

## **Quality Should Count More Than Quantity In Rwanda**

For Rwanda to compete and win it cannot compromise on quality. This applies to education quality every bit as much as it does to the quality of coffee for export or the quality of building construction. Quality is embraced where high standards are first put in place and then, unwaveringly enforced. These standards may be home-grown or they may mirror standards in place in the countries with which Rwanda wishes to compete. Once put in place, there can be no compromise on enforcement of quality standards. Any wavering on this point is fatal. Why? Because there will always, always be those who do not make the grade, who do not meet the standard. Every time such underperformers are admitted into the fellowship of the successful, a vicious negative chain reaction begins:

First, those already holding the certificate indicating that they have met the stringent quality standards imposed, find their credentials devalued. Why? Because those who have not earned the certificate, legally possess it. Worse, they legally compete for - and obtain - jobs, based on that certificate. When they perform badly in critical tasks the quality standards were designed to emphasize, they are embarrassed or exposed.

Then, the institution that condoned lowering its standards - whether by admitting, retaining or graduating the underperformers, has its standards and reputation questioned. When that happens, employers, customers, educational institutions - even family members - begin to legitimately ask if all those known to them, and known to possess the same credential, might not have simply been given the credential, in some deal whereby quality was conveniently overlooked when someone cried, pleaded, begged or complained to an influential authority figure.

Next, those lowering their standards are inundated with requests from students for special treatment whereby, rather than earning their grade or their admissions place, or their diploma, they - the students -- can have it simply given to them. The trickle becomes a flood. All quality is forgotten and the precious time allotted to real teaching is instead irretrievably wasted listening to the feeble justifications of the underperformers as to why quality should be ignored or overlooked.

Finally, each incident of forsaking quality leads to another and another, for once the precedent has been set, it is difficult to justify why the bar of quality should not be lowered further.

Those aspiring to join the fall 2010 intake into the MBA program at the School of Finance and Banking (SFB) in Kigali were faced with two quality

hurdles - in the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Graduate Management Achievement Test (GMAT). The minimum acceptable grade in each screening test was set at the same level as in SFB's partner institutions for the delivery of its postgraduate programs. These institutions are the Maastricht School of Management in the Netherlands in the case of the GMAT and the University of the Pacific in the United States in the case of the TOEFL. Quality evolves from benchmarking against the best -- not in Rwanda - but in the world, as SFB has done. In holding the applicants to the quality standards of these international institutions, not one applicant to SFB passed both exams. Over 95% of applicants passed neither exam.

There was no fall 2010 MBA intake to the School of Finance & Banking. Over the vociferous protests of everyone from senior SFB management to the aspiring students to their sponsors and political patrons, SFB chose quality. In the face of dire predictions that future students would opt instead for MBA programs with easier admissions criteria, leaving SFB with no future pool of candidates from which to draw, SFB chose quality.

SFB will be offering a fee-based remedial course for the first quarter of 2011, to those who did poorly on the MBA screening tests. The course will also be open to those who have not yet taken these tests but who want to improve their scores and their chances prior to applying to SFB. The School is offering this course because it is committed to helping prospective students succeed without lowering its standards.

SFB will not waver in its commitment to quality over quantity - whatever the cost.

Professor Reid E. Whitlock

Rector

SFB