Energy Group Holds Third GMD Conference in Sao Tome

Contributed by Bala Dan Abu
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Barrister Jimoh Ibrahim, group managing director of Energy Group, and about 200 chief executive officers and senior managers of the subsidiaries of the group meet in Sao Tome to discuss causes of failure of corporate organisations

The choice of Pestana Holiday Resort Hotel in Sao Tome, was the first evidence of the seriousness of the job at hand. Barrister Jimoh Ibrahim, group managing director of Energy Group, a conglomerate of about10 subsidiaries, had chosen a subject that was not only felicitous to modern corporate management but crucial to it. The subject was: “Working with Incompetent People – The Role of Managers.”

Pestana, Sao Tome’s best hotel, located by the seaside of the Republic of Sao Tome and Principe, provided a very relaxing ambience for the four-day lecture and group discussions during which the subject was treated in all its ramifications. Ibrahim had himself lit the candle that provided the light which guided participants into the dark and hidden aspects of the subject matter to ease understanding. His introductory remark on Wednesday, December 7, 2011, after the formal opening of the conference by a representative of the government of Sao Tome, had provoked a lot of thinking among conference participants and prepared the ground for the discussion that was to follow. All of these began after the participants, about 200 of them made up of chief executive officers and senior managers of all companies in the group, had registered for the conference on arrival the previous day, and had had a full rest. In consonance with the tradition of the Energy Group, proceedings began only after a 30-minute devotional prayers and worship led by Bishop Steven Ogedengbe. Thereafter, it was time to dissect the subject for the understanding of the participants and Ibrahim, who was the main speaker and lead discussant, began by reminding, participants to learn to put God first in the conduct of affairs in their various companies. Thereafter, discussion was focused on why big companies fail even after more than a century of existence, the role of the corporate malady called incompetence, in such organisations, how to identify incompetent workers in an organisation, the various manifestations of incompetence, the risk incompetence poses to the survival of companies, and how to handle incompetent workers. One of the points which Ibrahim emphasised as a fundamental mistake of most successful companies is over-celebration of their achievements. “Success is an intoxicating liquor and often leads to the failure of companies which ought to have remained on top.”

In most cases, managing growth leads to crisis which comes in stages. This includes the desire by the successful company for even greater success. This often leads to excessive and reckless acquisition and expansion. The next stage of the crisis that would inevitably cripple the organisation is denial of risks, that is the tendency to conceal the fact that the organisation is on the decline, and in fact, rolling down into the valley of failure. At that point, if nothing is done to reverse the situation, it will relapse and begin gasping for salvation, after which it gets strangulated to death. The conference also provided answers to many of the challenges that managers and other levels of corporate leaders could face where there are incompetent workers and how to handle such workers. Ibrahim, the Energy Group’s leader, was emphatic that managers must always identify incompetent workers and make them competent.

Another step towards solving the problem is to adopt the “soft approach.” This requires leaders to be open on the actual state of the organisations they run. “Leaders should not build a ring around themselves, but should rather talk to their workers. Their communication skill must be perfect. They should endeavour to run their organisations as a community.” The third of such approach is “Full Disclosure” Everybody in the organisation should know what is happening and when this is done very well, the staff would themselves become public relations agents for the organisation. But again, Ibrahim was emphatic that the soft approach should not lead to sympathy and tolerance of wrongdoings. “Managers must not accept what’s is wrong,” he said.

The fourth, is that managers must put a long-term plan in place that would take cognisance of envisaged changes in the economy.

The conference was not only very successful in terms of knowledge gained by the participants but also as an opportunity to interact with Ibrahim whose burden of running a large conglomerate which is still expanding into several continents of the world has kept him on the move.