

**NEEDED: A PURPOSE-DRIVEN AFRICAN YOUTH LEADERSHIP
Odyssey
Sunday Times Article
16 August 2011**

If you aim at nothing, you are bound to hit it.

It is ill-advised to embark on an Important Voyage without a compass.

Those two statements raise important questions around the purpose-driven life, so central to young leadership. Young leaders need to aim at something, a wholesome goal, a compelling vision that beckons them as they go through life. The individual goals or visions may be as varied as there are various walks of life, careers, professions and occupations. What is important is that one should have a sense of destiny, a sense of purpose, the will to make a positive difference in one's life and to be a positive net contributor to one's family, community, nation; to humanity.

Martin Luther King Junior, arguably the leading African-American Civil and Human Rights leader of the 1950s and 1960s, exhorts us to be the best that we can in whatever mission we choose to pursue.

Success in making a positive difference with one's life as a leader, professional, manager, entrepreneur, etc) as is the case with institutional or corporate success is a function of being values-based and vision-beckoned.

The question is what are some of these values that provide a sound and solid basis for success and wholesome contribution to society? First we must appreciate the crucial importance of moral values - the need to be good and to do good, it is essential to comprehend the pervasive nature of this. As youth leadership we need to understand that there is no distinction between private and public morality, no distinction between private and public behavior, that even our innermost thoughts are acts of leadership. We should understand that each waking moment for each one of us, is an act of leadership. We should understand that even our most private actions and thoughts should, therefore, be based on principles of morality and not on expediency.

Our youth leadership (and leadership in general per se) should have as defining features probity, humility, integrity, compassion and human-ness. We should strive to be competent, tenacious and imbued with a sense of efficacy. Our behaviour should generate trust, goodwill and confidence, in leading, co-leading and following, we should understand that the success of others does not diminish your own success but adds to the value of the commonwealth. As young leaders we should deeply believe that the locus of control for Africa's future is with Africa itself, and then seek to employ the advice, skills, technology and resources of others for own ends and to our chosen destination, and not to serve the agenda of others. The active participation of our African intellectuals should be encouraged and such intellectuals should be nurtured by native founding principles and insatiable inquiry into global knowledge resources.

Our leadership should seek to bridge the schisms and cleavages wrought by religious, tribal, social, ideological, economic and political diversity and sheer coercion and domination.

These are some of the values that should guide our youth leadership development in our quest for national development and actualisation.

I sincerely believe that the forces which truly define you as a budding leader are your values. Values provide meaning and substance to your life and make it societally worthwhile. Values predispose you to behave in certain ways, and if you go contrary to these inculcated principles you will experience a great deal of discomfort and dissonance. Values lie at the heart of compunction - that uncomfortable pricking of the conscience when you know you are ashamed of what you have just said or done. It is the compass in your life or leadership odyssey.

I submit that with the proper set of values in society, business and politics, young leaders will be guided to behave in a manner which builds, inspires and have the courage to face unpleasant realities and address them constructively. This is the stuff leaders are made of. And, don't think of leaders just as those prominent figures in public and civil life that clutter the media. Wherever you find yourself in life, then you can lead.

I do not believe that one can analyse leadership without associating it intrinsically with a value system. Leaders inspire - they do not coerce. As Ronald Heifetz points out in his book, "Leadership without Easy Answers", leaders mobilize people to tackle tough problems. They interact and are influenced by people as they in turn influence them. Such leadership creates value, it is socially enriching. It leaves a lasting legacy, it is impossible to consider that such leadership could be values-free.

Our own Nelson Mandela is an example of a true leaders, He was motivated by a profound value system, believing intensely in the worth of every human being and in principles such as integrity, compassion, probity, responsibility and respect, all grounded on solid moral and ethical foundations. Could you honestly see such a man behaving in a reprehensible manner then still being able to live with himself and pretending to lead? Or stooping to dishonest business transactions and not only hotly denying them, but continuing to operate unrepentantly in the public arena?

in other words, I argue that leadership is by its nature good. You cannot have "bad" leadership. That is simply not leadership but misleadership. True leadership must be infused with values that create a value system that reflects the culture in which it has been born. Cyril Levicki in "The Leadership Gene" defines it as "a profound sense of decency with moral fibre". Without that, people can "lead" as it were, but be as great a danger as they seem leaders.

Leadership must embrace a moral, even passionate, dimension, not just a practical, material one. Different situations may well demand different personalities and call for different behaviours. So while it is true that "cometh the hour, cometh the man" as the old adage goes, and leaders might have to adapt their particular approach according to socio-political circumstances, they should never, ever, compromise their moral and ethical stance. There is no excuse for unjust behavior. There is no excuse for a lack of compassion which is vital in considering the individual and the community. There is no excuse for

irresponsible behavior, which aims only at self-gratification and self-enrichment without recognizing the consequences - not only on individuals, but an entire societies and nations.

And, I must admit, it makes me immensely proud as an African to recognize that many of these leadership values: compassion, respect, responsibility and integrity - are those which are inherent to Ubuntu. Ubuntu values humanity, it seeks consensus through consultation and accommodation. It appreciates that those who differ from us are not necessarily against us. This recognition of shared intrinsic human values is critical to the makeup of true leadership.

As an emerging economy, we cannot afford to be blasé about the leadership which emerges to guide our nations and our continent. We are at a particularly sensitive stage of our African development where we need to attract foreign investors, we need to be respected globally, we need to be exemplary in corporate governance and seen to be free of corruption.

I put it to you that as an emerging political economy, we need to be prescriptive -even proscriptive - about the kind of leaders we want to lead us. We cannot leave it to fate or circumstance. We must groom our leaders and not allow them simply to emerge, as it were, by accident, as a result of socio-economic or political events, I believe that leadership in our 21st Century should be neither incidental nor accidental. It must be planned. It must be purposeful, it must be driven by ideals which we define and demand. And if any presumed leader does not stack up against those requirements, then i believe that we as an emerging economy should put our foot down and say bluntly: this does not meet the requirements of our people. This person is not going to lead us into the global respect we require. We will not have him.

We know what is required of visionary and inspirational leadership. Africa's own tragic history has thrown up countless examples of what we do not want or need. Yet unless we are vigilant, and unless we have the courage to resist, there is no guarantee that we too, will not be burdened by yet another populist leader lacking in a sound value system. We do not have to wait until such a person emerges full-blown on the scene. We must ensure that we are party to the selection process. We must influence the steps which lead to the emergence of a true leader.