

OPINION

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



By Fusi Akinkugbe

Is the Followership bad?

spires them but has no leadership position. In Nigeria followers don't seem to be able to make that choice as they should as leaders manipulate them by disempowerment through lack of financial independence and the means and opportunities to progress. Along with general economic hardship, these have become tools for elite domination with people invariably forced to 'follow' whoever can provide sustenance.

I daresay that because of how our people have been groomed and conditioned (in fact abused) by so-called leaders, they in turn see the only way to survive is by looking out for themselves only. People no longer have any expectations of leadership because they have been failed and disappointed for so long. The social contract between followers and those in positions of leadership has been broken so much and for so long that followers no longer feel there is any fidelity to be honoured between them and leaders any longer. Does this justify bad followership? No. But I think it explains why followership is bad, and reinforces the reality that leaders are the ultimate key to making the difference. The paradox here is that

the fact that if followership is bad, then it really is a cry for leadership!

On a trip I took to Singapore in 1992, a lady who worked in the hotel where I stayed, on realising I was Nigerian said she had been to Nigeria and preferred Nigeria to Singapore be-

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cause according to her: "when I am in Nigeria and I eat banana, there goes my skins, when I eat groundnuts there goes my shells." She preferred Nigeria to her home country because she could in her view do as she pleased here. This experience showed me that human nature is the same and leadership plays a strong role in moulding followership. The same person would obey the law in strict Singapore because she had to but could do whatever she wanted in Nigeria because she felt she could get away with it. The followership in Singapore is 'good' because the leader-

ship is good.

If our leadership has failed so far, is there nothing we can do as followers to change the status quo? If we have been labelled as bad must the label stick? These are four things that will help us as followers to make a difference. The first

effective leadership when the opportunity arises.

Secondly, develop competence at something. Leadership capacity is the foundation on which effective leadership is built, and competence is the pillar of leadership capacity. The young people in the tech industry are showing the way here, as their expertise in this area means they have no boundaries regarding where in the world they can offer their services.

The third thing is that you should begin to live by what you say. This is very important and is ultimately what the change we seek rests on. We criticise leadership today, but we must train ourselves not to do what they are doing – which is letting there be dissonance between our conduct

and what we say. This will come at a price though, which could be huge, but you must choose to invest in who you want to become. It will also help if you set boundaries for yourself to guide you in crucial areas of your life.

The fourth thing is to support something that contributes to constructive change in a specific sector. This could be by letting your voice be heard regarding a particular area. Not everyone can or needs to be directly involved in the political process but find a way to contribute to things that are in pursuit of positive change in your immediate environment and beyond.

Evidence of leadership abounds in unlikely places, showing that followers can be leaders. I wrote about one last week: a security guard called Musa who after 25 years of faithful service asked his boss to convert the offer given to him of a house in his village to a borehole because his people did not have water. His example shows that we can each make an impact right where we are irrespective of our status.

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.