

LEADERSHIP: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Protocols

Introduction

May I begin by assuring the Body of Senior Advocates of Nigeria that I am richly honoured by your invitation to me to join you this evening, and by your acceptance of me as speaker at this dinner. I suspect that it is not exactly easy for the highest-ranking Learned Friends in our nation to subject themselves to even a few minutes of invited invasion by a 'friend' whose learned status is somewhat open to question. However, I am proud to say that some of your distinguished members regard me as a friend, which explains my temerity in getting up to address you now. It is also true that, some 42 years ago, the University of Sierra Leone awarded me an honorary doctorate degree in civil law – DCL – but I am careful to emphasize to everyone that I cannot claim any entitlement to professional legal recognition on account of that award.

Let me also clarify my objective in speaking here this evening. This is not a lecture, or even an address. Rather, I trust that you will allow me to share some thoughts on my view, which is that professionals are probably best placed to show what true leadership should look like, especially in this place, and in these times, when we are inclined to attribute many negative trends in our land to what we describe as 'poor leadership.' My view on this subject is one that I have held for quite a while. 23 years ago, in September 1994, I was invited to speak at a luncheon hosted by the Ikeja Jaycees, as they were known at the time. Speaking on the theme – **A NEW LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA**, I said –

"I am strongly convinced that the future of successful leadership in Nigeria will not begin among the politicians or the holders of public office, whether they be in uniform or in plain clothes. My belief is that, for the new leadership that we seek, we must turn to the people who belong to the professions – the people who undergo specific training to acquire certain knowledge and skills, the people who are instructed and trained in the meaning and application of ethics and standards, the people who have voluntarily prepared themselves to render service, and who are committed to life-long acceptance of the fact that they must stand ready to be judged by their performance. Clearly, we have no hope of developing successful leaders in government or politics until we clean up our leadership act at the levels where our professionals operate."

Why Leadership?

As we all know, there are many definitions of leadership, and they range from the one that claims that a leader is able to take people to a place where they would not wish to go, all the way to the other extreme where the leader is seen as the weakest member of the team, since he cannot claim success until the slowest member of his team has reached the destination of their joint endeavour. I prefer to escape possible confusion by adopting the definition that sees leadership as –

An influence relationship between leaders and followers through which they effect changes that must be made for the realization of their mutual purposes.

That definition gives rise to a number of thoughts –

First, that a leader must have followers. Someone has said that anyone who claims to be leading, but has no one willingly following him, is merely taking a walk!

Second, that both leader and follower should be pursuing the same goals; they have a shared purpose.

Third, that they must both be ready to take decisions and actions – including making changes as necessary – in pursuit of their mutual objectives.

And fourth, that both leader and follower can influence one another as they work together in pursuit of their shared goals.

Leadership in Practice

Yet, in our actual practice of leadership, we often come face to face with some challenges. First, we feel a need to distinguish the leader from his followers, and so we give him a specific position with an appropriate title, a position reflecting his higher status, which we may then further recognize by awarding perquisites (a.k.a. privileges or freebies) that sweeten the life of the leader. We may be so taken up with these trappings of position that we forget that there is actually a good reason for appointing or electing people as leaders, and that leadership is not title, status or money.

Leadership is needed at every level of life where there is a responsibility to be carried out. So, first and foremost, the central concern of the leadership role is RESPONSIBILITY, which usually means that the leader must maintain a focus on the RESULTS that must be achieved, remembering that such results must keep faith with the expectations of people in respect of quality, timeliness and cost-effectiveness of the outcome of work.

To help the leader in the PERFORMANCE of his task, we usually provide resources, and we give him the authority to deploy such resources where they will be most effective. Some leaders regard this authority as the power of position, and are often unable to see the difference between the application of authority for effective performance and the display of power just to impress onlookers.

Perhaps the greatest danger that leaders often face is the temptation to ignore or oppose the need for ACCOUNTABILITY. To normal human beings, it seems reasonable that anyone who is given certain resources with the authority to deploy them for an agreed purpose, should be willing to give account of performance whenever such accounting will promote mutual confidence between the leader and other stakeholders of the enterprise. In practice however, it is not unknown for some so-called leaders to crave the establishment of a system where they can enjoy immunity from accountability.

Expectation v. Performance

Here, we may pause to highlight the main concern of this paper, which is that we often confuse issues by indulging in the practice of rewarding leadership performance before it actually happens! We give title, status and other privileges to the leader on the day that he takes up the role *because we expect performance of the right quality from him*. Three questions immediately arise:

- first, have we done everything necessary to ensure that the leader has the capacity to live up to our expectation?
- second, have we made provision for the mandatory learning that the leader should undergo in his new responsibility to enable him to perform to expectation?
- And third, do we have credible, fail-safe arrangements for separating a non-performing leader from the role, and from the privileges of office if, indeed, the gap between expectation and performance cannot be bridged?

Leadership and the Professional

Clearly then, we need to be truly concerned if, in our everyday experience, leadership performance does not always reflect 'best practice'. Considering the importance of good leadership in the attainment of sustainable success in all situations, I suggest that we consider what I regard as the superior fitness of professionals for leadership, since I believe - indeed, I am convinced - that professionals are in the position to bring the *culture of best practice* that they apply in their normal professional work to their leadership performance.

To further elaborate my suggestion, I begin by sharing the definition of the word – profession – which I have borrowed from the American People's Encyclopaedia. It says that a profession is – “*A vocation based on long specialized intellectual training that enables a particular service to be rendered. Professions generally represent a high degree of creative thought and are thus distinguished from vocations calling for technical skill alone.*”

The encyclopaedia goes on to add that professions and professional practice usually demonstrate the following features: high prestige; lengthy periods of training; standards established through formal examinations; and rigid codes of ethics designed to safeguard the interest of clients.

I justify my own faith in professionals in the light of the following facts:

- First, the professional voluntarily commits himself to the values, standards and discipline of his profession. He does this because those standards and values are universally respected, and are based on concepts of equity and fairness – concepts that require the practitioner to respect the rights and entitlements of other people.
- Second, the professional undergoes formal study, followed by a maturing process under the supervision of someone with experience and commitment in the same field.
- Third, the professional must observe the discipline of his profession in order to be allowed to continue in practice. If he fails, there are sanctions to be applied by his fellow-professionals.
- Fourth, the professional is actually required to pass on the benefits of his discipline to his juniors in the profession. Sharing such benefits with the rest of society should come naturally.
- Next, when we study the code of practice established by the profession, we observe the importance that is given to objectivity, and to the application of due care and diligence in the professional's daily work.
- Professionals are also expected to conduct themselves with courtesy and consideration towards all with whom they come in contact.
- Finally, accountability is an inescapable imperative in the work life of the professional. The same goes for integrity. Those who embrace integrity as a way of life will readily acknowledge and accept that they are accountable for their behaviour and performance, not only to the people whose lives they touch, but also to a Divine Authority from whom nothing can be hidden or disguised.

In summary, we may conclude that the charter of the true professional emphasizes the importance of giving good service; the essence of applying high standards and ethical principles; and the imperative of safeguarding the interest of the client or customer. Values, standards, stakeholder focus.

Now I am going to ask that you stretch your imagination for one brief moment: What would happen to leadership performance in this nation if all who are elected or appointed to leadership responsibility were to use this charter as the template for their own performance? If they had genuine commitment to the application of the right values, standards and discipline, and were determined consistently to deliver service that would truly safeguard the best interests of their stakeholders? Without a doubt, we would joyfully witness a clearly discernible improvement in leadership performance, and the yawning gap between expectation and performance would be firmly and permanently bridged.

The Way Forward

So, the main thought that I have tried to share tonight, is that we can best bridge the gap between expectation and performance among our leaders by applying some of the cardinal principles that govern professionalism and professional practice. Even so, there are some basic considerations that deserve our continued attention, even as practitioners of respectable professions that need effective leadership for sustainable success.

- Let us remember that the leader succeeds best by working sincerely for the good of the corporate body, not for selfish or narrow interests. It should be obvious that a society or an organization that is in wholesome condition is best able to provide for the genuine welfare of its individual members. Where the community itself is in poor shape, the prospects for the individual are pretty dim.
- Good values form the best basis for taking positive leadership decisions. Good values not only cater to the best interests of people; they also ensure that we will all pursue an agenda of peaceful coexistence. If we engage in unlawful acts that endanger other people's life and limb, we lose the peace and jeopardize the future of our community.
- The leader should be a person of high standards, always able to show a good example in his own work and relationships. This enables followers to fix their focus on ennobling standards as well, and the general tone of the entire community is uplifted.
- Self-discipline is an essential factor of the leader's success, and facilitates his ability to learn and to develop his leadership capacity. It is also the best way of ensuring that he will always have the moral right to demand consistent best practice from his people.

Of course, there will be challenges, and the leader should expect challenges in the following areas:

- **People:** Finding the right mix to work with, and gaining and retaining their commitment.
- **Interpersonal skills:** Communicating effectively, and applying the right leadership style to each situation.
- **Power & authority:** Knowing the right balance, and using both to achieve the desired objectives of the endeavour.
- **Courage & strength:** The will to stand firm in the face of opposition, and the readiness to admit when one is in error.
- **Learning:** The ability and readiness to learn and to pursue self-development.
- **Values, ethics, standards:** Standing for, and operating with the right values at all times.
- **Empowerment:** Progressively encouraging followers to enter into leadership roles, and thus preparing the leaders of the future.

- **Accountability:** Readiness to be judged by the quality of one's own leadership performance.
- **Example:** Showing the way to followers by personal example.

Conclusion

I bring an end to this thought-sharing privilege by recalling a fact of which we are all aware. The rhetoric of leadership in our land is eminently respectable, and it is difficult to fault the things that we are usually told about the need for probity, transparency, good values, and many other positive factors that should support our nation building endeavour. The final thought that I would offer to leaders of the present and the future, is best illustrated in a thought expressed by Francis Bacon, who said: *"He that gives good advice builds with one hand; he that gives good counsel and example builds with both; he that gives good counsel but bad example builds with one hand and tears down with the other."*

Once again, I wish to express my true appreciation for the privilege that I have been given to share my thoughts this evening, and pray that the Lord will continue to bless our joint efforts to bring leadership performance in line with the best professional principles that are the true hallmarks of the Body of Senior Advocates of Nigeria.

Christopher Kolade
November, 2017