A HEADY MARKETING CAMPAIGN
‘A HEADY MARKETING CAMPAIGN’ is a title of Tiri for the Aga Khan Development Network’s Civil Society Programme.

This is one of a series of comic strip booklets that challenges the reader on the role of ethics and integrity as contributors to success in the conduct of business.

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The general manager of Starlight hotel, Sardar Ali, is in conference with his senior management team.

We have survived some very tough times recently with the political situation, but things are about to change.

That would be such good news. There have been many times in recent years that I thought we were going under.

Saed Rajae, our new marketing director, has a great deal of overseas experience. We are very lucky to have him.

It is an honour to be with you and a great pleasure to be back home after so many years away.

International business is picking up. More and more tourists and businessmen are visiting the country. We have exciting times ahead of us.

And how will we attract these visitors? We are not like those big international chains that cater to western tastes. That is not the Starlight way.

And where was he when the rest of us were struggling to keep this hotel afloat?
WHICH IS?

TRADITIONAL HOSPITALITY IN A TRADITIONAL SETTING. IT HAS BEEN THAT WAY SINCE THE DAY WE WERE FOUNDED.

WE CAN EFFECT CHANGES, WITHOUT LOSING SIGHT OF THAT ADMIRAble MISSION. IT IS SIMPLY A QUESTION OF APPEALING TO A MORE COSMOPOLITAN AUDIENCE.

IF BY “COSMOPOLITAN” YOU MEAN WESTERN, THAT WILL MEAN CHANGES OF A KIND FOR WHICH THIS HOTEL AND ITS COMMUNITY MIGHT NOT BE READY.

IT WILL INDEED, BUT ANY SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS MUST LEARN TO ADAPT TO CHANGE. THAT IS PROGRESS.

IF YOUR PROGRESS COMES IN A BOTTLE, I AM SURE SOME OF OUR OLDER, ESTABLISHED CUSTOMERS WILL NOT LIKE IT.

NOR MANY OF OUR STAFF.
WE MUST MOVE WITH THE TIMES. WE ARE A CUSTOMER-FOCUSED BUSINESS AND WE MUST OFFER WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS WANT.

THAT DEPENDS ON THE CUSTOMER.

WHICH IS WHY, SHIYNA, WE SHALL SOON BE SEEING SOME NEW CUSTOMERS. WORK BEGINS TOMORROW ON OUR NEW JAZZ AND COCKTAIL BAR.

A JAZZ AND COCKTAIL BAR. WHATEVER NEXT? WHY WERE WE NOT CONSULTED ABOUT THIS?

THERE WAS NO NEED. WE HAVE MADE SOME EXCITING NEW ARRANGEMENTS WITH SEVERAL WESTERN AGENCIES. WE HAVE ALREADY BEEN PROMISED SUBSTANTIAL BOOKINGS.

SEVERAL MONTHS LATER. SHIYNA, THE HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGER IS IN THE BAR AREA WITH MAHMOOD, A WAITER AND THE COCKTAIL BAR MANAGER.
He refused to serve a customer. Several other waiters have followed his lead and done the same. I have tried to reason with him, but he is adamant. It is a disgrace.

The disgrace is that we serve alcohol. I cannot in all conscience do so.

Why did you not talk of this before now? No-one would make you go against your principles. Yet in this way, you have caused us to be short-staffed at a very important event.

Someone must take a stand. This goes much wider than my own principles. You know it.

Mahmood, this is very serious. You cannot simply refuse to serve customers. You have embarrassed the hotel.

The hotel has embarrassed itself. I have worked here since I was a boy and I have never felt so ashamed of my employer.

He is not the only one. I think many others share his view.
What are we to do with Mahmood? I understand his concerns, but we cannot have employees behaving in that way.

Our employees are entitled to their principles.

But why would Mahmood of all people embarrass the hotel in such a way? He is one of our longest serving and most loyal employees.

But they must check them at the door when they come to work.

He is not alone in his concerns. Many staff are not happy.

Mahmood feels the Starlight is no longer the place he joined. He does not feel comfortable here.

That is very sad. I wish he did not feel that way. But we cannot tolerate such behaviour, still less from such a widely respected role model.

Surely you do not wish to fire Mahmood, Mr Ali?
What else can we do? He refuses to apologise, or accept that he was wrong. He is too stubborn for his own - and our - good.

Mahmood is a good man, if a proud one. There must be an alternative.

I don’t see one easily. He is a man of principle and as honest as any employee we have ever had. But we cannot let such a challenge to our authority go unchecked.

Excuse me Mr Ali. I have Mr Khan from the Ministry of the Interior on the line. He would like to speak to you personally.

Of course. It is always a pleasure to speak with one of our oldest and most trusted customers. Please put him through. Shinya, we will continue our discussion later.

Later that day a worried Sardar Ali calls a meeting.

Thank you all for coming at such short notice. I spoke earlier today with Mr Khan, from the Ministry of the Interior.

Mr Ali, you look concerned. I hope there was not bad news.
Regrettably, yes. Mr Khan told me that he has heard unfavourable reports about the new developments at our hotel. He is unsure whether he can continue to use our services.

That is terrible. He is our best customer. Without his business, we would surely have gone out of business during these recent lean years.

We are also meeting resistance within the staff.

And we have had complaints from the local community about the noise.

We have had complaints from the local community about the noise.

How can the loss of our largest customer, rebellious staff and unhappy neighbours be dismissed as “nonsense”?

This is nonsense.

But it is. Our new balance of “traditional old” and “desirable new” is a hit.

It’s true that bookings are going through the roof. They are at the highest level we have seen for years.
We are not abandoning our tradition of hospitality. We are merely updating it for a new age. What can a “new age” have to do with traditional values? I have always said the westernization of our hotel would be our downfall. We must reverse our policy before it is too late.

Far from being our downfall, it has been our lifeline. If it comes to that, new business will more than make up for the loss of the Ministry. We can easily find new staff to replace those who don’t want to work here.

And let’s not forget that without enough money coming in, we will be unable to pay our staff, or serve any customer, whether local or international.
It's not just about the money. We have been here for many, many years. People expect more of us. Mr Ali, surely you must agree with me?

It is a complicated issue on which I need time to think. I will notify you of my decision in the morning.
Questions for discussion

- What factors will influence Sardar Ali’s decision?
- What decision should Sardar Ali take?
- What action should Sardar Ali take with Mahmood?
- What issues of trustworthiness and trust does the situation expose?
- What lessons can the hotel management learn from this experience?