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Effective Leadership

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The statement – “Everything rises and falls on leadership” rings through my ears every time we have a conversation about a successful organization or country, and every time we talk about the failures that organizations and countries face or experience.

I always tell the story of how the American leadership trainer, John C Maxwell asked a gathering of Nigerian political, social, and business leaders what they thought the biggest problem in Nigeria was sometime when he visited in 2004. The room packed full of all the leadership heavy-weights in one of the least developed and most dysfunctional societies in the world responded resoundingly – LEADERSHIP. Were they really admitting they were the cause of Nigeria’s problems? I doubt it – I believe they were as usual passing the buck to some amorphous object called - “leadership” who should take the blame, rather than them.

This is quite characteristic of organizations and societies that have a low quality of leadership capability – there is a lack of self-awareness, vulnerability and ownership thinking to turn things around.

As we all hope for better organizations and a better society, I am assured that the only way to achieve these is through better leadership. Therefore, my colleagues and I have dedicated a huge part of our research, scholarship, and practice to building leaders.

One of the biggest impediments to this is the false notion that many people have about leadership being the exclusive preserve of a handful of powerful people occupying high-ranking positions. No, leadership is a pervasive capability that can be learned and practiced by everyone in an organization or society. The more pervasive leadership is, the more likely

it will have a positive impact on society. This does NOT in any way take away the specific expectations that leaders who hold certain positions need to fulfill, nor does it extricate them from responsibility – all it does is to empower and motivate everyone to create a better and more prosperous organization and society through selfless acts of leadership. These acts include improving the selection of positional leaders and taking ownership in holding such positional leaders accountable.

Many people often misunderstand our stand on the pervasiveness of leadership to mean that we want to give ineffective positional leaders a get out of jail free card. No, we are rather trying to get everyone to be more involved in ensuring that we get the best from our positional leaders by thinking and acting as leaders themselves. By building leadership capabilities from the bottom up and all through our organizations and societies, we will improve the quality of positional leaders that we get and the results that we achieve.

How do You Grow as a Leader?

We asked this question at a workshop for professionals in the financial services industry and got a response from a participant that I can never forget. She said and I paraphrase “You start from being an Officer, then you move to a Senior Banking Officer, Assistant Manager, Manager and then when you reach Senior Manager, you have become a leader”. Her complete concept of leadership was from the perspective of positional leadership and was WRONG.

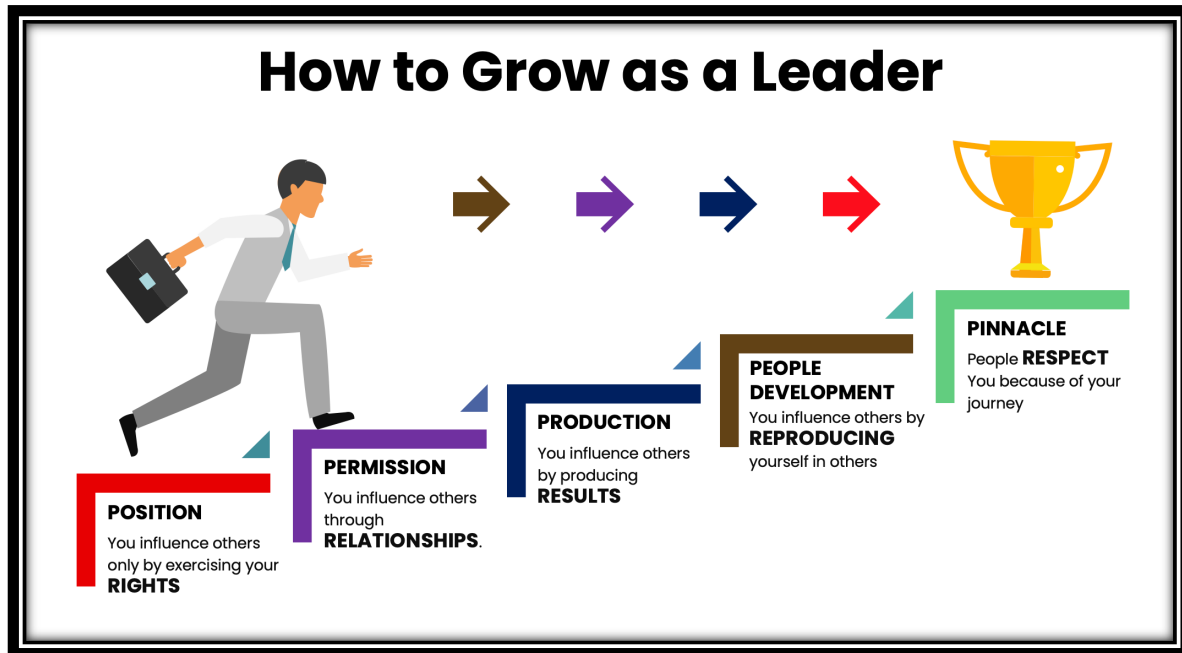
We understand however that leadership is about influence, and that you can influence people from anywhere. In fact, the most influential person in the home of a family with a new-born child is certainly not the parents, it is that small, powerless child who decides everything – when they sleep, what temperature the room is and how they spend their money.

Growing in your influence has very little to do with your position or title. A powerful model from John C Maxwell, the American Leadership Trainer and Author explains that there are five levels of influence or leadership that requires you to get off from the high horse of your position or the depths of your lack of it to build relationships, drive results, reproduce other leaders and gain the respect of everyone around you.

Leading Beyond Your Position

The truth is that we all have a position – it may be as a CEO or as a doorman, but it is a position, so lead from where you are. If we all

understood leadership as influence, then a doorman can certainly see how to exercise leadership in his work and decisions each day in a manner that will create results for his organization. Also, while he is a doorman at work, he may be a positional leader in his faith community, social or tribal community and a father in his family or home. Can you choose to wear the leadership hat at home, and take it off once you arrive at the office because you are a door man?



Regardless of our positions, we should focus on influencing others by building meaningful relationships. Relationships are the foundation of leadership success. We must get to know the people we work with and be prepared to be vulnerable around them so that we can build real connections and relationships. Trust is also an important element to building relationships and without it, your relationships will not last, and your leadership will crumble like a pack of cards.

While relationships are essential, they are not enough. Being a nice guy or gal is not enough. You need to galvanize those relationships to produce results. Results are the tangible evidence of your impact as a leader and give you the credibility to lead.

If you are a Team Leader who is loved and admired by the rest of the team, but constantly under-performs, you will not have the support of your own supervisors and soon your team members who “like” you will start losing respect for you because of the lack of results. Your lack of results will soon become a stumbling block to their own growth and prospects. Results come from your ability to set clear goals, delegate effectively and apply the skills of disciplined execution in your team.

Unfortunately, a narrow focus on the pursuit of results can destroy some of the relationships you have built, so you must strike a balance, and ensure that the people you lead see you as not just a task driver, but one who genuinely cares for their growth and development.

Beyond results, you need to reproduce yourself in others around you, so that they can build their capacity and influence and multiply the impact of your leadership. You can achieve this by coaching and mentoring people around you and showing them how they fit into the bigger picture and how they are part of the succession plan for yourself and your organization. Once you do this successfully, your people will be more committed to achieving results because they can see a relationship between the sacrifices and results of today and the long-term prospects for themselves.

When you have committed yourself to getting off the high horse of your position or being unabashed by the lowliness of your station, and have built the capabilities to grow relationships, drive results and reproduce other leaders around you then you would have started to grow towards the PINNACLE of your leadership where people are inspired by and follow you out of profound RESPECT for who you are, what you are to them, the results that you have achieved and the impact that you have had in their lives.

At this level of leadership, people will be prepared to make sacrifices for you and the success of your organization. This is the point of effective leadership and is process that we can all embark upon.

The Three Tests of Leadership

As you journey to becoming a more effective leader, I have found that there are three very important tests of your leadership. The first is **ALIGNMENT** – which kind of people are here with you in the first place? How well you and the people around you are to the goals and values of your team, organization, or society? How well do your talents, passions and interests align with the goals of the organization? What motivates you and your team members to come to work each day– is it intrinsic or extrinsic? How well aligned are you all to your espoused values and beliefs?

When people are not well aligned, they will struggle to find fulfilment in their lives and the work that they do, and they will struggle to exercise influence and leadership in a positive way – you’ve got to be a square peg

in the square hole of your leadership for you to be effective, and you have to attract and retain people who are aligned with your organization if you are going to make leaders out of them.

The second is **COMMITMENT**– what people around you will do when you are temporarily unavailable.



For example, when you are out of the office, when you travel, or when you are on leave? Do they hold the fort, challenge each other to be more accountable, and ensure that everyone does what is expected? Or do they immediately disregard your expectations and wallow in complacency only to pretentiously pick themselves back up when you show up. Lagos Business School’s Founder, Professor Pat Utomi describes this as the “Discriminant Operant Model of Classical Conditioning” or what in lay man’s terms in Nigeria we call “eye service”.

I recall facilitating a workshop where two colleagues (one senior to the other) from a Government Agency were participants. On the first day of the training, the junior colleague was so “respectful” of her senior colleague that she refused to introduce herself in the round-robin introductory exercise until her “boss” who was seated on another row introduced herself first.

The next day, this her boss that she apparently “respected” so much was absent from the workshop. Each time during the rest of the workshop that there was a reference to an inept leader, this same junior colleague was very quick to reference her boss as an example.

Another simple way to think about this is what happens in a home when the parents are out at work. When I was growing up the natural leader emerged in our home when my elder sister would show her commitment to ensuring that the house was organized in line with the expectations of my parents even when my parents were out at work (playing what we now respectfully call the *senior house girl* role). In this way, my parents' leadership worked because of the commitment that my sister showed.

The third test of your leadership is **SUCCESSION** or **LEGACY** - what happens when you are no longer there on a permanent basis. What will happen to your legacy? Will your colleagues that you have left behind uphold your legacy and build on it or will they jettison it and even make things worse.

This played out negatively in the political leadership scene for example in Nigeria's two largest City States, Lagos (the former capital), with the exit of Governor Fashola; and Abuja (the current capital), after Minister El-Rufai exited. In both cases, their political parties continued in power with pretty much the same political patrons that endorsed them (Mr Tinubu in Lagos and Mr Obasanjo in Abuja) playing a major role in selecting their successors, but still it is alleged in most quarters that their successors didn't continue their legacies and did not perform as well they did.

Leadership is the important ingredient that is required to transform any organization or society. It is NOT the exclusive preserve of a handful of positional leaders and requires everyone to play an active role in ensuring that the right positional leaders emerge while holding such positional leaders accountable.

We all **MUST** grow in our leadership despite how high or low our stations are. To grow as leaders we must build relationships, drive results through those relationships and reproduce ourselves in others around us.

The true test of our leadership is not when we are there, and the ovations are loud. It is when we are not there either on a temporary basis (commitment) or a permanent one (succession).

If you would like to transform your organization with a deliberate investment in leadership development, then look no further than our team of leadership development experts at Learning Impact NG, who have supported scores of organizations in building the capabilities of their leaders for many years. You may call +234 805 195 3276 to speak to someone about how we can support you in this regard.