

**TOMORROWS LEADERS CONVENTION
REFLECTIVE, RESONANT, VISIONARY LEADERSHIP: A MUST FOR
TOMORROW'S LEADERS.
18 March 2010**

A key aspect of the theme of this conference is: A contest for the future. It is a conference for those South Africans who consider themselves to be enemies of entropy.

Ralph Waldo Emerson opines: "There are always two parties: the party of the past and the party of the future; the establishment and the movement."

Fundamental truths inhere in this observation in Gary Hamel and C.K Prahalad's elucidation (Competing for the future 1996. Harvard Business School Press)

The future belongs not to those who possess a crystal ball, but to those daring to challenge the biases, prejudices and populisms of the "establishment".

The future belongs more to the unorthodox than it does to the prognosticators, more to the innovators than to beneficiaries of the establishment... maintainers of the status quo.

Let us be conscious of the reality that tomorrow or the future is not what will happen. The present (today) and the future (tomorrow) don't abut each other, neatly compartmentalised between the five-year plan or the election cycle and the misty unknown yonder. Today and tomorrow are intertwined.

Every individual, corporation or nation is in the process of becoming - of becoming an anachronism irrelevant to the future, or of becoming the herald of the future. The future is not something that occurs someday; it is what every nation is building or forfeiting by its numerous decisions. As William Jennings Bryan put it: "Destiny is no matter of chance. It is a matter of choice: it is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved".

Only those who can imagine and pre-emptively create the future (tomorrow) will be around to enjoy it.

The key question about Tomorrow's Leaders, allied to the question of which corporations or nations create the future is far from academic.

The stakes are remarkably high. The wealth of a company, and of each nation in which it operates, largely depends on its role in creating tomorrow's markets and its ability to capture a disproportionate share of associated revenues and profits, GDP and economic development.

What then can we say about South Africa's future leaders? Tomorrow's Leaders?

Leadership does not stand alone. It is a product of followership. The art and craft of leadership is both deeply personal and inherently collective. Because leadership is collective, it must also be morally centred, for the leader's ultimate role is to empower followers to realise the

full potential of their humanness. You cannot be a heartless dictator, a corrupt exploiter of power and position, or a rabble-rousing populist and still be regarded as a leader who empowers the followers. The true leader who cares about the destiny of followers will seek an ethical and wholesome relationship with them.

To put it another way, the mind and emotions of a leader should resonate with the yearnings of the followers. To be a leader requires introspection and moral reflection.

It is this dimension of inwardness that has been signally lacking in our world. In corporate affairs, we have seen directors of global companies like Enron simply plundering the wealth of their nation without a thought for the loss and suffering they caused amongst innocent investors and other stakeholders. Greed and superficiality led to the investment banking crisis of 2008-9 which plunged the world into a recession and shook the foundations of capitalism, raising fundamental questions about the system's merits. The leaders of mighty banks in Wall Street were largely unconcerned with the integrity and sustainability of their operations: they were focused on profit alone and on personal extravagance. Many of them failed to make the effort to understand their own financial products. Members of Boards had little inkling of the crisis to come because they swallowed the myth that new forms of securities and derivatives had eliminated risk. Those of them who took the trouble to think about what was happening, and warn of the likely consequences, were seen as Jeremiahs, pointlessly lamenting the wickedness of the people.

Well, those Jeremiahs have been proved right and we should learn that honesty, consideration, good governance, and well-informed analysis are the prerequisites of business leadership.

In political life, lack of introspection and absence of a sound value system lead to what I call misleadership. Misleadership may take an authoritarian form, imposing the leader's will on the people. In Nazi Germany this was the Fuhrer principle, in Africa today it is the Big Man syndrome, in other countries it materialises as celebrity leadership where personality comes before policy and whatever the leader says, goes. Misleadership may also take the form of mob rule. The populist follows the whims of whatever audience he or she happens to be in front of, not caring whether what is said today flatly contradicts what was said or done yesterday - popularity is all, and this kind of leader is compliant, taking orders rather than giving them. In both these forms of misleadership, the authoritarian and the populist, we see domination and manipulation rather than service.

A leader is not above, or below, the followers, but is one with them and leads from within occasionally boldly stepping ahead in response to a beckoning compelling vision, a sense of destiny. I have come to use the term "attuned leadership" to describe the quality of the leader-follower relationship that we will need to see in the 21st century. Attuned leadership is a form of what has been called "servant leadership". To be a true leader requires that you be attuned to the hopes, expectations, fears and demands of your followers so that you may serve them better. An ethic of service must lie at the heart of leadership.

Attuned leadership is deeply transformative because it respects people. It encourages us to grow, change, and seek what Aristotle called "the good life" -the life that improves us and contributes to the betterment of all. Attuned leadership correctly senses the direction that the followership needs to take in order to realise their potential as human beings.

This sense of direction comes partly from instinct and partly from knowledge. The attuned leader is both empathetic and intelligent. Insight into the lives and dreams of the followership comes from the ability to identify with them and share their perspective. We should remind ourselves that no leader is simply born to the role: leaders are born but then made. Leaders need to be developed through education, training, mentoring and example. When we say that the attuned leader knows which direction to take it implies that serious reflection and investigation has gone into a decision, and the leader is well aware of the complexities of any challenge.

The uneducated and undeveloped leader will suffer from the twin shortcomings of lack of introspection and lack of situational awareness. You cannot transform others if you have failed to transform yourself. And you cannot transform a situation if you have failed to make the effort to understand it.

I am afraid that these shortcomings characterise much of what passes for leadership in South Africa, Africa and the world today. Good governance is good leadership realised in practice. Where governance breaks down, leadership is at fault.

In South Africa, it is ridiculous that we have a “youth leader” in the ruling party who is convicted of hate speech on the basis of sexism, and stands accused of racist hate speech for singing “Kill the Boer”. Yet the leadership of the country regards this youth as a potential future leader of the country. Where are the ideals of reconciliation and tolerance for which the ruling party fought and triumphed, and upon which the country’s democratic Constitution was founded? It is appalling that President Mugabe in Zimbabwe has been allowed almost limitless leeway by Southern African leaders, so that human rights abuses, corruption and political gangsterism continue unabated - indeed, have been condoned. And in the world at large it is altogether shocking that an American President can be granted the Nobel Peace Prize while escalating troop commitments in occupied Afghanistan where the civilian population is bleeding in the crossfire from both sides.

If you want to put out a fire, direct the extinguisher at the root of the flames. The symptoms of misleadership in our world society are many but the root cause is lack of leadership morality. Leaders who dwell on issues with compassion and intensive study will exercise moral choices in a manner that eludes authoritarians and populists. Attuned leadership focuses on people’s allegiances and trust, and because it is fundamentally a relational approach to leadership it is essentially ethical. What is due to me is due to you and to all of us: the same universal principles of respect and fair treatment apply to all of us. We are all human beings living in the same world and we are intimately dependent on each other.

The principle of mutual trust and dependence has been lost sight of in the leadership crises that I have referred to. This is where I believe the philosophy of African humanism, or Ubuntu, can come to the rescue. Ubuntu focuses on our being, asserting that / am because you are, you are because we are - we could not exist in isolation, we would not be ourselves and we would have no human community. The philosophy is expressed in the Zulu maxim *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (“a person is a person through (other) persons”). In the leadership context, *Hosi i hosi hi malandza*. Leaders and followers are interdependent. Any leader who fails to appreciate this simple truism is a leader in limbo bound to wither sooner rather than later. African humanism is a comprehensive philosophy that is relevant for the modern world and that meets the criteria of a universal system of thought.

I am not so naive as to believe that the world will turn to Africa for a solution to its problems! Africa is by and large regarded as a basket case because of its wars, corruption, disease, malnutrition and poverty, a beggar for aid and a playground for Big Men who exploit their own people. Of course, there is an Africa of humane values, noble achievements in statecraft, wonderful music and dance, booming entrepreneurship, and peoples who are among the most warm and hospitable on the planet. But I am really referring to neither of these Africas: my concern here is with the African insight into the nature of the human community. Leadership that embraces this principle is strengthened by introspection and bolstered by community.

The more one explores Ubuntu from a philosophical perspective, the more depth and breadth its proverbial wisdom begins to assume. In a world that is seeking new models for leadership, I believe we may hold the key to ethical, forward-looking, effective methods of governance.

For me this project is very much a work in progress and I am working on a book about Attuned Leadership, using Ubuntu as the central principle of what it means to relate effectively to others. It may come as a surprise to hear the term “governance” coupled with Ubuntu. The concept of governance has a history in management studies and political science, and is associated with best practice in organisations. Ubuntu, on the other hand, is a developing field of study mainly in the realm of values and ideals. But I believe that the two concepts - governance and Ubuntu - are vitally connected through their joint emphasis on human dignity and rights.

In terms of stakeholder theory, organisations owe it to their constituents and to a wider circle of social interests - all their stakeholders, that is - to take into account the costs and benefits of their activities. Organisations such as businesses are embedded in society and could not function without employees, shareholders, suppliers and customers - and beyond that, organisations are indebted to the health and education systems, economic infrastructure, the justice system and government for regulating all these systems. The whole idea of stakeholder theory is that organisations owe their existence to communities and must be socially responsible. Responsibility takes the form of good business practice, putting something back into the community by investing in people, and caring for the environment for long-term sustainability. That’s the triple bottom line: profit, people and planet.

To me, this all means that, at root, organisations must adopt a humanitarian approach and must show, through good governance, that they respect human rights and dignity.

Ubuntu emphasises that we are tied together by our humanness. This term humanness has somewhat more concentrated connotations than the more familiar word “humanity”. We are all members of the human race and share our humanity, but it is our human-ness that binds us ethically to each other. What applies to one must apply to all because we all share our human-ness. As Shylock says, in Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice: “If you prick us do we not bleed? If you tickle us do we not laugh? If you poison us do we not die?” and he adds ominously: “And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?” Shylock is of course talking about being a Jew, who is discriminated against, but his argument is that we are all human under the skin.

So what I am saying is that the philosophy of Ubuntu strongly supports the quest for good governance because both streams are founded on the same humanitarian principles. In this equation, leadership is the craft of good governance. When an organisation or a country is run well, its governance translates into the trust that the stakeholders place in those who are directing affairs. Stakeholders will know that organisations are accountable, transparent and run according to predictable procedures. This is what good governance means. It is out in the open. When people believe they are being treated justly and that they have the opportunity to empower themselves and grow in their human capacities, they will confer their trust on the leadership.

Certainly, in today's world, trust in leadership is at an all-time low. Cynicism abounds and the legitimacy of leadership is widely questioned. Public dismay in the self-obsession of leaders can translate - in democracies at least - into voting out the government or dismissing the Board at a shareholder meeting. But even these democratic controls have lost force as whole echelons of leaders, those who are in as well as those who are out but are vying to take their places, are shown to be morally depraved and decadent.

For example in South Africa, the public is growing weary of the scandals involving ruling party figures who are enriching themselves through tenderpreneurship. Using political connections to get lucrative business contracts is nothing new in politics anywhere. It runs completely counter to the ethos of a social democratic party like the ANC. The party promises to serve the poor and transform South Africa's economy into a competitive, highly innovative one that can take truly its place alongside other major emerging economies like China, India and Brazil. Instead, we are seeing the development of a form of neopatrimonialism - all too familiar in Africa - in which business depends on patronage. The rules of fair competition are submerged in a welter of bribery and jobs for pals. It is beholden on the followership that supports the country's leaders to put a stop to this steady degeneration of governance.

Pressure from the followership is one part of attuned leadership. The other part is the leaders' own sense of moral responsibility. Put them together and a vocal followership supporting a responsible and responsive leadership is a formula for trust. Trust grants the leadership the scope to pioneer new initiatives and mark out new directions that will fulfil the hopes and expectations of the followership. The attuned leader sets out to serve the followers, pioneering the direction they need to take, transforming confusion into clarity, despair into hope, dreams into realities. A new world order of leadership is not going to come through moral suasion alone. It requires the discipline of proper governance. In the book that is to come, I hope to show that the recognition of governance as a moral discipline founded on our collective being is really a major part of reforming our organisations, our country and our world.

In a nutshell, this is what I desire as Tomorrow's Leadership for Africa and the world:

A leadership whose defining features are probity, humility, integrity, compassion and humanness;

A leadership[who stands for the truth and affirmation of the good, and whose primary pursuit is noble causes and the common good;

A leadership that does not shy away from the difficult nor the unpopular decisions or measures;

A leadership that practises introspection and self-renewal;

A leadership that lives by the tenets of consultation, persuasion, accommodation and cohabitation and shuns coercion and domination;

A leadership that generates trust, goodwill and confidence and is politically and personally as gracious, honourable and magnanimous in defeat as in success;

A leadership which understands that the success of others does not diminish its own success but adds to the good of the commonwealth;

A leadership that deeply believes that the locus of control for Africa's future is within Africa herself;

A leadership that acts as much for today as it does for the future;

A leadership that does not consume seed capital but invests for ensuing generations;

A leadership which bridges the schisms and cleavages wrought by religious, tribal, social, ideological, economic and political diversity that characterises much of Africa's politics;

A leadership that understands the difference between cause and effect and for whom the means are as important as the ends;

A leadership that is visionary and compassionate.

This is the calibre of leadership that will help redefine the term "emergent" from a notion of condescension and derision to a term of economic, political, and socio-cultural vibrancy and technological prowess.