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LIFE IS LIKE A FIELD OF NEWLY FALLEN SNOW: WHERE YOU CHOOSE TO WALK, EVERY STEP WILL SHOW

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I know you understand that companies that regularly upgrade their products, sell more in the marketplace. Ever heard of the cult of Apple? The company that upgrades its flagship gadget, the iPhone, every 18 months? By the time Apple releases a new version of the device, its upgrade is already on the cards. Behold iPhone XIII: a marvel, pure magic, a gem. Look at its cinematic video mode - something a fanatic fan may be thinking of licking its screen. No wonder people line up for new iPhones at the Apple store two days before launch day. Here's the big story: Of the \$89.6 billion total revenue which Apple Inc made last year, the iPhone sales alone accounted for 53%.

Starbucks. The oldest and largest coffeehouse. Five decades brewing the black stuff. Whether you are an avid coffee lover like me or you're not so much into the brew, Starbucks always has a treat for you. It boasts of 35 drinks on its menu. Thirty-five. Here's the big story about the venerated coffeeshop. Starbucks doesn't keep its offerings on the menu cast-in-stone. The menu keeps on changing. Iconic former CEO of Starbucks, Howard Schultz, put it better than I could when he said, "... there are countless ways to customize drinks at Starbucks." Here's my takeaway: countless ways to customize drinks - whether you're a regular coffee imbiber or a casual drinker; whether you like it hot or cold - there is always something for you to try at Starbucks. Whether you fancy iced-white chocolate mocha, steaming sugar-free cappuccino, or lukewarm caramel macchiato, you have a pick. Yummy. I can't imagine how dull life could have been without the black brew. Yes, Starbucks, fifty years in the business of roasting, marketing, and serving the much-loved cognitive enhancer. Here's the other big story about Starbucks: \$30 billion in revenue – compliments of frequent systematic upgrade of offerings.

As I write, a lot of businesses, religious organizations, academic institutions, tribes, political establishments, and nations are actively looking for leaders that have true commitment to leading others. To influencing peers. To owning the marketplace. To revolutionizing industries. To bringing positive change to and for the herd. If it's you, then I have a message for you: Read on!

Let's recap today's message - an organization that regularly upgrades its products and services sells more in the marketplace.



I'm not good at keeping secrets. I want to reveal something. To you. Today. Big revelation. About performance: The quality of your practice, training, personal development is the quality of your work. There is no iota of truth that the date on your birth certificate, the title on your business card, the badge of honor on your shirt (for those in military), or pigmentation of your skin, determines your work performance. What brought you here won't take you there. Show me one's personal development regimen and I'll show you one's results. If you want to ascertain one's performance, look no farther than one's training habits and rituals.

Abraham Lincoln understood this best and had a point when he challenged, "If I had 6 hours to cut down a tree, I would spend 4 hours sharpening my axe." Don't rush to execute before you're ready. Dedicate time to hone your skills. No matter how good your prospects may look, don't fall into the trap that befell Greek mathematician Archimedes who excited with a discovery rushed into the streets of Syracuse naked shouting 'eureka' before covering himself. Never mind the excitement generated by the discovery, look at the ridicule, embarrassment that Archimedes inflicted upon his family, friends, and himself. Rethink your eureka moment before taking it to someone or making it public. Never start a project before you collect and bring all materials on site.

A bride devotes time on her wedding day to groom herself before being unveiled to the would-be-husband. No person born of a woman came into the world as a finished product. After all, leaders are not born but made. We all have Achilles' heel that requires dusting off. I'm yet to come across an epic performer who doesn't set aside time in the lab to recalibrate his acumen. All men and women we admire as legends take time for dress rehearsal in isolation before staging public shows. Legendary producers, yes all of them, take time to panel beat and shine their wares before displaying them on the shelf. Epic performers, yes, all of them too, go through vigorous apprenticeship before they become icons of their industry. Former heavyweight boxer, Muhammed Alli, once said; "I hate the runs, press-ups, sit-ups in the gym, but I love the idea of being heavy weight champion of the world."

Just as Apple upgrades its iPhone, decide today to upgrade yourself. View yourself as a product; a product on a shelf in a grocery-shop with features, benefits, a value proposition. What is it that you want the product called 'you' to have so that it becomes a bestseller in the marketplace? What value propositions do you want this product labelled 'you' to have so that it becomes a product that attracts applause of peers; . . . so that it becomes a product that dazzles the marketplace; ... so that it becomes a product that out-marshals competition and brings panic among market peers?

Do you want to be the best in your department, organization, sector, market? If the answer is yes, I need to warn you before I share some vital information on the subject – there's no shortcut to success. Being successful is dangerous. Why? Because the moment you stop doing the very things that took you to the top, is the moment you start to slide back into the deep valley of oblivion and obsolesce. Oftentimes I come across people who lay victim to the law of reversed effort and wonder why they don't hit the bull's eye. You cannot use yesterday's knowledge to solve tomorrow's problems. Former CEO of Intel, Andy Grove,



advised that “smart actions lead to success, but success breeds complacency. And complacency breeds failure. So constant innovation is a necessity. Only the paranoid survives.”

The world is changing. Learn from the icons of the industry. Starbucks doesn't change its menu, nor does Apple upgrade its iPhone, nor does Intel innovate, nor did Muhammed Ali practice habitually for fun or because they have or had spare time. They're aware that customers' tastes, opponents' moves, competitors' strategies, and business macroeconomic fundamentals evolve. This reminds me of a Chinese proverb that says, 'all the flowers of tomorrow lie in the seeds of today.' In 2017, I bought and read a cracking book entitled *Quiet Leadership: Winning Hearts Minds & Matches* written by the greatest football coach and manager of all time, Carlo Ancelotti. The book offers useful insights into Ancelotti's leadership style. Commenting on how he was able to win trophies yearly, Ancelotti wrote in the book that at the end of each season, he bade farewell to his players with one piece of advice “. . . today's championship is the starting point of next year's performance.' Wise man. What advice do you give to your team?

Former British prime minister, Margret Thatcher, was not only a shrewd politician, but a witty leader too. She said these words many years ago, but her point is still relevant today, “you may have to fight a battle more than once to win it.” Develop grit. Practice without grit is useless. Commit to improving yourself relentlessly. Don't do it once as if it was a birthday, which comes once in a year. While talking about grit and habit formation, at the peak of his boxing career, Mike Tyson, in an interview with a newspaper reporter, remarked, “. . . there are three things that I do: I sleep, I practice, I eat.”

Spartans were brutal fighters and war mongers. They won almost every battle that they orchestrated and fought. What was the secret behind their habitual successes? Practice. Spartans had a strong conviction in one creed: “sweat more in practice, bleed less in war.” Spartan boys were literary weaned from their mothers' breasts and conscripted into army as early as age 5. They would, then, spend the rest of their lives in vigorous training for the army and fighting wars. There was no school for Spartan boys. But what did the Spartans leave behind, as legacy, for you and me, vis-à-vis significance of training? 'Sweat more in practice, bleed less in war.'

Most of us suffer from self-imposed de-professionalization of business. We treat personal development as painkillers instead of looking at it as multivitamins. Only to be taken on need basis and not continuously to remain healthy. We stop upgrading ourselves in certain areas of our profession, the moment we lay hands on professional certificates, such as ACCA, CIMA, ACIM, ACII and college degrees. We get carried away and contented with accolades and applause offered by peers. What a dangerous way to live! Neuroscience shows that knowledge gained through reading and examinations wears out with time. The neuro pathway fades off. The research goes on to say that unless one pursues vigorous continuous professional development in a certain field, by the time one reaches 110,000 hours from the date of the last examination, one's knowledge would have become trailblazed. The implications of self-imposed de-professionalization of business are multidimensional and unlimited. If we don't deal with them as soon as possible, they will deal with us in private life



and business. Is this not the reason university professors take sabbatical leave for attachments in industries of their expertise? Don't we see practitioners from different professions leave posh corner offices heading in opposite directions to lecture at business schools and universities? It's called reconditioning therapy. Self-renewal. Feeding the prefrontal cortex (brain's executive function) and limbic system (brain's memory bank). Eric Hoffer, beautifully painted the scene, "In time of change, learners inherit the earth while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." Yes, leadership is for learners and those that understand the process become epic producers, are highly sought and become successful and do great things.

Lester Chinyang'anya | General Manager - Operations | Minet Malawi