

## **No sand boys here!**

I remember vividly arriving in Mohammed Murtala International Airport in Lagos. The sweltering heat, the chaos all around me and what I perceived to be everyone else knowing exactly how to navigate the checks and the queues. At least I had my passport, my visa and proof of my yellow fever vaccine. Patience was all that was required.

Patience and the hope that the person and the car to collect me would be somewhere close outside. I walked out into the darkness, the crowds and the enthusiastic offers from money changers.....and the searing heat at 6.30pm.

I breathed a lot more easily as Henry approached me and helped with my luggage. Phew! Now it was just a case of how in God's name were we ever going to get out of the chaotic car park (if it could be called that) through the mayhem and head for my destination. We did it..... we made it.

I had travelled extensively before this trip around the world, but this was to be my first experience of West Africa, having spent some time in Uganda quite a few years before. There's something wonderful, something inexplicable about standing on the red African earth. Something life-changing too if you're ready and willing.

My reason for being in Nigeria was to conduct three weeks of leadership training, a visit I repeated many times over the next 10 years. I was based in Victoria Island and travelled into Ikeja in Lagos every day to work with so many amazing people. Having said that, it was also very challenging to deliver training 6 days each week in heat that nobody else seemed to notice.

I travelled everyday across the massive third mainland bridge from Victoria Island, craning and stretching to capture as much as I could of life in the bay below. It was through these journeys I made my discovery.

You've probably never heard of the sand boys of Lagos. The sand boys take their heavy-hulled, wooded sail boats into the bay in Lagos while everyone else is asleep and finish their work before most of the people have left for work.

They dive in the bay with buckets, scooping up sand from the ocean floor and tip it into their boats. They keep diving and tipping until their boats are full before making the weary journey back to the shore. The sand is brought on-shore and sold every morning. The sand boys will do it again the next day and the next ...and the next.

Some of these divers are now in their 50s and still they go again and again. It's all they know.

I'm told the sand they sell is perfect for making concrete building blocks. No surprise then that the bay is peppered with many block making businesses who trade with the sand boys in the early hours. Without this sand, the building of amenities, shops, schools, offices and homes would not be so easy. But the real work is done when no-one is watching, when no-one really knows.

There are people in organisations everywhere who carry out their tasks and duties in a committed and dedicated way. They don't seek, or in many cases, receive the credit or recognition they deserve. They don't want their names in lights either.

In these unpredictable times, there is an army of people out there who have gone about their unnoticed work and without whom we would have struggled so much more than we have. We salute them.

If you hold a leadership position or a position of influence in your organisation, why not take the time to recognise and appreciate your unsung (unnoticed) heroes today. The people who work day in, day out, doing nothing especially spectacular perhaps, but without whom your team, your family, your school could not function, succeed and grow.

**Bill Roy**

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