Why one-size leadership model does not fit Africa

Excitement mounted around the office. The entire operations team at a manufacturing firm in Athi River planned for the past month to attend a motivational talk in Naivasha given by one of Kenya's most admired CEOs.

The team looked forward to getting out of the office, bonding in a new environment and learning key life and career lessons by the renowned speaker.

Upon arrival at the lodge, the team hurriedly made their way to the main conference room firmly intentioned not to miss the start of the CEO's speech.

The group felt the energy in the room from many participants from other companies and the thrill of anticipation from expected boundless wisdom to roll forth from the podium.

The famed executive did not disappoint. He weaved together fascinating themes besides riveting stories of his life along his own personal ladder towards success and triumph.

The awe-inspired employees left the retreat to head back to Athi River. Moods within the staff bus along the highway back to Athi River stood initially markedly higher than even on the way to the event.

Eventually, discussion amongst the team centered on how to actualise and implement the CEO's steps in their own lives in order to boost their careers.

The conversation became less animated. The group struggled to recall specific action steps that they should take themselves.

The youngest member in the back of the bus, Juma, blurted out loudly some clichés from the speech “believe in yourself” and “follow your own path”. Everyone nodded in agreement.

Then a few seconds later, Adhiambo, a long-time employee of the firm, called out “but what do those sayings actually mean and what should we actually do?”.

The conversation continued for the two more hours to reach Athi River. The workers ended up feeling let down.

As stated repeatedly in Business Talk, life is full of variables. Life carries multitudes of causes and effects. What works for one person may not work for others. Inasmuch, do not live with anecdotal stories. Live with scientific realities.

Listeners to any CEO or other inspiring business leader amongst the many across the Kenyan landscape may hope to mimic the individual career paths of these storied executives by following in their footsteps. Do not trust people who try to convince you about a course of action you should take by providing you one-off stories about how it worked for one specific person or another.
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