

Mount Disappointment

In 1824 an expedition commissioned by the Governor of New South Wales, Australia and led by Messrs. Hume and Hovell, set out on what is regarded as one of the most significant journeys of exploration of eastern Australia. Amongst other things they were tasked with finding new grazing land in the south of the colony as well as a route from Sydney to what is now Melbourne.

Tired and exhausted after endless hiking the group wanted to call it a day and return home. However Hume persuaded them that from the mount to which he pointed, they would see the Southern sea board and thereby realise their journey's purpose and end. They crested the mount, but because of the expansive vegetation and faulty instruments, hopes were dashed. Before them the horizon was an unending corrugation of hills and valleys. In the disappointment and dejection of being mistaken, Hume named the outcrop Mount Disappointment.

Not every leader has undertaken the arduous task of Hume and Hovell, but every leader whether Supervisor or CEO has, following an error of judgment, an irrational decision, or allowing his emotion to triumph over reason, found themselves sitting atop their Mount Disappointment.

Leaders' mistakes take them on many and varied lonely trails. The mistakes giving rise to such meanderings tend to fall into regular groupings. Over the next three editions we will examine some of the erroneous paths leading to Mt. Disappointment. Our point in doing so is, as someone wisely quipped, 'greater progress is often made in leadership when ceasing a besetting weakness, than in learning a new skill.' Leaders might improve their effectiveness and progress if they would simply stop climbing the wrong mountains.

Leading a group and being responsible for its performance is not the same thing as knowing everything! For too many the mantle of leadership imposes an unhealthy and undue expectation that they should know everything. Too many leaders forget that the mark of their greatness is not in knowing everything, but in being willing to learn everything. Simply put, too many leaders forget to remain teachable.

They suffer the delusion that a title General Manager or General Director means they should be omniscient – all knowing. As Carnegie said *"The question is not whether you can do everything yourself, its how soon you realise you cannot"* The sooner a leader grasps Carnegie's words the less Mt. Disappointments will be camped at and the fewer frustrated team-players there will be to pacify. That is the first error, not being teachable.

Many Mt. Disappointments are climbed with the genuine conviction and determination, like Hume, that "we are on the right track". This gives rise to the second error of leadership: when errors are discovered, too few raise the hand and stand up and accept the responsibility. Mess and errors are part of business life, things go wrong, and as John Steinbeck noted *"even the best laid plans of mice and men often go astray"* (paraphrased).

In seeking to avoid accountability, leaders change through the deceit of blame-shifting and avoiding responsibility, what might have been an "understandable" or "acceptable" error, into something far more serious and attracting increased attention. Consequentially, they lose the respect of colleagues, and incur the derision of their detractors. Just reflect if Bill Clinton had admitted immediately to his relationship with Monica Lewinski. In ten days the scandal would have passed, and he would have saved himself, his wife, his daughter (never mind the party) the humiliation of tabloid headlines for almost twelve months.

Oh, for a few good, noble leaders who stand by what they do, without being swayed by applause or fear and who avoid being tempted to pretend to know everything!

Not withstanding the pain and disillusionment with Mount Disappointment there are redemptive affects that sitting atop such mountains produce. In addition to looking at other mistakes, we will examine some of the redemptive nature of disappointment next month.

Until next time Yebo!

P.S. Have you visited www.stennyafrika.com

