



CMC Motors Group chief executive, Mr Martin Forster honours Ms Fernandes who has worked for the company for 52 years.

PHOTO: COURTESY

Secrets of long service

WORK ENVIRONMENT MATTERS MOST, AND SO IS ATTITUDE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES, REPORTS **ELLY WAMARI**

On February 26, 1957, young Elizabeth Fernandes, then only 19, walked into the offices of Cooper Motor Corporation (Kenya) Limited and started working as a copy typist. She is still working for the same company, now called CMC Motors Group.

We last checked on Monday, and she also called on Thesday to clarify a few details from her office, where she now holds the position of senior secretary to the group management accountant.

That's about 52 years of unbroken loyalty to one employer. And if you thought she had already made a rare achievement, she'll tell you she isn't done counting the years at work.

"I will continue working as long as I can and as long as the company wants me;" comes her response when asked about calling it a day.

Talk about dedication. Ms Fernandes lives it in her work, and as she affirms, she isn't about to stop soon. CMC Motors

Group is her second home.

She said so last year after being recognised as the first employee to have attained 50 years of service in the company: "Fifty years, more than a lifetime, I have shared memories, joys, and even sorrows with so many people here over the years. The community is like my second home, and indeed my second family."

Ms Fernandes has experienced and witnessed all kinds of transformations and transitions that have occurred within the company through those years. She joined when the company was only nine years. That makes her a valued bearer of institutional memory.

Just how she has managed to work in the same environment for this long without being fired, without thinking about changing jobs, and still going on with fresh energy, can be startling.

She doesn't find it easy explaining how she has managed other than the usual advice about going flat out to 'serve with

commitment.

It is about working in a manner that gives the employer zero reasons to even think about blacklisting your name.

"I wouldn't want to speak for myself but people say I get along well with colleagues. For me, it's easy. I come, I work, and I give it all."

Coming across as a modest person, she prefers to let It copy of a letter written by a former boss speak for her.

It is dated October 6, 1993, and it's a recommendation by Mr Arthur Lord, then preparing to leave the company as group managing director. Mr Lord was then her boss.

He wrote: "She is hard-working and efficient, has a very pleasant personality and is very popular with all her colleagues. She will always readily help out when asked to do so by other executives, and as a result, she is rarely without something to do."

Mr Lord (now deceased) had himself

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From Page 7» done 42 years with the company by then, 19 of which had been supported by Ms Fernandes, as his "confidential secretary";

Gathering more courage to discuss her loyalty, Ms Fernandes says: "Since I joined, I've never felt like moving. The atmosphere has been good. My bosses have been good to me. I have never been frustrated at work."

There lies the secret. In addition to sheer commitment and a good rapport with workmates, Ms Fernandes has been contented with her work environment.

That speaks a lot about the importance of office atmosphere in retaining employees. By her own assessment, work environment greatly influenced her decision to keep going in the same company, more than the incentives she received along the way during the many years, such as training

and promotions.

This was the same reason that stood out about three years ago, when we discussed the subject with employees who had served done upwards of 25 years in the same company.

While long service could be admirable in terms of demonstrating loyalty and consistency, and also in the sense that the retirement package from the employer could be generous in the end, there are some side effects, particularly for those who suddenly have to change employers.

One professional encountered difficulty in securing a job after being retrenched by his employer of 20 years.

When he consulted with a recruitment agency to establish the source of the difficulty, the explanation he got was that having worked for that long in one company, he was probably being

perceived by some prospective employers as lacking initiative and drive, and therefore the reason he may have stuck with one company for long. To him, this sounded like he was being punished for demonstrating loyalty and commitment. That, it appears, is the risk associated with long service, but only if you may want to move on elsewhere.

To eliminate such perceptions, one needs to aggressively demonstrate in their that they had significantly advanced within the company they had served for long.

Well-packaged, long service, say some career advisers, can be used as a powerful bargaining chip in demonstrating a potentially powerful combination of commitment to serve and the experience to prevail.

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