

★ Job Advice

Get ahead in your career

A FINISHING SCHOOL FOR KENYANS

BY PAULINE ODHAMBO

How to dance, eat and dress appropriately are just some of the aspects of Finishing School that a growing number of professionals need to learn to help them clinch that crucial business deal.

Though some Kenyans would scoff at the idea of a Finishing School for CEOs and senior management,

others such as the Public Image Kenya CEO Derek Bhang'a say that the dining etiquette and appropriate conversation starters taught in such schools could boost your climb up the corporate ladder.

Since numerous networking ties are made at cocktail parties and such functions, it is important to make a good, lasting impression on prospective clients within that short period of time.

Learning how to move into a group politely and how to include bystanders and strangers in conversations at corporate parties are some of the few things that Public Image Kenya deals with.

The company has organized a five-day course on Finishing School scheduled to run from yesterday, August 25th, during which Kenyan professionals will have the chance to advance their

social skills. Finishing School as a course concept began in Europe in the 19th Century and was aimed at girls who had just completed their formal education.

Organizing tea parties and learning how to walk, talk and dress appropriately were some of the subjects taught to the girls to prepare them for married life.

However, Bhang'a argues, the confidence and

composure techniques of Finishing School are today relevant to both women and men.

Says Bhang'a: "We've borrowed concepts from the old-fashioned finishing schools to teach our students."

Experts say that it takes between 90 seconds to four minutes to decide whether or not we like someone. According to research by the BBC, 55 per cent of all first impressions are determined by body language and 38 per cent of the same by the tone, speed and inflection of the voice. What a person is actually saying counts for a mere 7 per cent.

Bhang'a continues: "First impressions are vital. You want to come across as confident and poised, so having polished shoes or wearing a suit that fits you correctly is very important whenever you meet clients for the first time."

"Having dirty fingernails is not an option, because it means you don't pay attention to detail. You can't expect a prospective client to trust you when

his multi-million-dollar accounts if your fingernails are chipped and grimy."

"Politics and religion are often some of the topics to be avoided during formal parties. It's best to avoid starting conversations where people might become too impassioned or too inflamed. In Kenya, a topic like politics is difficult to avoid, but it can ruin the ambience for the guests."

Other subjects to be included in the finishing course include Anger Man-

agement and Self Defence. The course, which mostly targets school leavers and working professionals, is to ensure easier adjustments in tense working environments.

Says Bhang'a: "It is important to learn how to address difficult bosses because you risk losing your job every time you're rude or impatient with your boss. A lot of professionals work late hours. Learning how to break free from night muggers is just one of the few things that could help someone get away from such a situation."

Bhang'a's business partner and founder of Public Image (UK), Diana Mather, teaches most of the courses at the school.

Mather has for the past 20-years taught corporate professionals the acceptable etiquette in both social and business occasions.

Her experience in both acting and media training are two essential tools that she incorporates in the role-playing exercises done by the students.

She explains that inviting a tea party could make potential clients more receptive to your ideas.

The ambient value of a tea party held in the home environment sometimes proves more endearing than the cold or formal business cocktails held in restaurants.

He concludes: "Kenya is rife with poor telephone skills and dead fish [limp] handshakes that do nothing to help a business."

These are the small details that can make or break a business."

Photo/ PAULINE ODHAMBO



ETIQUETTE MASTER: Limp handshakes are no good