

**BMF – LOT NDLOVU LECTURE**

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**By**

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# **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE TO GOVERNANCE, ETHICS AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Thank you to the BMF and to the Maduke Lot Ndlovu Legacy Trust for giving me the opportunity to present this commemorative lecture today.

During my term as President of the BMF, Lot "u Gatyeni" was the Chief Executive/Managing Director of the organisation

Therefore, I worked with him very closely and got to know him well.

We deliberated many times about the need to accelerate the development and grooming of black managers, not only to end domination of managerial positions by whites, but above all to ensure that when freedom comes, qualified and experienced black managers could be deployed in strategic positions.

He was passionate about the subject and made great sacrifices to ensure that the BMF remained its powerful champion.

He believed that black managers had a much bigger responsibility than their white counterparts.

In addition to being competent managers they had a duty to be agents of transformation.

A duty to bring to their roles, their historical experiences drawn from the values and practices of our ancestors and the resilience and drive to prove oneself coming from years of oppression and denial of dignity and respect as a human being.

Like Reuel Khoza, he believed that the foundation of our contribution to leadership and management practices should be the values of "Ubuntu" which we have to interpret and action in the context of current realities and challenges.

In attuned leadership, Reuel says "Ubuntu combines reason and empathy, logic with compassion: it urges us to relate to others as we would have them relate to us in so doing, lift all".

He goes on to say this principle applies to organisational leadership in general, not only in politics, but also in business.

Today, as we commemorate Lot Ndlovu's legacy, we have to think very hard about whether we are transformational leaders or not.

Whether our leadership is building trust, inspiring and motivating those we lead to perform at their very best and is taking the institutions we lead to higher levels of excellence, because these are the outcomes that should come from transformational leadership.

## **2. A BRIEF NOTE ON THE MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP.**

To transform is to make a thorough or dramatic change or to alter or be altered radically in form, function and or character.

Transformation becomes necessary in circumstances where there is a need to radically improve performance.

Reuel Khoza comments as follows: "In business, as in politics, transformational leaders bring out the best in their followers and enhance the good of society by acting on a core set of benevolent values".

In a social context, performance may have been constrained by denial of freedom as a consequence of conquest and/or colonization or by imposition of a destructive ideology or dictatorship or poor leadership that entrenches mediocrity.

In a business context, persistent poor performance may be a consequence of changed market conditions, failure to respond to technological changes or poor leadership that fails to reorganize resources under its control and to motivate people to strive for better performance.

To get a business out of such a hole, transformational leadership becomes crucial.

Leadership that builds trust, motivates the people to perform at their very best and takes the institution/organisation to higher levels of excellence.

In Africa, post the colonial era, visionary leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Kenneth Kaunda, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor articulated visions of a new Africa.

A continent that would empower its citizens through rapid modernisation, increased investment in education, infrastructure and technology and guarantee of personal freedom and security.

Above all, promote African humanism as the value system that would underpin relations between the leaders and the citizens on the one hand and Africa and the rest of the world on the other.

Unfortunately, this era of African visionary leadership did not last long. It was stifled by the interests and ideologies of the super powers. As a consequence, Africa went through a dark period in the 1980s, when a significant number of African leaders abandoned idealism and became the exploiters and oppressors of their own people.

Corruption and abuse of power for personal enrichment became rampant.

The point to note here is that at independence there was a realisation of a need for transformational leadership to change the lives of Africans for the better.

As we know, when South Africa finally dislodged the chains of apartheid in 1994, President Mandela became the torch bearer of transformational leadership.

His undisputed moral authority enabled him to challenge us as South Africans to strive to be forgiving and compassionate to embrace all humanity as brothers and sisters. Above all to become better human beings in the spirit of Ubuntu.

The power of his moral authority radiated to the rest of the world and through him Africa, the legendary Dark Continent, brought light to the world.

When T M Mbeki succeeded President Mandela as President of the Republic in 1999, he placed the spotlight squarely on Africa.

Pronouncing that Africa's time had come. Africa should claim the twenty first century.

He became the chief architect and promoter of the African Renaissance agenda and the socio economic renewal programme for Africa – the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

He articulated and expounded the vision on many forums in South Africa, rest of Africa and the world.

The vision galvanized Africa to take its destiny in its own hands.

African leaders led the resolution of conflicts that had been raging for many decades in DRC, Angola, Liberia, etc., confronted the

developed countries and multilateral development finance institutions on debt that was crippling most African countries. Above all, called on African leaders to protect the basic human rights of citizens, eradicate poverty, develop policies to promote economic modernisation and inclusive growth. Moreover, to subject themselves to periodic reviews of progress through the Africa Peer Review Mechanism.

This was transformational leadership in action.

In addition, he exhorted Africans, in particular the intelligentsia to define themselves, so that we as a people can devise and implement our own political and socio economic programmes of action.

He emphasised that we have to respond to today's challenges from our worldview and proceed to action from our own authentic possibilities based on the culture and competences of us as Africans.

The ideas resonated with a number of African scholars, researchers and business leaders in Africa.

In South Africa, Reuel Khoza rose to the occasion and responded with a number of publications.

Backing with research and scientific analysis what Lot Ndlovu was saying to us all along in his own way talking directly to Africans in management positions throughout South Africa.

Of course, since leaving government, Joel Netshitenzhe has established a powerful think-tank and through it, he is tackling some of the big challenges facing our country.

At this point, I will pause and reflect further on the point I made earlier that the foundation of transformational leadership should be values and practices originating from the experiences of the people themselves – Africans in this case.

### **3. FURTHER REFLECTIONS ON WHAT SHOULD UNDERPIN AUTHENTIC TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

In reviewing the history of civilisations and nations that had to rebuild themselves after years of disturbance through conquest or colonization or dictatorship or persistent poor economic performance, I have noticed a common thread.

They all grappled to understand why the disturbance happened in the first place. What weaknesses in their culture and traditions made it possible? What gave the conquerors an upper hand – beliefs and values that were superior or scientific and technological know-how that was superior?

This deep introspection is invariably led by the intelligentsia – religious leaders, leaders in government, academics, independent researchers and leaders in business.

The outcomes are new visions and plans to end the disturbance and move the nation to a better future.

In cases where the introspection has been genuine, deep, thorough and unrestricted, with nothing regarded as too sensitive and therefore out of bounds, the new visions lead to sustainable better futures.

Where things go wrong and the new vision lead to an unsustainable future, is when the intelligentsia rejects everything that the people know and can relate to from their traditions and historical experiences and introduce a completely foreign vision informed by historic experiences of far away nations - like socialism, communism and the individualistic capitalism of the purist Anglo Saxon tradition.

It is for this reason that in China, Mao Zedong adapted communism to the specific conditions of China and subsequently expelled the Russian advisors.

To propel a nation forward, a vision should link to the values and traditions of the people that are key to solidarity and motivating the people to be self-reliant, hardworking and willing to be accountable for their actions.

This is what is behind the success of China.

Each time that they confronted a crisis, they evaluated their situation, making the Confucian principles and the centuries of prosperity under some of their great emperors the reference points.

Are we still restless because we realise that we need to do more and better to improve the conditions of our people – eradicate poverty and unemployment and contribute to new knowledge and innovations in proportion to our size?

What are we pre-occupied with?

These are the real questions that transformational leaders should be occupied with.

Yes, we have made a good start in areas of our immediate interest, employment, equity, advancement of black managers and black economic empowerment. This is impressive and this work should continue.

But, as mandarins, our role in society is much bigger and more complex.

It extends to the whole continent and to all black people because we share the same history.

As we commemorate Lot's legacy today, let us think very hard about our role as mandarins of our country and what we should do to be the transformational leaders that our country and Africa needs.

Thank you! Thank you!

## References

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