

# LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

## With Privilege comes responsibility

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THE funeral this April of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh, husband, and Consort of 73 years of the Queen of the United Kingdom is a lesson on how those who have privilege should act. Most of us are not royalty, but in every society, there are those who are privileged for one reason or the other. They may not have formal positions of leadership, but their status for reasons such as their birth, financial position, education, political and social status invariably puts them above the general population.

They are the elite, and in any society, they have influence because of their status. So, how should they behave? Is leadership expected of them? Because of the influence their status accords them, they can and should lead by their conduct and choices. If you are reading this, you have some relative privilege: you have an education, you are probably a professional or you are in business or in public service. Privilege comes with responsibility, and this is what was shown by Britain's Royal Family as they buried their Patriarch, Prince Philip. His funeral took place during the pandemic when there were restrictions in the United Kingdom regarding funerals, which included a limit of thirty mourners, no singing by mourners, everyone wearing masks, and only those from the same household could sit together.

Having originally planned that the guest list at his funeral would comprise eight hundred people, what could the Royal Family now do

in these circumstances? Ignore the restrictions? Apply for a waiver for more guests – maybe fifty or a hundred? In the circumstances, perhaps the government and public sentiment may have been favourable towards the latter option. But they chose neither.

Instead, they (including the Queen, who is the titular head of the government) chose to abide to the letter with everything stipulated by the government. They understood that with privilege comes responsibility, and with public position comes accountability. They don't have political power, but they have an exalted position which they know they enjoy because of the support of the people. It is a trust which must be honoured and given utmost respect. By obeying the same rules that everyone else was subjected to, they acknowledged that the law was above their Royal status and in doing so they showed leadership. Prime Minister Boris Johnson also gave up his place on the guest list so an additional member of the Royal Family could attend. This is how those who have privilege should behave especially when they can use their privilege to circumvent laws and regulations.

But what do we see here in Nigeria? A so-called elite who act as though regulations are meant for others and not for them. In fact, their status is a licence NOT to abide by regulations. During the lockdown we saw political elite holding rallies when there were limits on the numbers that could congregate in a place, while the social elite held parties in defiance of regulations put in place for their own

safety and the safety of others. All an abuse of power and misuse of influence to achieve private ends.

So, where is the example or incentive for those who don't have privilege to act properly and lawfully, if those who do are not showing the way? A genuine elite know that there is always a bigger picture beyond them and their own personal priorities and interests.



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In his inaugural address, United States President Joseph Biden said: *"We will lead not by the example of our power but by the power of our example"*. The Royal family led by example, and the hallmark of this for many people, was seeing the Queen in a mask and sitting alone, at her husband's funeral in compliance with the Covid regulations. None of her children could sit beside her or walk with her, because they were not members of the same household. Rules were rules. It was strange to see a widow without physical support at her husband's funeral, especially one who was almost 95, and who is Queen.

But this was not just about themselves, it was also about the institution. This is how those who have privilege preserve and sustain institutions. They always look at the wider picture. On the other hand, when those who have privilege put themselves and their interests first, then it becomes difficult to sustain institutions. This is where we constantly fall in this country. It takes discipline to sustain an institution over years, decades, and centuries. You cannot have privilege and only enjoy the benefits without bearing the cost that comes with the privilege. No matter your status, demonstrating leadership requires you to have the humility to submit yourself to laws and regulations, especially when you are in a position to exempt yourself.

I hope those of us who call ourselves elites in our society understand the responsibility that comes with whatever privilege we have – whether it is political, social, educational privilege or otherwise. Sustaining in-

stitutions and building a society that encompasses the interests of others is difficult and virtually impossible when those who have privilege do not want to have any responsibility.

Let me set this challenge to all who call themselves elite in our society: no matter who you are, your conduct and choices send a message to others - positive or negative. Are you thinking of the larger picture or only of yourself? Personal change can lead to social change, but someone must set the example for others to follow. Will that be you?

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



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