

# OPINION

## LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP



By Fusi Akinkugbe

# The Burden of Leadership

ity is built and you cannot lead effectively without it. Secondly, we need character - in terms of your values (which shape your choices and decisions), and in your conduct and attitude. As a leader you cannot have separate public and private personas - both must be the same.

One of the realities of having power is that power exposes you. A leadership position will magnify character weaknesses. Having power will reveal who you really are. If you have not dealt with pre-existing character flaws before stepping into a leadership position, you will carry them with you into it. If someone who cannot control his emotions and gets uncontrollably angry at the slightest provocation takes up a leadership position without first dealing with this, a situation that tests it will arise exposing it and ending up undermining his influence. Many leaders have failed not because of technical incompetence but because their leadership position exposed their flaws, which compromised their leadership. While no-one is perfect, if you want to be a successful leader the bar is set higher for you and your character and conduct must be able to stand up

to the scrutiny that comes with being in a leadership position.

This brings me to an incident that was recently reported in the media. It was an account of a member of the House of Rep-

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representatives who had an altercation in a lift with a senior legislative aide. In a nutshell, the gentleman was in a lift with this lady 'Honourable' and she alleged he bumped into her. This was a lift meant for the public and not exclusively for legislators - there is apparently one for legislators. Things escalated as she said the gentleman bumped into her. He said he didn't. As the lift came to a stop and they exited they ran into a group of people who intervened and told the gentleman that he should apologise - which he said he did even though in his eyes he was not guilty. Yet he ended up being detained by the police unit for two hours before being bailed. The 'honourable' denied ordering his arrest though

she is said to have admitted making a complaint to security as she felt intimidated.

I find this incident very distasteful. If the gentleman 'bumped' into her in a public lift with NINE people was that tantamount to har-

assment or intimidation? If it did occur, could she not have been gracious enough to let it go especially as he was made to apologise publicly? Bumping into people accidentally does happen in crowded lifts! If this could happen to a staff of the Assembly, I wonder what would happen if it was an ordinary member of the public. And if a trivial issue can become blown up like this what would happen if it was a more serious issue? Power is a paradox. You work to acquire it, and then when you have it you learn that the best way to use it is with self-restraint. Self-restraint acts as a brake on your impulses and helps you avoid using your power in an excessive, impulsive, inappropriate, or disproportionate manner.

The title "honourable" demands a certain standard of conduct but here we want the title but not the burden that comes with it. It's time we speak out and not allow it any longer. Public service isn't just for the perks. Rather it should be for the service. If weighed on a scale, public service should be a net giving position not a net receiving one. This incident might seem small especially as we have been so conditioned to the bad conduct of so-called leaders and because we are probably so exhausted from being bullied by those in power, but it is symptomatic of the wider and deeper malaise.

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The burden of leadership demands conduct that measures up to the position. But how many want to bear that burden? This 'Honourable' demanded respect as she was said to have shouted "Do you know who I am", then proceeded to say who she was. In the words of Ambassador Patrick Dele Cole, "Respect is earned, never demanded. If you allow yourself to be manoeuvred into demanding respect, you probably do not deserve it."

If we are truly in service of the people, then we must show some respect for them. In this part of the world, leaders seem to have perfected the art of making those they are meant to serve feel like they are doing them a favour. Unfortunately, we too have low expectations of leadership and have sadly been groomed to accept bad treatment from them. We must begin to set and demand higher standards of conduct from those who are leaders in every sphere. If you want the position, then you must be ready for the scrutiny. It can't be any other way. This was a bad example by the 'Honourable'. Period.

Thank you and until next week, let me challenge you to Begin to Lead from where you are.

LEADERSHIP comes with a burden which is, to conduct oneself as someone who can always set an example. I use the word burden deliberately, because it is meant to convey the weight of responsibility and expectation that comes from being in a leadership position. So, if you have intentions of going into public service or are already in public service, what do we expect from you? First, we expect competence. This is the foundation of effective leadership- competence is the building block on which leadership capac-