

Slowly, slowly catch a monkey

I doubt many of you, or in fact *any* of you, have ever contemplated catching a monkey. There is a saying in Africa that goes slowly, slowly catch a monkey. And although it may sound strange, the meaning is very appropriate.

Not only to the actual catching of a monkey if required, but also to the pursuit of a wide variety of challenges through life.

If you tried to catch a monkey in a hurry you would surely fail. I highly doubt the wise African man or woman who coined this phrase originally meant it

exclusively to the act of actually catching a monkey! More than likely it was intricately woven into a colourful and dramatic story that was expertly used to grab the attention of the village youth, inadvertently guiding their behaviour towards patience, diligence and perseverance. And of course, towards team work and accountability.



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Catching a monkey requires one to know not only the monkey's habits, but its habitat. Understanding its strengths, weaknesses and its support system is a must. What motivates him? Only then will you know how to catch him. But, be warned; you may not always succeed the first time or even the second time. Or even perhaps the third. This metaphor transcends many walks of life. This is what my story is about. Does it not address the monkeys in all of us?

USING NATURE AS AN ANALOGY

The New Financial Forum celebrates original thought and inspiration to change. I believe that by using nature as an analogy, we can again connect a more sustainable form of leadership with our modern world and systems. There is so much evidence of this growing trend around us.

Perhaps one of the most significant shifts in the modern corporate world is the move away from the sometimes callous pursuit of short term financial gains to a mindset more orientated to 'business wellness'. A far more holistic, balanced and durable culture that very much values and nurtures the well being of employees and consumers, while simultaneously playing a positive and proactive role in environmental and social responsibilities. A gradual and patient process indeed. Is this not 'boardroom speak' for *slowly, slowly catch a monkey*?

The energised, immaculate and stimulating atmosphere of a busy office may seem far removed from the colourful, noisy, shoulder to shoulder energy of an African market place. But I believe the thread of basic human understanding, not to mention the thirst for personal growth, has no boundaries. Perhaps the gravest mistake we can make is in thinking that not much can be learnt around a humble fireplace... Or even around a boardroom table, for that matter.

THE WISDOM OF AFRICAN ELDERS

Even as an African, when I hear the word Africa, it thrills me to my core. It evokes a multitude of thoughts and images – from harsh dry thorn trees and vulture-filled skies to painted shack fronts with misspelt slogans inviting one for a beer and a haircut. Majestic herds of elephant casual in their knowledge of belonging. The colourful garb of women collecting firewood, with the joy that is only found with acceptance. Shoeless children playing tag on the roadside, in no hurry to reach school for the bell. Silver-haired old men honouring the blessing of another day, as

they sit in the comfort of each other's company. The wisdom of African elders suggests patient dialogue can resolve many issues, no matter where they may be. And yet more images are becoming synonymous with the Africa I know, with stories spreading from the fireplace to the boardroom, and in return.

It is both interesting and irrevocably baffling to know that in your average African market every bag of tomatoes will cost you the same! Every avocado, every draw (a single cigarette) and every loaf of bread will cost you the same, no matter which stall you choose to buy from. You will find twenty stalls in a row, all looking identical with the exact same produce on display. The ladies running the stalls appear relaxed and non-pulsed. While they will try to entice you to visit their stall, they will not generally try and lure you away from another. Tomorrow is another day.

FOR ALL TOMORROWS TO COME

I was sitting in a mall coffee shop recently, working on my laptop, when a couple sat down next to me. I was enthralled by their demeanour and conversation which so confidently excluded everyone else. They were immediately engaged in a bold conversation about God. "Why must you always challenge God?" the man asked as he whipped out his iPad and rapidly swiped across the screen finding a relevant verse from his paperless bible.

By this stage I was well aware that I was eavesdropping and I had to wonder what I found so intriguing that I was being so rude. I realised that what I was witnessing was change, and what I was feeling was the sheer excitement to be a part of it! The passionate iPad-wielding pastor and his companion were modernised, dynamic South Africans finding time within their busy business days to block out all and everyone else to sit around their campfire and share.

Are the guides of the modern business world leading us down a path that interprets success as an honourable, balanced journey rather than a short term outcome? Perhaps blending the strategy checklists of the organised corporation with the underestimated fire-side *indabas* (meetings) of the wise illiterate African could ensure we maximise all the shareholders returns for today and for the tomorrows to come. ■

 www.wildernessvision.org

 [Alan McSmith op YouTube](#)





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