



## From “Shredding” to Performance Improvement

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Amaka was recently appointed as the Head of Human Resources at Marula Pensions - a mid-sized Pension Fund Administrator (PFA) with its Head-Office in Lagos, Nigeria. She had very big shoes to fill, as her predecessor, Ibrahim was a founding staff of Marula and had built quite a reputation within and outside Marula, and the Pension Industry before reaching the retirement age of 55 years.

Amaka had worked in the operations Department at Marula and had a stint in Marketing and Relationship Management. She had no real experience in Human Resources Management except being a Line Manager herself and dealing with people issues as part of the daily grind. One of her first assignments was attending a Quarterly Performance Review (QPR) session on a very hot and humid Saturday in Lagos.

The weather was hot outside, but it paled in comparison to the temperature in the Company’s Board Room on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor where the meeting took place in spite of the two air-conditioners that seemed to be working perfectly. These QPR sessions always ended up in a blood-bath. The ED and the CEO were very tough on the Regional Managers (RMs) and the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) and the result was as usual - bruised egos; palpable fear and resentment; and lots of transferred aggression back in the offices across the country.

As Amaka drove back home that evening, she ran into some un-remitting traffic congestion on Ikorodu Road - apparently a big lorry heading towards Ikeja had broken down and there were no LASTMA officials at that time to re-direct the traffic. The congestion gave her a lot of time to reflect on the QPR session and the general culture at the organization, and she wasn’t generally pleased with what she observed.

On Sunday, she struggled out of bed early in the morning and headed to Mass at St Agnes in Maryland. She stayed back for the “Legion of Mary” meeting, which didn’t start on time, and got an odd chance to talk with her mentor from many years, Joy Anumah who was also a Legionnaire. “Aunty Joy isn’t there a better way of running these QPRs?” “All that happens is that a few of the RMs who did well in the quarter under review get fist-pumps and pats on their backs, while the others get shredded and threatened, and leave very downcast and with a clear mission to transfer the aggression back to their teams. I recall how my RM back then used to



literarily shave our heads back then after the QPR sessions”. “The worst part for me is that the needle of performance doesn’t seem to move an inch, and this quarter’s heroes end up being next quarter’s villains, and the vicious cycle of shredding, fear and under-performance continues.”

“Interesting that you brought this up, I just completed a workshop on Human Performance Improvement - it is also called Performance Consulting and the facilitator, Dr Feese was awesome. It is all about getting HR people and business leaders to start using Periodic Performance Reviews as Problem Solving Sessions to generate ideas to improve performance and not just “shred” people the way you described”. She even has a short video on YouTube (2 minutes max), let’s find somewhere to sit and watch it before the meeting starts...

Armed with what she watched, Amaka spent most of Sunday evening reading more from Dr Feese’s website and watching her videos. It was an eye-opener. Amaka decided to run an experiment with the Lagos and South West RM and his team on Monday since they were still around from the weekend meeting.

She ran a “mock” Performance Consulting session, using various tools for diagnosing root-causes, identifying interventions and working with the RM and his four Team Leads to develop a plan of action to implement and improve performance. The session was different and impactful - there was no blaming, and everything was up-beat, creative and focused on problem-solving.

‘Amaka, this is awesome, I see where we have been getting things wrong all this while” said the CMO, Adesuwa, who had also joined the sessions. Certainly, we need to have this replicated across the organization and get the two EDs and MD to see how valuable this will be”.

Ma, I am not sure I am ready for MD and EDs yet, as I just stumbled over this and need to learn more and practice, but you are right, we have certainly been getting things wrong. We need to move our QPRs from shredding to problem solving and performance improvement”

**Are you concerned about the QPR and MPR sessions in your organization? Will you like these sessions to be more focused on problem-solving and performance improvement, rather than “shredding” and a culture of fear and blame? Then, call us on +234 818 195 6161 to explore how can we support you in this regard.**

