

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF ACHIEVEMENT

BY

ENGR. ERNEST C.A. NDUKWE
EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIRMAN, NIGERIAN COMMUNICATIONS
COMMISSION

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ABUJA

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

All protocols observed.

I would like to start by thanking the Institute of Personnel Management for the privilege extended to me as one of the guest speakers at this important occasion.

As many of you will know, I am an Engineer by profession, certainly more comfortable with circuits and switches than with semantics, but I think it would be useful to begin with a brief discussion on the exact definitions of the words contained in the topic at hand: Developing a Culture of Achievement.

First of all, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word Develop has several uses, but the two that are most relevant in this instance, are:

To gradually grow or become more advanced, and

To think or produce a new idea..and make it successful.

These definitions tell me two things. One, is that development is about first, conception; then, strategic action and finally execution. Secondly, that development is about gradual, consistent motion not about overnight results.

Next, the word Culture simply means a way of life of a group of people. On a broader perspective culture is formed through the identification and acceptance of certain common elements – whether language, arts, customs or social institutions. This tells me therefore that to develop a culture in any organization, one first has to identify and promote common elements upon which to build.

Finally, the word Achievement connotes success in reaching a particular goal, status or standard through effort and skill. Therefore, an achievement is not a one-time event, but an on-going process driven by actions and talents of people.

To summarize, these definitions show that the development of a culture of achievement is a gradual, forward-moving process, dependent on the ability to draw diverse peoples within an organization onto a common platform, by harnessing their energies and talents towards the execution of a specific goal.

That said, I have identified six key factors that can drive the development of a culture of achievement. These are:

- Leadership – the role of the Chief Executive
- Direction – the Vision and Mission of the organization
- Goals and Objectives – giving a voice to the vision and a map to the mission.
- Values – identifying and inculcating strong ethics and standards of conduct.
- Structure – establishing a robust yet responsive framework.
- Motivation – providing a stimulating and learning work environment.

LEADERSHIP – The Role of the Chief Executive

The Nigerian Communications Commission employs over 400 personnel, many of whom are seasoned professionals in such fields as engineering, accounting and law. I am fortunate to have several very able Directors and Deputy Directors supporting me, but I am keenly aware that as Chief Executive, the buck stops here. The responsibility for the organization's performance rests ultimately at my door. Recognizing and living up to this responsibility is one of the basic tenets of leadership.

To quote Dr Warren Bennis, Professor of Business Administration at the University of Southern California:

“Leadership is as much an art as a science. It is..primarily a combination of art, adventure, science, and, perhaps most important, purpose. Purpose has to do with ambition, with drive, with passion.”

Bennis goes on to say that only when imbued with these elements – purpose, ambition, drive, passion – can a leader truly have an authentic voice and the ability to engage others in shared meaning.

As Chief Executive of NCC, I am driven by an abiding sense of purpose, to improve the telecommunications industry in this country, to provide universal telephone access and to build a strong regulatory body that can guide the industry through the coming years. My responsibility is also to drive this sense of purpose throughout the organization. I am ambitious, not so much for myself, but for the Commission. I believe that my job as Chief Executive demands that I hold high expectations both of myself and of those that work with me. Mediocrity should never be an option. The key to developing a culture of achievement is through a continuous search for the better way, an unrelenting pursuit of excellence that has to be visibly led from the top.

DIRECTION – the Vision and Mission of the Organization

Yesterday, at the Nigerian Telecom Summit, one of the distinguished speakers said that NCC's role was to provide the "Rules of the Road" for the telecom operators. In the last three years, NCC has emerged as a strong voice both for the consumer and the industry and a guiding hand in the country's rapid telecommunications explosion. Our steering has been successful because we had developed our own "Rules of the Road" in the form of the NCC vision and mission statement, to direct our path.

A corporate vision is essentially an ideal or over-arching goal towards which the organization is working. A mission statement is an explanation of how the vision will be attained, how the organization will work, the environment in which it will operate and the standards by which it will abide.

The vision and mission statement represent the heart of an organization. At NCC, we try to develop and scrutinize every policy decision in the light of our vision and mission statement. We also try to articulate the vision and mission to both employees and the outside world. Thus our employees adopt a common focus and the organization sets up standards to which all stakeholders can hold it accountable.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES – Giving a Voice to the Vision and a Map to the Mission.

If the vision and mission tell where an organization is heading, the goals and objectives explain how to get there. Setting concrete, measurable goals and objectives is the only way to realize the principles of the vision and mission. Every department in the organization must develop its own objectives from the organization's corporate objectives. Every division or unit must similarly develop objectives based on the departmental objectives. Specific goals and objectives may differ but all should stem from and be imbued with the spirit of the larger corporate vision and mission statement. As Ed Woolard said, "Leadership today means empowering others to achieve their goals while ensuring that each individual's goals contribute to department and corporate objectives."

VALUES – Identifying and Instilling Strong Ethics and Standards of Conduct.

After the major corporate scandals that rocked the U.S. in 2002, corporate governance became the hottest topic in international business circles. Good corporate governance starts with a strong value system, the establishment of ethical and professional standards of behavior and business practice. CEOs must articulate, exhibit and promote these values to the best of their ability.

At NCC, our core values include what we call the "3 Fs" – to be Fair, Firm and Fortright in the discharge of our regulatory duties. By espousing and embracing these values, NCC has been able to earn a reputation as an agency where transparency and openness are extolled as virtues. Note for example, the GSM auction process which was widely praised for its fairness and transparency. The phenomenal improvements recorded in the telecom industry in Nigeria stem largely from the fact that NCC, as a corporate entity, has inculcated certain values, such as hard work, integrity and service. The greater good is always lifted above personal gain, and we guard our integrity carefully.

STRUCTURE – Establishing a Robust yet Responsive framework

An organization that lacks proper structure lacks the necessary foundation for on-going achievement. Structure is the skeleton upon which the flesh of mission, vision, goals and objectives can grow. Good company structure describes a framework that can maintain the corporate integrity of the company and protect its values. However, structure is not synonymous with bureaucracy, nor is it about unwillingness to innovate or consider new ways. Structure must be flexible and able to respond to rapid change.

One of the mottoes of the modern business world is “Adapt or Die.” This is a glaring reality in my field – telecommunications, where technology evolves at the speed of light. Instead of being reactive – waiting to see what happens and then figuring out a response, organizations must learn to be more proactive – identifying the catalysts and possible effects of change and formulating responses ahead of time. A culture of achievement is only possible when change is not only accepted, but embraced. Change agents and innovators must be encouraged at every level in the organization.

MOTIVATION and PERFORMANCE - Creating a Stimulating Work Environment.

The old saying goes, you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Employees may follow a set of rules or obey the dictates of a stern leader, but they may lack that self-motivating spark that fuels productivity and makes the difference between a good and a great company. This is why consistent promotion of an organization's guiding principles is critical. To live out the vision and mission of your company, the employees first have to buy into it. It is very difficult to make anybody effectively pursue a goal that he or she doesn't believe in.

The aim of every organization should be to give their workers a sense of opportunity and excitement by valuing them as individuals and helping them understand the role they play within the larger corporate body. This starts by putting in place a coherent recruitment policy to attract, develop and retain talent. Secondly, organizations must clearly articulate the competencies required for every job and measure employees against those competencies. If necessary, training, coaching, mentoring and other tools should be

employed to bridge any competency gaps. There should also be continuous evaluation of performance through appraisals and counseling.

Finally, organizations must find creative ways to motivate staff. We need to go beyond the bag of rice at Christmas, or an award for long service, to incentivize employees. A culture of achievement is closely tied to a culture of learning. Perhaps the only sustainable competitive advantage that any company has today is the ability to learn faster than its competitors. Your organization must be a learning organization. At NCC, manpower development is always top of our agenda. NCC staff attend international and local courses, conferences and other fora where they can benefit from information and knowledge exchange, learn about new technologies and processes and apply these new skills and information directly in the workplace.

Another way to engender a culture of achievement is to foster an entrepreneurial spirit among employees. This doesn't mean that organizations should encourage staff to spend office hours engaged in private practice. Rather, it is about bringing to bear some of the vigour, energy, creativity and commitment to the work of the company that a successful entrepreneur brings to his own private enterprise. In essence, it is about empowerment of the employee and the realization of the CEO that he is part of a team and cannot do it all. I don't claim to be wise, but I am wise enough to know that I don't know it all. I can't do it all. I must empower my colleagues to take decisions, allow them to solve problems, execute actions and yes, even make mistakes. Any CEO that tries to hold onto too tight to the reins of decision-making, will choke the creativity and productivity of the organization.

CONCLUSION

As a culture of achievement grows, organizations must also focus on sustaining the culture of achievement. At NCC, we face the challenge of trying to maintain our cultural integrity in the face of a rapidly evolving industry. Yet this is a challenge we must

overcome, because as is seen in society, a culture that is not carefully maintained and cherished will surely wither and fade. For culture to take root and develop, the organization must foster a sense of common purpose and direction based on a clearly articulated vision, mission statement, goals and objectives. Creating and keeping alive a culture of achievement is about commitment to strong values, to excellence, to learning and to responsible leadership.

Thank you for your attention.

Engr. Ernest C. Ndukwe, OFR

Executive Vice Chairman

Nigerian Communications Commission