjoy. It would be safe to say that the hotels were sowing seeds of recovery.

As hospitality brands adjust to a new normal, they also have to walk a tight rope of coming up with brand building

(recovery) strategies that will endear (reconnect) them to their marketplace. One of the key tactics brands shouldn't overlook is storytelling –a shared commonality for marketing and communications (PR).

There are numerous reasons why it is beneficial for hospitality brands to leverage their stories. As a content marketer, it's imperative to craft the narrative you want your prospects and customers to consume. Some brands have recently announced through traditional media placements how they are putting in place necessary safety measures, while ensuring social distance between staff and patrons.

This example shows that they are helping shape the public's perception of their brands through placed, or pitched stories – instead of letting people make assumptions, or worse, letting people live their lives without knowing who you are, as a result of keeping your stories all to yourself.

## Relevant content

One of the ways to consider, is storytelling through content. This is where you find and track down the stories themselves. But how do you do this? You simply find the customers who will be your champions of your storytelling, talk with them and then later, crafting a narrative that evokes the emotion you want them to feel. The next step is to designing and packaging your stories. So you'll want to take your story and dice it up into various forms; a video, a blog post, a press release or case study.

Therefore, through the strategic placement of Calls-to-Action and forms, the overall flow of content, and the integration of the different formats listed above, can assist with attracting and converting new or returning website visitors into leads.

Indeed, if hospitality brands take the time to craft and package a good story, through the right promotional channels, then it follows that this quality content can make its way to the top of the proverbial stack and into the feeds of their audience (market place) –thereby aiding them on their roadmap to recovery.

*The writer is the Associate Content Director for Rave Strategies*

# Proper communication key to resumption of duties in this era

By Keith Njiru

The global coronavirus pandemic has hit hard and has made companies and institutions re-imagine the concept of workplaces. Several countries experienced varying levels of lockdown and recently these measures are being relaxed in a bit to stimulate the economy. As a result, organizations are beginning to recall their employees to their workplaces albeit with strict measures in mind. With the World Health Organization warning that COVID-19 may be here to stay, it seems we have to learn to live with the virus. Key in easing this transition to the workplace will be communication which if harnessed can lead to a seamless return to work as outlined below.

Closely tied with this is the need for companies to communicate to their staff what measures they are taking to safeguard employees against the risk of contracting the novel coronavirus within their premises. Given the many number of people who visit an organization within a day, there is a risk posed to staff while in these facilities. These new protocols need to be communicated in advance to allay any fears staff may have. Examples of this would include communication regarding installation of sanitizer dispensing points, fumigation of work premises and temperature screening. Depending with the nature of the organization, proof of certification may also be required as with the case of restaurants. Relaying this information not only proves to employees that you are compliant to Ministry of Health guidelines but also shows them that you value their well-being.

Undoubtedly remote working will feature in some part of work life in the post-COVID era. This means that platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex will be essential moving forward. There is the need for institutions to effectively communicate policies regarding working virtually and when it will apply. Given that a significant number of people are experiencing working from home for the first time, companies could go the extra mile of conducting in-house training of their staff on how to use these video

conferencing platforms. This coming from the company will make them more conversant using the specific platforms and enable smoother virtual working.

This will equip the employees with the requisite skills needed to navigate through these platforms, as the usage of such media is tipped to grow in the future. Many companies have had to send their employees on unpaid leave as they grapple with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic. With the strict measures put in place being eased, organizations are attempting to resume to normalcy, there is need to recall staff who had been furloughed.



Consequently, businesses need to inform their staff on any looming pay cuts. This needs to be explained clearly to the staff members and the numbers need to be clear. Communications should work in sync with the Human Resources Department to provide the correct information regarding the percentage of pay cuts to be taken. With the unpredictability of this pandemic, employees expect clear cut communication regarding their pay and this needs to be heard from official channels. In the unfortunate event that employees have

to retrenched, organizations have to inform the employees in a transparent yet empathetic manner. This communication will also gear up the remaining employees to take up the workload previously carried out by the laid off workers.

With employees being the greatest asset, it would be worth exploring the ideas employees have moving forward, as well as address any queries employees may have. Hence, organizations should adopt an anonymous channel whereby employees can suggest any ideas they have will impact positively to the organization. COVID-19 has had a tremendous effect and has made organizations step back and re-examine policies they have in place. Having been out of the conventional office for a few months, employees are bound to have come up with suggestions to move forward. In line with that this channel should also be used for them to air out any grievances they may have particularly regarding how the company has handled the COVID-19 situation. In both situations the aim is to provide a collaborative environment where employees feel their input is valuable while concurrently promoting best standards in the workplace.

Ultimately, organizations will have to rise up from the slump caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as the push to save a battered economy intensifies. The workplace as we knew it in the pre-COVID era has been re-shaped and a lot of reflections by institutions regarding their operations in a post-COVID world. With so many uncertainties lurking, effective communication holds the key to ensuring that both organizations as employers and their corresponding employees can sail through these uncharted waters. This will be instrumental since a well-informed workforce will support improved organizational performance within their respective companies and ultimately make the organization more resilient in the face of the global pandemic.

*The author is a Communications Student at Strathmore University*

# Reproductive health information much needed during pandemic

By Benedetta Wasonga



Pandemics make already existing inequalities for women and girls and the discrimination of marginalized groups for instance Persons Living with Disabilities and those living in extreme poverty, worse. Women are less likely than men to have power in decision making during the outbreak, consequently their general, sexual and reproductive health needs may go largely or entirely unmet.

In Brazil, during the 2015 Zika virus outbreak, differences in power between men and women meant that women did not have power and control over their sexual and reproductive decisions, which was compounded by their inadequate and difficulty in access to health care and insufficient financial resources to take them to hospitals and health facilities for check-ups and treatment for their children, in spite of women being responsible for the community spread control activities. Many a times, there is also inadequate level of women's representation in pandemic planning, management and response, which is already evident in many of the national and global COVID-19 responses. Sexual

and reproductive health rights and gender equality is a significant public health issue that requires high attention. Emergency response of the COVID-19 outbreak may also mean that resources for sexual and reproductive health services may be diverted to deal with the outbreak, contributing to a rise in maternal and newborn mortality, increased unmet need for contraception, and increased number of unsafe abortions and sexually transmitted infections.

## Abuse

Pandemics compound existing gender inequalities, sexual and reproductive health illnesses and vulnerabilities, increasing risks of abuse. For example, the economic impacts of the 2013-2016 Ebola disease in West Africa, placed women and children at a greater risk of sexual trafficking, exploitation and sexual violence. Some of the violence such as sexual and domestic violence occurred in all cultures, although they were more common in some than others. Manifestations of violence, such as dowry related, wife inheritance, and genital mutilation practices are specific

to particular cultures. Recognizing that women and girls may be at higher risk of intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence due to increased tensions in the household as systems that protect women and girls, including community structures, may weaken or break down, specific measures should be implemented to protect women and girls from the risk of intimate partner violence with the changing dynamics of risk imposed by COVID-19. As such, sexual and reproductive health rights are a significant health issue that requires high attention during disease outbreaks or pandemics.

Safe pregnancies and childbirth are highly dependent on functioning health systems and strict adherence to infection prevention as well as the provision of family planning and other sexual and reproductive health commodities, including menstrual health items, are central to women's health, empowerment, and sustainable development and may be impacted as supply chains undergo strains from the pandemic response.

Women who are empowered are likely to know their rights insist on safe sex during isolation. Compounded forms of gender-based violence including rape in a relationship and outside, in times of pandemics, forced early and child marriages, sex trafficking and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation, deeply impact women's health and well-being, particularly their sexuality and reproductive health. Correspondingly, women's and girl's choices and opportunities regarding their sexual and reproductive health are a major determinant of child survival. Certainly, reducing child mortality is closely connected to a mother's age, spacing of her children, and the decisions she makes about their care and welfare, including whether and how long to breastfeed. Improving maternal mortality through prenatal care, including the presence of skilled midwives or birth attendants, and universal access to reproductive health, will ensure greater survival outcomes for both mothers and children.



# Only way to tackle gender based violence is through understanding

By Kennedy Opondo

A national survey released by Hon. Simon K. Chelugui, CS Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, revealed that more male children (56 per cent) than girls (46 per cent) have suffered sexual, physical and emotional violence, but less than three per cent of them got help.

According to Robert Rosenthal, a professor of psychology, empathy plays a critical role in understanding other's emotions. It's the ability to perceive the subjective experience of another person. This come into play in a vast array of life arenas. The empathic feelings develop from childhood and parents play a critical role in shaping this. For instance, when a child falls down and his/her friends starts empathizing, they tend to imagine the pain their friend is going through, they develop a repertoire of empathic response, towards helping the distressed and they will portray such personality through adulthood. A psychological fault line is common to rapist & child-molesters among many perpetrators of family violence. They are incapable of empathy. For rapist, they tend to think that this is just another form of showing affection, after all, if the victim is uncomfortable with the act, they should defend themselves. They perceive the

victims, mostly children through the lens of perverted fantasy, not considering what the child feels in the real situation.

The sprouting cases of gender violence within the country are overwhelming, the cause needs to be traces from childhood, a lot of physiological help from adept people need to be used. Understanding the root cause of such issues is critical, rather than reacting to the act of violence.

The society has also failed nurturing men towards what is expected from them in the feature, some being emotionally unfit to tackle life challenges, they resolve to violence against the kids and their spouses. With the increasing support to help the girl child grow into a holistic individual, let us not forget the boy child, since such actions may lead to frustration and envy and can precipitate to acts of violence, even among siblings. The only way to manage this menace is through responsible parenting, creating an environment for two- way open communication with our kids and training them to be empathic toward others, since it takes the whole community to raise a child.

# Mental health awareness at work

By Caroline Waithira & Mercy Rapha

The manifestations of mental illness in its various forms, has been reported in our media houses in recent times. A loving father suddenly canes his son to pulp over the loss of 20 shillings. A mother poisoned her three children and attempted suicide by jumping into a river. An armed police officer goes on a drinking spree then later returns to camp and starts shooting at his superiors and colleagues indiscriminately. A promising music artiste jumps to death from a residential building in an apparent suicide. And the list goes on.

The root causes of these mental disorders cannot only be attributable to financial difficulties or strained relationships, or witchcraft and dark spirits, or the prevailing Covid-19 scenario. Indeed, as aptly stated by Lillian Ngala, a human resources practitioner in her opinion published in the Daily Nation on 25th November, 2019, some of them emanate from work-related scenarios such as extremely high expectations, inflexible working hours or when one senses lack of support by management or colleagues.

H.E. President Uhuru Kenyatta in his 2019 Madaraka Day speech noted that depression has become a common phenomenon and it affects persons from all walks of life and ages. He directed the formulation of an appropriate policy response to mental health issues in Kenya. This led to the formation of the Taskforce on Mental Health in December 2019. In its report titled “Mental health and Well-being: Towards Happiness and National Prosperity” released in June 2020, the Taskforce recommended that mental ill health be declared a national public health emergency and that all employers to ensure healthy working spaces, and fully-fledged wellness centres in learning institutions with psychologists.

## Open communication

For starters, employers need to create work environments that support open communication amongst staff and management, where staff can feel valued hence be able to empathize with each other’s wellbeing. Tomas Chamorro Premuzic, United States Manpower Group Chief Talent Scientist, opined that

one of the best ways to create a culture that supports mental health is to ensure that people experience their jobs in a meaningful and purposeful way. This can be achieved by giving employees autonomy and resources. Mr. Premuzic says that if your team experiences support and independence, and that you trust them to do what they ought to do, they will generally be happy at work, which will reduce the risk of mental health problems. Secondly, employers and organizations could consider on-the-job educational programs that encourage employees to reach out to co-workers who appear to be in emotional distress. It is unfortunate that disorders like anxiety and depression often go undetected for months or years since they are more challenging to pinpoint unlike physical illness.

Work-life balance as an essential aspect of a healthy work environment and employers to offer flexible work options. Maintaining work-life balance helps reduce stress and burn-out. For example, flexible work hours can provide a better work-life balance, greater control, physical exercise, a chance to avoid traffic, and the opportunity to attend to medical appointments, all of which are important for those coping with mental and any other illness.

## Open conversations

We can improve mental health through

open conversations. The more Kenyans are aware that mental health is not something to be embarrassed about, the more avenues will be set up to curb it. This should start from the family unit where everything starts and stops at. This means encouraging young children and adults to express themselves in an open and safe environment, instead of waiting until it is too late. The media as the gatekeepers of our societies play a key role in setting the agenda of discussion among the Kenyan population. Having programs, talk shows, edutainment segments across all media platforms, would push further the agenda of taking care of mental health, how to do it, and who to contact to get help. More exposure results in more awareness. As much as there are many issues regarding how money is handled by the government, there needs to be funding set aside specifically for addressing issues of mental health. The funding would be for the benefit of the Kenyans who cannot afford to see therapists, psychiatrists, or counselors or afford medicines if needed.

*Caroline Waithira is a Development Communication and Public Relations Practitioner.*



# Fight not the front-line heroes

By Ruth Nduta

Players in the essential services sector play a critical role in keeping economies going as the world is engrossed in the COVID-19 battle. Essential services are derived from a broad spectrum of sectors notably, healthcare, transport and logistics, banking, food suppliers, governments among others. It is therefore safe to say these are the warriors on the front-line in the war against the pandemic. These sectors ensure populations have sufficient access to medical supplies, personal protective equipment (PPE), pharmaceuticals and food. The logistics sector, for example, plays the critical role of ensuring these key supplies are imported and distributed to the destinations in a timely manner and in their requisite state. As such, logistics providers in cargo transportation, warehousing, port, and customs clearance pass the baton to other front-line sectors with much needed supplies through the supply chain.

Unfortunately, these front liners bear a huge brunt of COVID-19 infections arising from exposure to this disease while on duty. Kenya registered one fatality and announced over 100 health care workers have tested positive to the COVID-19 virus. It is expected that these numbers will continue to rise. Government officials manning border posts have not been spared and several infections have been registered at key ports of entry in Kenya. Truck drivers are today required to take COVID-19 tests every 14 days failure to which, they will not be allowed to move cargo.

Save the Children's report dated 1st June states that "misinformation around how COVID-19 spreads is a concerning barrier to reducing infection rates of the disease. Prejudice against those affected by the virus, including frontline health workers and diaspora communities and their families, is contributing to stigmatisation across sub-Saharan Africa and discouraging people from seeking healthcare if they develop symptoms." This statement aptly captures the stigmatization that front liners face due to failure to understand the pandemic

prevalence and infection. Truck drivers have shared instances where they have been chased away by communities where they park the trucks to retire for the night. This is due to the misconception that their very existence in that locality will lead to the spread of the virus in that area. The horrors that drivers face at neighboring borders such as Uganda, Rwanda and Sudan paint a bleak picture with drivers being called Corona and shunned from procuring services in eateries, shops and lodgings. One driver details, "Once you enter the Ugandan border you encounter a really hostile situation. In fact, they rarely talk to us,"

Northern Corridor Transit and Transport Coordination Authority (NCTCA) whose member states include; Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and South Sudan address the challenges brought about the COVID-19 pandemic stating, "We understand the difficult situation our Corridor finds itself in and we fully support the national, regional and international measures being taken to flatten the curve for COVID-19 spread. Our top priority in this unsettling time is to ensure continuous supply of essential goods including medicines, fuel, and food is fully facilitated along the Northern Corridor and at the same time limit the

spread of COVID-19."

As we continue to enjoy a regular and steady supply of much needed goods for both commercial and domestic use despite the pandemic raging on, it is important to note that none of this would have been possible without the diligence, hard work and commitment of the front line workers; most of whom brave the virus to allow us access to essentials.

However, let us not lose focus! The common enemy here is the COVID-19 virus and not the front liner who is going out on a limb to ensure key products and services are available to us. They bear great risks and surmount challenges, sometimes at the cost of their own health and lives. Next time you see a trucker, a health care worker, or any other essential service provider, share a word of encouragement and salute them for the great work and sacrifices they are taking to keep us going.

Do not forget to wear a face mask, sanitize, wash hands with soap and water, observe social distance, avoid unnecessary travel and crowded places.

*Ruth Nduta is the Group Marketing & Communications Manager at Siginon Group.*



# Flexi hours to dominate work places in the near future

By Michael Ochula, MPRSK

Like many Public Relations (PR) executives and Communicators, the last few months have probably been spent leading non-stop pandemic-driven business continuity planning efforts. You've probably addressed more topics in less time than ever before: travel cessations, curfew hours, workplace hygiene guidelines, voluntary pay-cut, work force reduction, flexi hours working from home arrangements among other COVID-19 pandemic protocols. We are now entering a new phase of organisations preparing return-to-work plans.

One key variable that could decide success or failure for returning to work is compelling strategic corporate communications. Some of the key considerations while communicating during this period are being credible, cadence and churning out relevant content. These communication elements can serve you effectively when relaying critical information.

## Credibility

Your institution senior leadership needs to establish credibility for all your pandemic communications beginning with key messages about the pandemic, organisation policies and statements of principles. Credibility for your communication must start at the top, but don't stop there. These can then be cascaded to functional leaders who can drill down with more details and granularity at lower altitudes, including the schedule and what changes to expect. For example, you may have weekly messages going out to staff from your senior leaders thematically discussing the

impact to specific parts of the business operations. This strategy aligns the leadership of the organization and instills trust.

However, communicating about the new realities should not be top-down only. It should also be bottom-up and organic from within your organization. With so many negative headlines hitting us these days, offer employees open communication platforms and channels to express themselves. Providing a safe space to relieve pressure and anxiety is definitely the right move. This channel will foster authenticity in the communication and encourage transparency.

## Content

In communication, elegance is fantastic, but content is king. Employees focus now is: What does this mean for me? Chit-chats flourish at workplaces in the absence of credible information. This represents a destructive force among employees. PR executives and Communicators need to be as candid, factual and specific as possible. If you don't have all the answers, say so. But be sure to follow up.

Communicators need to create feedback loops so employees' concerns are heard-and, most importantly, addressed. You need to better understand their concerns for example, how do they commute to work during this COVID-19 period. This may ultimately lead your organisation to design better policies for the common good of all employees.

## Cadence

During times of non-stop change

like these, it's understandable that employees are seeking as much stability and predictability as humanly possible. One way to establish at least a modicum of control is by creating a regular and strategic communications cadence so staff know when to expect information and look forward to it.

Message repetition also helps. And to be truly effective, it's important to vary how employees hear that repetition. Employees consume information differently. Some are more visual; others prefer written text while others trust numbers more. As communicators we need to vary our communication media with infographics, blog posts, flyers, emails and short videos clips. It's better to have one message that's communicated via three or more different channels than three different emails.

A well-planned communications cadence-promised and delivered-can not only help create a much-needed routine for employees but it can also help build institutional trust. A simple, from-the-heart video message recorded on your smart mobile phone will go a long way and be far more authentic.

As institutions conduct their return-to-work planning, we're all learning that the future of work will likely involve a blended mix of work-from-home, flexi-hours plus work-in-office solutions. The difference will be communication. That much will never change, and now's the time to act.

*The difference between mere management and leadership is communication - Sir Winston Churchill*





# Streamlining Back to Work Policies

By Wavi Mungala, MPRSK

It is without a doubt that in this century, COVID-19 has emerged as a major global order and workplace disruptor imposing unprecedented lockdowns on many communities and sectors of the economy. Everybody is at risk and public health experts are giving indications that Covid-19 could become endemic and “may never go away.” So, what does this mean to a communication professional who is tasked with engaging both internal and external clients with resumption of work messaging?

Organizations will have to wade through the COVID-19 sniper fire dodging bullets on closing down, bankruptcy or scaling their back to work modalities in order to stay afloat even as they also streamline remote working by some of their employees. In this context, re-configuring communication as a core and essential service in the organization is critical to foster better inter departmental, staff and customer engagement. Three critical pillars should be part of the back to work communication starter pack.

## Review and expand channels of communication

Organizations that will break even during these changes are those that have embraced and transitioned to expanded tools and platforms of communications that proactively engage with their employees both at a welfare and productivity level. We live in a multi-screen and multi-device world and effective communication should ideally be device interactive so as to realize the benefits of connecting with staff whether they are at home, on the move, or back

to the office. Managers should be open to employee engagement via WhatsApp group chats, scheduled training and client support sessions via Skype or even Zoom.

## Positive outbound communication

In both our personal and professional lives as consumers, we have all received a barrage of communication from organizations about how they have approached the COVID-19 pandemic. Organizations have utilized emails, social media posts, virtual events and articles to discuss the actions they are taking to ensure business continuity while encouraging users to virtually interact with their brands. It has not necessarily been easy for customers to adjust from the level of communication they are used to. Therefore, having the proper tools to communicate virtually and maintain user-friendly experiences becomes increasingly important. Whilst organizations are expected to provide a consistent cadence of communication about changes in policies and provide status updates during these Covid-19 times, care must be taken to avoid communication fatigue. For instance, repeatedly sending emails can lead customers to archive if not spam these correspondences.

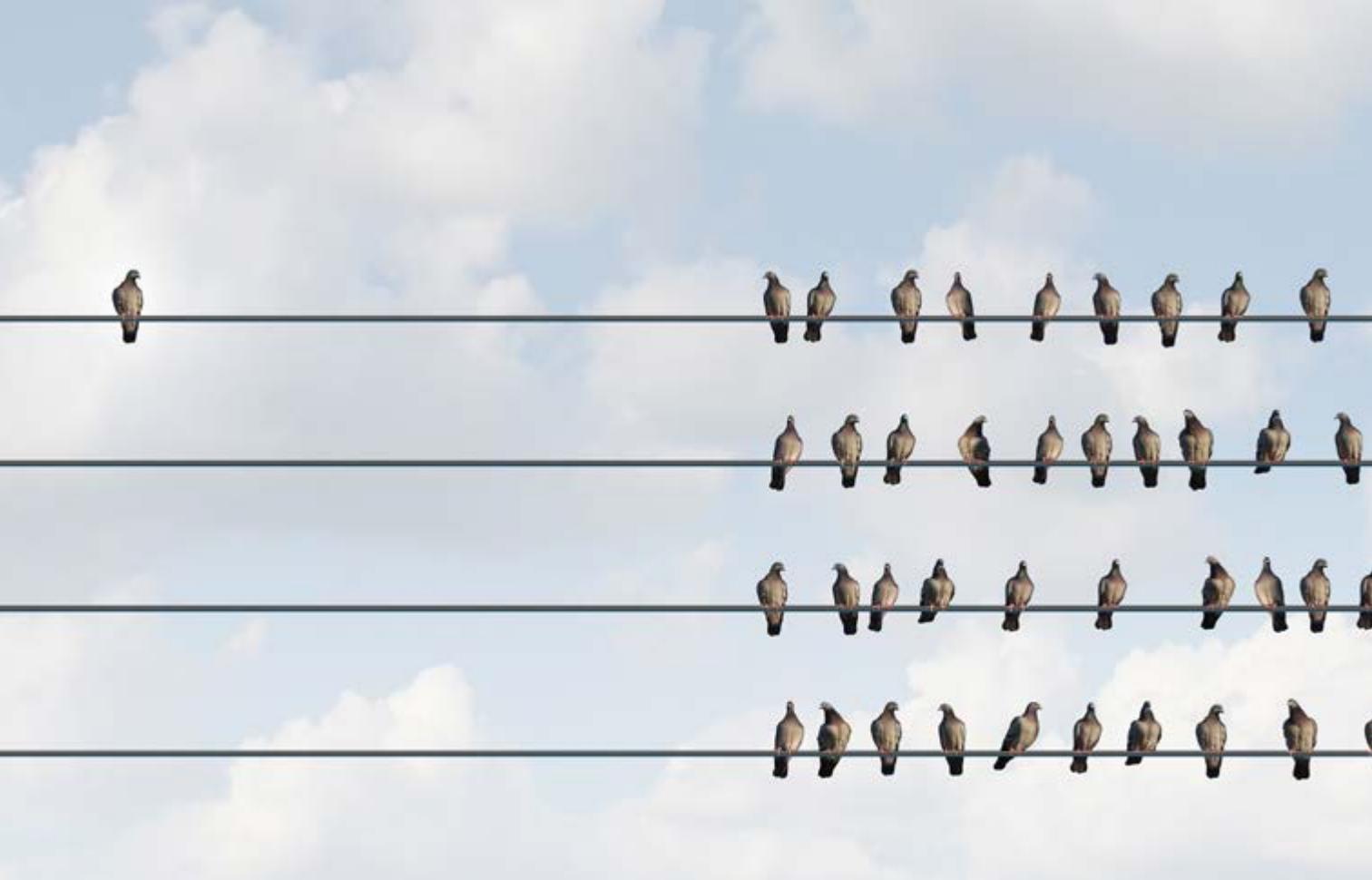
Adjustments in the midst of uncertainties Former US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld is famously known for his concept of the knowns, the unknown knowns and the unknown unknowns. With COVID-19, we are in the realm of the unknown unknowns as we have gone beyond uncertainty and into ambiguity. This means we have to be flexible with our communication and make course

corrections as facts change. It is also advisable to structure communication in terms of multiple event horizons; what is happening right now and how to provide communication support for that as well as the future and the transition to the future communication plans.

As organizations slowly reopen and resume back to office processes, a huge part of managing change in the workplace is setting expectations with employees. When considering return to work, a gradual, phased approach seems to be the most popular model. Communicators have to work hand in hand with the human resource and operational teams to make it as clear as possible what both internal and external audiences can expect as the organization reopens and adapts their products and services to the new normal. Change communication during these times inadvertently calls for leveraging on technology. However, it is important to create user-friendly experiences that overcome common communication challenges while driving business value. Organizations will have to adopt policies that are essential and proactively alleviate platforms or processes that might slow down adaptation or increase bureaucratic red tape.

While this pandemic has changed our perceptions, how we build the next version of communications in uncertain context is entirely in our hands.

*The writer is a Corporate Communication & Customer Experience Specialist.*



# Diseases don't discriminate, societies and systems do

By Douglas Mwale

The phrase “We are all in this together” has widely and wrongly to some extent, been applied as a rallying cry during the coronavirus pandemic. The fact is that we are not in it together, or at least the rules are different for some quarters. We are not all facing the same consequences of the pandemic. While it is true that it has affected everyone in some way, the magnitude and nature of the impact has been anything but universal. The pandemic’s social and economic effects have been more lethal to groups that have been historically disadvantaged.

The gender dimensions of the pandemic are numerous and numbingly severe, but they are neither new nor surprising. In fact, if anything, the invisible coronavirus has made visible the already existing fault lines in our hyper-globalized world with its economic, social injustices, persistent gender inequality and sexism, violence as well as racism.

With most people working remotely in compliance with the Government’s directives, there has been an elevating risk of gender-based violence. Sadly, violence is a daily reality for women and girls across the country. A recent study revealed that 45% of women and girls aged 15 to 49 have experienced some form of physical violence and 14% have experienced sexual violence during this crisis. Many cases are not reported to authorities and few women get justice or receive medical care.

As inequalities rise, disparities in health and social protection have widened. Access to services have steadily tilted toward the educated and the well-off as the less unfortunate feel more insecure. It was rumored that some government officials had installed fully equipped intensive care units in their homes as a “precautionary” measure. These are the

same leaders who are expected to ensure access to health care does not remain a luxury of the fortunate few.

It is no coincidence that the dominant discriminatory economic patterns and thinking have continued to exploit existing stereotypes. While it is true that the virus isn’t a respecter of persons, the resultant impact is more lethal to particular disadvantaged groups. The fight against pandemics, the current and those to come, must therefore be comprehensive and systemic. It cannot be limited to the level of virology and relegated to improving health systems, but must attack discrimination and inequality at homes as well as places of work and learning institutions.

*Douglas is a Public Relations Executive at IMG Kenya Ltd*

# Corporates to build brands for posterity

By Ruth Wanjiru

As communications practitioners, one of our key roles is to lead brands and corporates into the new normal with responsiveness, courage, and creativity. However, COVID-19 has since evolved from a health pandemic to a global economic pandemic with adverse effects on business operations and on the lives of communities. Of late, news headlines are dominated by stories of how businesses operating in the Aviation, Tourism, and Hospitality industries among others have been affected. However, with countries starting to ease on restrictions that had been put in place such the opening of borders and introducing of new guidelines that ought to be followed in an attempt to resume to normal operations while containing the spread of the deadly virus; brands and corporates have an uphill task of developing and implementing recovery strategies that will support an almost seamless bounce back.

Organizations that prepare for recovery will build strong foundations for future growth. How leaders and organizations handle the recovery journey may define their brands for years to come. Corporates and brands that acknowledge and embrace this through their communications strategies and recovery plans will win their space in their respective industries as we move to the new normal. Corporate and brand recovery strategies are the strategies undertaken to preserve an organization and prevent its shutdown. The key objective of recovery strategies is to quickly identify and address the sources of organization problems that may lead to its collapse. According to Harvard Business Review the following are strategies that will help your organization in the recovery journey: Reflect, Recommit, Re-engage, and Rethink. These strategies can help bridge the recovery response to the new normal by laying the foundation to thrive in the aftermath of the current pandemic.

Reflection is the first step in the recovery journey. As we shift from response to recovery, the key for senior leaders is to make strategic decisions that will lead an organization to a renewed future state. Organizations should reinforce their commitment to well-being and purpose, addressing physical, psychological, and

financial concerns at the workplace. They will need to support staff through the transition to recovery, ensuring safe workspaces for those coming to the office and flexible schedules as staff continues to work from home. Organizations should communicate directly with their workforces on new priorities and organizations' goals, recognizing that performance will likely take on new meaning in the post-COVID-19 workplace.

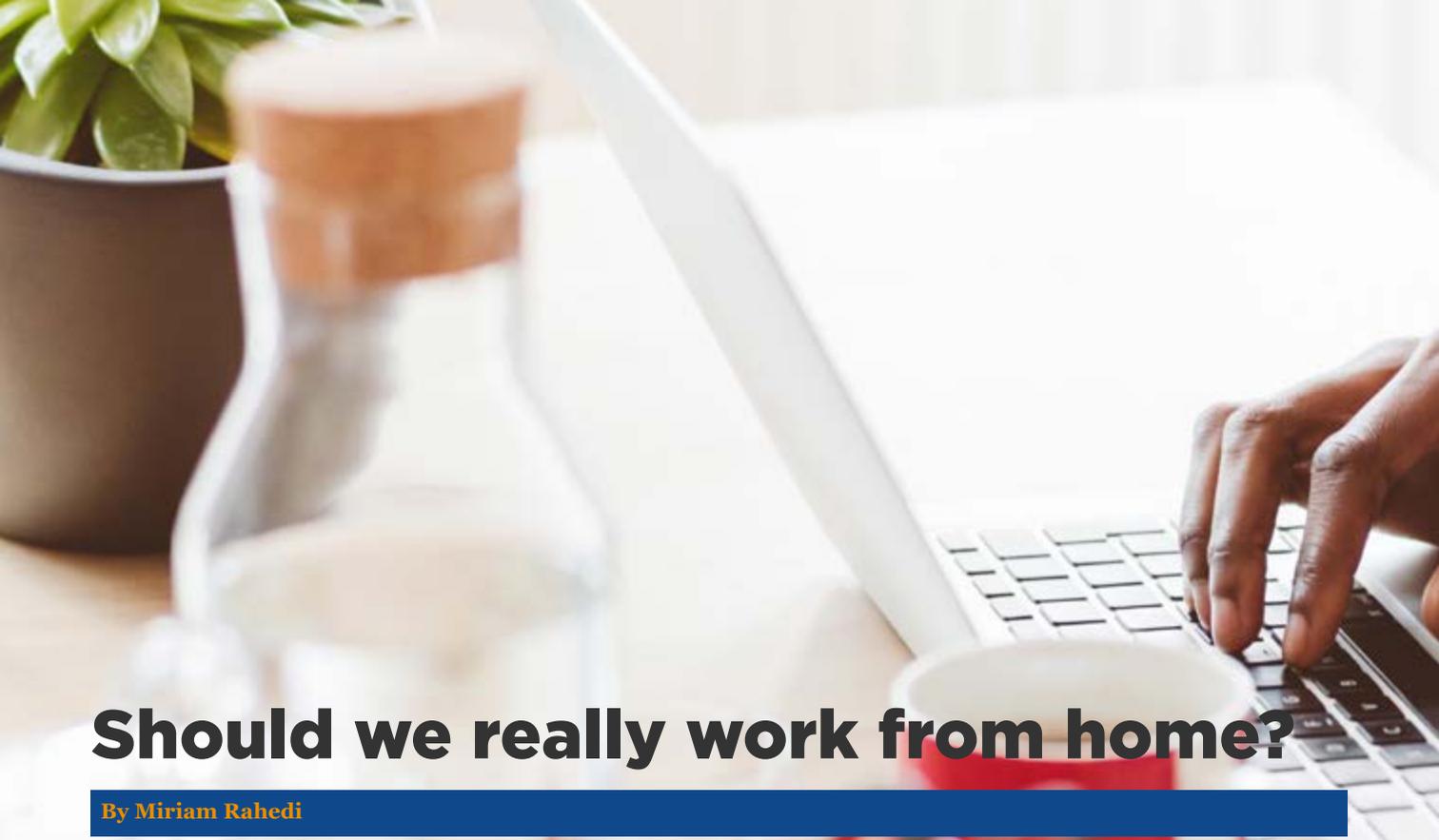
The recovery process creates opportunities for organizations to redeploy their workforces. This strategy requires organizations to have more organized and coordinated efforts to stabilize operations. While some employees will return to the office, others will continue to work remotely. In addition to arming staff with the skills and access needed to meet work requirements, re-engaging the workforce will involve assigning meaningful work. As teams play an increasingly important role in recovery, organizations leaders will need to provide their workforces with clear direction on new assignments and priorities. Given the ongoing challenges employees may face in recovery as they balance their work and home lives, team assignments should allow for flexibility while still supporting critical organization needs. How organizations prepare and

support their workforces for these new priorities and routines will be a key driver of workforce performance.

As we navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic, there have been many changes in work, workforces, and workplaces. These are swift shifts to virtual and remote work, new partnerships across ecosystems, and unprecedented levels of adaptability. Rethinking empathizes on how organizations should have a critical goal of recovery to pivot toward a more resilient workforce, shifting away from rigid routine and structure.

As organizations rethink work, it is important they communicate how and why they are redeploying employees and identify how this supports new organization priorities. This includes providing context and rationale for changes and clear communication on new workforce policies. Rethinking work also means rethinking the workforce size, composition, and compensation, and performance management. Therefore organization leaders should reassess and explain compensation and promotion plans for the short term while managing expectations through the recovery process and toward sustainable operations.





# Should we really work from home?

By Miriam Rahedi

Our lives changed dramatically – and probably irreversibly – when COVID-19 emerged as one of the most pervasive pandemics in a hundred years. It called for immediate adjustments to the way we live from the mundane to the sublime activities that we engage in as humans.

Amid hand-washing, sanitizing, wearing masks and adopting different forms of greeting, perhaps the most talked about issues are working from home and the new normal. Adopting we must, but how should we do it?

Already, some of us are exasperated by the never-ending invitations to Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, (whatever became of the hype of Skype?) meetings, webinars, presentations from erstwhile unknown “experts”. It is amazing how many have emerged from the woodwork! All of them have something to say about one thing – COVID-19.

Someone should put a stop to this before we burst an artery from the effects of the soon to be uncontrollable infodemic! How much information can one person honestly process?

Most of these online interactions are done from the comfort of our homes, making many companies consider whether they really need to be renting office space in the future. Twitter has already declared

that its staff can work from home forever, if they wish.

Working from home has its benefits, and it may be the way to go in the future. However, before we jump (blindly) onto the bandwagon, we may wish to consider our circumstances, and what such a move would entail for us as a country.

The idea and practicability of working from home can only work for the minority. This is because the bulk of the population live below the poverty line, and with nuclear and extended family cramped up in small houses. This in itself has made the prescribed social distancing well-nigh impossible. How does this person set up a place from which to work in such conditions?

Even where conditions may be conducive to working from home, there is the issue of connectivity. How many can afford to install WiFi, or buy the requisite data bundles? In addition, who pays for the power required to keep the devices running?

Many Kenyans have invested in real estate, having taken huge loans to put up residential and commercial buildings. Office space is in itself a major source of employment – from construction (labourers, electricians, masons, plumbers, bricklayers) – to maintenance

(cleaners, gardeners, caretakers, food vendors, clothes sellers, watchmen). For the landlords, this is their investment. Working from home renders them “jobless” and unable to service their loans and mortgages because their premises are not generating income. Have we thought about how much office space will be let go?

## Physical Connection

There is an innate need for humans to connect physically. We have seen people risking life and limb to have a party. At work, the human connection adds to productivity because ideas are exchanged and problems solved collectively. Many people want to go back to the office and engage with their colleagues. In one of the state agencies, a duty roster was made to ensure that everyone has a chance to stay at home. After the third week, people started reporting to work, begging their colleagues to let them sit in for them.

On the social scene, how will people learn to live with each other face to face, having been so used mediated conversations? Having WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram is already bad enough. Many people find it hard to relate to others in real life outside these platforms. How will people date, marry, have children, and live together amicably in future if we do not stem this electronic tide? How would we know, for example, that the other



person slurps their tea, eats with their mouth open, or even – heaven help us – are a killer or pedophile?

Leaving home, for many of us in urban areas, is welcome. We can get some fresh air, and meet other people. For many, especially in the high density areas, it is a necessity to enable those in the house to bathe, change, and clean up. It is an insult on human dignity when these activities cannot be carried out honorably.

The much touted e-learning is working – after a fashion – for very few of us. The bulk of students in the rural areas do not have this luxury, and it puts them at a gross disadvantage. How many of us would accept to be treated by a doctor or nurse who mostly trained online? Or be flown by a pilot who has mainly worked from home?

### **Propagating Violence**

Cases of domestic violence and child abuse have increased manifold the world over. This has largely been attributed to the containment measures that have brought families together in an unusual way. The adage that distance makes the heart grow fonder has never been more accurate. Because people are able to go out, get a change of scene, make a little money, exercise and engage in other activities that relieve stress. As things stand, we may never know the number

of people who have died from physical injuries, and suicides from depression.

Another form of domestic bullying is likely to arise. Where both husband and wife work from home – who gets to use the space allocated for that use? Many of us don't live in mansions where each person can have their own private space. Isn't it likely that the woman will be metaphorically wrestled to the ground to cede ground? Never mind that already a disproportionate amount of household chores fall on the woman. We need to address these cultural norms if working from home is going to be tenable. For now, the office gives us reprieve and privacy to carry out our duties without tripping over each other at home.

### **Lost jobs**

The fashion, art and beauty industries have taken quite a hit during this pandemic. Is there need to invest in designer- or ordinary- clothes if we're going to be indoors all the time? Anyone seen Trevor Noah lately? Let's spare a thought for his designer(s) and barber – for he has resorted hoodies and dreads.

Employers need to be deliberately sensitive to the criteria they use to lay off staff. Anecdotal evidence suggests that those who can register an online presence from home are more likely to be retained. This decision is taken without

interrogating the reasons for non-participation. For some, the little money they have is used to stock up food supplies with little or none left to spend on luxuries like WiFi connectivity. Those who had to go back upcountry when life in the city became unbearable could not have access to electricity as not 100% of the country is connected to electricity. The employee who is thus disadvantaged may be one of the best workers the organization has, but because of factors beyond their control, they fall out of favor and are consigned to further poverty. Being at the office is an equalizer of sorts.

Yes, the disease is devastating, taking a toll on affected families in unimaginable ways. It is imperative, therefore, that we prepare for life during and after the pandemic. We must plan for food, water, shelter, clothing, education, healthcare (the other diseases did not go away), and social support networks.

Let us start by addressing the working from home approach, not from our own advantaged lens, but from that of the poorest, most vulnerable in our society, because that is where the battle to rebuild our economy will be lost or won.

*Miriam Rahedi is a PR and Communications practitioner*

# Hope keeps anxiety at bay

By Branice Anyango

This year started like every other only before the highly infectious novel coronavirus pandemic unraveled. It has since posed a lot of challenges to individuals and businesses. Even before the virus landed on Kenyan shores, the chills that were associated with it had created anxiety in the country. The harsh reality of an 'abnormal' situation hit home once the first confirmed case of COVID-19 was announced on March 13, 2020 – redundancies, pay cuts, foreclosures and evictions became the new normal as more business reported losses and rent defaults increased.

The disruption COVID-19 has created runs deep. Educational institutions, airlines, entertainment joints and eateries were forced to close triggering mass layoffs. Life has become difficult, more so for parents working in the private sector. Farmers who relied on food supplies contracts to learning institutions and other boarding facilities for income are stuck with their harvest. It is a hurtful situation.

It is worth noting that COVID-19 situation has also brought to the fore opportunities and vices in the community. There are so many stories of teen pregnancies, high rates of extended poverty, inhuman evictions, among others broadcast in mainstream news channels and social media.

At the same time, Kenyans have remained innovative and explored their potential to achieve results. For instance, two young innovators, 26-year-old Mungai Gathogo and Joseph Muhinja, 35, caught the eye of President Uhuru Kenyatta who directed the Ministry of Health to buy 500 locally manufactured hospital beds from them. Similarly, 15 medical and engineering

students at Kenyatta University developed smart mechanical ventilators in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, there are also people who need psychosocial support to overcome the vagaries of the pandemic. It has been reported that there are teachers depressed by the loneliness experienced outside classrooms. This may, however, be cured with the planned roll-out of community learning programme by Kenya's Ministry of Education. A significant others have taken up other income generating ventures such as baking, online tuition, knitting and embroidery for sustainability.

The situation may seem tough but people are slowly coming to terms with the fact that the virus is here to stay. The government is championing for prevention and therefore putting regulations that will ensure that it is within controls. The stigma that comes with getting the virus is also thawing. That is why continual engagement of people in any form of labour is a right step. The Kazi Mtaani programme that has seen more youths engaged in manual labour, including cleaning and garbage collection and in the road construction and rehabilitation of the railway. Food deliveries to homes and offices are another form of entrepreneurship embraced by Kenyans to earn a living. More people in the courier and delivery business are making money down the value chain.

The People in the Jua Kali sector have also innovated safe handwashing vessels deployment in offices, hotels and neighborhoods. We have faced worse situations before and overcome. It will get better each day, as we rise up and roll up our sleeves to make a difference.



# Early identification & treatment is key to dealing with mental health issues

By Jane Gitau

A few weeks ago, the Presidential Taskforce on Mental Health in Kenya, submitted their report in which they drew attention to the rising yet ignored state of mental health in the country. According to the taskforce, Kenya is going to need a lot more mental health practitioners and spend a lot more money rebuilding its neglected infrastructure, otherwise all emphasize placed on the economy will be naught.

The Njenga- Taskforce observed that the common mental illnesses in Kenya are depression and suicide, substance use disorder, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. The illnesses affect everyone without discrimination including otherwise healthy looking beings as well as special populations such as children and youth, women, refugees, prisoners, disciplined forces, sexual minorities, the boy child, people living with chronic physical illnesses, persons with disability, and survivors of gender-based violence. One of the key recommendations is to “declare mental illness a national emergency of epidemic proportions” and adopt a multi-sectoral approach in much the same way as the country did towards HIV/AIDS two decades back.

## Kenya has high suicide rates

Has Kenya actually reached this level in its mental illness concerns? Unfortunately, the answer is ‘yes’ even with the very limited data available. On the other hand, the World Population Review places Kenya at 114 among 175 countries with the highest suicide rates globally. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 1408 Kenyans commit suicide every year which translates to four deaths daily, a number that is higher than what the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics reported for 2018: 421 deaths.

In 2017, the organization ranked Kenya as the sixth African country with the highest levels of depression with at least 1.9 million diagnosed Kenyans suffering

from depression. The WHO acknowledges that this is a conservative figure because Kenya lacks vital data on the causes of death. This lack of data, alongside the criminalisation of suicide in Kenya supported by in the penal code, cultural stigma and cultural beliefs contribute to lack of adequate knowledge on the subject. A sure way of preventing suicides is by early identification, treatment and care of people with mental and substance use disorders, or individuals in chronic pain and acute emotional distress.

## Limited access

Yet with all these rising cases, currently, 75% of Kenyans are unable to access mental health care and as at December 2014 mental health care was only available in 29 of the 284 level 4 hospitals. Basic psychiatric units are only available in 25 of the 47 counties in Kenya and the public is not fully aware where they are located as there is no existing database for reference. Patients seeking mental health care in the remaining 22 counties must travel most often to Mathari Hospital in Nairobi. The only National Referral Mental Hospital, Mathari Hospital, was built in 1910 and, the 110 years old dilapidated, infrastructure cannot be expected to deliver modern evidence-informed psychiatric care. This facility was termed the ‘lunatic asylums’ when it was built in the pre-colonial times and was hence ‘hidden’ and isolated from the rest of the hospital services further leading to their neglect, a practice that continues to date.

**Currently 75% of Kenyans are unable to access mental health care and as at December 2014 mental health care was only available in 29 of the 284 level 4 hospitals**

Indeed, given the increasing incidences of mental ill health, there is need to adopt and implement a number of the proposed

measures urgently. First there is need to urgently conduct a national mental health survey as a first step to have more comprehensive research on mental health which will be enabled by reduced stigma so people can openly talk about causes of illness and death, that mental illness is not equal to being a lunatic. Parliament moving fast to decriminalize suicide attempts will help to reduce stigma and discrimination and encourage help-seeking among people that are feeling suicidal.

*Madam Gitau is the former President of Public Relations Society of Kenya*





# Finding hope in hopelessness

By Macdonald Ogambi

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a lot of hopelessness in people's lives all over the world. People's ways have been changed by the nature of this virus. For instance, several governments instituted lockdowns and restrictive measures to contain the spread of the disease. Places of worship and learning institutions were also closed as well.

Apart from the impact on the social aspects of human beings, COVID-19 has also had a great impact on the economies of individuals, companies and governments. As a result, tough decisions have had to be taken particularly by companies to survive in business. Such decisions have included downsizing of employees and in more devastating situations total closures of companies.

The inability of people to make ends meet as a result of job losses have further resulted into psychological issues as depression as well as an increase of other social ills as domestic violence in homes. This is the reason why governments and organizations need to inspire hope as they communicate, interact and transact with their citizens and stakeholders. It can be done through communication, involvement and action.

Communication during a hopeless situation is a medium of expressing empathy. For effectiveness, it should be consistent and accurate in order to eliminate speculations and misinformation. People need assurance that they are not alone in the situation

alone and that there is someone by their side in this walk.

In as much as the COVID-19 requires us to observe social distancing, governments, religious and organizations need to take advantage of technology to pass encouraging messages to their followers and stakeholders.

The person charged with the responsibility of communicating in whatever setup must be someone who is believable and inspires hope to the listeners.

A perfect example of a leader who has been able to inspire hope in this hopeless situation is the Kenya's Cabinet Secretary for Health the Honorable Mutahi Kagwe. To affirm the good job being done by Hon Kagwe, he was featured in the *The Wall Street*, a globally acclaimed journal.

In their article titled 'In This Crisis, the Deputies Are The Heroes We Need.' The author of the article refers to Kagwe as "Kenya's unlikely corona hero". The article further describes him as a "technocrat who is too ordinary and emotionally distant". It also said that the Cabinet Secretary's traits became "assets in his regular briefings on corona virus". Kagwe has also used his briefings to draw attention to corruption at the Ministry of Health, asking Kenyans to help him stem the vice. His briefings shows that governments can, indeed, hold meaningful engagements with their people.

Hope can also be inspired through the involvement of parties affected. In an organizational set-up, it is important to inform workers in good time of decisions likely to affect their lives, including layoffs, impending pay cuts and withdrawal or amendments to a medical insurance cover. This gives them good time to make adjustments in their lives. Involvement also helps in handling devastating situations with a human touch.

Finally, the action an individual, organization or government takes during a hopeless situation can either inspire hope or make an already bad situation worse. It is, therefore, important that caution is taken during a crisis of whatever nature. The COVID-19 pandemic has seen governments and some institutions take actions that have helped the citizens to remain positive in these difficult times, including paying wages and other benefits. Nation Media Group, for example, has retained retrenched staff in the company's medical scheme and availed free counselling services as a way of providing relief and psychosocial support at a difficult period.

The stimulus package announced by President Uhuru Kenyatta to shore up critical areas of the economy is a positive step. His government has also provided a welfare package for vulnerable members of the society, including the youth, women and people living with disabilities.

# There will be life after corona

By Beatrice Mbeyu Joto



The coronavirus pandemic crawled its way into an ailing world, strangling economies and civilization. Unlike other major epidemics such as malaria, cholera, measles and dengue fever that had earlier ravaged the globe, humans are struggling to contain COVID-19 thanks to its aggressive spread poor containment measures at the onset. The containment measures for the other diseases were effective, perhaps because of the great leadership at the time and un-developed travel systems.

Health specialists, consultants and pharmaceuticals have for eons invested in research and development to control and cure potential pandemics. Ebola, HIV/AIDs, H1N1 Flu and other highly contagious and deadly made headlines, but fell short of the level COVID-19 enjoys in all global media channels.

It has caused fear and anxiety. Firms have recorded steep decline in sales and lost businesses. Down cutting and layoffs have

become the norms of today's economy. For example, Kenya Airways, a national pride, has set aside 5.4 billion to lay off unspecified number of workers, reduce its network and dispose some assets due to the pandemic. Before the pandemic hit, international travel business, hotels and restaurants and even health facilities were doing great, offering employment opportunities to many.

However, the capacity of man to adapt to change cannot be gainsaid. It is well captured in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, which can be transposed to explain why some members of the human race have been able to shed-off the virus. Fear and anxiety can be concurred.

There is no need to worry and nurture fear. The many questions in our minds have answers. Time does not stop to sympathize with us nor do we have the power to relive the time we forgo worrying of what ifs! What if I get Corona? You might not get the Corona Virus so why worry about it? Even if you get the virus, you only get two options; your immune system fighting the disease or you die! And what if I Die? We mourn you shortly and continue with life. It's time we realize we have zero total control of what happens to us or around us. We can only take measures to curb the impact of negative things from happening to us but we cannot guarantee that bad things won't happen to us.

And even when these bad things happen, your general attitude towards life itself will get you through the darkest moments of your life. A learning culture is the greatest virtue any man can have. It enables one approach life challenges in a different perspective. It ignites hope and courage amidst trials.

Already, there is promise of a vaccine for COVID-19. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has pledged equal access to the vaccine that will enable the body beat the virus. Let us, therefore, embrace hope over fear, compassion and courage amidst uncertainty knowing that better days are ahead of us. We shall overcome.



# The whole of society approach to COVID-19: Role of private sector

By Felix Abrahams Obi

As the COVID-19 pandemic rages on, governments across Africa and other continents are grappling with the tough decision of reopening their economies and also protecting the health and wellbeing of their citizens. While some countries have made significant progress in flattening the curve through a combination of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical interventions, the rate of new infections and deaths continues to rise especially in United States, South America and Africa. Notwithstanding the epidemiological picture, policy makers have been constrained to ease the lockdowns and cessation of movement to allow for reopening of different sectors of the economy in addition to the resumption of local and international travels.

Many countries, especially developing economies with weak health systems, have experienced service disruptions at all levels of care, including immunization and other critical and essential services. Countries are ramping up their capacity to test, isolate and treat more patients than ever. With the increasing shortage of personal protective equipment (PPE), health workers at the frontlines have faced increased risks with some contracting the virus while others have

died, unfortunately. In tackling the health and socioeconomic consequences of COVID-19, governments within Africa and elsewhere have faced resource constraints making it imperative to explore and mobilize additional resources from the private sector to strengthen the response. In addition to domestic resource mobilization to support the national response to COVID-19, the private sector has played critical roles in ensuring the continuity of primary health care services in their facilities, laboratory testing, logistics and supply chain management, risk communication, citizen engagements and community outreaches, setting up food banks and social safety net initiatives, amongst others.

### Emerging practices and models in private sector engagement during COVID-19?

Recently the Strategic Purchasing Africa Resource Center (SPARC) hosted a Twitter chat on the role of the private sector in the COVID-19 response with focus on Uganda. Available evidence shows that the private sector in Uganda and other countries have played crucial roles in mobilizing financial and other resources in addition to ensuring the continuity of essential health services through strategic

partnership with the public sector.

### Ramping up testing, isolation and treatment capacity

Although most countries have clear policies and plans for epidemic preparedness and response, the pandemic stretched the public health infrastructure and capacity for testing, contact tracing, isolation and treatment of COVID-19 patients. Through partnership with different players, Nigeria ramped up its testing capacity by expanding Nigeria Centre for Disease Control's (NCDC) network of molecular laboratories from five (in four states) as at March 2020 to fifty-seven (in thirty states) by mid July 2020. In addition to donating smartphones for COVID-19 emergency call centers, data capturing and case reporting, the private sector has supported different Nigerian states to establish bespoke isolation and treatment centres to augment the government's response.

### Facilitating citizens' engagement and risk communication

Unlike high income and developed economies, majority of the citizens in African countries who earn daily wages experienced disruptions to their



sources of income during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Many could not stock-up food and household supplies, hence required external support from their respective governments. Although governments provided some palliatives (cash transfers and food supplies) through their social investment programs, the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs) played a critical role in ameliorating the humanitarian impact of COVID-19. In addition, the private sector helped to disseminate public health advisories and reinforced risk communication initiatives using different innovative approaches and platforms to engage citizens.

### **Innovations in service delivery and continuity of services**

The private sector in Nigeria has partnered with federal and state governments to deploy technology and innovations to improve COVID-19 response. For instance, with the fear of contracting the virus reducing health facility attendance, a mobile application giving access to virtual consultations in Nigeria has helped increase innovation in the healthcare space, in addition to supporting health service delivery and continuity. A bank in Nigeria is providing free telemedicine services to all its customers for sixty days

on this application. A medical emergency service pioneered the use of cost-saving mobile testing booths that prevents contact during sample collection in Nigeria

In countries where some government health facilities were converted to COVID-19 isolation and treatment centers, private health facilities have bridged the gap in instances where patients are unable to access services from the public hospitals. In many countries the private sector for health donated PPEs such as face masks, and hand sanitizers for use by health workers at the frontlines. The financial support enabled the private sector, especially, to continue providing essential services, including accident and emergency services during the lockdown.

All things considered, the potential of the private health sector has yet to be fully exploited and deployed to improve the strategic purchasing and delivery of health services towards achieving universal health coverage (UHC). In most African countries, the informality of the sector presents a huge challenge to effective coordination and regulation. Poor engagement also hampers the ability of this sector to contribute meaningfully

to the health system reform discourse and the ability of governments to harness their innovative ability and efficiency to improve citizens' access to quality healthcare.

Notwithstanding these challenges, the onus is on the relevant government bodies to develop appropriate policy and legal frameworks for engaging the private sector to ensure that the benefits of public private partnerships (PPPs) are realized. Without an enabling environment that incentivizes investments into the private sector for health, governments might find it challenging to get the private sector to participate in PPP and other arrangements designed to improve the production and delivery of essential health services.

*Felix Abrahams Obi is a public health specialist with interest in health policy and systems research, health financing and knowledge translation. He is a Senior Program Officer with Results for Development (R4D) and is based at the Nigeria Office in Abuja.*

*This article was first written on the SPARC blog.*

# Use digital space to communicate

By Lina Njoroge

The digital space is changing so fast the way we look at communication. No one ever imagined that internet would one day dictate how we do things or live our lives a decade or more ago. It is even more difficult to predict how the next decade would be due to the evolving nature of technology. Humans have to keep pace with the changes to remain on top of the game.

According to the World Internet Usage and Population Statistics (WIUPS), nearly 4.8 billion people are using the internet against a global population of 7.8 billion people. The number has significantly increased following the coming of the novel corona virus pandemic, as online learning and 'working from home' became the new norm.

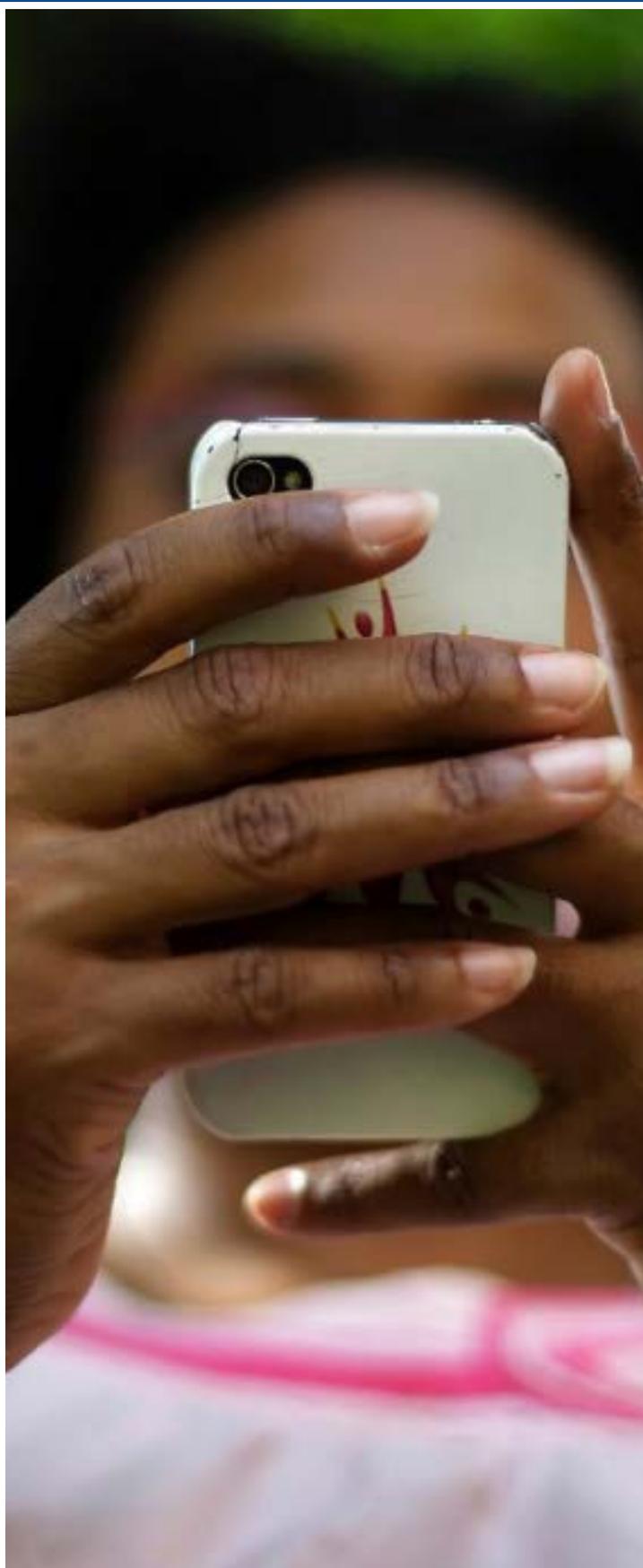
An increasing number of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snap Chat have connected nearly 3 billion people, particularly the young and middle-aged who craves information and convenience. They've become platforms of choice for artists, educators, innovators and entrepreneurs.

The last five years has seen businesses move from traditional ways of communication and are now reaching out to their customers through the internet. It is cheaper and fast. The future is, therefore, promising.

The future of online engagement is very promising. It is creating jobs for content creators, designers, web-developers, and social media influencers to advertise products and services. In Kenya, former K24 news anchor Betty Kyalo and comedian Felix Odiwuor (aka Jalango) have popular YouTube channels that have attracted adverts from individuals and corporates. Approaches such as these are effective in creating a connection between the target customer and advertised brand.

For governments, non-profits and corporate organisations, the opportunity for feedback in online platforms is critical for growth and development. Information backflow helps the firm or brand get more insights on the expectation of the consumer. Also, the more an organisation reaches out to their audiences with relevant information about their values, products and services, the more trusted they become.

A key strategy would be to build a huge online community that will not only receive, but play a critical role of sharing the message to others. It is cost effective compared to traditional marketing methods, and enables one to participate, say in a virtual meeting, from any location. The upside of this is the unpredictability of online communities, who can be very unforgiving, especially when an individual or organisation is caught in unlawful or unethical conduct.



# Time to rise to the occasion

By Charity Njeri



Mankind is facing an unprecedented crisis which evidently threatens the very existence of the human race. This is owing to the ramifications occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. Businesses are experiencing setbacks and facing huge losses forcing them to curb their expenses in various ways.

Most of the businesses are adopting the 'wait and watch' approach. This is true, even for a service-led industry like Public Relations (PR). The COVID-19 global pandemic has had negative impacts on the Industry.

## **Challenges facing the PR Industry**

The global market is facing a massive slowdown and most of the industries are virtually striving to survive. The PR industry is no exception. The art of maintaining a close connection with the masses always bears fruits. Creating a longer lasting brand recall with the public effectively aids in marketing and indeed influences the buying decision-making process. The global crisis has created such a negative environment around people that they are scared to trust anything new or unknown.

PR specialists have had to adjust to the new way of life by being mindful of the challenges and sensitivities involved. Now is not the time to be pitching anything self-promotional. Pitching self-serving news will without a doubt backfire. Journalists are working almost exclusively on stories relating to COVID-19.

## **Employee Engagement**

We've experienced a shift from seeing co-workers every day to now interacting only via online engagements such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams. A drastic transformation is already taking place and PR professionals need to rethink the purpose and practice of what makes this discipline so great.

## **Emerging gaps**

Many agencies have experienced significant drops in revenue as the crisis deepens. Egos and fears are being put on the back seat by rival firms poaching a client. Agency leaders are now recognising that through shared experiences and openness they can devise measures to counter the effects that the pandemic is having on their individual businesses.

## **Digital story telling**

As PR practitioners, we should use this as an opportunity to focus our creative energies in mobilising wellness and welfare communication as well as in renewing hope and confidence.

For us to continue providing efficient service that our clients could count on, it would be necessary to go that extra mile. To go beyond the prescribed scope of work during this trying times. Let us indeed rise up to the occasion and make use of our expertise to inspire hope in a hopeless society.

# Communication key in building trust among stakeholders

By Esther Njoroge



In preparation for the post Covid space, organizations should ensure the formulated back to work policies align with government guidelines to guarantee the safety of their employees. However, transitioning back to the office space still poses a risk of infection as employees are coming from different locations. In the event that an employee gets infected, there should be structures put in place to ensure employee privacy to avoid stigmatization. In an effort to encourage employees to come forward when they get infected, companies should assure employees of their job security.

Communication should be used to build trust among employees. To achieve this, communication strategies should ensure a continuous flow of information from top-level management to lower level. This type of alignment of communication instills trust among the employees and enables efficient cross-departmental collaboration. It also facilitates synchronized communication that further eliminates any grapevine. In this regard, it's crucial for companies to identify

multiple communication channels that work for their particular organizational structure. It is important to factor in that maintaining communication with employees in different physical locations is particularly difficult more so when using one channel. Thus, the emphasis on creating customized communication channels for your business to cater to both internal and external publics.

Even as organizations explore alternative Communication channels is it important to incorporate feedback channels. Feedback channels are crucial since they allow for two-way communication giving employees an avenue to air out their issues. This will promote interaction and reception of information from the organization by the employees. Real-time information of any unfolding issues in regards to the business developments or safety updates reassures the employees and provides clarity. Consistency of communication will help employees cope with the new model of working. For employers, this is critical in ensuring business continuity.

## Digitisation

One of the key lessons that this pandemic has taught us is that digitization of organizational functions is vital more so in communication. Therefore, the integration of technology into traditional communication channels is a key factor in ensuring a smooth transition. Organizations should highly consider upskilling their workforce to align with digital work tools that are instrumental with work from home modules as well as transition to the new normal.

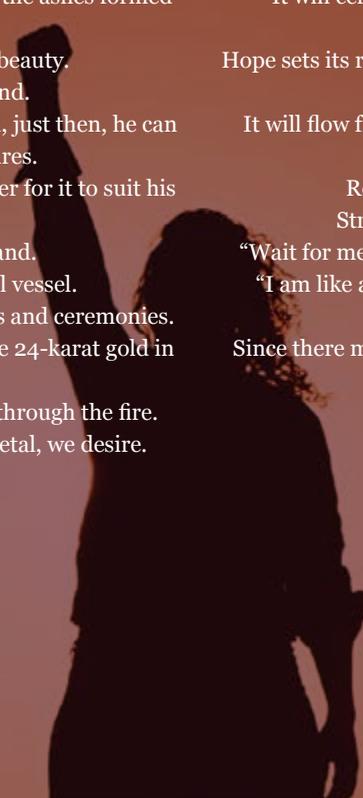
The success of the strategies a company implements will have a direct impact on how well a business will recover from this crisis. Therefore all companies should take this time to evaluate their current communication tools and consider the effectiveness of new channels such as Zoom, Skype, Lifesize, and Google Hangouts among others. They should also strongly encourage the employees to fully adopt these communication tools to supplement face to face interactions as a new normal of how to conduct meetings.

# Hope for the Hopeless

By Lydia Pierre

The lights go off around you and in a twinkle of an eye; you  
have the impression of being lost.  
The darkness surrounds you.  
You think you are walking through the valley of the shadows of  
death.  
And you fear evil.  
Yes! Lost into a dark world where your eyes cannot see the end  
of the tunnel.  
Your ears cannot hear any sound of victory, and your feelings  
become a mixture of fright, despair and hatred.  
You are afraid of the dark in which pain has left you.  
You are desperate for sunshine and you hate your disarray.  
You just need one candle to keep you through the night;  
But you can't find any.  
You just need some warmth but the night keeps getting dark,  
cold and frozen.  
Hopelessness and absence of faith become your identity.  
Fright becomes your strength and serenity your weakness.  
At times, it seems like your silence speaks louder than your  
pain,  
Your contentment to whatever you live shows you are giving  
up.  
Your condition defines your identity.  
You believe every finger is pointing at you.  
You think every mouth is mocking at you.  
You even think every eye is staring at you.  
Well! Well! My friend!  
The earth was conceived and made to revolve around the sun,  
And the moon around the earth.  
Once night falls, the sun would definitely come around.  
They say pain hurt uhh!  
Well I say pain is an anchor.  
Yes an anchor for the strong and the famous.  
It strengthens you and makes you learn the hard way.  
Pain might seem ugly yes! It is just as ugly as the ashes formed  
from the flames.  
Which can one day rise to become beauty.  
Pain is like iron in a smith's hand.  
He heats it into the fire until it melts and then, just then, he can  
craft it into a form he alone desires.  
He uses hammers and other hard tools in order for it to suit his  
taste.  
Pain is like a pot in a porter's hand.  
He uses the clay, to carve a beautiful vessel.  
One which can be of honourable use in homes and ceremonies.  
Oh, yes! Pain still, can be compared to the fine 24-karat gold in  
the refiner's hands.  
He acquires it in its raw state then works it through the fire.  
Separating impurities from the precious metal, we desire.

Then makes it pure and ready for sale or exposition.  
So friend! Lean on your pain for it might just be the way to  
your honour.  
Hope says: in the midst of pain, I will not sit on a spot.  
Hope says: in the midst of chaos, I will not cry over spilt milk.  
Hope says: in the midst of war, I will try to seek for peace.  
Yes, hope says: in the midst of darkness, I decide to adapt my  
sight to what I cannot see and use my intuition instead of my  
vision.  
Yes, hope says: in the midst failure, I decide to work harder  
and try over and over until I can change the course of time.  
They say what does not kill you makes you stronger right?  
Well I say what does not kill you, increases your lifespan.  
Therefore, when you think you are the sunset, hope says I am  
your sunrise.  
When you think you are the darkest night, hope says I am your  
twilight.  
When you feel you are the unwanted, hope says I want to be  
your friend.  
And when you feel you are the frozen sea, hope says I will be  
your crater lake.  
Hope says I will fight for you, when no one would.  
I will be your strength, when you cannot hold on.  
I will be the little candle you need in your darkest night.  
I will be your eyes when you become blind and yes, I will be  
your breath when you cannot breathe.  
My friend I will be your song when you have none.  
I will definitely be your fate and your destiny.  
So: do not despair, do not be dismayed.  
Do not lose hope.  
For after all of this has passed, you still will remain.  
After crying and lamenting, you'd definitely find your beauty.  
It might not be in a near future, but joy comes at dawn.  
Hope might just knock at your door one of these days.  
It will certainly come your way and even if it is late,  
It would come right on time.  
Hope sets its roots from within; though the surroundings will  
look tensed and difficult,  
It will flow from the inside out like a river of living water.  
Friend! Be free in your mind-set.  
Recover your identity and be strong.  
Strong in your heart and in your head.  
"Wait for me", says hope "till I show up at your door step"  
"I am like a lover, who for a long time has left his lover  
promising her to come back.  
Since there must be a happy ever after, I definitely am your  
Once upon a time partner".





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