



Your attitude reflects the color of your bird

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IN MANY organizations, certain problems are obvious and some others are invisible that we don't see their adverse effects until they have become too late to be solved. Many people are oblivious to those problems, or they just don't care if their company loses money or not. Conversely, the management is seen at fault if it does not create a working environment that empowers employees to look for problems to solve, such as cost cutting.



Active cost cutting is one big step toward profitability. After all, problems and solutions are in the same place, if not found in the person or persons who created them. If your organization does not care because it is earning a lot of money, or if the wastage does not bug you enough, or management does not require cost saving as part of everyone's KPI (key performance index), then sure enough, no one in the organization would be able to discover them, until they have driven the company to the point of no return – bankruptcy.

This corporate absurdity takes its roots from the 1835 Danish fairy tale called “The Princess and the Pea.” The story goes like the usual fare, except for the ending.

A handsome prince wanted to marry a princess. He was introduced to many, but still couldn't find a suitable woman for his wife. The prince, being picky, would often find something wrong in every princess presented to him.

He suspected they couldn't be real princesses because of their loud characters and uncouth table manners. At one time, he was introduced to a new array of princesses, all well mannered, but he found them either too chubby or skeletal, if not beautiful enough to his princely taste.

One stormy night, a young beautiful woman drenched in the rain sought shelter in the castle. She lost her way and told the mother of the prince that she was a princess from a neighboring castle. To test the woman's claim, the prince's mother offered her a bed towering with 20 mattresses topped with several feather pillows and blankets.

The 20 mattresses covered a piece of pea that was placed by the prince's mother at the bottom of the bed. She thought that if the guest were a real princess, she would feel the discomfort despite the layers and layers of mattresses in her bed.

The following morning, when the prince's mother asked her how she slept, the guest was courteous to tell the truth. She told her host that she endured a sleepless night because of something hard in the bed that bruised her body. The prince and her mother were elated with the discovery of a real princess, who had the sense of discomfort of a small pea through such excessive quantity of bed materials.

The prince and his newly discovered princess got married in time and lived happily thereafter.

Last week, armed with this story in mind, I facilitated an exclusive workshop on Kaizen Blitz to a Batangas-based factory that was successful in identifying its own "pea" in the form of operational wastes, many of which are hidden underneath layers and layers of "mattresses." The 25 participants underwent a series of activities to help them discover their "pea," worth at least P120 million of potential savings.

Despite their success in discovering their "pea," the workshop participants continued to be tested as part of their orientation to solving problems. I told them about the case study of the blue bird:

One morning, a blue bird flew into your room through an open window. For you, the blue bird is a symbol of good fortune. Imagine, of all places, your room happened to be its choice of a place to enter, so you decided to keep it in a cage and care for it. The following morning, to your utter surprise, the bird changed its color from blue to yellow.

"I'm feeling lucky. There must be something special in this bird," you told yourself.

The third morning, the same bird changed its color again overnight to bright red. And on the fourth day, the bird's hue turned to white this time. On the fifth day, the bird turned itself into black.

You began to ask yourself, what could be its color on the sixth day? Then you made a wish – that this bird would change into your favorite color, permanently:

#1 You wish it would turn back to its original blue color.

#2 You think the bird should be permanently white.

#3 The bird should turn itself into gold.

#4 It should be black.

I told the participants to choose a color from the four colors mentioned.

The 25 participants dispersed quickly and positioned themselves under the signpost representing their favorite color. I then showed them the meaning of their choices according to

the interpretation of psychologists Tadahiko Nagao and Isamu Saito in their book “Kokology: The Game of Self-Discovery” (2000):

“As we close this workshop on problem-solving, I’d like to help you interpret the meaning of the color you’ve chosen,” I told the group. “This should help you understand how you will approach problem-solving in the future.

“Those who sought blue means they’re ‘practical optimists.’ People who landed below the white post ‘are cool and decisive under pressure.’ Those who prefer gold are described as ‘fearless’ of problems and their pressures. While those who prayed that the bird stays black have ‘a pessimistic outlook.’”

I’m glad only two out of 25 participants chose black.

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