

**TOWARDS SIGNIFICANCE:
From Meaningful to Significant Leadership
Saturday, 4 August 2012**

Jim Collins has inter alia, written what is now a classic in leadership theory and practice, a book titled *Good to Great*. Herein he makes distinctions between leadership that is merely Good from that which is Great. The most important distinction in Jim's submission is what he refers to as Level 5 Executive Leadership which "Builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will".

Confucius would add that "There are three marks of the superior man: being virtuous, he is free of anxiety; being wise, he is free from perplexity; being brave, he is free from fear".

In a similar vein we can distinguish leadership that is merely Meaningful from that which is Significant. Significance in this instance implies transcending what the leadership role means for the leader in question to the impact such leadership has on the followers and others.

Ali A Mazrui, the Afro-Arab scholar, advises that there are three basic imperatives that inform or shape cultural diffusion; what I consider to be among the key elements of the architecture of Leadership Significance: GOD, GOLD and GLORY. Why, he asks, do people burst forth from their confines in search of new horizons and influence? They are driven either by a search for spiritual or religious fulfilment (the God standard) or by a desire for economic actualisation (the Gold standard) or by that insatiable passion for fame (the quest for Glory) that John Milton described as "that last infirmity of noble mind".

These are acknowledgeably potent forces influencing our lives, significantly. What bearing do these have on our quest for significance, particularly leadership significance, leadership that has a positive impact on others, leadership that transcends such platitudes as a better life for all and begin to genuinely deliver for community, nation and humanity?

Well, the God standard informs such values as humility, humanness, honesty, integrity, probity, altruism (the Stranger Principle in Attuned Leadership) and philanthropy.

The list of values defies exhaustion. Suffice it to say that they are all virtuous, ethical and bespeak moral authority in Leadership Significance.

David the Psalmist has the following to say in this regard:

Psalm 15

A psalm of David

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?

He whose walk is blameless

And who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart
and has no slander on his tongue,
who does his neighbour no wrong and casts no slur on his
fellow-man,
who despises a vile man
but honours those who fear the Lord
who keeps his oath even when it hurts,
who lends his money without usury
and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things
will never be shaken.

The great thing about the God Standard is that it is comprehensively wholesome, virtuous and underpinned by morality. What is more, the resultant leadership is guided by an internal locus of control (Spirit); and requires no policing.

The Gold Standard on the other hand, can be a mixed basket of the good, the bad and the ugly; to borrow, an expression from the creative industry; given that it is driven by the yearning for economic realisation. The good herein include wealth creation that successfully fights poverty, raising the quality of life, fuelling progress and nourishing innovation and technological advancement that address even health and welfare challenges.

The bad of the Gold Standard include avarice, embezzlement, manipulation of derivatives, fiddling with such interest rates as LIBOR in a bid to unfairly self-enrich and so on. A modern classic of this is the amazing rise and scandalous fall of Enron, championed by Ken Lay, Jeff Shilling, Rebecca Mark and Andy Fastlow. Today this is being perpetuated and given greater imprimatur by Bob Diamond of Barclays' fame and his cohorts. HSBC does not seem to be covering itself in wholesome glory either where money laundering is concerned.

Among the truly ugly would be corruption, exploitation, latter day slavery in the form of sweat shops and child labour and the like. A case in point is Khulubuse's Aurora and its exploits in mining.

Leaders who subscribe to the Gold Standard perforce walk a tight rope, negotiate their way

through mine fields, and unless that Gold Standard is predicated on the God Standard, leadership significance from this departure point is typically a huge challenge in that it is inclined to be self-serving.

The third imperative, the quest for Glory, whilst not intrinsically inimical can predispose would-be leaders to trample over followers, other organisations, nations and so forth, in a bid to achieve glory. On the one hand, the Quest for Glory such as we see in spots like the Olympics, World Leaders who care for humanity are clearly commendable. On the other hand, totally unjustified wars have been and continue to be waged in pursuit of this misguided passion for Glory. Glory standard based leadership needs to be tempered with the God Standard to provide positive significance.

I submit that significant leadership, leadership that positively impacts on followers and benefit the greater good, is predicated on values and beckoned by a compelling vision. A compelling beckoning leadership vision is inspired by a sense of destiny. Impactful leadership is Values-based and Vision-led.

The foregoing sought to deal with values and their relevance/importance to leadership. We now turn our attention to vision. Leadership is about persuasively taking followers from where they are to where they desire to be. The leader must be able to paint and articulate a desired end-state for would-be followers.

To illustrate this it would be helpful to cite, say two visions that have moved nations, as examples. One by our own Tata Nelson Mandela, and the other by Martin Luther King Junior.

As a biblical precursor, Moses had to paint and articulate THE LAND OF MILK AND HONEY. He, by the way, also later on provided the Children of Israel with an enduring set of values: THE TEN COMMANDMENTS.

Centuries later, Nelson Mandela was to face a leadership challenge of similar proportions and had to move an entire nation from modern-day bondage to a kind of Promised Land. He articulated his vision thus:

“During my lifetime, I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against White domination, and I have fought against Black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live and to achieve. But, if it needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die.”

The sense of destiny the conviction that a leader is here for a purpose to make a positive difference, the dogged determination, clarity of vision, are all there in superabundance!!

Nelson Mandela’s compelling vision, magnanimity in subjugation and in triumph, unconditional forgiveness, reconciliation and unification of a nation are unmistakable. Certainly part of the legacy he bequeaths. His significance!!!

In 1994 I could not resist to implore Tata Mandela to help me crystallise my sense of

purpose. He magnanimously obliged and penned me the following epistle:

To Reuel

Through the ages and in all countries men and women come and go. Some leave nothing behind, not even their name. It is as if they never lived.

Others do leave something behind: the haunting memory of the evil deeds they committed against their followers. Every time their names are mentioned, feelings of revulsion well up in our hearts.

While others do leave something behind, the good works they do to improve the lives of all people.

Nelson Mandela 21.12.1994

The supreme human rights/civil rights campaigner Martin Luther King Junior, articulated a wakeful dream, a vision for America devoid of racism and human rights abuse. He said in part:

"I have a dream, that my three little children will one day live where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, but the content of their character."

Virtue, morality, fairness, equitability, personhood even Jesus' Golden Rule abound in this powerful, compelling vision.

These leading examples might come across as operating in a space apart, in the stratosphere, because of their phenomenal achievements. Before we move on to extrapolate what these leadership achievements might mean to us, let us briefly touch on those though very impactful, seem within reach.

Raymond Ackerman's pioneering work in supermarketing, transformed a nation and yet he remains community-spirited and down to earth.

Anton Rupert, foremost businessman and co-founder of Urban Foundation and The Small Business Development Corporation, never lost the common touch and bequeathed to us the dictum: You cannot sleep peacefully as long as your neighbour goes to bed hungry.

Dr Sam Motsoenyane, Agriculturist turned Leader of Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NAFCOC, kept the flame of Black Business burning during the darkest night occasioned by apartheid; and popularised the slogan: LIFT AS YOU RISE

The quartet of Ian McRae, Reuel Khoza, Alan Morgan, Thulani Gcabashe and Their Team, took it upon themselves to connect electricity to 1000 homes per day, 300 000 per year for five years, and in the wake of that inter alia earned the accolades of being voted the Global Power Utility of the year rated above the sovereign in 2002.

Bill and Melinda Gates have redefined Global Philanthropy, funding numerous worthy

causes in Health, Education, and Technology etc. worldwide, giving life and credence to global contemporary altruism on philanthropy.

Abraham Lincoln's Leadership Significance is captured in his conclusion of the Gettysburg Address "that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom and that government of the people by the people for the people shall not perish on this earth".

Walter Sisulu's Leadership Significance epitomised humility, quintessential stewardship, and leadership from behind and amidst, almost never from the front!

WHAT LESSONS MAY WE LEARN FROM THE FOREGOING IN OUR QUEST TOWARD SIGNIFICANCE IN PARTICULAR LEADERSHIP SIGNIFICANCE

From this brief discourse and highlights of the content of the Book: Attuned Leadership we can extract the following that some of the leaders from have in common:

Impactful leadership, leadership with significance is values-based and beckoned by a compelling vision.

Effective leaders have a profound sense of history, effectively used as a rear-view mirror and for understanding the prevailing challenges and planning the future.

Leaders dedicated to a worthy cause have an abiding sense of destiny - it is as if they truly believe they have a date with destiny, underscored by a sense of efficacy.

Such leaders appreciate the interplay of NATURE and NURTURE and realise that leaders are not just born to the role. They are born then made - and sometimes unmade by their own actions. A leader who is not in tune with the follower-ship will be a leader in limbo, and soon withers. Acknowledgement of the NATURE-NURTURE complimentary behoves leaders to prepare for the leadership challenge both formally and informally but preferably formally. Street-wisdom is by all means welcome-wisdom, but unfortunately some wisdom cannot be found in the streets.

They recognise and appreciate interdependence "Akukho qillinok uzikhoth' umhlana; Ditau tsa go tlhoka seboka di sitwa ke nare e tlhotsa".

They do not shy away from the difficult or unpopular decisions.

The generate trust, goodwill and confidence and are organisationally and personally as gracious, honourable and magnanimous in defeat as in success.

Leaders of significance are typically as passionate as they are compassionate.

Leadership significance is attuned to the followership in a variety of ways; prerequisites including:

o Empathy: Purposefully cultivating the skill and reflective ability to see the world from the follower's vantage point -to "walk in their moccasins, so to speak".

o Inspiration: Engendering a sense of follower self-worth, pride in current status and hopefulness in the future. Good sense, allied with sensitivity, gives the leader traction within the mental and emotional lives of the followers.

o Commitment: Attuned Leadership adopts a course and sticks to it passionately but with great and genuine goodwill towards the followership and anyone else who may be affected. Attuned Leadership is thus as PASSIONATE AS IT IS COMPASSIONATE.

o Probity: Assuring followers that leaders can be held accountable. Probity is the ETHICAL IMPERATIVE to remain upright.

A good balance of competence, vision and virtue begets wholesome and effective leadership.

When all is said and done, leadership that is not ethical, leadership that does not rely on moral authority, is essentially misleadership.

May I move to conclude and in so doing reflect a little more on myself as a businessperson. I shall merge such reflection with wisdom from more seasoned leaders.

I have come to conclude that many things in life do not last but meaning does, and significance which is one's meaning beyond self and meaningful impact on others, endures for ever.

George Eberhard sagaciously observes that: "The vital force in business life is the honest desire to serve. Business it is said, is the science of service. He profits most who serve best. At the very bottom of the wish to render service must be honesty and purpose, and as I go along through life, I see more and more that honesty in word, thought and work, means success. It spells a life worth living and in business, clear success".

I find the following stern admonition from Dorothy Shaver as instructive as it is irresistible: "Today's business leader cannot justify his existence by profit statements alone. He must also render service to his local, national and world community".

And now to all of us, one of the ultimate sages has this to say about life's purpose: "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I know, the only ones among you who will be really happy, are those who will have sought and found HOW TO SERVE". Albert Schweitzer

If only we could heed these pearls of wisdom and a bit of what precedes, proceed to live by their tenets and apply ourselves diligently in leading and following actively, our political economy, our communities, our nation and our continent would genuinely be a better place for all of us and we would be moving inexorably towards significance and the God Standard would prevail and supercede the Gold and Glory standards.