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BUSINESS LIFE

ETIQUETTE ■ MWENDA WA MICHENI



Finishing school comes to town

Public Image Limited project manager Diana Muthiga (right) shows students how to create self image and a correct posture by balancing a book on the head. PHOTO: KENNEDY

Public Image, a UK based company, is finally here with lessons to connect the academic and social cultural skills

For the first time, the Kenyan business elite will have an opportunity to take their kids to finishing school courses.

"Kenya is slowly increasing her chances in the international business stage," observes Diana Muthiga, the managing director of Public Image. "We must be aware that the image we project to others is a sort of trade that makes or breaks deals." The author of these books: *Surviving the Media: ImageWorks for Men and ImageWorks for Women* is a town so elite executive with image skills and says that it's never too early or too late to learn image matters.

Immediately after leaving the British drama school, where she learned crucial vocal and body language skills, Diana joined the news team at BBC North. For ten years, she read news and did several interviews with businessmen and women working in companies and organizations in Britain.

"With her journalistic experience, Diana decided to fill in a gap that was left by the collapse of the British finishing schools with admission pegged

on ability to pay as opposed to social class. All the finishing schools in Britain closed down. Emphasis on academic rather than good manners and etiquette fell on the 'wayside,'" Diana says. This inspired the idea of Public Image. "Even with the fall of the finishing schools, there still was a need for good manners in the society."

At first, Public Image dedicated its efforts to business before demand arose that even men wanted the service.

Reestablished nearly 20 years ago, Public Image employs working brand owners, writers, actors and management professionals who are fully conversant with changing business trends. Its specialist training programmes are designed to improve employees' verbal and non-verbal communication skills and cultural awareness so as to allow their companies to profit from successful business communications.

The client list ranges from British

MPs, lawyers, university vice-chancellors, teachers, counsellors, TV presenters, PR executives and small business people.

"It is not enough just to be able to do the job," says Diana adding that "Chief executives and top managers need the finesse that puts them at ease in any company."

They require a certain amount of polish, which means being familiar with the social graces."

To achieve the perfect image, good sense of dress and knowledge of how to use their voices are also essential tools. Executive should also know how to conduct business abroad and how to navigate office politics. These are all areas of expertise where Public Image is ready to offer in the courses that will be running at the Pacific Hotel.

The course includes: The art of conversation, essential etiquette and good manners, dining etiquette and even department that includes standing and sitting with confidence and

style, handshakes and even walking as a way of projecting image. Body language and interpreting it, education and voice training are also part of the course that costs \$224,000.

Targeted are CEOs, senior managers, TV presenters, administrators, accountants, stockbrokers and other professionals. The popular slogan that image is everything is true cannot be over emphasised in the corporate world.

To earn the much needed competitive edge, companies must do even what they traditionally would have ignored without paying a very high price.

One of those is to ensure they recruit only the best—those who can project the desired company image and train those they already have in their work force—on matters image.

To attract the best brains and image, companies are ready to pay. Some will even be willing to spend more time walking the extra mile.

It is true that many companies in town are already taking the image thing very seriously in recruitment

After taking interviews through the rigours of the interview, they may among other things want to take prospective employees out for dinner to observe how they behave, how they speak and even how they eat.

Good manners

Mean the fork, adds the opportunity—no employer wants to understand there was no finishing school where you grew up. This all because, proper etiquette and good manners by the staff—within and even outside business—is becoming so important that no one wants to take chances with ill-mannered characters any more.

But the trouble does not end there. Company executives who have been training business people have to navigate smartly through new standards, whether in terms of etiquette or even simple rules of manners that they would have hitherto ignored.

In the modern sense, a finishing school would be somewhere graduates could take some time to learn whatever social and cultural lessons that business schools did not factor in their syllabi.