Kenyans sat riveted to their television screens on Monday as broadcasters beamed fascinating images from Parliament showing the temporary handover of power from the President Kenyatta to his deputy William Ruto. While some took comfort in the action, others dismissed it.

By the next morning, as Kenyans took their morning tea, debates sprung up as to the necessity of the action and whether a boss of a company facing a personal situation should take the same action: temporarily step aside to deal with a personal matter.

A corporate executive surely exists in a separate medium than a political leader. However, some research overlaps. Certain aspects of public relations to external stakeholders involve governance and marketing theories. Executives retain public relations firms from Ogilvy & Mather to Gina Din Group to Brand Associates to handle external perceptions with carefully crafted images, slogans, rollouts, and messaging. Public relations firms would create focus groups among key investors on the stock exchange, develop surveys and gauge prospective customer thoughts, and conduct extensive research on comparable industries and events in regions with similar demographics. After a PR campaign.

Unfortunately, organisations often overlook a key constituency: the employees. When a corporate CEO faces personal difficulty, he or she must view the decision to temporarily step down, step down permanently, or stay the course in light of organisational trust.

Further, those in the boardroom need to create and sustain public perceptions, then the executive team must identify the specific reason to step aside. If stepping aside actually stems directly or indirectly from a workplace situation, then the firm must understand which of the three trust components the CEO may have violated in the employees’ minds. To rebuild trust and keep employees on track to continue peak performance, the CEO must apologise for any violations of his or her ability to do his or her job or any actions or perceptions that infringe on the workers’ opinions on the CEO’s good intentions towards them. Following the apology, the executive must take steps to prevent such actions from occurring again.

However, if the CEO violated integrity in the employees’ minds including a range of behaviour from cheating on a spouse, avoiding KRA, breaking promises, or paying bribes, then research from professors Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, and Dirks show that the CEO should deny the allegations directly. Even if true.

The researchers found that denial creates smoke, so to speak, in employees’ minds and clouds them from forming a solid negative opinion on whether the executive is guilty or not. Barring DNA or videos evidence to the contrary, the unanswered question remains in their mind and enables the employees to continue diligently working. Given the research, then the firm must make an ethical decision on whether to deny or apologise even if studies show an unethical response actually helps more with integrity violations of employee trust.