Unique strengths that make Kenya the capital of enterprise

In a digital world, global citizens digest large volumes of information. One gets blinded by over-communication through hundreds of news sources and dozens of information mediums.

Unfortunately, among the clamouring of thousands of news stories each day, bad news usually sifts itself to the surface of everyone’s consciousness due to shock factors. Inasmuch, Kenya struggles with an uphill public relations battle.

Sure, Kenya faces some major challenges in the coming years. However, every country possesses a plethora of issues including political gridlock in America, Belgium, and Pakistan or debt overload in Greece, Spain, and Japan or regional insecurity in the Philippines, Colombia, and Mexico. Each of the mentioned countries also enjoy fantastic strengths that bless the rest of the world.

Currently, USIU students on different teams for various programmes are traversing Europe learning aspects of culture and different political and economic structures. As I see some of our students experience Europe for the first time, I am reminded of why I love Kenya. In Kenya, our mountains of strengths outweigh our handful of negatives.

My personal favourite Kenyan strengths include the following:

First, even the world’s press has come to notice Kenyans’ boundless entrepreneurial spirit. From CNN to the BBC, reporters spotlight Kenya’s entrepreneurship culture. In much of the world, people hold one source of income typically from employment in one job. Not in Kenya.

Multitudes of Kenyans hold a job, have a consultancy or two on the side, own a shop, own a shamba, and supply tenders all at the same time. Studies often indicate that South Koreans and Americans typically work the longest hours. Respectfully disagree.

When one aggregates the entirety of time that Kenyans use towards income generation, Kenya could likely lead the world in the amount of time worked per citizen per week. Further, Kenyan entrepreneurs maintain a higher level of aggressiveness that pushes our citizens to achieve business venture goals. Inasmuch, Kenyans do not give up easily.

Second, Kenya has become much more adept at creativity. New ideas from IT to agriculture to art to finance pour out of Kenya into the rest of the world. Kenyan creativity helps fuel its entrepreneurial spirit in a symbiotic relationship. Businesses who copycat neighbouring competitors will not survive the new Kenya.

Third, reduced bureaucracy also spurs our entrepreneurial spirit. Sure, Kenya holds legal hurdles to forming a business, paying taxes, and obtaining permits. But Kenya continues to make processes simpler.

While some places in the world are easier, such as Hong Kong, many nations hinder business through oppressive bureaucracy, for instance India, or faux ease with hidden undisclosed obstacles, for example Rwanda.

Fourth, lower startup capital is required to test out a new business idea and then scale the business. Imagine the difficulty involved in starting a bakery in London. In Kenya, one may easily test out the idea in smaller incremental stages before building up capital to launch a large enterprise. Developing countries often hold such staged possibilities, but Kenya’s infrastructure also enables scale to widespread growth.

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Fifth, Kenya retains competent professionals. Kenyan professionalism often shocks other African nations who struggle to compete with us.

Kenyan professionals know how to brilliantly build long-term business relationships, how to provide on-time deliverables, how to show up on time to meetings despite often incorrect stereotypes to the contrary, how to present captivating results, and how to author international reports.

Many nations may struggle with some of the above, but Kenyan professionals conduct themselves with a certain panache. Cultures that emphasise interpersonal business relationship-building often skimp on the professional deliverables.

Not as much in Kenya. Additionally, Kenyan professionalism exists as far less rigid than in France or Japan whereby allowing us more flexibility. Further, Kenyan professionals are more polite and considerate than many counterparts in the northern hemisphere.

Sixth, the Kenyan sense of humour is unmatched anywhere in the world. Kenyan jesting eases business relationship-building and enhances trust. Kenya is one of the only countries in the world where someone may laugh at him- or herself and not be viewed as having low self-esteem.

Further, incoming foreigners to Kenya frequently comment that in Kenya, they can laugh all day with their colleagues and still get work done. Kenyans diffuse tense situations with funny wit coupled with incredible finesse. Kenyans utilise humour to build cohesive teams more than other team building tools used more often in other countries.

Seventh, Kenyan literacy rates compare favourably with even OECD countries. Kenyans are increasingly literate even in multiple languages. Nothing seems to match Kenyans’ thirst for education and knowledge. Businesses relocating to Kenya can be assured of educated workforce.

While some commentators may deride that even university graduates lack the appropriate skills for certain jobs, they do not realise that formal education is not a shallow skills factory for robots but rather a system that teaches Kenyans how to think critically.

Eighth, Kenyans are an optimistic people. We look forward to the future and believe that forthcoming expectations hold better realities for us individually, our families, and our nation.

After living with Kenyan optimism, one may find it hard living anywhere else.

View additional opinions on Kenyan strengths at #KenyaTop10 on Twitter:

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Prof Scott serves as the Director of the New Economy Venture Accelerator (NEVA) at USIU’s Chandaria School of Business and Colorado State University, www.ScottProfessor.com. info@ScottProfessor.com; @ScottProfessor.