

The corner stone of leadership

Leadership involves at least 14 effective leadership behaviours: supporting, consulting, delegating, recognizing, rewarding, motivating, managing conflicts and team building, developing, clarifying, planning and organizing, problem solving, informing, monitoring, representing, and networking.

- “Successful leaders have the intrinsic ability to have others in a group to accept and follow their directives or command. This ability takes a strong, dominant extrovert personality and oodles of charisma. Studies have shown that these are psychological and character traits that the person who emerges into adulthood from adolescence will demonstrate for the rest of their life”.
- "The task of the leader is to get his people from where they are to where they have not been", Henry Kissinger once said.
- In the words of Margaret Thatcher, "Being a leader is like being a lady, if you have to go around telling people you are one, you aren't".

Some people argue that leaders are born with the necessary qualities which, when honed through nurture brings about success. Others share the view that leadership, like many other similar characteristics, can be learned and developed through life. Whether leaders are born or made, there is the undeniable truth that Africa's biggest problem today lies with lack or availability of born or made leaders. The leaderships of Africa are so removed from the people that they are looked upon as foreigners. “They are driven by self-interest, so excessive that their peoples' interests are forgotten -- hardly different from the colonial masters" (John Hayford). Why is leadership the major problem with Africa?

The importance of leadership has since the origin of man been recognised. For example the scripture dating back more than 2000 years states “Without leadership a nation falls”. It goes further to prescribe the conditions for effective leadership:

“A leader must be well-thought-of, committed to his wife, cool and collected, accessible, and hospitable. He must know what he's talking about, not be overfond of wine, not pushy but gentle, not thin-skinned, not money-hungry. He must handle his own affairs well, attentive to his own children and having their respect. Outsiders must think well of him, or else the Devil will figure out a way to lure him into his trap”.

The devil has truly figured out ways to lure African leaders into his trap – perhaps the root of the African leadership curse. There are many instances where African citizens with “most impeccable credentials and a track record of personal integrity and credibility become so inept or/and squander their credibility so quickly once they emerge at the helms of affairs in the public domain” (Aina).

The good news is that this curse can be broken. There is much to learn today about leadership from a living legend such as President Mandela. President Nelson Mandela is one of the most respected and revered leaders of our time, a role model to presidents and clergy and the darling of the common man. US Ambassador Joseph observes that President Mandela’s influence came from: (a) the power of his personality, (b) the elegance of his humanity, (c) the loftiness of his ideals, (d) the wisdom of his judgement, (e) the calmness of

his temperament and (f) the power of his commitment to the well being of others. Therefore President Mandela, a world citizen with fully coded genes of African origin, has demonstrated that Africans are born with leadership qualities and can make great leaders if and when they choose to.

President Khama of Botswana and his predecessors are also an encouraging reference point in Africa. They have committed themselves to building the social and economic infrastructures such as schools, hospitals, roads, harbours, airports, rail lines, telecommunication, silos and irrigation facilities. Today the people of Botswana enjoy one of the highest standards of living in Africa (Editor Business, Education & Opinion).

Qualities to/not to look for in a true leader

The major problems of Africa are largely to do with failure to formulate and effectively implement sound economic, agricultural, infrastructural, educational, health and environmental policies. The varying characteristics of the African leaderships explain the sources of the failure:

- Leaders are out of touch with the needs and sufferings of their people.
- The seat of power has been occupied for too long by individuals short of ideas and solutions to deal with the economic and social problems facing their people.
- Leaderships are preoccupied with how to preserve their existence rather than the existence of their people.
- Leaderships are more interested in voting themselves into power than the responsibilities that go with the votes.
- Leaderships exist based on tribal, party, religion and regional alliances and loyalty of the security forces rather than their own economic and social records.
- Leaderships accept no opposing views and remain accountable to themselves.
- Leaderships worship and reward corruption rather than fight it.
- Leaderships destroy the educational systems of their countries and sponsor their children to top schools in Europe, USA, South Africa, etc.
- Leaders put the interest of their former colonial masters and big multinational corporations ahead of their own people.
- Leaders are preoccupied “with how to enrich themselves and prolong their rule” by engaging in “short term ill conceived, vote buying, cosmetic policies and programmes that increase poverty and turn the people into slaves”.

Research, based on studies of men and women who shaped history over time (politics and business), identifies characteristics of successful leadership as follows:

- **Adaptability** – Ability to adapt and incorporate new information and new challenges.
- **Charisma** – This lies in the personality of a leader and is the “energy, vision and charm of a person which when communicated to others inspires loyalty, enthusiasm and a willingness to go that extra mile”.
- **Communicator** – Ability to communicate with a variety of organisations, groups and individuals, hold their attention and get them to act on what is communicated clearly and unambiguously.

- **Embraces responsibility** – A leader must demonstrate full understanding of the weight of their duties and willingness to take responsibility for success and failure. No room for transfer of blame for failure.
- **Altruistic** – A leader puts the needs of others ahead of his, leads by example and is perceived to be fair and even handed in all actions and decisions.
- **Enthusiastic** – Shows excitement for the job or responsibilities and because enthusiasm is contagious people will follow.
- **Knowledgeable** – Possess sound working and up-to-date knowledge of all aspect of the organisation and responsibilities for the purpose of providing guidance and advice and understanding the challenges the organisation and staff face. Great leaders don't have to be technicians but know how to get the best out of specialist working for them. When Henry Ford set out to manufacture an automobile, he was asked during a press conference in his office why he thought he could be successful in making cars. After all, someone said, "You are not an engineer." His reply was, "No I am not an engineer, but if I pressed this button under my desk, some of the best engineers in the world will walk through that door."
- **Organised** – Leadership often comes with enormous amount of information to collect, interpret and utilise. A leader must therefore be highly organised and structured in the way his/her responsibilities are carried out.
- **Consistent** – "A good leader is a solid and stable rock which staff can revolve around and refer to while working towards goals". A leader must therefore be consistent in their approach to responsibilities. Favouritism, mood swings and open dislike are avoided.
- **Diplomacy** – leadership is not a popularity contest but about carrying out what needs to be done – pleasant or otherwise. Diplomacy and tact are crucial in developing and sustaining supportive relationships and developing team members. Often leadership has to do with "balancing the needs of one group against the needs of another and keeping both groups happy".
- **Role model** – A leader must be a role model for followers or subordinates. They must uphold the highest personal and professional standards if they expect respect and support from the followers or staff.
- **Emotional intelligence** – Daniel Goleman highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence after studying a number of successful leaders. He argues that while the qualities traditionally associated with leadership are crucial, they are insufficient. He identified emotional intelligence as highly relevant and includes the following elements: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social awareness.
- **Social intelligence** – According to Ambassador Joseph, this refers to the ability to recognise and protect the dignity of difference. He argues that leaders with social intelligence "are the ones who are most convincing in persuading other s that diversity need not divide; that pluralism rightly understood and rightly practiced is a benefit not a burden; that the fear of difference is a fear of the future".

- **Spiritual intelligence** – This refers to “the ability to cope with the unexplored, the unexamined and the unknown; the capacity to transcend the reality we see and to imagine alternative possibilities; and the ability to step back, renew oneself and to find meaning and purpose in our existence (Ambassador Joseph). Spiritual intelligence reminds a leader and would be leaders that they have a role to play as agents of reconciliation and forgiveness. Among the greatest strengths of President Mandela was his ability to “alloy his strong beliefs with patience, charm, self-discipline and an ability to forgive”. He learned the language and history of his oppressors (Afrikaans) in order to understand their culture and concerns.
- **Purveyor of hope** – In the modern world full of challenges ranging from economic meltdown to terrorism, famine, disease and wars, every county needs leaders who can project hope; “leaders who can look beyond what they see and imagine alternative possibilities. Hope is the ability to look beyond the evidence and to see something deeper and different”.
- **Recognition of others’ contributions** – A leader looks for and acknowledges the best in his political opponents and enemies. It enriches a leader’s wisdom and places a leader on higher moral ground. It is on record that President Mandela saw in Botha (the architect of apartheid in South Africa) a reflection of qualities he wished to see in himself. Botha was a tough leader, a man clear in his principles, honest in his own way. “And yet Nelson Mandela, who has described apartheid as the second-worst crime of the 20th century after the Holocaust, responded to the news of the death of his former jailer not only with a message of condolence to his family, but expressing his recognition of the contribution Botha had made to peace”.

Perhaps you are beginning to think through, evaluate and appreciate the quality of leadership that has led to years of endless poverty, humiliation and slavery of generations of Africans. The truth is that most of our leaders lack credibility and integrity. The basis for judging the credibility of African leaders should include: reconstruction of the state, rebuilt citizenship, renewed social contract, reconstructed society and reclaimed and rebuilt integrated and inclusive economy (Tade Aina). There is the need for a “new leadership in the continent capable of delivering the people out of poverty, diseases, wars, famine, economic meltdown, political paralysis and insecurity” – the Obamas.

“The years of leadership incompetence, weak, ineffective, totalitarian and corrupt government as seen in DRC, Uganda, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Angola, Congo, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, Ivory Coast, Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe must give way to strong, effective, corruption free and solution driven government as seen in Botswana” (Editor Business, Education & Opinion).

This is where Openmind Foundation comes in. Our mission is to assist the Nigerian Nation to enjoy the products of democracy: free and vibrant press, free and fair election, transparent governance, respect for human rights, accountability, economic prosperity, an enterprising civil society, rule of law, and freedom of religion, thought and speech democracy through the following strategies:

1. Preparing grounds for the election of responsible, patriotic, competent and agenda driven politicians into power by educating at least 50% of the eligible Nigerian electorates within the next two years on:

- (a) The workings and limitations of a presidential system of government
 - (b) The power of a citizen through a single vote
 - (c) The dangers and limitations of voting on tribal, religious, and corrupt basis
 - (d) The art of effective selection and ejection of political leaders
 - (e) The endless possibilities for Nigeria and the role of effective leadership
2. Massive nationwide campaign aimed at facilitating hope, reconciliation and unity particularly among the three main Nigerian tribes Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba. The campaign is to drive home to the Nigerian people and tribes that “what unites the people and tribes of Nigeria is greater than what divides them”.
 3. A massive educational and behaviour modification campaign aimed at drawing attention to the ills of the Nigerian society and geared toward a mass rejection of those vices. This will operate under the “SAYNO AND SEE” campaign slogan and through School Clubs, Soap-Opera, etc.

Do something amazing and surprise yourself – join Openmind Foundation and make a difference in the quality of governance and standards of living of our people.