

Lions, sheep, shepherds, and the the unending pursuit of meaning

Our columnist is a graduate in stoicism, a virtue (or flaw, according to some) that is part genetics and part symptomatic of the lingering post-traumatic stress disorder of growing up in 80s Uganda.

Yet even he felt a tinge of emotion, even a slight moistening of the old glass bead, by the farewell from the newsroom last week and the warm words that followed elsewhere.

Newsrooms, the uninitiated might want to know, have the chaos of a democracy and the discipline of a military dictatorship.

Everyone has an opinion and a voice, and everyone is encouraged to speak up. One can tell the health of a newsroom by how much argumentation goes on and how well teams disagree without becoming disagreeable.

Yet decisions, once taken, are not countermanded. Dissent is allowed; treason isn't.

Foot soldiers in most newsrooms believe that they are an army of lions being led by a sheep. Many editors, on the other hand, see themselves as lions commanding an army of sheep. Wisdom lies in knowing when to be a shepherd, and when a lion.

I was humbled and at times also surprised by the memories. It was also a bit schizophrenic: those who worked closely with me in my earlier days recalled the feisty, tough, arse-kicking and take-no-prisoners moments.

Younger ones spoke of a calm, even mysterious version that was at once real, yet unrecognisable.

It will take a while to all bed in, but the more I listened, the more I was convinced that I had made the right call.

It wasn't just the realisation of how many of my contemporaries long left the newsroom and the profession, but how many, too, of the younger journalists that I might have had a hand in recruiting, supervising, or even mentoring.

Mzee Amani Mushega likes to say that one can never be considered a good leader until they have identified and nurtured able successors.

I daresay they must also be willing to hand it over to them and let them fly. It is something leaders elsewhere might be encouraged to try.

I've been lucky to work with some of the finest journalists this country has produced. If the sun ever shone on your columnist, it simply reflected the sum parts of their talent and hard work. Of course, the mistakes were always mine.

I would get into trouble if I tried to name names here, but many know themselves. There were those who were unsure but had all the talent and simply needed affirmation.

Then there were those who had the talent but were too lazy and needed a kick up their backside! Then there were those who were low on talent but very eager and dependable.

These workhorses of the newsroom never win awards but are the mantlepiece on which newsroom awards rest.

Hidden from public view, and sometimes even from the newsroom itself, are the so-called "sup-

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Daniel K. Kalinaki
In My View



port staff" but whom I always considered to be non-commissioned officers, but officers all the same.

These are the men and women who take care of the newsroom so that the journalists can take care of the journalism.

Led by Aidah Nalubega and David Mukwaya, they included other essential civilians like Betty Nanyunja, Julius Kalyango, George Kamugisha, Harriet Apolot, Olivia Nakitende, James Mashua at Nation Centre and many others who were there at opening and closing time, every day.

If an army marches on its stomach, newsrooms survive on the resourcefulness of their non-journalistic staff. I can't thank them, and the journalists, enough.

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But comfort zones dull the mind and stymie growth. The next stage is to find what the Japanese call *ikigai*, or reason for being.

It combines what one loves, what one is good at, what the world needs, and what one can be paid for. But it goes beyond work and includes hobbies, relationships, and daily moments of joy.

The struggle continues, but at a slower pace, and with a more intentional search for meaning. To my newsroom people, thank you for letting me shepherd you, and forgive me if I sometimes roared too loudly, or not loudly enough.

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