Integrity raises staff performance

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Supervisor must demonstrate integrity even in challenging potentially situations.

Many of us get caught in what researchers David Clark and Christine Purdon call a negativity spiral. We think of depressing news headlines for a few instances and then get wrapped up in thinking negatively about all aspects about Kenya.

Surely, we could specifically do better in fighting the scourge of corruption. Transparency International’s much cited and discussed Corruption Perception Index 2016 ranks Kenya 145th out of 177 nations. The result means that 144 countries are perceived as less corrupt, 26 more corrupt, and six nations just as corrupt. Given Kenya’s high levels of professional skills, metropolitan global hub status, high literacy rate, vast extent of news consumption, and considerably large diaspora, many ponder why we continue to fester down near the bottom of the ranking.
In our negativity spiral, we fail to look for inspiration from our ethical leaders like Uchumi’s Julius Kipng’etich, WYLDE Group’s Joram Mwinamo, Kijiji Entertainment’s Kanji Mbugua, human rights activist Timothy Njoya, and new EACC chairman Eliud Wabukala. Kenya retains much to be thankful for and celebrated. But does ethical leadership within organisations help or hinder performance? Know the facts and act with integrity, do not make excuses for your actions.

Social scientists Dianhan Zheng and team detail the extent to which employees work in dangerous jobs such as the military, police force, firefighters, etc.

They eventually become emotionally exhausted. The exhaustion diminishes team cohesion and drops performance. However, when the team’s leader demonstrates high ethical conduct, the group’s emotional exhaustion abates and employees feel they can continue working.

John Schaubroeck, Simon Lam, and Ann Peng uncovered in employee service quality that ethical leadership behaviours increased beliefs about social expectations for acting with integrity.

In essence, the more the employees saw their leaders and coworkers engage in ethical behaviour, the more they too felt social pressure to improve their own integrity and, therefore, improve service quality in the organisation.

So, even when you feel alone in your pursuit of integrity, know that your efforts do indeed hold knock-on effects and will influence the ethical behaviour of those around you at work. Fred Walumbwa and team investigated supervisors and employees in China. In East Asia too, ethical leadership among supervisors significantly increased employee performance as rated by the supervisors themselves.

Jeroen Stouten and his group of researchers found fascinating results that ethical leadership not only improves employee performance, but also decreases deviant behaviour. So as managers demonstrate integrity and expect it in return from staff, then lying, cheating, theft, altering reports, etc, goes down measurably.

A supervisor cannot merely state that they demand integrity, which often occurs here in Kenya. The supervisor must go the extra step and actually demonstrate it even in challenging potentially compromising situations.

However, Stouten’s team also found a disturbing result that employees start to decrease their willingness to go out of their way above and beyond the call of duty to help fellow staff members and assist the organisation if ethical leadership gets very high.

The study did find that as the level of ethical leadership increased in a firm it also improved desirable extra actions among staff, but only to a point.

Once employees believe that their supervisors exhibit exceptionally high ethical behaviour, then they actually slow down and stop helping as much at the office.
Managers should uphold integrity and act with ethical principles at the workplace. The workers, across cultural contexts, will reciprocate to some degree and will also perform better in their jobs.

But eventually a leader can be perceived as too ethical and employees stop helping each other and the firm as often. So, supervisors should demonstrate high integrity, but not pound it into employees’ heads at every twist and turn.