THE BEST HEADLINE IS ONE IN SOMEONE’S HEART

Separate awards from rewards

I am an “email magnet”. I receive tonnes of feedback. With the nature of my work,

this is not unexpected. I forward some of the emails to my staff for assistance

because I do not know everything. There are also messages that I put in the “To

Attend” folder as I try to gather the relevant information before responding. Some

emails have been there for yonks because exact answers have not been forthcoming.

Recently, I fed this folder with two more emails. One is from a gentleman who

threw a curve ball of a request.

**Olympic dreams**

“I’m an athlete and I’ve even competed in local full and half marathons. While in

school, I regularly scooped trophies for winning races,” he explained.

“I want to participate in the Olympics, but I’m no longer running competitively.

How can I become a torchbearer like you?”

Previously, all I knew about the Olympics was that it was held every four years in

the country that won the bid. I had seen people on TV carrying the Olympic torch,

but I never bothered to know who they were or what they did to get there. I assumed

that it had to do with sports. And I am not a sports freak; my major contribution

in this area is attending Joshua’s sports day.

Frankly, I do not know how to reply to the writer without crushing his Olympic

expectations. I do not know the criteria they will use to select the next torch bearers.

One thing I would recommend to this gentleman is to do what he does best. Sir,

carry and shine your torch in your arena.

As Mary was growing up, she did not know God had ordained her to carry Christ.

Who knows, if she had had a hint, it might have been all over the social media. Folks

would have talked through their hats. I am sure God was aware of all this and in

His own right time, He sent the angel to deliver

the message.

I do not know exactly what Mary

did to qualify for this noblest

of tasks. Any woman, and that

includes yours truly —

forget about her medical

records — would

have wanted to be in

this position. But only

Mary was honoured.

From Mary’s story, I

have learnt the wisdom of

hanging out with those with

a similar vision. When she was

visited by the angel, she went

to visit Elizabeth, who had

also been visited by the angel

regarding the birth of

John the Baptist.

**Great decorations**

The other email was on how I

got the Order of Grand Warrior

(OGW), awarded by the Head of State. It was my first award, but I only came to

realise its importance much later.

“You mean you have the OGW?” people would ask, and it prompted me to start

using it in letters after my name.

This email that I received was from a woman who noted that my name is always

followed by the abbreviations “OGW”. I am stuck how to respond to her question; I

have never known the criteria the Head of State uses to give this award.

There are many more awards, and my mouth can water, but I know I cannot

reach some. Each coat is cut according to size. Some are for those who serve in the

armed forces, academicians, athletes, and so on.

So to my good lady, I will say that I do not know how you can get there. Do whatever

you do to the best of your knowledge and capability such that, given another

chance, you cannot improve since you gave your 110 per cent.

And do not chase awards; let them do the chasing. When I got the OGW for

community service, Kenwa did not have an office. The team from the award committee

had to trek to all the slums looking for me to go for the award ceremony

rehearsals.

From these varied experiences, I know that the greatest decoration is not the one

that comes with titles after our names. Neither is it the one that makes headlines on

newsstands, but the one that makes a headline in someone’s heart.

I would advise both these people — like Mary and Elizabeth — to hang out with

people with a similar vision. Keep on dreaming and hoping and doing what you can

towards that goal. There is no dream that is too big.

You may not be feted the way you desire or deserve, but, like Denzel Washington

once said: “Man gives the award, God gives the reward.”

This is the diary of Asunta Wagura, a mother-of-three who tested HIV-positive

23 years ago. She is the executive director of the Kenya Network