

OPINION

LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



By Fusi Akinkugbe

Musa's Sacrifice

Because we can all lead from where we are, it is not only those in leadership positions or with leadership platforms who are called to sacrifice. In an Opinion piece, veteran Nigerian journalist Ray Ekpu told the powerful story of sacrifice by an ordinary man, Musa Usman, who had worked as a gateman for 25 years for his Indian employer. His employer was so pleased with his diligent service that he offered to build a house for him in his village. How did Musa respond to his boss' kind gesture? He said no to the house but requested that the offer should be converted to the provision of a borehole for his community because his people did not have access to good drinking water. Here was a man who had been doing what was really a low-level job for over two decades being offered shelter of his own but preferring to forgo it.

SACRIFICE involves the notion of giving up something in pursuit of the achievement of an objective. When the purpose a leader seeks to achieve stretches him or her in every conceivable way, it will require great sacrifice for it to be fulfilled. Not every one of us will be required to make the sacrifice some of the great leaders in history have made, but we must all in some way pay a price for the influence we desire to exert. When you lead others, you must accept that sacrifice is part of the price you will pay if you want to lead effectively.

Musa gave up his reward for 25 years of dedicated service to change the lives of others. Think of that! This was someone who was a gateman, not an executive in a large organisation. This probably would be the only opportunity he may ever get to own his own house - yet he chose to forgo it because the need of others was more important to him than his own need. This is

sacrifice. He may not have had money himself, but through his sacrifice he was able to do something to change the lives of people in his community.

Though he had no formal leadership position,

Because we can all lead from where we are, it is not only those in leadership positions or with leadership platforms who are called to sacrifice

he sacrificed what he had to make a difference in the lives of others: this is what leadership is about. I do not know what happened next with Musa, but undoubtedly this selfless act would have given him influence in his community because someone who positively impacts the lives of others especially in this way, will gain influence with them. The job of a gateman is more than opening gates as the name implies; it is also about guarding access to the boss. It is a role that requires trust, as the boss must trust that whoever oversees the gate of his premises will protect his interest. In Musa's case, his boss would sometimes travel to India leaving the

house in Musa's care with no problem of any kind. His integrity in doing his job led to his boss' trust in him.

Musa Usman's example of sacrifice provides lessons for leaders in all spheres about the impor-

ance of placing the needs of others before theirs and sacrificing something to change the lives of others. His story shows that there are examples of leadership all around us. We only need to look.

But why are people not willing to make leadership sacrifices? Let us look at three reasons.

First, Self-interest. When our personal interests (or group interests) are more important than the purpose of the group, then we will not sacrifice without reservation. Self-interest is probably the greatest reason for a lack of personal sacrifice by leaders in Nigeria.

Secondly, Sacrifice requires conviction. If you

consider your purpose compelling enough, you will be ready to make the necessary sacrifice. Your level of conviction about something will determine your investment in it, because when you are sufficiently invested in something, you will be ready to sacrifice for it. In 2009, in the wake of the global financial crisis, Citigroup received \$45m financial help from the government of the United States. The then CEO Vikram Pandit told the board of Citigroup that his salary would be \$1 (one dollar) per annum until the company returned to profitability. This was the sacrifice he was ready to make to see that the company's performance was turned around. The bank returned to profitability two years later, and his sal-

ary was increased to what was commensurate within the industry. This CEO had strong personal conviction about the possibility of restoring the bank's fortunes and in his own ability to do so. The sacrifice he made demonstrated this conviction and was his personal investment in the bank's turnaround. Unless you have conviction about something, you will not be ready to sacrifice for it.

Lastly, the cost of sacrifice can be great. The costs of sacrificing for a cause can be great, and they include being rejected and ostracised by those closest to you, loss of personal liberty, loss of earnings, depletion of personal resources and even threat to one's life. Some of us, no matter how motivated we are by our purpose are not ready to go to jail for one day, forgo compensation, or have our safety threatened. It takes both conviction and courage to sacrifice.

Musa's example shows how through sacrifice an ordinary person can do something extraordinary. Do you have a purpose that benefits others which you want to pursue? What price are you prepared to pay to achieve it?

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.