



Kemi finds the Value of Leadership

“This weekend was no different” Kemi thought to herself, as she struggled with the low power output from EKEDP in her house (that made the air-conditioners stop working); the power going off and on and the noise from the generator; and the assignments she had to complete on her MBA program. She had hoped that things will be different this weekend considering that she had gotten through all the Finance and Statistics modules and was still alive. For the next couple of weeks - it was the lighter stuff that she needed to contend with like this week’s module - Organizational Leadership. Kemi is the Head of Human Resources at Horizon HMO, one of the large health management organizations in Nigeria, and is running an on-line MBA Program at Walden University.

It looks like everyone else on the program was thoroughly fatigued from the previous weeks’ grueling mathematical challenges and computations. The discussion board was rather quiet and most of her course mates had not submitted their thoughts on the discussion of the day - “What is the Value of Leadership Development”. After some nudges and teasers from the course facilitator, some ideas start to stream in and one in particular caught Kemi’s attention and she started to think on how to build on it. It came from a lady called Audrey in South Africa, and it sounded something like this - “If you measured the quality of leadership in various companies who were competitors, you will find that there is a direct positive correlation between the level of leadership that you measure and their relative financial performance as a business”.

Audrey had a background in Finance and was the “teacher’s pet” - considering the great work she had done in prior weeks with Finance, Statistics and Data Analytics. Her response sounded like she had already done a Data Experiment on Leadership and Business Results, and interestingly it sort of made sense. The thread on Audrey’s theory gained a lot of traction on the discussion board, as many people weighed in “for” and “against” her proposition. The challenge for Kemi was - how do you measure leadership, and could leadership really be measured?

On her way to work the next morning, she tuned in to her favourite radio station and caught a discussion with her favourite early morning talk crew on radio: Inya and Ben 200 on Nigerian Info FM, and believe it or not - they were discussing a similar



topic - if everyone says the problem with Nigeria is leadership, how do we teach people how to be better leaders and be sure that the effort is worth it?

The guest in the studio spoke about creating a system where leaders could get an honest appraisal from their colleagues, supervisors and team members, and that if that appraisal was done properly, we could arrive at areas of strength and weakness for each person and use their leadership ratings to continuously motivate and coach them to be better. “It was either this guy was on the MBA discussion Board or he and Audrey had consulted the same guru” Kemi chuckled as she listened and took mental notes.

The rest of the working week was hectic as usual, and the Wednesday EXCO meeting was even more eventful. The performance figures were low, and the industry data suggested that Horizon had been losing market share each quarter, with new industry entrants driving more aggression out there with product development, sales and back-office operations. Usually, the sales guys got the bashing at this meeting when things were going sour, but today was different, everyone was getting bashed and it was quite clear that the Company’s leaders and managers had a lot of work to do to reverse this trend.

Horizon Founder and CEO, Jide Ibeziako gave a passionate speech at the end of a very long meeting about how leaders around the table and elsewhere across the organization needed to roll-up their sleeves, get their hands dirty and take ownership of this challenge. He fell on his sword and took a huge blame for allowing a culture of complacency to set in after a few years as the market leader and challenged everyone to go back to their “space” and think about what to do to turn things around. “It is most likely not going to be a quick fix”, he said, “but something that will take time, effort and will yield sustainable results”.

After another weekend of “Organizational Leadership” discussions with Audrey & Co, Kemi came up with a simple plan of action - develop leadership competencies at Horizon HMO with clear descriptors of the actual behaviours that are required to create the turn around. Then a 360-degree leadership evaluation will be done for all Managerial cadre staff to “measure” their leadership. The results will identify the three areas of weakness that each manager has, and interventions (training, coaching, etc.) will be created with content that relates to those leadership descriptors.

Jide loved the idea and so did everyone at the weekly EXCO - “if we could get our leaders to think and behave in a particular way, then we will no doubt be able to get the kind of results we want” Jide remarked. A number of other initiatives from the Heads of Products, Operations and Business Development were discussed and considered. “All of these will no doubt yield short to medium term results, but I am placing my bet on the Leadership Program” said Jide as he closed the meeting.



The next few months of the roll-out of the “Horizon Leadership DNA Program” by Kemi and her HR team was quite interesting. The hardest part was creating a set of leadership competencies. The first attempt was not good enough, it sounded a bit too soft like something from a “soft” leadership book and it was not reflective of the Company’s realities. Kemi reached out to Inya from Nigeria Info FM for the contact details of her guest from many months prior. Ebi was a very experienced consultant - in fact he took exception when Kemi introduced him as a Motivational Speaker to her team and explained that the work he and his colleagues did was nothing like motivational speaking, and in a matter of weeks he proved it.

By studying the Company’s Strategy and profiling the Company’s three core departments, Ebi and his team developed a robust leadership competency model that got Jide’s approval at first-sight. The language used was clearly focused on the company, and even reflected some of Horizon’s nuances and industry jargon. It captured issues relating to the industry - finally the Horizon Leadership DNA was ready. Kemi retained Ebi’s Company to design the 360-degree leadership evaluation tool - they had a good Technology Solutions team that also understood these issues quite well and from then on, the project gained significant traction.

There was some resistance when managers including Jide were pooled into different groups based on the feedback from their leadership evaluations to get a combination of coaching and training to improve in those areas, but the resistance faded away quite quickly once Ebi and the ensemble of experienced facilitators and coaches started the sessions. It took a number of months, but things started to change. Right from the point where conversations began on the leadership competencies through to the 360-degree appraisals and then to the interventions. Attitudes and behaviours started to change and the results started to change - a few people who were not the right fit in the organization left; managers were more “hands-on”; there was a lot more “commitment” and the push for results was overwhelming, so much energy and drive, and the numbers started to improve - slowly and steadily. The other initiatives were no doubt making a difference too especially since commitment levels were generally higher. Kemi had found the value of leadership and things were really different at Horizon HMO.

Teaching soft leadership skills is not enough. For leadership development to make a difference, it needs to focus on the things that really matter in a way that aligns with your organization’s strategy. It also needs to be measured and consistently applied. If you are looking to bolster performance in your organization, then pay the right attention to Leadership Development. Call us on 08181956161 so we can work together to find the value of leadership in your organization.

