

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

You want to lead? Start here

Fusi Akinkugbe

MOST people at the end of the day want to be significant in one way or another and not just go through life without making an impact. But how can you lead and make a difference? Where does one start?

Conviction is very important. If you don't have the conviction about something you cannot make an impact in it. You also will not be able to endure in it. Difficulties and challenges will certainly come, but your conviction will help you stick through it. Even when you feel like giving up, your conviction will help you persevere. Your conviction also ignites others. It's difficult to attract people to follow us in something if we ourselves are not genuinely convinced about it. If you are lukewarm about what you should be convinced about, I don't see how you will be able to make a difference in it.

But even if you have the conviction about something, to influence others, that thing must be directed towards making some aspect of their lives better. This is the focus of leadership. If what you have conviction for is solely directed at making you richer, better, more visible or it is about building your empire, you won't find people following you in it because it is focused on you. While there is nothing wrong with these things, to truly lead, we must set a purpose that others can identify with and through it also achieve their own hopes and aspirations. It must be a purpose that includes

others and benefits them.

Wherever you are and whatever you do, you can be a leader because you can influence others right where you are. This brings me to the inspiration for this article, which is a LinkedIn article someone sent to me, about a father who had emigrated to the United States from Russia, but because he could not speak English he could not work with his education (a master's in engineering) and he became an Uber driver. Through his work as a driver (which he does very well with an excellent work ethic), he uses every chance he has, to find opportunities for his son who works in Silicon Valley in one of the largest banks in the United States. In one striking incident recounted by his son who wrote the article, his father connected him with one of his passengers who happened to be a top executive in the company where his son worked. This opened a very important professional and personal connection for his son – through his father the Uber driver who had sacrificed his own future for his son. The father had a purpose that was not focused on himself, and as a result significantly influenced his son by his values, character, and sacrifice. To the son, his father is a leader and rightly so. Indeed, leadership can be found in every sphere of life and is not dictated by status or position.

But is conviction enough? Or having a purpose that includes others? These two things as important and fundamental as they are, are not enough. To conviction and

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purpose, we must add competence. How can you influence others if you are not good at what you do - whatever that may be? In every sphere, competence is the foundation of leadership. There must be a justifiable reason for anyone to willingly follow you as leader. So, if you want to become better at what you do, it is important to be self-aware. This helps you to know your strengths

and weaknesses, and through this, you know where you need to lay emphasis as you work to improve yourself. What are your strengths and weaknesses? Can you identify them? We must have the humility to accept our weaknesses because no one can lead if they live in self-denial.

Once you have identified your strengths and weaknesses you must set out the things you need to do to develop yourself – especially in your areas of strength. In what ways can you develop greater competence in what you do? Our weaknesses on the other hand don't have to an Achilles heel that can bring us down as we can work to develop ourselves in those areas, but more importantly we can build teams and have people around us who compensate for them. This means acknowledging the skills, gifts, and capabilities of others especially where they are better than us. I remember reading about how Sir Richard Branson always recruited people to compensate for his weaknesses. He was clearly self-aware enough to know what his weaknesses were, humble enough to accept them and then staff his teams in a way that compensated for his weaknesses. No one can be everything, so even as we recognise our weaknesses, we must be able to defer to the knowledge and competence of others in those areas.

Consistency is also important. Many are convinced about what they are doing but don't stay the course because they are not consistent. Consistency is a charac-

ter trait that shows your commitment to something irrespective of circumstances. It increases your credibility because consistency in something makes you known for it, which helps your credibility. Consistency also helps you build competence because competence is incremental. It can make an average person get to the top, while inconsistency can hinder a brilliant person from fulfilling their potential.

Conviction, purpose, competence, self-awareness, consistency. It's doable. You CAN lead, and you can start today.

Thank you and until next week, let me challenge you to begin to lead from where you are.



Akinkugbe qualified as a Chartered Accountant. He served as treasury controller at DHL and later as CEO of a technology services company founded by Accenture.