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Ethiopia Today

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Poverty...Work...Satisfaction...PMO

It was Friday, the last office day of the week. I enter my office early at 8:20 am. I know it is early, but it is better than being late. Actually my dad was the one who made me wake up early (6:00 AM) in the morning, as I have a trend of exercising before anything else. By the time that I got up from my bed, my neighborhood was totally asleep. The cloudy sky was wrestling with the natural forces in its wish to shower onto the rusted corrugated iron roof of my neighborhood. I asked myself a couple of questions, which may actually seem ridiculous.

Does this cloud know that it is wishing to fall onto the roofs of the poorest people on earth? Why do we become poor? Can anybody imagine that up to 5 people could sleep on a small bed in my old, tarnished, jumbled and poor neighborhood? Is life really fair to let some people pay thousands of dollars for sleep-therapy since they cannot get asleep on their sumptuous bed surrounded by custom-designed pillows, while others are enjoying it in the middle of a mess? What is a question worth if it cannot be answered, though? What is a human being worth if it cannot get the fundamental human necessities? What is life worth if it could not be given the value that it should be accorded? What will history preach about my poor neighborhood after 40 or 50 years? Emmmmm...No Answer!

Understanding that simple answer could not be found to the questions, I got back to my exercise, and did it furiously. Then, I took a shower, dressed up and went out to work. Oh, today's stuff is heavy. I have a Millions Birr project document which is on *Drug Control System Improvement*, that is supposed to be funded by UNODC (United Nations Office on Drug and Crime), WHO (World

Health Organization), MSH (Management Sciences for Health) and the Ethiopian government, that I have to finish appraising as early as possible, a book about king Tewodrose II (My Favorite king) that I have started reading, and other work related papers.



I got a taxi to take me to my work place. The only vacant place in the minibus (Similar to the Pictured One) was at the back seat, which according to a new traffic law is supposed to accommodate four persons. Thanks lord, I'm slim enough to fit into this crowd-a crowd of three fat individuals, one guy in his 40's dressed up with suit holding his big lawyer-like suitcase, one young lady intensely perfumed, and a traditionally dressed old lady.

I moved to one of the front seats as a lady left the taxi around Hilton Addis. Now it was better. I took out my notebook and started to memorize and prioritize my To-Do-List. Meanwhile, the lady next to me, I guessed her age to be 28-30, dressed in an ethical way, says a word. *Heading to work?* Yes, I said. *Where do you work at?* Ministry of Finance and Economic Development. *What do you do there?* I'm a Project Expert in my profession, I *appraise* projects. *What does that mean?* Feeling thwarted with the fact that my job is not easy to understand to a normal person, I murmured, I evaluate projects before they go to financial arrangement and implementation. *What then?* Either they will be accepted (in which case they will go ahead to financial arrangements and implementation), or they will be ignored, or be recommended to go through some changes. *Oh, now, I got the clue, you are the Yes/No man. By the way, do you like what you do?* Eh-eh-eh...yes.

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Pause

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What do you do? I asked. *I'm a business owner. I have a cafe and restaurant chain at three spots in Addis. It has been two years since I got engaged in this hospitality business...*

That part of the conversation that I had with a lady in the taxi enlightened me to ask myself an important question, that I would like to address in this month's edition of our sailing boat *pmworldtoday*. The question is; what will make working in a PMO enjoyable?

What makes working in a Project Management Office (PMO) enjoyable?

Working in a PMO as a project expert specializing in infrastructure projects has taught me invaluable lessons (on both life and professional matters). Thus, my answer to the above question will totally depend on the experience that I have acquired while working in it. Working in a PMO is really enjoyable.

The secrets behind are:

I. Cooperation

Cooperation is a vital characteristic in a PMO. The cooperation could either be internal or external. As there is little/no individual work in a PMO, cooperation within the PMO itself is imperative to its efficient functionality. Further, cooperating with project managers (and project offices) of the different projects that are being supervised by the PMO, their sponsors, and stakeholders is also fundamental, as the successful completion of the projects is a shared value to the PMO. Working in such an environment will make your day bright as you have to effectively collaborate with your colleagues in the PMO and other stakeholders. Even, in the case that you may have felt low in your heart, the collaboration will ease the things and make you smile at yourself. What is more idyllic than smiling at yourself?

II. Helping Others

One of the basic reasons behind the establishment of a PMO is to provide support to the different projects (and project offices) under a given project portfolio in a centralized manner. While you work in a PMO, you may be assigned to help the project manager/director or coordinator, and/or the specialists working under the projects, in a specific area of concern. It could be procurement, change management, information management, quality control, human resource management, or risk management. Your concern, therefore, will be to help others achieve their targeted goal by showing them alternative solutions. As the saying "The good you do to others will come back to you" goes, helping to fix the problems in the projects will ensure the sustainability of the PMO, making you feel happy for what you did.

III. Recognition

The PMO is an agent to the senior management of an organization. In so doing, it will advise, coordinate, support and train units at project level while it reports directly to the senior management of the organization. Hence, everything that is done in the PMO will be talked about at the desk of the CEO and other senior management units. If you do well in the PMO, you will easily be recognized, while at the same time you are the closest to be blamed for the bad things at project level. For an employee, recognition is a treasure, as it will be converted to real time income at some point in his carrier.

IV. Good Working Environment

One of the major factors, which determine employee morale, is working environment. The working environment in which an employee is assigned to work at shall be as per his heart's desire. The things that he/she wants in his office, the type of furniture that he will be working at, the friendly relation with his colleagues, the management style that he will be adhered to, the interrelationship between employees and bosses, and other tangible and intangible elements of the working environment will determine the extent with which the employee will be initiated to achieve his goal. In most of the PMOs, these things will be given high value seeing that the intricated job of a PMO employee needs his inclusive attention and hearty commitment.

V. Competitive Salary

In this era of information and technology, project professionals are highly wanted. Accordingly, they are of the highly paid group of professionals. As PMO is strategically crucial to company development, maintaining high caliber professionals will be critical. If you want the best, then, you got to pay the highest. That is what is happening in the realm of project management (Me, No! I may be mentioned as the poorest PMO employee in the world, but still I'm good).

Thus, why wouldn't working in a PMO be enjoyable, provided that good working environment, flexible structure, easy recognition, competitive salary are put together to facilitate the mental satisfaction of helping others achieve a shared goal? I think this was my basis for the "YES" to the lady in the taxi!

I wish you a Happy PM Month!

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