

## POWER TO THE PEOPLE

My new year's resolution for 2008 was a big ask - to stay positive even in the face of overwhelming adversity, stupidity and shocking customer service, I am going to see the good in the bad, the right in the wrong, the silver lining in every cloud etc. So faced with the reality of load-sharing and shedding I refuse to be beaten. True to my new philosophy I've taken the concept completely in my stride and more than that, I've taken it to heart. So when it comes to switching off the geyser during the day I am complying, ditto no air conditioners on at home (granted that was easy this unseasonably chilly week), outside lights off, energy saving bulbs installed...

I wonder if everyone else is doing their bit, really getting behind the power-saving initiative and fully understanding the state of affairs? The neighbour's house was lit up like a Christmas tree the other night whilst ours was like a Londoner's during the Blitz. I felt so patriotic and fervent in the face of our national crisis that I wanted to report them or at least accost them to ask if they hadn't heard the news. I must admit I am a bit confused though. I was always told that switching light sand the geyser on and off used more power but I now have it on good authority that geyser management saves a fortune. I'm trying to convert my family to this new concept too but when I mentioned to one of my daughters to switch off unnecessary lights to save power her response was 'Why? Because then someone else will then get it.' It's the scarcity mentality - there's not enough out there for everyone so you better grab what you can when you can. She and my neighbours have a lot in common.

Potholes too were a big discussion point this week. Seeing the same guys at the Kgale circle filling in the same holes that were attended to a few weeks back couldn't help but conjure up the image of mice on a treadmill or poor old Sisyphus pushing his rock up the hill for all eternity. It seems that potholes have an annoying way of showing up again and again. It may be smarter to fix them properly once and for all but the roads department would have thought of that...surely? A colleague of mine hit the nail on the head when she said that they're missing the point each time they scurry to fill another pothole. The problem is not 'how' the pothole gets filled and how long the patch will last.

The problem is sorting out the drainage. And it's the same with the power – clearly at the moment we have limited resources and it certainly looks like it's going to stay that way for a while so we need to curb excessive seepage and that means changing mindsets. The solution is not load-sharing but getting the population motivated and committed to use less and then the need for load-shedding lessens.

What we want is for people to voluntarily act in a certain way, to get behind the idea of using less power in such a way that it becomes second nature. We want people like my neighbour to tone down their lighting and be good citizens. We are talking a mixture of education and motivation. Whilst I appreciate Botswana Power Corporation's adverts on radio encouraging people to be more responsible users I really have to ask myself is it enough and will it spur people into the type of action we want? I do know for a fact that they have some awesome and audacious plans in the pipeline and with their new and motivated management team I am sure they will achieve long-term success but in the short-term they need their customers' co-operation.

What is needed in my view is nothing more than change management – a structured approach to alter the way individuals and groups think. The solution is not about shedding the load – that's just a temporary coping plan and plans themselves do not get results; results will be realised only through the sustained, collective actions of the thousands of power users who are responsible for working with and living with the change. This is about how we get a nation of users to feel good about using less even if it is darn inconvenient. Like fossil fuels, power is now a limited resource and there's only so much to go around. Fact. But it's also about getting the nation to start responding with enthusiasm and real commitment to national goals like Vision 2016, water problems (okay, not applicable at all at the moment but things change!) low productivity etc.

It's not impossible. Come forward our local equivalent of Winston Churchill, Britain's 1940's prime minister who was able to motivate a nation to do almost anything for the sake of keeping the Germans at bay during World War 2. With a fearful and ailing nation, a Winston Churchill speech was just what the doctor ordered to rally and inspire.. People handed in pots and pans to supply metal for the war effort, did without basic commodities, made constant sacrifices for the good of the country. Simple campaigns like posters helped to mobilize a nation. Inexpensive, accessible, and ever-present, the poster was an ideal agent for making war aims the personal mission of every citizen. And that was just the tip of the iceberg.

You don't change behavior by sending a single message. And it's not any different here and now. If we really want people to switch off the geyser they have to really feel purpose and reason, to believe that they are making a difference and be recognized. In the workplace we often motivate for a safe environment by displaying a tally of how many days since the last accident. contravention of procedure or man-days lost due to accident. We put up safety posters, hold safety drills etc. We need all of this for the power effort and more, along with a whole clutch of activities to reinforce the message. We need a daily 'rah rah rah' telling us how our combined effort last night resulted in a saving of x amount of megawatts and what that means to the economy. We must ensure that the shame and guilt of leaving lights on gnaws at you so much that you turn around after you've left home to make sure you did indeed switch everything off – doing your bit for the war effort.

I say for all our national crises, whether its potholes, power or productivity, we can only get results by making sure that we educate our people about what needs to be done and why, motivate by inspired leadership and celebrate when we make progress and are victorious. In fact, why wait for the crisis why not just fight everything that doesn't work for us like we would a war? Enlist every able-bodied citizen and revive that old war slogan 'Your Country Needs You'. Spread the word and perhaps then we won't all be left in the dark?

