How Should the IEBC Repair Trust

Details
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Agonizing hours upon hours waiting for results. One excuse given following another. We Kenyans first expected IEBC results from the 4th March general election within a few hours and then to trickle in consistently until a winner became apparent. But suddenly, stop...

...results ceased to flow in. IEBC announced that it required another day, and then two, then no promise seemed to come true. We learned that the IEBC system crashed and could not come back online. Safaricom announced that its own network support had not faltered and the blame lay elsewhere. We learned that the electronic voting register had not functioned in many instances. Kenyans pondered on the core issues – what next? Then IEBC mandated that all constituency representatives had to travel to Nairobi. No updates came forth with where each constituency representatives had reached on their journey to Nairobi. Citizens asked “why does someone need so many days to reach Nairobi from anywhere in the Republic”? International election observers claimed that the IEBC prevented them from observing the final vote tallying per constituency. Results finally came in while a whole nation waited on edge. Millions stayed home from work and school, including us here at United States International University (USIU). Then, unfortunately, the final IEBC announcement ran hours late.

Following years of careful planning with Government of Kenya officials, donor governments, aid agencies, election observers, corporate service providers, and citizens’ rights groups, IEBC struggled to deliver timely and thoroughly transparent election results. Now, in IEBC’s defense, planning, executing, and tabulating results from a national election with millions of voters and multiple candidates presents a unique challenge anywhere in the world. Many things did indeed go right. Voting queues remained orderly and efficient and the IEBC’s own composition comprised representatives from a wide array of the Kenyan political spectrum. Finally, the Supreme Court did indeed unanimously validate the election results. Still, though, many Kenyans from all political walks of life developed mistrust towards the IEBC. Even deeper, IEBC’s own employees lost considerable trust in the organisation as well as its leaders.

In the Kenyan or even global context, IEBC does not stand alone as the sole organisation to suffer from the development of severe mistrust by its own employees. Many organizations lose employee trust through various organisational crises. Last week we discussed in the Business Daily how managers may utilise the powerful tool of trust to enhance employee performance and improve corporate profits. Remember that everything a manager does in interacting with his or
her staff must revolve around showcasing and reinforcing three main concepts: **goodwill, ability, and integrity**. A manager must demonstrate these characters to employees regularly or face corporate decline.

As the head of a large entity, like Isaack Hassan at the IEBC, how would you commence rebuilding the trust your employees hold in you as their leader and in the institution as a whole? Rebuilding trust proves vital to organisational success or the entity starts to falter, lose profits, entertain scandals, and begin downward spirals. Following a violation of trust, companies must take immediate steps to repair the damage and move forward.

The type of action you should take as a leader depends on the sort of trust violation that occurred. Did you violate the employees’ perception of your goodwill towards them, your ability to do your job, or your integrity? Research at top universities globally and right here at USIU by this author that investigated multiple companies around the world shows that the best remedy to fix employee trust revolves around two key actions: apologize for whatever happened combined with admission of guilt and punishment or deny that anything happened. You may read the specific fascinating sources of research from the USIU website at: www.usiu.ac.ke/blog/businessdaily (/../blog/businessdaily).

Take a moment to think about what you would do. What action would you take? Imagine that you lead a large company listed on the Nairobi Securities Exchange. You violated your employees’ trust. Then, you notice your corporate earnings start to decline. Let us presume that the employees lost their faith in your goodwill intentions towards them because you never provided salary raises during your three years as CEO but all your competitors raised salaries considerably each year. Do you apologize in order to rebuild trust or do you deny that salary raises typically occur or that your firm’s salaries remain lower than competitors? Research shows that an apology and punishing yourself in some manner actually repairs trust and gets the company moving in the right direction again more than a denial when it comes to fixing goodwill trust violations.

On the other hand, perhaps you violated employees’ belief in your ability to do your job because the company failed to attract new investors as had earlier been expected. Do you apologize for your failure or do you deny that the firm ever sought new investors? Once again, research shows that admitting responsibility, apologizing, and punishing yourself repairs trust more than a denial with regards to ability-based trust violations.

Lastly, look at integrity violations. You did not keep a promise to employees or perhaps auditors caught you inappropriately misdirecting funds. Employees then lose trust, start looking for other jobs, work fewer hours, call in sick more often, quality drops, and revenues start to decline. You know you must fix the trust gap. Faced with the choice of an apology or a denial, which do you take? While your pastor, imam, or your own conscience might urge you to admit your mistake and apologize, unfortunately research actually shows that for integrity based errors that ruin employee trust, your denial works to more quickly and strongly rebuild trust and therefore improve corporate performance.

Further, some trust violations occur on such a massive scale that becomes an organisational crisis. The IEBC’s mishaps hurled them into an organisational crisis. How can the IEBC rebuild trust? Research across many industries and companies conducted by researchers at Durham University in the UK and the University of Queensland in Australia show that a company must undergo specific steps to fix trust so as to improve organisational performance following a crisis of any of these eight (8) proportions:
• Accounting frauds
• Deceit
• Incompetence
• Fatal yet avoidable accidents
• Exploitation of vulnerable people
• Massive compulsory job losses
• Bankruptcies
• Catastrophic collapses in organisational finances

Please pay attention IEBC as well as all CEOs, public relations consultants, and crisis managers from Kampala to Nairobi to Dar es Salaam and beyond. When an entity undergoes one of the above crises, it must quickly institute the following four (4) stages in order to rebuild employee trust and turnaround performance:

First stage: the firm must verbally and publicly acknowledge that an incident occurred and express regret and sorrow for it. Then an announcement about a full investigation that should take place must transpire. Next the organisation needs to commit resources to prevent the reoccurrence of such an event in the future. The company then steps forward and takes intervention action against known causes for the crisis.

Second stage: an accurate organisation-wide multilevel thorough diagnostic investigation should take place in a timely and deeply transparent manner.

Third stage: the firm should then verbally apologize if the investigation shows its guilt and make reparations, or payments and actions, to right the wrong as appropriate. The company action should incorporate the results from the diagnostic investigation conducted in stage two with full implementation and prioritize solution mechanisms according to the type of failure that led to the crises.

Fourth stage: finally, the company must now conduct an evaluation of the success and appropriateness of the first three stages. The evaluation should take place quickly and transparently and cover the whole organisation on multiple levels.

Once an organisation completes the four post-crisis trust repair stages, employee commitment and trust begin to improve and company performance goes up. Remember that your actions to solve problems as a business or organisational leader depends on what type of issue occurred. Did you fail at demonstrating your goodwill to employees, your ability to do your job, your integrity failings, or did you undergo and organisation-level crisis? All hope for a successful future does not crumble following a violation or failure. But getting back on the right track quickly and effectively requires you to implement the above trust repair tactics. Business exists as a science, but most people unknowingly approach it as an art.

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Intrigued by the above topic? Want to know more and dig deeper? Join us for the weekly USIU-Business Daily NEVA Executive Theory to Action Lecture Series on Fridays at 1:00pm at The Norfolk beginning 10th May 2013 (note change to Fridays). The series will cover today’s topic, “How

Next week: “Understanding Tribes in Your Business”

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- Behavioral Finance: Delay to Recognize Losses (/on-campus/blog/103-business-talk/363-behavioral-finance-delay-to-recognize-losses)
- Lies and Boss Evaluations (/on-campus/blog/103-business-talk/351-lies-and-boss-evaluations)
- Stamping Out Selfishness (/on-campus/blog/103-business-talk/345-stamping-out-selfishness)
- Personality and Quit Intentions (/on-campus/blog/103-business-talk/336-personality-and-quit-intentions)