

## **5 Principles of The Story You Tell**

### **about your life**

**(C V Magavilla 2010)**

- 1) Be the author of your story; do not relegate yourself to the role of an editor or co-author.**
- 2) Every story has a beginning and an ending that brings with it a meaning for a new beginning; a life lived is never for not.**
- 3) Have the end in mind, even if it is just the end of a chapter and make sure it reflects what you want not just what you need.**
- 4) Tell your story until it becomes a reality – we are what we think.**
- 5) Make sure your story is interesting – take risks and enjoy the reward of an interesting story that you will want to tell time and again.**

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**The story you tell**

**Growth**

**and**

**The end of a chapter**

By C V Magavilla

Having been raised by what would typify your Chinua Achebe post independence African urban dwelling parents, I must say that, like many others in my shoes, I got the best of that era. The richness of African storytelling was alive in our household. My father, your typical African father rising from that era, is a self imposing but highly gifted storyteller. He really knows how to stir up a crowd. His stories are often real life stories capturing, not only events that detail varied moments in his and the lives of those he had encountered, but also serving to highlight the underlying essence of the same to his own growth. Whether he was the hero or the villain, is almost never material, as the stories are always commanding of the attention and imagination of the crowd. He is not alone. Story telling was a way of life in Africa such that it defined life itself. Who doesn't remember the stories of our late Father of the Nation, Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere? Stories we tell or hear instill values, transfer

knowledge, guide actions and manage expectations in the face of uncertainty. My father would often tell his stories so much so that they would become a reality, at least in his world...

I guess we all enjoy telling our story. I realized, not too long ago, that I too tell stories about my life. Every time I do or do not do something, it is often the outcome of the story I am telling myself about what I am going to do or not going to do. What this means is that I am often writing my own story even without knowing it.

### ***The story you tell...***

In my many years of work as a career marketer and personal motivator, I never aspired to be anything in particular or gain any accolade for my efforts. For whichever reason(s), achieving something specific never registered in my mind as being a worthwhile ambition. I was, though, motivated by a deeper reaching desire to continue in my quest to change the way things are done, change the world, and have influence over the way people think, feel and act. At the time of the beginning of my professional career journey, not more than 10 years ago, only three fields seemed to offer me that sort of fulfillment in Tanzania: politics, consumer marketing and social development. I was too liberal and ambitious for the political scene in Tanzania at the time; but times are changing and so am I. Social development work seemed to be something I would work towards

gradually as I already had a strong footing in the same having worked with and founded several social movements. Marketing was the most viable option as a result and boy did I endear the potency of this field. This coupled with the fact that I got an opportunity to work with one of the most amazing consumer goods companies in the world, made it a sure fit at the time.

But this and the other amazing opportunities that came along after have not come without their share of challenges; some frivolous (not worth reflecting on) and some more fundamental. Marketing, as a profession, being in its infancy stages in this country, faces the foremost challenge of meaning too many things to too many people (everyone is an 'in-the-closet' marketing guru). To some it is a strategic business driver requiring the best minds in the business to work on it, and to others it is just an excuse to expend millions requiring no minds at all. In some cases marketing is reduced to just some of its more visible components like communication and brand identity management foregoing the holistic scope of the traditional four Ps of marketing (price, place, product and promotions). Sadly, little has been done in Tanzania, even by me, to enhance the professionalism of this, otherwise, very versatile and vital management function.

Most of us marketers, like other 'professionals' in this country, tend to prefer to subscribe to an exclusive club of 'elites by circumstance'

thinking that we are exceptional by virtue of our current positions and/ or achievements. We do not see the need to invest in a framework that will nurture future generations to achieve equal or greater levels of professionalism as a result. In a country that not more than 10 years ago had ONLY 5,000 university students across the country, can we really consider ourselves exceptional? Should we not consider ourselves privileged instead to have been first to market? Mwalimu Nyerere once spoke, wisely, of a villager who was chosen amongst many and entrusted with the last of the village's food reserve so that he could have enough to get him to the next village and return with food for his whole village. Was this villager exceptional or privileged? We have a social obligation as a result of being privileged by circumstance to give back to the society around us, yet what do we go and do...

That said, as a career marketer, I have realized my aspirations in part (a wholesome part at that) and the struggle ensuing has purposefully reminded me of a past that may need revisiting and a future that could pass me by if I do not do this in earnest. These years have been colored by safe exploration, and a need to discover, with limits, something that may have always been there deep inside me.

## ***Growth***

Every living organ has to grow. Whether it is an organization, an organism or an organ, growth is the inevitable fate that befalls all that is living. When the stars that circle the galaxy grow their fate is either to implode or degenerate out of its own fuel. The same fuel that supported their growth is responsible for their demise. This means that when we grow, the same devices that brought us to prominence will almost always be at the core of our demise. With size, we lose sensitivity and become more easily disengaged from the reality that becomes the situation.

We use old methods to compete in a new and ever changing environment and in as much as we may be dominant (by virtue of the weight of our legacy), we clearly cease to be relevant. Organizations hold on to people, processes, products and structures that were at the heart of their past growth only so that they can become the source of their demise in a changing market that couldn't care less. Growth sometimes requires that we shrink in order to preempt the inevitable of size. Shrinking encompasses off loading the baggage of social obligation and circumstance associated with our legacy. I am ..., so I should .... I have done ..., so I must .... Shrinking encompasses removing oneself from an ego that blinds us from reality and allows us to trust in the unconventional – a future not certain and a people not conforming to the tie ups of your legacy.

Could you be growing too big for your own good?

### ***The end of a chapter***

As we embark on any conquest our chances of success are vested heavily in the quality of the story we tell ourselves about what is to come as this will almost always be the story we tell others when all the chips are down. The conquest in question here is any action or milestone of significance to ones' personal growth and life management and/ or realization.

In my case, I wrote the general story outline but did not define clearly the chapters required towards achieving my desired outcome (the end I had in mind). I invested in general ideals or values that were, to say the least, safe. We all know what we need in life as these are basics for survival but to get the most out of life (success & significance) we need to define clearly what we want to achieve at the end of each chapter. Those who suffer most are those who do not know what they want; they get exactly what they ask for - everything, anything and ultimately nothing. Wanting something specific and going after it is risky business, as it often time takes us out of your comfort zone, but it is a clear pre requisite for reaping your just rewards. So unless you are investing in a mystery story for which the outcome is sometimes even unknown to the author, best we have the end in mind and start telling our story until it becomes a reality.

***Remember, we are what we think and as of late have you taken the time to think of what story you are going to tell at the end of this conquest.***

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