

**REMARKS BY DR. KENNETH S. OMBONGI,
PRINCIPAL KENYA UTALII COLLEGE AT THE
GENERAL STAFF MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
8TH JULY 2009 AT KENYA UTALII COLLEGE**

- Members of Management, the first floorers, the B5, who are here
- Ladies and gentlemen:

58 days ago, in the words of one newspaper reporter, I was plucked out the lecture halls of the University of Nairobi, where I was teaching, reading and writing history.

Since then, I have walked in and around this compound; I have had time to talk to many of you in your respective work stations. I have bumped into some of you in the corridors of this College. I have had interesting conversations with some you on phone; I have received many e-mails and text messages, some anonymous, some not, from many of you.

In all these interactions, a number of things have become glaringly and eloquently clear.

First, that KUC, and when I talk about KUC I don't mean Kisii University College but Kenya Utalii College, is a historic institution; an important institution that has played a leading role in this country in the 34 years of its existence.

And therefore it is a great privilege, it is a great honor, for a historian to come forth at the threshold of the second decade of the 21st century to determine the future of this great College.

The second thing that has come out of my more than a month's interaction with you is that you are great men and great women; people who have worked so hard for so long for so little in way of salary and wages; people who have worked diligently to make KUC a shining star that it has been and was meant to be.

The third thing I have learned in my short interaction with you is that KUC has been and is number one in hospitality and tourism training.

I have, also, appreciated that our greatest challenge now going forward is to make KUC remain number one. And this is the challenge we must tackle head on. We must tackle it now, here and today; tomorrow will be too late.

This challenge is manifested in the rampant wastage and pilferage in our offices, in our kitchens, in our hostels; manifested in the chorus of the blame game I hear all round; manifested in the disorder and haphazard ways we do certain things; manifested in the excesses we indulge in; manifested in the last minute rush visible in a number of things we do.

In a sense, I want to urge you my dear brothers and sisters, my dear fathers and mothers, and my dear friends that we need to embrace simple principles of management at all levels in our respective areas of operation to enable us do some kind of paradigm shift. This, in my view, is the urgency of the moment.

This is the first and foremost step, from within, to meet the challenge of making KUC remain number one.

And to do that, we have no option but to embrace the ideals represented by one little word called PROUS [spell it]. And I say it again, PROUS!

First, we have P for proactive; if we forward-plan, anticipate the needs of our operations, put off fire before it breaks out so to speak, we will avoid a number of situations I have seen in the College in the last 58 days. We will avoid a situation in which the driver only knows that the bus is faulty when it stops moving on our way to Amboseli National Park;

we will avoid a situation in which we need casual workers to move old files from the first floor of the administrative block to the archives; we will avoid a situation, in which we have secretaries with nothing to type; receptionists with no body to receive; house keepers who don't keep their houses.

Second, we have R for responsibility. If we are all responsible, if we take responsibility for the decisions we make and/or we don't make we will make life easy for everybody; we will avoid a situation in which I have to take between 20 to 25 minutes to sign one LPO; we will avoid the shouting matches I have witnessed outside the Purchasing and Stores offices; we will avoid the situation where I have to eat left-overs in the dinning hall because of the deep pain of watching food being wasted; we will avoid a situation in which we are forced to use broken trays in the dinning hall!

As the great British World War II Prime Minister, Winston Spencer Churchill, said responsibility is the cost of greatness. Let us be responsible.

Third, we have O in the word PROUS which is for optimism; I'm not old enough; indeed, for some of you what I'm doing here is way beyond my years. But I have lived long enough to argue that people are as productive as they think. Those who are optimistic that dark yesterdays will translate into brighter tomorrows always achieve more.

Cynics, those who always see the bottle half empty instead of half full, pessimists who cast doubts over anything and everything, will not go far.

Therefore, I say to you my friends where there is hopelessness, let there be hope; where there is hatred, let there be love; where there is no smile, let there be a smile; where there is darkness, indeed, let there be light.

If this happens, we will avoid situations in which people use foul and abusive language against their colleagues; we will avoid situations in which we send anonymous e-mails and text messages to colleagues; if we avoid being cynics, always looking at the negative side of things, we will give 1000 chances to our enemies to become our friends; we will not give a single chance to our friends to become our enemies.

The fourth letter in the word PROUS is U which stands for understanding. I once more say to you my dear brothers and sisters that seek ye to understand others before you seek to be understood. We live in an extremely precariously world. Life in Kenya today seems to be short, nasty and brutish, to use the words of the British Philosopher, Thomas Hobbes.

Those of us who supervise others, we should know that people come to KUC with emotional burdens on their 'shoulders', people come here with insurmountable financial woes; people come here every morning with deep thoughts of their wayward children. Yes, people come to Utalii with bodies that are failing them health wise.

Behold my dear chairs of departments, heads of divisions and a host of other supervisors in this institution; understand the emotions, fears, interests of the people who work under you. They are human beings first and then workers second. You may not trust their motives but please understand their reasoning; understanding where they are coming from.

Give them a shoulder to cry on, if need be; for those who call the mighty name of Jesus, lift their burdens at Calvary because Jesus is very near; that is another way of saying, my dear friends, please pray for and with them. For our Muslim brothers and sisters, lift them up to Allah, the most merciful, most graceful and His Prophet Mohammed *El Wa salam*.

The fifth and the last letter in the word PROUS is S for synergize. However skillful, however talented, however educated, however strong, you will need others to make Utalii remain number one. You are not going to do it alone; Kenneth Ombongi won't; first floor, on its own, won't manage anything; we are just but mortal beings.

For us to leave an indelible mark on what we do, we must synergize our skills, our talents and our education.

One popular proverb goes “If you want to go quickly, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.” Together we must keep Utalii College number one.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As you go back to your respective departments, as you go back to your various units of operations, better your best to keep KUC great. Be proactive; be responsible; be optimistic; be understanding; and work in synergy. Then and only then, can we say proudly, loud and clear, that this big vehicle, this big bus, called Kenya Utalii College is cranked up and we are all moving up the highway of success together as one!