

# **PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS - THE ROLE OF THE IVORY TOWER**

## **Protocol:**

The Vice-Chancellor of the University of Lagos, Professor Tolu Odugbemi,  
The Dean, School of Post Graduate Studies,  
Other Deans present,  
The Principal Officers of the University,  
Professors,  
Academic and Non-Academic Staff of the University present,  
Post-Graduate Students and Under-Graduates present,  
Gentlemen of the Press,  
Ladies and gentlemen.

## **Introduction**

I would like to begin by thanking the University of Lagos and in particular the Dean of the Post Graduate School for inviting me to deliver today's lecture.

I will be talking on Preparing the Next Generation of Leaders - the Role of the Ivory Tower.

Leadership is a very wide subject which has generated interest over the ages. It has been the subject of many books and articles. It receives special attention as an important area of research in universities and business schools. The wide interest stems from the fact that leaders make things happen in every sphere of human activity. The quality of leadership determines to a great extent success or failure in every human community or endeavour.

## **Leadership - Some Definitions**

John Maxwell says, "Leadership is influence". That is the ability to influence others.

To Warren G. Bennis, "Leadership is the capability to translate vision to reality," and Dwight D. Eisenhower defines Leadership as "the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."

An article on concepts of Leadership defines Leadership as "a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent."

You would have noticed that common to all these definitions is that there is a goal, an objective. Leadership is all about achieving a goal.

Leadership has become a daily subject of discussion in our country because of the general feeling of disappointment by the populace, as regards the performance of our leaders in virtually all spheres of life. I am always fascinated by these discussions because in every case, the man at the head is the culprit, people forget that in every society there are many leadership roles. This brings me to the question - **who is a leader?**

### **Who is a Leader?**

A leader is someone who guides, someone who directs or someone who commands. A leader can also be defined as someone who shows the way or the first in a group. A leader is therefore someone who has responsibility to show people the way, direct them or command them. Simply put anyone who has responsibility or authority over another person is a leader.

Each of us has a leadership role and each of us has a role to play in the determination of the quality of leadership. A nation is made up of family units. The quality of the leadership in these units, determines the quality of leadership in the nation. The implication of this for us is that if we are not satisfied with the quality of leadership in Nigeria, we need to have a look at the way these leaders have been produced. This means, we should have a close look at the family, the schools (elementary and secondary), the universities, social values, spiritual exposure, etc, etc. One cannot, given the time at our disposal, consider any of these in any real depth. However, I believe that within this University there are numerous research reports on some or all of these. Even though I have not had the privilege of reading these research reports, I believe I can make a layman comment based on my experience and exposure.

In my younger days, the family unit had more opportunities for bonding than it has today. The children were always around their parents or around members of the family. Parental influence on their children was strong. Good family upbringing was an important factor in the training of the children. Parents were strict. They wielded the cane freely. Their focus was to bring up well-behaved children. Children of good character. My father on his death-bed at age 96 said to us - "I am leaving for you a good name. Guard it jealously. It will do you more good than money."

Sadly, over the years the parental influence and control has been eroded by long hours at work. It is common practice for father and mother to go to work at 6 am and return at 9 pm or even later. There is little or no time to bond with the children and influence them. The consequence is an erosion in the quality of family upbringing with disastrous consequences on behaviour and character.

Also in my younger days elementary and secondary schools paid considerable attention to ensuring their products were of good character. They took pride in producing brilliant children who were also of good character.

In those days the quality of leadership at home and at school was good. The value system was related to what the society held dear - good character, uprightness. Of course, money was important but it was not “the be all and end all” of life. As a result, corruption was not rampant. Indeed, anybody found to have received a bribe was in disgrace and a problem to his family.

Those who stood tall in society were not necessarily the rich but men and women of character - Teachers were recognised and respected. Religious leaders were held in high regard and respected - what was more important was the fact that they influenced society more than those who were wealthy. Society questioned the source of your wealth. Not so today.

### **What went wrong?**

The good days I have been talking about were principally the pre-independence years. There was respect for law and order. The limited infrastructural facilities we had worked well and they were well maintained. The educational institutions at all levels were of good quality. Some were well recognised internationally. There was a fair measure of **the fear of God** in the hearts of many.

During this period the main focus of our politicians was to obtain independence from the British. There was a common goal and for want of a better word a common enemy. Their methods and tactics were different but they ensured that the chance to achieve the goal was not put at risk.

Independence came in 1960 and was quickly followed by the struggle for national supremacy by the key players and parties. At independence the key players were well entrenched in their regional/tribal strongholds. The struggle was sometimes bitter and very tribal. The cracks started to show. Fierce politicking and subsequent elections brought with them a form of corruption. The situation deteriorated fast and respect for law and order started slipping. In 1966 Nigeria experienced its first coup and by 1967 we had a civil war on our hands. Managing the war became the main focus. The civil war lasted for thirty months. At the end of it, Nigeria was not the same again. The Psyche of the nation had changed. Maintenance of law and order became a daunting challenge. With guns and other dangerous weapons, miscreants put the law abiding citizens (who by the way constituted the vast majority) at siege. By this time Nigeria had become an oil rich nation.

The end of the civil war did not mean the end of our troubles. There were serious social problems created by the war. The important point to make in this

regard is that moral decadence set in and increased the level of corruption. Money and the acquisition of it became the order of the day. The pace was set by those in power and those walking the corridors of power. Corruption sank deeper into the system. Nigeria became the country to beat in terms of corruption. We continued merrily along this dreadful path until we became the most corrupt country in the world. In the last few years our competitors for this ignoble position have worked very hard and succeeded in displacing us. Thanks to the war against corruption.

Meanwhile all the institutions in the land that help to build manpower and leadership have suffered serious set backs. The pursuit of money has adversely affected our value system. The family unit is not as strong as it used to be. Consequently family upbringing has suffered. Our educational institutions are in a sorry state, the facilities for teaching are either in decadence or non-existent. Money is the basis for power and to a large extent leadership. The love of money has overshadowed the fear of God. We have become a nation that talks about God but totally ignore His commandments. We cannot continue like this.

### **What next?**

We urgently need men and women who possess what Stephen Covey calls “Primary Greatness.” In her paper on “How To Grow A Leader”, Ruth Haley Barton makes reference to a book titled “Principle - Centred Leadership”, written by Stephen Covey. In this book the author distinguishes between **Primary and Secondary Greatness**. “Secondary greatness is leadership that relies on human influence, strategies and tactics to get what it wants. It focuses on technique, and may prove successful in the short run, but over time it can result in duplicity that breeds distrust. Primary greatness, on the other hand, is related to the strength of a person’s **character**. It inspires people to follow”.

“Ruth Haley Barton goes on to say “Too often, young leaders set their sights on secondary greatness - wealth, position, public recognition - without paying the price in terms of character development. We set young leaders up for fall if we encourage them to envision what they can do before they consider the kind of person they should be.”

**“Their growth in primary greatness (which is at the core of leadership) requires a holistic approach to development that involves personal discipline and self-mastery in all areas - spiritual, physical, intellectual and psychological.”**

The question arises, how do you develop leaders with primary greatness? Is there a right programme for developing such leaders?

Ruth refers in her paper to a true life story of an article that appeared in Sports Illustrated. The title of the story was “bred to be a Superstar”. As “America’s first test tube athlete”. It reads thus:

“Todd Marinovich had been groomed from baby hood to be a leader on the football field. Starting with the stuffed football that was placed in his crib from day one, his parents had monitored his diet, his intellectual capacities, his physical conditioning, and his psychological development for the sole purpose of molding him into someone who could lead football teams to victory. Eventually there were 13 different experts - doctors, nutritionists, psychologists, computer experts, trainers, and coaches - assisting Todd’s father, Marv, with what some called “his true occupation, the development of his son.”

For a while, everything seemed to be going as planned. In high school Todd was an outstanding quarterback who held the national high school passing record. By his senior year, he was receiving at least six phone calls a night from coaches with recruiting offers. In the midst of much media hype, Todd eventually chose the University of Southern California and led the Trojans to a Rose Bowl victory in his freshman year.

Then everything started to fall apart. The beginning of his sophomore year found Todd benched due to slipping grades, cut classes, and erratic performance. And in late January 1991, he was arrested for possession of cocaine and marijuana and was barred from spring practice. The young man on whom so many had set their sights to “set an example as a team leader” seemed to be self-destructing. Marv Marinovich had set out to grow a leader, but instead his son seemed unable to hold his own life together, let alone lead others”.

Why did Todd fail? In his development, a great deal of attention was paid to his physical, intellectual and psychological needs. You can say everything his father could do he did for his son. Some by himself, and others by experts in their respective fields. Todd started well. He raised the hope of his father. He was a child of promise. He could not as things developed, hold himself together. He fell to the temptation of the flesh. His development did not prepare him for this particular challenge. His development completely left out his **spiritual needs**. His development was centred on man and man’s expertise.

For me the morale in this story is very clear. It is that there is **no real success without God**. Any semblance of success without God is short lived. It is transient.

The Leader we are looking for must be **spiritually prepared**. This preparation must start early - i.e. when the child is at home. The word of God says - “teach a child the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.” What is this right way to go? It is the way of God Almighty. The One who created all things and knows all things. The One who knows the end from the beginning. The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Parents have a duty to put the fear of God in the hearts of their children.

We need leaders **who are literate and well educated**. For this to happen the decadence in our educational institutions at all levels need to be urgently addressed. A nation cannot develop faster than the rate at which it develops its education. How fast are we developing our education? We talk qibly about narrowing the gap between us and the developed economies. Have we determined what to do to educate our children for this to be achieved? Clearly we are not doing enough.

The leaders we need have to be **physically fit**. This implies that in their upbringing our children must be well fed, and given adequate medical attention. You cannot have a healthy mind in a sick body. We know too well the poor state of our medical facilities.

The Primary Leaders we need in this country must imbibe the right value system. This they will acquire from an adequate spiritual and intellectual development.

The combination of all these factors will give us leaders of good character. People whose character will stand up to public scrutiny. Men and women of vision and integrity. We are looking for leaders that will lead by example. Leaders who have the fear of God and know that they are where they are to serve and not to lord it over their subordinates. We need leaders who are good listeners and team builders.

In one of my travels, I saw a card in a shop in Singapore which had as its heading “The World needs Men”. My first reaction was what is so strange about that? Sure, the world needs men. I turned away from it but something in me urged me to read the card. I was on holiday and so I was not in a hurry. I picked it up only to find it contained very wise words. I would like to share the content with you.

The card reads:

**“The World Needs Men**

- \* **who cannot be bought**
- \* **whose word is their bond**
- \* **who put character before wealth**

- \* **who possess opinion and a will**
- \* **who are larger than their vocations**
- \* **who do not hesitate to take chances**
- \* **who will not lose their individuality in a crowd**
- \* **who will be as honest in small things as in great things**
- \* **who will make no compromise with wrong**
- \* **who will not say they do it because everybody else does it**
- \* **who are true to their friends in adversity as well as in prosperity**
- \* **who do not believe that shrewdness, cunning and hard-headedness are the best qualities for winning success**
- \* **who are not ashamed or afraid to stand for truth when it is unpopular**
- \* **who can say no with emphasis, although all the rest of the world says yes.**
- \*\* **whose ambitions are not confined to their own selfish desires.”**

I did not hesitate to buy the card. I have found it very useful. I am sure I was Divinely guided to that shop. Of all the things I bought on that trip, I have found this card the most valuable. I agree with every word on it.

There once lived a man who was a prophet and the leader of his people. In his old age the people asked God to appoint a king for them so that they will be like other countries around them. At what you may call the handover ceremony, an interesting thing happened which I would like to share with you. Before handing over to the man anointed to be king at the special assembly, the old prophet and leader said to the people:

“Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and His anointed: whose ox have I taken? Or whose ass have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or whom have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? And I will restore.”

And they said, thou has not defrauded us, not oppressed us, neither has thou taken ought of any man’s hand.”

I am sure some of you know who I am talking about. I am talking of Samuel and the section quoted here is from 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 12 verses 3 and 4. How many leaders will subject themselves to such scrutiny in Nigeria and survive? In addition to the qualities we looked at earlier under “The World needs Men”, Samuel had the grace of God on his life to lead as he did. He was not a Todd Marinovich who was prepared by men to be a superstar without any spiritual input. The only obvious omission in The World Needs Men card is spiritual consideration.

## **The Way Forward**

Given the level of corruption in our country and the poor state of our educational and other facilities, the question arises, how do we move forward? At this point I believe it has to be said loud and clear that Nigeria is not bereft of good people and good leaders. We have some but far too few. How do we develop more or rather fast track the development of good or Primary Leaders?

It has been said earlier that the home has a primary role to play by bringing children up in the way they should go. It has been pointed out that education has an important role to play. The point has also been made that we are not paying enough attention to **character building**, an important aspect of leadership.

There is an urgent need for developing a system that will not be too dependent on paper qualification in the preparation of children to face the challenges of life.

For us to develop, we need to eradicate illiteracy. It has been argued by many that for this to happen, every child should receive education up to school certificate level. This way, we develop a society that can be well informed. It will also be a potential workforce that can respond more quickly to training.

Many of our leaders in all sectors today are graduates. This will become so in the future. It is the development of this group that I would like to draw your attention.

## **The Role of the Ivory Tower**

For the purpose of this talk, I would like us to consider the University, the Ivory Tower, as the finishing school in the preparation of men and women for the challenges of life.

The point has been made that we need to balance the academic input with the character input in the preparation of the next generation of leaders. I would like to suggest that the finishing school is an excellent place for the injection and re-enforcing of this very important ingredient of life. I say this because the University degree is awarded on the basis that the student has been found worthy in **Character and Learning**.

Academic performance is the basis on which undergraduates are admitted - how many As or Cs in the relevant subjects. There is no way to have any idea of the character of candidates from his or her result.

At the point of admission, the University knows that the candidate is a suitable material for academic studies.

Given our society, it would appear to me that the bigger challenge is how to adequately prepare the student in the area of character development.

The Webster's dictionary defines character as "the total quality of a person's behaviour as revealed by his habits of thought and expression, his attitudes and his interests, his actions and his personal philosophy of life."

The concept of a finishing school for preparing leaders or their spouses is not uncommon in the private sector. However, I must say that I have observed that it is not commonly used these days by the companies in Nigeria. A finishing school instructs on manners, comportment, behaviour, communication styles and fine ways of life among other things. This is well in line with the definition of character.

The question that arises is how much of character building is the Ivory Tower doing? No one is asking for a change of the University system. May be what one is asking for is keeping to the best practice. I am not by any means an expert in character development, but I recall reading a report many years ago that says that 90% of how people learn is visual, 9% is verbal and about 1% is through other senses. If this report is anything to go by, it means that students will be very much affected by what those who teach them direct them to read, by what they do and what they say. In my own experience, I know I have been greatly influenced by some of my teachers and lecturers. They built on what my parents had firmly entrenched in me.

In these days of IT one hears of the expression "gabbage in gabbage out" In this context some may argue that there is little the University can do about a badly behaved student who has gained admission. I do not subscribe to this view. With the grace of God I know that a very positive result can be achieved with the right type of exposure. In the case of a "gabbage" in the lecturers have a wonderful opportunity of leading by example and bringing about a change.

One way of bringing about this change is to apply the rules very strictly and create a disciplined society. The Private Universities are doing just this and it is working well for them. It is a winning formular, the important thing is to make a start and be consistent.

The point being made here is that there is need for the Ivory Tower to consider innovative ways of paying greater attention to producing graduates who are truly worthy in character.

I have been a user of the services of our Ivory Towers for several decades. I must say to you that while your brand remains desirable, the quality is

sometimes not up to standards. What people want is consistent good quality. We had this in the 60s and 70s. I am confident that we have the ability to even improve on those standards.

Mr Chairman, the Federal Government has given us a laudable and ambitious vision. Vision 20, 20/20 is a challenge to every Nigerian. It calls for leaders who will make-a-difference. According to Dr. John Maxwell, make-a-difference people have four characteristics:

- a) They are committed to Excellence
- b) They are committed to Service - they are servant leaders.
- c) They are committed to growth
- d) They are committed to giving - giving to Society, not grabbing from Society.

These are the people we need to make Nigeria one of the first twenty economies in the world by year 2020.

I cannot think of a better place to source these men and women than from among the products of our Ivory Towers.

I am sure you can and that you will produce them. I can see in this auditorium the make-a-difference leaders Nigeria needs.

Mr Chairman, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the opportunity to share some thoughts.

God bless you.

**Felix Ohiwerei**  
**19<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2008**