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Problems of branch management

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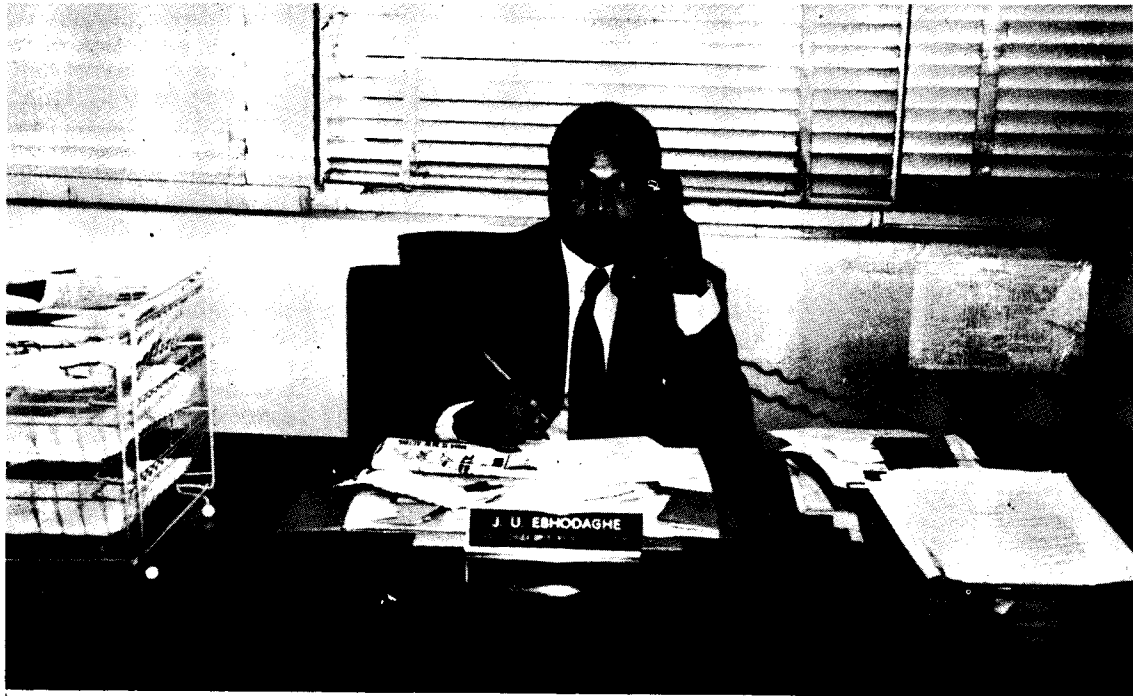
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INTERVIEW WITH KANO BRANCH CONTROLLER

Mr. J. U. Ebhodaghe



QUESTION: Branch Controller, you were recently posted to Kano as the Controller of the Kano Branch of the Bank. How would you describe your experience so far?

ANSWER: I found my new assignment as the Branch Controller of Kano Branch as very interesting and challenging. In fact, the opportunity afforded me to partake in the implementation of some of the Bank's policies and functions have provided me with stimulating incentive, more sense of leadership and have widened my experience in the Banking arena. I have been used to working from morning till evening including week-ends. Casting a retrospective view on my stay so far, I have cause to thank God for all I have been able to achieve.

QUESTION: How would you describe the effect of the Transfer from Lagos to Kano on your family? Are they having problems adjusting to life in Kano?

ANSWER: Frankly speaking, initially, things were not smooth sailing. Our first few weeks were very uncomfortable in view of the

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sudden change of environment. My family have been long used to the life in Lagos and now to expose them to the biting and harsh climatic conditions of Kano was not an easy task. Naturally, there was fear of the unknown - a place we have not lived before and then the sudden departure from friends and relatives and change of school for the children constituted initial problems. However, the family is settling down gradually and in due course, I hope they will fully re-adjust to the life in Kano.

QUESTION: What major problems would you say you've have to solve since you took over as the Branch Controller?

ANSWER: Since I took over as the Branch Controller of the Branch, some of the major problems which confronted me included ways and means of solving the problems of inadequate accommodation both for offices and residential purposes in the Branch. I had to tackle this with vigour and determination in the overall interests of efficiency and staff welfare. Secondly, I had to work very hard to ameliorate the degenerating conditions of some disgruntled staff. I also tried to improve the communication gap between the Branch and the Head Office. I worked day and night to carry out the renovation of some filthy places in the Branch. I also cleared some back-log in the office. For example, abandoned foreign notes and travellers cheques in the Banking Office safe. The reconciliation of account current with Head Office which was in arrears from 1976 to February 1978. Other areas were the expansion of offices e.g. the Note Counting/Coin Counting and Shredding Offices and the partitioning of the Branch Controller and Assistant Branch Controller's Offices.

QUESTION: What other problems would you identify as militating

pursue their exchange control applications either for business trips or medical treatment abroad both of which time is essence. Now, the services had been brought to them in their own states. Also, when the Note Counting/Audit and Note Shredding become fully operational, the incessant congestions in our strong-rooms of used notes will be drastically reduced. The increased power of authority of Branch Controllers have also gone a long way to improve efficiency of Branch management and the general welfare of the staff in the Branches.

Yes, there is room for improvement for example, decentralization of staff salaries will eventually solve the problem of paying staff salaries late. I remember there was a time when salaries of staff would not be received in the Branches until after many days of delay due mainly to the poor communication system in the country.

QUESTION: What specific contribution would you say that you have personally made to the improvement of the Kano Branch since your appointment as its Branch Controller?

ANSWER: Immediately I assumed duty as the Branch Controller of the Kano Branch, I pursued vigorously and with iron-will of courage, the Bank's Housing Policy to provide quarters for all the staff. To achieve this aim, I tried to establish good relations both with the Emir of Kano - Alhaji Ado Bayero, the Military Governor of the State and other Government functionaries. During my courtesy calls on them, I seized the opportunity to discuss our problems with them especially with regard to accommodation. I am proud to say here that my effort was very successful. Hopefully enough, arrangements

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are now at an advanced stage to develop the lands already acquired for housing facilities for the staff. Internally, I took immediate actions to ameliorate the deteriorating conditions of some dissatisfied staff in the Branch. For example, some staff had been denied of their monthly salaries for some period merely on the ground that they absented themselves from duty for one day or two and the Head Office appeared to have forgotten that their salaries have been stopped for the above reason. I quickly took up this matter with the Head Office and happily, the salaries were restored.

I also bridged the communication gap between the staff and management of the Branch by encouraging social activities through the social club which was revived on my assumption of duty. Moreover, I resuscitated the junior staff and senior staff associations. I adopted the method of addressing my staff regularly to know their grievances and how to solve them.

Generally, I noted a lot of improvements among the entire staff of the Branch. Moreover, when I reached the Branch, I was not pleased with the filthy conditions of the Branch, and the delapidated and ramshackled furniture in the Branch. To give the Branch a new shape, I employed more cleaners to work daily including the week-ends. Many records were in arrears when I reached the Branch. In fact, a filing system was almost non-existent and as a result, past records were always difficult to come by. In fact, this is better precised in the language of the Divisional Chief (Branches) in his findings after his visit to the Branch. I quote: "There is evidence to show that the Branch Controller is soliciting the co-operation of all the staff to improve on the degenerating situation he inherited in the Branch, there is no gain-saying in the fact that standards fell in the operations of the Branch within the last few years but there were signs of improvement and the determination to restore normalcy by the present leadership in the Branch". With the absolute co-operation of the Head Office, the standard of furniture and equipments in the Branch has been substantially improved. Efforts are being made to provide canteen facility for the staff. In fact I gave the Branch an ample new shape. I re-designed the Branch Controller's and Assistant Branch Controller's Offices and the Managers' Offices were carpeted. I also constructed a beautiful conference room which both staff of Kano Branch and other Branches includ-

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ing Head Office now enjoy for conference and seminars. I also introduced a protocol section to cater for the interest of the staff visiting the Branch. The Note Counting Section has now been completed and work will soon start there.

Today, Kano Branch has become a pace-setter in the development of Branches and it has retained its leadership not only as the first Branch but also as the doyen of all the Northern Branches. I have been able to achieve all these because of the absolute support given to me by my staff coupled with the receptive attitude of the Head Office which made the work worthwhile.

QUESTION: One last question, sir, as the Controller of the oldest Branch of the Bank, would you say that the Kano Branch has advantages over the other Branches of the Bank?

ANSWER: I would say that the Kano Branch has no real advantages over the other Branches of the Bank. Rather, it has more problems both administrative and technical. There is more volume of work in Kano Branch than other Branches except Ibadan Branch. Kano Branch also has the largest staff population. There are hardly enough - indigenes to work in the Branch as a result of which there is generally the language problem.

However, Kano Branch has the advantage of having more experienced staff to handle the intricacies of commercial banking transactions usually inherent in sophisticated commercially oriented township like Kano.