

OPINION

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



By Fusi Akinkugbe

A world of Problems needs Problem solvers

THERE are problems of all types and of all sizes in every sphere of life. Life itself can seem like an obstacle course in which we can succeed only by overcoming problems that face us along the way. In the words of Satya Nadella, CEO of Microsoft: “Constraints are real and will always be with us, but leaders are the champions of overcoming constraints.” Challenges are a fact of life, and we cannot escape them in one form or the other. Anyone who wants to be identified as a leader must be able to overcome problems. Someone who was President of an organisation said in his position, everything that came to him was “a problem, an issue, a struggle, and a decision.” Leading an organisation or having some level of responsibility in one means you will have

to contend with challenges. The story is no different if you run your own business or seek to make a difference in the lives of those around you. But, if you don’t want to deal with problems, issues, challenges or take decisions, then leadership in any form isn’t for you.

The world today is seeing more and more problems. In Nigeria, we have growing political, security and economic problems on top of an ongoing pandemic. In the world, we see problems like the effects of climate change with increasing natural disasters, global economic challenges, increased migration, and the unrelenting pandemic with its effects on almost every aspect of life. All these call for those who will provide solutions.

Because problems occur in every area of life including the home, problem solving is a very important leadership capability. Problems are therefore opportunities for leadership, and how you see a problem is one of the first fundamental shifts toward leadership that you can make because when you identify a problem and resolve to do something about it, it gives you the opportunity to lead. Since there are problems everywhere we find ourselves in, leadership can start right

where you are.

Problem solving is therefore key to effective leadership. In private organisations, those in leadership positions must have the capacity to solve problems and deliver appropriate solutions to their organisa-

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tions’ problems if they want to justify their leadership positions. Some of these solutions will require not just technical competence and ability but also creativity, courage, communication skills and persistence.

In the public sector, solving problems is fundamental to leadership, because a leader in public service is there to solve problems for the people he or she serves. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (or OECD) acknowledges that: “The most important role of public sector leaders has been to solve the problems and challenges faced in a specific environment.” If you find yourself in a leadership position in the public sector (whether elected or appointed), then a primary

responsibility of yours is to solve the problems that will result in a positive difference in the lives of those you serve. This is important because the security, well-being and other factors that determine quality of life for the people served

are often directly tied to the ability of leaders to solve problems. It means you truly care and shows you understand the purpose for which you occupy that position. In fact, in both public and private sectors, solving problems should be predominant in determining what is expected of leaders, and in evaluating their effectiveness.

Solving problems has many benefits, one of which is that it creates opportunities. In the world of business, many entrepreneurs and organisations provide offerings that are solutions to problems that people experience. The growing number and phenomenal growth of tech companies in Nigeria, each started to solve a specific problem is proof that problem solving

in the business space can be very rewarding.

Problems therefore present a unique opportunity – to provide solutions. According to T D Jakes: “Truly great leadership is solution oriented.” A leadership position is a therefore a platform that provides opportunities to solve problems or address challenges and being in a leadership position and not being able to solve problems or successfully address challenges is essentially a waste of the platform and the opportunity it provides.

But one thing that does not solve problems nor deliver results is excuses. An effective leader does not make excuses, because performance is what matters. Leaders are measured on their performance and not on their excuses. If

your excuse is that “Oh it’s because of the person who was there before me” or “I didn’t have what I needed to perform” or “I didn’t know the problems would be this many and this bad” then perhaps you need to ‘excuse’ yourself so someone else who can perform without excuses can take the position. Leaders who successfully deal with the challenges faced by their organisations do not do so alone. They lead others to do so, which shows the importance of collaboration in problem solving and in leadership generally.

People who solve problems always remain relevant in the scheme of things because people want solutions to problems. It is one thing that guarantees relevance in every setting.

What problems can you identify within your sphere of influence that you can solve or contribute to solving? Are there problems close to you that are literally staring you in the face which you can do something about? Take a step today to make a change wherever you are because the world is looking for those who will solve problems – big and small.

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.