

Empowerment Beyond the Ordinary: From Sweeping Floors to Academic Prowess

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ABSTRACT

There are some individuals in our communities whose potential cannot be fully fulfilled due to certain personal, social and financial factors. Consequently, such individuals inevitably lose social and personal identity, leading to their disempowerment. While total disempowerment is an elusive state, empowering those with low self-esteem is a convoluted process. This chapter reveals that among other things, it requires strategies for regaining the lost identity and a will power to fight all other negative barriers to empowerment. Above all others, as it will emerge from Peggy's experience; it takes determination and focus on the part of the disempowered individuals to make use of the availed and available opportunities for empowerment. This chapter reveals that such determination does not go without challenges. For instance, Peggy experienced both internal and external obstacles throughout her empowerment process.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an empowerment story of Peggy Boswa (pseudonyms), whose schooling prospect was cut short as parents could not afford the financial supplies of elementary schooling in Botswana. From an early age of fourteen (14) years, Peggy became accustomed to fending for herself. As an elementary school dropout, one of the available jobs for her was being a 'housemaid' or house cleaner' mainly employed to keep the house in order. Being naturally gifted, Peggy's ingenuity amazed those who could see beyond her poverty driven housemaid job. Among these were an American family she worked for who inspired her to pursue her junior secondary education through the Night Schooling system. This family offered not only financial backup but also emotional support abundant enough to see her throughout her secondary education. Their unwavering support saw her going through all levels of education, achieving her doctor of education and attaining the current high profile position of a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Botswana. To be noted here is that the University of Botswana is the first, oldest and perhaps most internationally renowned. To reach this position, Peggy had to go rigorous requirements such as good performance in her teaching, research and publication, professional service as well as community services. Having learned that hard work pays at a very tender age, Peggy worked hard to deserve her current prestigious position at work.

BACKGROUND

Empowerment relates to both a process and an outcome (Staples, 1990). Based on this conception, this chapter is a descriptive and critical analysis of the journey taken by Peggy during her empowerment process. According to Rapport (1981, 1984 & 1987), the success of any empowerment depends on individuals' responsibility to change their lives. Taking responsibility can come in different forms; an individual can act alone to change an undesirable situation in his or her life or it can be a collaborative endeavour. Taking own responsibility is viewed as self-mobilization or self-empowerment. For Peggy, both self-mobilization and collaboration with other persons was necessary. Peggy's self-mobilization is founded in her very strong religious belief that gives her hope, inspiration and an optimistic mind on God as a never failing provider. She believes that there are always fresh opportunities and new beginnings for everybody. However, it is one's choices, decisions and actions that are of utmost importance in reaping the benefits of these opportunities. These opportunities may translate into availability of relevant information for empowerment purposes and means of taking advantage of such opportunities. This matches

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