

OPINION

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



By Fusi Akinkugbe

Our values crisis

I was moved to write this article after I saw a social media post copied on someone's WhatsApp DP. Briefly, the person who wrote the post said he was at a barber's salon when someone stole a customer's phone. When the number was dialled, it rang in the thief's pocket. He calmly brought out the phone and handed it to its owner. No one said anything. Shockingly, the thief sat down for another 30 minutes before leaving. The writer concluded that he doesn't think anybody has strength again in this country. It set me thinking – how could such an incident happen in a relatively controlled environment like a salon, and no one said anything? Are we so exhausted from fighting to live daily that we truly have no more strength to defend what is right and oppose what is wrong? Have we become so indifferent? The thief had no shame, and no-one could muster the energy to say something. Something is wrong. We've lost our values.

What happens when values become eroded with no one modelling values and institutions failing in this regard? Then there are no boundaries, anything goes and worst of all, as it seems to be with us – nothing shocks us. We

become seared. Values are like markers that guide us on the journey of life, and a lack of values means people (especially young people) go through life without these markers.

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stitutions like the home, school, and by leaders in all spheres. Crucially, values are reinforced when they are modelled by those in leadership positions and by others we acknowledge as leaders.

Values may be seen as the 'soft stuff' but there is no short cut without them. When a society lacks values, politicians will lack enduring conviction about anything and will change political affiliation just as the weather changes. Such politicians may think they have an immediate personal gain but sadly, the long-term effect is further mistrust of leadership and authority in all forms by everyone. When good values are not modelled by leaders, there is further erosion of whatever values remain since there is no

compelling incentive to live by them.

Are we building a country? Without values, we can't. Even common courtesies hardly exist anymore. Economic, financial, security and other crises,

are in one way or the other derivatives of the values crisis. There is no perfect society, and no one is advocating one, but when the lack of values and its effects become so pervasive like they are now, then we must recognise the problem and address it. Values set standards for everyone and without them, we will all bear the cost of not having them.

Is the situation hopeless? There is certainly no quick fix after generations of rot, and one article will not solve the problem. But if we each accept that there is a problem then it's a start. If we can then find common ground regarding this in our various clusters – home, friends, workplaces, community etc that is a next step. Institutions like the home, educational insti-

tutions, corporate bodies, and government organisations also have a key role to play. But in doing this, we must realise there will be a cost. To live by values that benefit all will mean paying a price: turning our backs on how we have done things up till now. Are we ready to give up something for the greater good?

Then there must be leadership by example. This is critical in imparting and sustaining values. Leaders who lead by example inspire others and set the tone for better conduct among those they lead. Unfortunately, many in leadership positions in Nigeria are not fit for those positions.

When leaders cannot lead, then there is no inspiration for others to live by values that are beneficial to everyone.

Values also need a vibrant, fearless, and equitable system of law and order to impact society. A country where sanctions are applied inequitably, based on 'who is involved' will accelerate the erosion of values and result in cynicism and retreat from what is of collective benefit as people look out for themselves. When this happens, people have no reason or 'strength' to fight for anything that is for the collective good.

Values are personal, but they are also systemic because they represent something shared. So, any change must be both personal and systemic. Right now, the lack of values makes it feel as though we have nothing shared. We can begin to take small steps to change the narrative, but it will be a long journey. Values are important in leaving a legacy, because without values you cannot have effective succession. You can pass down an asset but without passing down the values to sustain, preserve and enhance it, it won't last.

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

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