

Covenant University

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CONVOCATION LECTURE

EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN AFRICA: CURRENT CONTEXTS AND FUTURE PATHWAYS

By

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HR Vice-President, Shell Downstream, Africa

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About Distinguished Lecturer

The Distinguished Lecturer, **Dr. Akin Oparison**, obtained a B.Sc Honours degree in Human Physiology from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria and started his working career as a medical sales representative with May and Baker a multinational pharmaceutical company, in Nigeria. He left this company, initially to pursue a Master's Degree in Business Administration and ended up obtaining an M.Sc and a Ph.D in Business Policy and Organizational Development from the university of Wales, Cardiff.

He returned to Nigeria and went back to his Alma Mater as a lecturer on the university's MBA program. In 1987, Dr. Oparison joined Price Waterhouse as a Management Consultant with a focus on Human Resource Management. In 1991 he was invited to take up the position of Head of Human Resources for Sterling Winthrop, another multinational Pharmaceutical and Consumer Health Products Company in Nigeria. He worked hard to develop and run the Management Development Training programmes for the Middle East, Africa and Asian Subcontinent (MEAASC) region of Sterling Winthrop.

In 1995, Akin was head-hunted by British American Tobacco to join the Board of its Nigerian subsidiary, a publicly quoted company, as HR Director. He also doubled as Regional HR Manager for West Africa. In 1998, He was seconded to Russia for two years as Compensation and Benefits Manager to harmonize and implement western type performance management, reward and benefits model, practices and processes in two major Soviet companies which British American Tobacco had just acquired in that country.

Our distinguished Guest Lecturer returned to Nigeria as part of a Management team that was charged with winding up an almost 60 years old publicly quoted company where BAT had controlling shares. The team thereafter re-established a new

100% BAT owned company. BAT was then making a multi-million dollar investment to build a state of the art factory, as well as a tobacco leaf growing operation and a marketing company.

For over seventeen years, Dr. Akin Oparison was HR Vice-President Shell's Downstream Business in Africa. He served as a member of the Executive Management Team for Shell Oil Products Africa as well as a member of the Shell Downstream Global HR Leadership team. He was based in Johannesburg - South Africa. He now runs his own Organizational Performance Improvement practice - *3e Performance Africa* .

We have in our midst today, an accomplished academic, scholar, boardroom technocrat, consultant and a fruitful entrepreneur. He has developed innovative systems and strategies. He has raised leaders and experts in the industry and the professions. Ladies and gentlemen, please join me as I request our Guest Lecturer, *Dr. Akin OPARISON* to take the stage.

COVENANT UNIVERSITY

ANTHEM

We're a Covenant Generation	Covenant generation arise
Pursuing excellence	Light and knowledge to shine
Redeemed to reign	Glorious foundation stone
Learning to lead	Leadership skills to show
We are bound by an oath	Departing from knowledge
Obeying rules to rule	To empowerment Legalism
Making Kings of youth	To realism
Flying high on covenant wings	Wisdom's call for change
Wisdom's call for change	Inspired, on fire
Inspired on fire	With Courage Marching on in
With courage Marching on in	grace
in grace	God's own arrow
God's own arrow	Shot for glory.
Shot for glory.	



Our Vision

To be a leading World-Class University, committed to raising a new generation of leaders in all fields of Human endeavour

Our Mission

To create knowledge and restore the dignity of the black man via a Human Development Total Man Concept driven curriculum employing innovative, leading-edge teaching and learning methods, research and professional services that promote integrated, life-applicable, life-transforming education, relevant to the context of Science, Technology and Human Capacity Building



EXPANDING THE FRONTIERS OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN AFRICA: CURRENT CONTEXTS AND FUTURE PATHWAYS

When I received the invitation for this presentation, I was in the middle of preparing for a conference in Cape Town, South Africa that is seeking to explore how to get African Universities on the path towards top quartile benchmarks in global academic rankings. As you probably know by now, only three African universities feature in the top 500 in the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU). The three are in South Africa and highest ranked Nigerian University is not on the top 1000. The request my colleagues and I had from the organizers of the conference was to describe how to enhance the performance of African Universities through Human Capital Development interventions, using proven techniques with demonstrable success in business organizations.

My key message to the conference, based on my experience in industry was that; The characteristics of high-performing Universities that will define their brand must include the following;

1. Knowing who they are, where they are going and strategies to get there as well as how effectively these strategies are executed
2. Clearly defined Market Position - all staff collaborate to achieve growth of student applications, courses commenced and completed, academic level of qualification, student satisfaction, post-graduate employment uptake and continuous learning.
3. They are People Focused - Successful universities recognize they are truly people businesses.

Every University's Senior Executive Team must create a clear and compelling sense of purpose and intent for their staff, both

academic and administrative. Senior leaders must engage with their staff to create an Organizational Climate in which they are self-motivated to direct their effort, energy and endeavor to achieve success in all areas of endeavor.

4. Oriented towards Quality - all staff are committed to design, develop and deliver high quality educational products which are continuously reviewed and refined so that they are valued by student customers, and prospective employers.
5. Strong Financial performance - All staff contribute to their University being run as a financially viable enterprise to ensure sufficient margin and cash flow are generated to support ongoing investment in people, product, i.e. course content development, and infrastructure renewal

These are more than mere characteristics. They constitute a universities brand. Fact is you do not have a choice of whether to have a brand or not to have one. You have one all the same. You either have a default brand or one you deliberately invested in building. To manage its brand actively these characteristics must be on the Leadership dashboard of a university in pursuit of excellence and world-class standards in my view, and must be measured and tracked continuously.

How well a university does these will define its brand. A university depends on its Internal Stake-holders - its Academic and Non-Academic staff as well as the experiences of its current students to create its brand. A crucial imperative to deliver the promise of its brand is for the university leadership to cascade a "Climate of Excellence" where their leadership behaviors are focused to equip, empower and engage all of its internal stakeholders; allowing them to be the best that they can be. Only through highly engaged and delighted Internal Stake-holders who take pride in what they do; achieve and feel inspired and valued and who own their work, does a university have a chance of validating and making its brand attractive.

I also emphasized that the climate of an organization “what it feels like to work in that organization” is the key determinant of performance and that the most influential of the variables that set the tone of the climate is leadership behavior – others are the structure of the organization and the management processes in use. So developing their own internal leadership capabilities is key, not to talk of supporting leadership development for industry and for the nation.

I thought oh well, I will come here today and share the same thoughts. However upon further reflection and seeing your goal statement for the year, which is “Expanding our frontiers: securing the future” I changed my mind. I changed my mind because your goal is broken down into seven components that touch significantly on what I said I consider to be characteristics of high performing universities. I told myself; these guys have got it! Period! I took particular notice of two of these seven components – Raising global Leaders and Industry/University collaboration. Since you specifically asked in your letter inviting me to reflect on leadership issues, with a charge to the graduating students on expectations of 21st century HR imperatives I decided that I will focus my presentation on Leadership and developing talent for industry. And that is what I have done. So help me God!

The CEO of a multinational company called his prepared successor, the heir-apparent, into his office and said to him; “You will be proceeding on an expatriate assignment. The business you are being posted to holds the key to the entire future of our enterprise. The business is in very bad shape and indeed anything that can go wrong has gone wrong. There is not a single competent manager out there, not one. For the survival of our enterprise, this business must be turned around and brought back into the mainstream. Right now, things are out of control. This mission is so critical, I would have undertaken it myself, but I am

entrusting it to you. It is a process that will take several years but you can only be out there for 36 months.

The host country will be hostile and will undermine your every step. If you make it to 3 years, you will then have to return to Headquarters. It will be critical therefore to set things up and put people in place within the 3years, to carry on after your inevitable departure.

The young manager asked to see the CV of some of the staff out there but none looked suitable.

He then asked if he could take along with him some well-trained, highly experienced, loyal, tried and tested managers with the right mindset. The answer was a very simple but emphatic NO.

How many of you will jump at such an assignment?

Here is what I see the young manager was faced with;

1. He had a very short time to fulfill his mission
2. If he failed, it will cost him his career.
3. The entire enterprise was counting on the outcome of the assignment
4. The full impact of what he was about to do will only become manifest after he had left.
5. As the outcome will only be fully realized after his departure, a lot will depend on the people he selected to work with him.
6. The people he had to choose from were all flawed
7. He could not take people from Headquarters with him on the assignment and had to work with what he found out there.

This manager took the assignment and made a great success of it. How many of you think this is a great leadership story worth reading by anyone who aspires to leadership? As a matter of fact, I believe it should be essential reading for Leadership Development. I have personally learnt a lot from the leadership principles and practices of this guy.

The very first lesson I learnt was in the way he recruited people who worked with him on the assignment.

He did not base his selection on their CV – what they did in the past; rather, he looked past that and what they were doing at the time. He saw what the people could become and knew he could help them become that. So He told them he would make them successful if they followed him. Actually what He said was “I will make you fishers of men”.

The reason I told you this story is not because this is Covenant University and it is a university founded on Christian mission ethos. It helps that it is, but the reasons I told it are two. The literature on this leadership brand contains profound principles and answers to issues that Leadership researchers, scholars and practitioners are all grappling with, all well-articulated and clearly laid out and illustrated in ways that are stunning in their simplicity.

For example; today a lot is being said and written about Servant-Leadership as if it is a concept of our time. Fact is that it was spoken about and demonstrated two thousand years ago. It is there in this piece of Leadership Literature that is today widely available but is rarely used outside of religious settings. Yet the person we speak about was not a religious leader. And when He was articulating these principles and touching lives, His audiences were certainly not people of any particular religion.

They were everyday people with quite diverse beliefs and practices. They were farmers, house-wives, fishermen, government officials, politicians, professionals, military officers, students, employers, etc.

Today, his words are confined to a book that is utilized only by people of a particular religion and even amongst these people they see it essentially as a religious book. It is my hope that we can put His principles and insights back on the street, into

organizations, Educational institutions, etc. where all that need it can access it, stripped of its religious wrappings.

And in any case, it would not be a very smart thing to come here and attempt to preach a sermon to Bishop Oyedepo and such eminent men of God present here. I only want to speak about Leadership lessons I have learnt and used in my career. I have used some well. Many I learnt from failures, through not having applied them or breaching them.

A second and even more important reason is that an organization, by definition, is not about one person; others are involved. Organizations are therefore about relationships and the literature I refer to is the manufacturers manual for relationships. God made us for relationships. I often say that in organizations, there are no business issues – there are people issues and the biggest is about relationships. All the characters of Leadership are displayed in relationships and so it is within relationships that leadership is developed. People are struggling in relationships because the software for running such relationships that was designed and written by the manufacturer of relationships to be installed in relationships has been corrupted. For such relationships to work as the maker intended it, the corrupted software has to be deleted; the original software reinstalled and the entire relationship rebooted. All the truth about this process is in the manufacturer's manual.

I will revisit this later but for now let us get back to the recruitment and selection methods that this Leader by Example used. First let us look at the type of people that He assembled for His assignment.

There were, amongst them, unlearned fishermen, an unscrupulous tax collector that was detested by the people because he was the very face of their oppressor. One eventually betrayed him. They were all quarrelsome and trying to outdo

each other, constantly arguing and jostling for position beside Him and some of them got their mother to put in a word for them. They were not the most dependable collection. They dozed when they should have been holding up in prayer. One of them called Peter was impulsive and fearful all at once. He yanked off the ear of one who came to take his master away yet when his master appeared down, he denied him in spite of earlier boasts to die with him. So fearful were they that they all scattered and went into hiding after their master died. These guys were as human as any random 12 people in any team today, if not worse. Yet, on these he banked the success of His mission. And the mission has been successful.

What made the difference was quite simple. Their leader supported them to be the best they could be. He knew they were not qualified but He invested in qualifying them for the assignment one day at a time and one issue and coaching moment at a time. He believed in them and cast a possibility of greatness for them and they eventually lived it. They were mere humans and he made them into super humans. He was able to do this for one reason – He valued them. He valued them not because they were good but because He accepted them as they were, where they were and believed in Himself to make them better than He found them. He saw them, not as they were, but as they could be. He valued them because He valued them. Period! He saw them as precious gifts and treated them as such. He knew that they were valuable to God and God has a keen interest in their lives and so did he.

You will notice I keep using the word value here. I could have used the word LOVE but this word does not travel well in organizations. The word VALUING PEOPLE does. It is the word I use in organizations. But frankly they are not different. Loving a person is valuing that person. You can replace the word 'love' with 'value' whenever you come across it and there will be no loss of meaning.

Now it is important to establish what love is. The common meaning we assign to love is usually one that suggests that we are getting pleasure from the object of our love. You love something or someone because you derive pleasure from the relationship or from the thing you love. This kind of love is not the “giving” love that is described and usually referred to when the word is used in the book I speak about. It is a “receiving” love. One that is conditional on the object of our love being able to sustain a capacity to please us. When you truly love something you would spruce up the thing and attribute value to it unconditionally. To love a person is to value and honor the person. God values us and created us in His own image, assigning His attributes and character to us.

Valuing is the software that was meant to run relationships. A hacker introduced a virus into the software and relationships began to be run on fear, control, manipulation and so on. These are inherently unstable and the more they are used the more controls are required and on and on.

Others do not want to be controlled because they want to be in control themselves. This is why relationships run on control are inherently unstable. Everything in such relationships are reduced to a complex game of control and resisting control. Control is a zero-sum game. The gain of one is the loss of the other. Such relationships weaken and inevitably always end up on life support or disintegrate.

Unlike control, Love or Valuing grows the more it is given. Love or valuing is the only thing that grows as you give it out to people. When it is the software running a relationship, such a relationship thrives because the more you give the more you receive, setting up a virtuous cycle of growth and resilience.

As with everything God created, there are specific principles at work in relationships. Whenever the principles are breached,

things would fall apart. While God instituted love as the medium of relationship between His human creations, He gave man dominion over every other thing He had created. So, the relationship between man and God was based on love and the relationship between

man and his fellowman was also to be based on love. Man was however put in a position to dominate and control all other things created by God on earth. Problem arises when this principle is violated; such as when a person seeks to dominate and control another person. All sorts of issues arise and the relationship becomes dysfunctional. Most of the issues and conflict in relationships have their root in the violation of this established principle of relationship. The Leadership literature I have referred to demonstrates how the relationships between This Leader by Example and His disciples and indeed with all others are run on valuing. Even though He had sufficient powers to have run such relationships on control, He did not.

As I looked deeper into the methods of this Leader by example, I also noticed that he taught his disciples a lot of things. One thing struck me particularly. They got to know very much but for a long time remained ineffective. The reason is this. They were not what they knew. This was a particularly important Human Capital Development lesson for me.

Organizations invest huge sums of money and time in training and learning events for their people. Very often, the returns on such investment are at best questionable. I realized that it is not so much about what people know and learn but who they become through knowing what they know. I identified three steps in His process of transforming people. First He engaged them; then He equipped them and then He empowered them. That is how I got the name 3e Performance for my consultancy practice. It is also the 3 steps we use in our Leadership development interventions.

It all begins with an appreciation that the way something or a situation presents or occurs to you would shape your response and actions. This also influences the intensity of your action. Your current motivation is therefore limited to how something or a situation occurs to you and this is what determines your current performance. For breakthrough performance to happen, the way the same thing or situation occurs to you must transform. That is inspiration. It leads to fresh thinking, causing you to envision breakthrough possibilities and a passion to follow through. Then your response and actions, as well as the intensity you put into it changes to another level. This is what results in breakthrough performance.

The difference between a person that demonstrates leadership and others is that the same thing occurs to them in different ways. The way Goliath occurred to young David was certainly different from the way he appeared to King Saul and his army. Of course, the way David occurred to his elder brothers is quite different from the way David occurred to himself.

For leadership to happen, the way a particular thing or situation occurs to you must transform from the obvious. If you want to inspire people to bigger possibilities, change how their current situation occurs to them.

It begins with ENGAGE. Engage entails cracking into and exploring how things or situations occur to people as individuals or collectively as a pair in a relationship, a team or an organization. This leads to a healthy challenge of assumptions and constructed realities arising from such assumptions. This is then followed by a controlled disruption of the normal ways of engaging and doing things. This is followed by the introduction to new ways of thinking about the same things or situation, which then results in a transformation of how the thing or situation

occurs to them. Teaching people more things may not on its own deliver the outcomes sought, if it is not built on a fundamental shift in how things occur to them. People need a self-awareness that comes with discovering who they are, to be achieving what they currently achieve, as well as who they must become to achieve what they aspire to. This is the first step in developing Leaders and one that institutions that wish to develop leaders must find ways to do better than is being done at present.

After Engaging comes Equipping. EQUIP entails providing people with access to the vital resources that they require to transition from who they are to who they have to be in order to achieve what they aspire to. It is about providing a tool-kit of techniques and 'how to essentials' for doing what they know to do and do differently. In the story of our Lord and His disciples this step included receiving the Holy Spirit.

EMPOWER is about creating a climate that causes people to see that they are part of something big and powerful for themselves and their organization. This makes them feel competent and confident to play a part in it, put in more effort and apply the tools they are equipped with.

Reading about this manager has been the most profound experience for me. I got to know what Leadership is. It refined my approach to recruitment for today's requirements as well as developing a pipeline of future leaders, the continuous assessment of potential, Talent Management, Coaching, Learning, etc. as well as creating an environment for people to be the best that they can be.

So that we do not miss the strategic, as well as the contemporary importance of what this is all about, let me establish a key fact at this juncture; the people in an Organization and the people of a country can constitute a demonstrable competitive edge. Only a nation or business that is supporting its people to become the very best that they can be has a fighting chance in the unfolding

global competitive landscape. The key is in Talent Development.

Only Leaders develop talent and only leaders can develop leaders. As such our capacity to grow our economies and drive the performance of our respective businesses could be easily limited by our capacity to develop leadership talent and that would invariably constrain organizational performance and national competitiveness.

It is because it is only leaders that can develop leaders that talent development is not something that can be done in a hurry. It is a process and usually entails a very deliberate intervention. You develop leaders, equip them, plant them around the organization and empower them to develop other leaders who then produce more leaders and the process continues as the organization renews itself.

People not only begin to envision a future of spectacular possibilities, they feel empowered to be part of it, as they discover how their individual outcomes are igniting each other's success.

People Make It Happen!

I mentioned earlier that people constitute a source of competitive advantage. Traditional sources of competitive advantage for organizations and nations have been evolving in quite dramatic ways. In manufacturing for instance, access to natural raw materials and energy are no longer quite as influential in defining success as it used to be. Material substitutes and effective alternative energy sources are rapidly being developed with advancing technology. Technology itself is fast becoming a more level playing field. Imagine that the average cellular telephone today or even an average washing machine has more technology in it than was available 40 years ago to take man to the moon and back.

Also, there is a wider range of financing options, certainly more global options are available today than have ever been. A small entrepreneur here in Nigeria could, these days quite easily be accessing venture capital from as far away as the USA.

So today, with other competitive weapons stretched to their limits, people offer the only true unique competitive advantage. An article in the National Geographic recently said this; “Information Technologies, for all the attention they receive, lag far behind the power of the human brain.

Researchers estimate that the normal brain has quadrillion connections between its nerve cells, more than all the phone calls made in the USA in the past decade”.

Everything around us that is man-made has its origins in the minds of people. It is all about their ideas and thoughts that survived to find expression, one way or another. In organizations, this is eventually expressed in the bottom-line. So profit is the ideas and efforts of our people expressed in the bottom-line. This is why it is often said that people are the most valuable assets of an enterprise.

People have the potential for value creation and contribution flow that are limitless, unlike other assets with finite capacities. The fact that people's ideas, behavior and efforts are elastic and they cannot be imitated is what makes them the source of true strategic competitive advantage. After all, it is the ideas and discretionary efforts of people in organizations that translate strategies into performance outcomes.

Nurturing the ideas, directing the efforts and controlling the actions of people is what organizational leaders do and how well this is done is a source of competitive advantage. But at the same time people are also the most long-suffering assets, and that is not such a great thing. Committed people are assets but stranded

people are not. The critical variable that determines whether what an organization has are committed people or stranded people is leadership.

Nurturing ideas and channeling efforts requires leadership skills. Where these are lacking, the nurturing of ideas is impaired. Things that are seen are easy to measure, control and manage. Ideas and thoughts are not because they are intangible. As a result of the difficulty in nurturing and harnessing ideas and thoughts, the default is usually to direct the focus to controlling the seen actions of people. It is easier. But then this does not develop people. What does is influencing the reason they do what they do and nurturing their thoughts and ideas.

Leadership has been reduced to controlling because that is where we see but it is not where it can be found. We must redefine what leadership is and design approaches for delivering it and measuring it. Organizations are beginning to do this; some more than others. These are some of the reasons why, more than ever before, leadership development is fast becoming the distinguishing factor between successful organizations and not so successful ones; between a people, whether as organizations, communities or nations that are just in the game to play and those playing to win.

I am not using Leadership in a positional sense but as behaviors that people display; what people do!

Leadership is not a position. It is choices that people make. What they do. It is about behaviour that is visible. As the competitive landscape has evolved, so has the new world come to require more leadership behaviour -something I call "LEADERSHIPPING". It is synthesis of what leaders do ...sizing-up a situation and understanding it as it really is, envisioning a more desirable situation, then inspiring others (helping them to see and change how something occurs to them)

to release the discretionary effort required to move from the current situation to the desirable situation. The new world needs more "leadershiping". Leaders facilitate and support people to become the best that they can be, thereby performing at their utmost. This means serving them, providing them with what they require to achieve their purpose and goals. Leaders serve. They serve their people. Bosses serve their subordinates; political leaders and civil servants serve their citizens.

Organizations today require People Leadership – creating the environment for others to be successful. This is not a HR thing. It is what managing must entail. Leadership may begin with what we do, but what actually matters is what we cause others to do. When we cause people to be willing to go on a journey with us and on the journey they release discretionary effort, then we are exhibiting leadership qualities.

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A University that aspires to such lofty intent and wishes to perpetually remain relevant in the socio-economic calculus of its nation and indeed the world must take Leadership Education to a whole new level.

For too long there has been undue dependence on a model that is focused on providing just knowledge and information about what

the presence and absence of leadership looks like and then hoping that once people know these they will begin to do the needful and transform. This model has become too limited to guarantee success in a global business environment and into the future. Leadership Education must entail seeing leadership as learnable behaviors, calibrating them and developing approaches that will support people to transform and become more of what they know. This is essential for a robust and sustainable development of Human Capital as it is becoming quite clear that focus must shift to building people, not things. It is in an environment where human capital is well developed that infrastructure development can be sustained.

I have a very simple model for talent development. There is an aspect that has to do with providing Knowledge and Skills to people. This refers to the technical skills and knowledge to do what one has to do. Then there is the aspect that is concerned about how and why people do what they do. This is more about who they are than what they know. This is the real Leadership development challenge. It is the reason Leadership is notoriously difficult to teach. As I said earlier, it is not about knowledge – what people know; it is about who they are.

Early in our careers, up to 80% of successful performance is dependent on ourselves and 20% is dependent on others. At this level all we need is strong technical skills and a dose of interpersonal skills to a more or less extent. As we grow higher we get to a point where more than 80% successful performance is dependent on others and 20% is dependent on our skills and even this 20% is about making others successful. Here, we require essentially, leadership skills.

To rise beyond a particular level in an organization, it is our leadership skills that come into scrutiny. Herein lies a vulnerability. Leadership development is making the transition

from being an individual contributor to (1) Managing others and (2) Managing Managers – a transition that focusses on relationships. First, it is relationships within the line and amongst peers, progressively moving into relationships between functional units and then ultimately relationships with external stake-holders that become more complex and intricate the higher you go.

When these transitions are not being made effectively, people find themselves in leadership levels they have not been prepared for;

1. People are ineffective in their roles, they fail to deliver and often cost more than they are worth. You find people that should be strengthening the business for perpetuity, seeing round the bend and planning for tomorrow's business stuck in delivering today's business and following up on yesterday's business; something that their subordinates or subordinates' subordinate should be doing

2. They devalue the people they manage as they are not helping them and stretching them to develop into who they are capable of becoming and so inadvertently construct a business foundation that very easily imperils the future of the business. They clog the pipeline and prevent the flow of strong leadership talent through to create a bench-strength of next generation of leaders.

The key lever for talent development in an organization is to support people in making these transitions and the critical skills required are people leadership skills.

The Black Man

The fact that specific reference is made to the black man in your mission statement is not lost on me. Let me test something with

you.

Expatriates in a particular country were asked, in a survey, some time ago to give their impressions of their host country and these are some of the things they had to say: “Instead of going to Court and having my driver's license taken away, could I not just pay a 'fine' to somebody?”

“Finding a house was arduous for me...for my wife it was a question of viewing and crying.”

“Never go into a hospital conscious.”

“Things are improving here. Only 30 people have been shot this year.”

How many of you think I am talking about:

The United States of America

A European Country

An African Country

Actually, this was Russia, about ten years ago!!

We have been conditioned to think the worst of ourselves in Africa. Our self-image is often what limits us.

A few years ago a number of stolen Japanese cars were found in Kenya and the Kenyan press made much noise about it. What was interesting was that more airtime was devoted to the fact that Kenyans, including unfortunately their parliamentarians were driving around in stolen cars, than the fact that Japanese were stealing cars from their own countries and exporting them to Kenya. You would have thought that Kenyans were snatching cars in the streets of Tokyo and Osaka and then exporting them to their home country. Regrettable as this whole situation was, I am certain that the poor Kenyans who bought these cars had no clue what the origins of these cars were and were themselves merely victims of unscrupulous international syndicates of probably Kenyans and most certainly, Japanese. The irony is that these

criminals were not the subject of the spotlight and

Indignation of the press.

Nigerians are fond of telling all sorts of scary stories about Nigeria. I am all for people being self-critical, speaking out about how things don't work, how it is dangerous to live in many of our towns, poor social infrastructure, lack of medical insurance, good schools etc. There are things happening in Africa that are quite scary, but then these are always only just a part of the story. Great things are happening as well and scary stories are not the sole preserve of Africa. I have been robbed in Lagos but so also have I been robbed in London. The media does not tell us the news; whatever the media chooses to tell us is the news. Let us always remember that the media that carry and inform us of these stories are not where the news is, but the news is where the media chooses to be.

Africa has been a major exporter of talent to the west for a very long time even though this is something it can least afford. Spending its meager resources in developing Doctors, Teachers, Nurses Etc., and losing these to the west is not sustainable and is a major factor in its continuing underdevelopment. Mercifully a good number of them, particularly the younger ones, are returning.

One of them said to me recently, “what I can do that will be a big deal here will not even move the needle in the US.”

50% African talent are in the Diaspora

African Graduates living in Western developed countries:

Burundi, Kenya and Uganda 35%

Ghana 45%

Angola & Mauritius 55%

There is an African saying that until the lions have their own storyteller, the hunter will always be the hero. We, as Africans,

need to tell our own stories better. It is not about hiding the truth at all. It is about telling them from our own perspective.

There are terrible things happening in many of the countries across Africa, like bad governments, poor infrastructure etc. You can actually say that Africans are generally surviving in spite of their governments. The way I see it, this demonstrates the resilience and skills of the African more than anything. Compare an African woman in the village who has to make tough choices, tradeoffs and decisions such as whether to feed her children with goat milk or sell the goat milk to buy medicine to cure a bout of malaria or to pay school fees that is way overdue, while her western counterparts only have to decide whether to take skimmed milk or whole milk.

In Africa, even today, many people still travel miles every day to attend school. I arrived at a country once and driving from the airport into town, I noticed groups of young people sitting under streetlights studying. I was told that many of them took fairly long walks to these study places because of the lack of electric power in their homes. Yet, in the end, some (maybe not enough) of these children do make it, in spite of such severe infrastructure and other handicaps, to the world stage.

Then, rather than earn the respect they duly deserve, they are judged and made to swim against currents of harsh opinions because of the countries they come from and the people that rule in such countries. Their strength and resilience is not what is measured. Who they have become because of the terrain their life's journey has taken them through and the character they have developed on this journey is often not what is brought into scrutiny but those other things that specifically play to their weakness. Yet such weaknesses are often more about knowledge and exposure which can be relatively easily provided than the character that defines who a person is and which is formed through one's life journey.

Ladies and gentlemen, these are the true heroes of Africa. They are, for me, the truly newsworthy ones. Africa continues to perform against all odds because of their heroism. Let us tell their stories more and remove the blanket of gloom that envelops Africa at the moment to reveal the glitters of light in these gems that are currently obscured. Some of them are being released here today as eagles.

In a noisy world of crowded frequencies, Africa needs to use the airtime it gets better. Whether it is in a conversation between two or in the mass media, we need to tell more of the stories of the true heroes of Africa who are surviving in spite of their respective leadership's determination to impoverish them. Let us tell more of the stories of the people who, with their meager resources, are daily making sacrifices to give their children a better life and therefore building the African talent pipeline of tomorrow, rather than allow the airtime to be hijacked by stories of the selfish minority, the criminal elements or the greedy government officials and politicians. Let us study and showcase more of the leadership credentials and Teachable Points of View of such people.

Relationships

I referred to the fact that Leadership is notoriously difficult to teach. A great part of Leadership development comes from Self-Awareness, so must a great part of Leadership development come from Self-development. There are two main influences on this; the first one concerns our self-awareness within relationships with people we are privileged to meet in our life journey and the second concerns the use of authority in leadership.

Relationships serve a particular purpose. They are to develop our character. They are where the characters of leadership are developed and strengthened.

There are different muscles of character to work on at any point in time. We meet all kinds of people – each one challenging us in different ways to strengthen the different muscles requiring toning up. Some will, for instance, strengthen the muscle of patience and others will strengthen the muscle of loving or kindness or peace, as the case may be.

Looked at another way, relationships are a full-length mirror in which we are to see ourselves. They bring out and reveal what is already in us. It is true; people bring out the best or the worst in us. So what are we supposed to do? We should see ourselves, as we are when others bring out the “worst in us”, and then make necessary adjustments so that we can occur to ourselves as better than before. That is how character is formed. That is how self-development in leadership occurs.

But then, the difficulty is that because relationships occur to us as being there to provide us pleasure, we are often so preoccupied with thinking of how to get out of them or change the other person to suit us that we completely lose the opportunity they provide for us to learn and develop character.

The reason for this is simple. One of the outcomes of the corruption of the software that is meant to run relationship is that it altered how things occur to us.

It located us at the center of things and it all became about us rather than about others as God had intended it and as Our Leader by example said many times. For as long as we are enthroned at the center, valuing others is impossible. This manifests in everyday examples of living and managing.

Take an employee appraisal for example. Is it about the employee or is it about you the manager? In many cases that I have seen, it very often appears as a contest, with the manager intent on establishing who the boss is, as if that should be in any doubt. A good appraisal is one in which the boss and the subordinate are

saying “How have I fared in respect of my commitment to you?” Also, you cannot coach and develop an employee you do not value or see potential in. It will not happen if it is about us, rather than the employee. All our natural predispositions are about self, which is why true leadership is a learnt set of behaviors.

The second influence on self-development in leadership derives from the fact that Leadership operates from authority. Authority has two aspects – Power and the legitimacy of the power. Power has a unique vulnerability. Power of its own does not amount to much except that it can command a followership. Followership can be forced or it can be voluntary and that is when the power becomes legitimate authority. Power can, for instance come from what knowledge you possess or is conferred formally in an organizational hierarchy. For any form of power to become authority though, it must be legitimized, usually by the people over who the authority is exercised.

The legitimization comes from stewardship responsibilities of the holder of the authority towards those over who authority is exercised. In other words, it is stewardship that provides legitimacy to power that is exercised in authority. Where there is no stewardship there cannot be talk of leadership. It becomes a raw use, indeed abuse of power.

The problem in Africa today is leadership utilizing power that is not legitimized by stewardship. This has led to behaviors that are untenable in true leadership and we all suffer the consequences. Most African leaders exercise power, not authority, over their citizens. By the same token, leaders, even in business organizations, do not see their role as service that embodies stewardship. Business leaders must see as part of their roles the development of their people to their utmost; creating an environment for them to be successful. This is serving them. It is not only about controlling them, which is what most managers default to. It is probably because people are seen, not as assets,

but resources to be utilized. People are not resources. Resources are to be utilized and controlled. People are people; they are themselves pursuing aspirations and going somewhere. Only through valuing them can you tap into their talent to release discretionary effort that is locked within to drive delivery of desired organizational outcomes. This is a shift in perspective that is required for managers to begin to see and develop the full scope of their role.

To Our Graduating Students

I cannot end without a word to our graduating students. I imagine you have all been made to read and study this manual I spoke about today. So much that some of you cannot wait to be get out from under the rigorous discipline that life lived through the teachings of the book provides. Some would probably be thinking “I just want to get out there into the real world”. I like you to imagine a tree growing in a season of draught. It is complaining of the lack of rain and sees the dry conditions as an affliction. Meanwhile its roots are developing and growing deep into the soil in search of water. Then comes a gale force wind. The roots it developed in drought keeps it from being uprooted.

I assure you that you will need everything you learnt from the manual while in the university when you get into the so called real world and much more. I know this from experience. There are issues out there that you will find you thought the world had answers to but don't but the answers are there in the manual. Do not keep it too far away from you, especially if you aspire to be eagles and soar like eagle.

A few things you need to know about eagles, if you don't know already;

Eagles fly alone at high altitudes where only eagles dare. They set high standards for themselves and that sets them apart as eagles. They are the envy of other birds and are admired by all – only because they are able to withstand the rigors of standing out

in all ways sustainably.

Eagles have strong vision. They can spot a prey or a threat to their eggs 5 miles out and they are focused on what needs to be done. They are not distracted. They are single-minded. Uncompromising principles keep them well grounded.

They do not eat dead animals – they take risk and hunt actively

Eagles fly into storm and ride storms by letting the force of the wind propel them to heights

Eagles test potentials rigorously. The female drops twigs for the male to catch raising the standards each time before settling with a partner

Eagles are good mentors. Build their nests on high cliffs to protect their offspring and eventually to teach them to discover their God given privilege of soaring by pushing them off cliffs and gradually removing the cushions it built in the nest to discourage them from settling in their comfort zone.

Old eagles pluck out their own feathers – and grow new ones, renewing themselves.

Your special graduation preparatory programme, Towards A Total Graduate (TTG), I understand, is designed to specially package you for the world of work upon graduation. It is to serve as an agent of change, to get you set to take charge of your environment and break the barriers of limitation confronting our nation and continent at large.

There is a world out there waiting to receive you. And there is a lot to do and achieve along these lines, I promise you. Sometimes things will go the way you want them to go. May those times be many for you. There will, however, be times when things will be far from perfect. Very often it is not what you have done or not done that caused the situations to occur. My friends, stuff happens!

Remember, at every point in time, that you are visitors to that place and time and you shall move from there. While at such points though, particularly the challenging ones, change how the situation occurs to you. You are *dramatis personae* in a script you did not author. If you did, you would most probably have written the script differently. See it that you are about to bear a testimony. It is always a privilege to carry a testimony for our Lord.

At such times, it is always not so much as whether or not you trust God. It is that God trusts you sufficiently to have commissioned you for a particular testimony. God trusted Job to bear His testimony, Job did not volunteer himself. So also did He trust Joseph sufficiently to entrust the challenge of being the earthly father of Jesus Christ. Thank God always for entrusting you with the testimony of the challenge. Courage is not a lack of fear; it is the choice we make in the face of fear, fully appreciating what the alternative outcome of a situation will be if we do not act. Be prepared to examine and challenge how your situation occurs to you and you are bound to discover fresh possibilities within your challenge. Every situation has within it the seed of its solution. Look for it right there – not in the past and certainly not in the future. You will find it where you are.

And remember always that He who commissioned you backed it up with hundreds of promises and He is faithful to every one of them to see that they do not return void.

Here is the story of a policeman and a coffin maker who found themselves at a point in time; the coffin maker whose car broke down, decided to carry the coffin on his head and was hurrying to deliver his order. Shortly after, a policeman accosts him and asks "wetin you carry?" Believing the policeman was about to extort money from him and unwilling to let that happen, he changed how the police man occurred to him – from one about to extort money from him to a person who can be scared away if he changed how he occurred to the policeman. He answered "I do

not like where I was buried so I am relocating". You can imagine what our police friend did!

I thank you for your time.