

Peace Talk Series by Mary Gloria C. Njoku

In this edition of the programme, peace, I will discuss leadership for peace.

We have some leaders that we can reckon with when we think about leadership for peace. Examples include Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jnr., Pope John Paul II, Mother Theresa of Calcuta, Ghandi. Nelson Mandela distinguished himself as a person of peace who refused to pay back those who colonized them and institutionalized apartheid with a continuation of the "monster" they created but instead chose to promote reconciliation of people of African and European descent. Martin Luther King Jnr. devoted his life to the quest for freedom of African Americans. He inspired hope in the people of the United States with his speech, "I have a Dream." Pope John Paul II broke several barriers in his lifetime. He visited many countries urging them to respect people of all colours, languages, cultures and racial profiles. He exemplified social justice in his life and he visited and forgave the young man who shot him. Mother Theresa of Calcuta promoted social responsibility and peace by making herself available to serve the downtrodden of the society. Her life consisted of "Making People Beautiful for God." Ghandi prayed, fasted and suffered to bring his people out of distress. He protested against their oppressors peacefully.

These leaders are among outstanding individuals considered influential leaders. There are many people who exhibit the characteristics exemplified in these types of leaders but circumstances have largely prevented them from being visible to us. However, most of us do not have the compendium of skills and mastery required for good leadership. Some of us have great skills and achievement profiles but are plagued by narcissism. They have big egos that most often makes it difficult for them to listen to opinions that are contrary to their views and rather dispose them to pay attention to only information that supports their own opinion, image and ideas. Their bloated ego propels them to take all the space and leave none for others to demonstrate their own leadership capacity. These narcissistic leaders suffer from inadequate self esteem and self-awareness (Njoku, 2011).

In contrast to leaders with narcissistic personality, those who have a healthy sense of self understand the importance of giving other people opportunity to demonstrate their leadership potentials. They know that no one is an embodiment of all knowledge, they know what they are good at and therefore, they fill-up some leadership space with other people who will complement their skills. It is not unusual to see that the team members may have diverse and critical view points.

Given what we know today about development, it is clear that no country, institution or sector can manage our global challenges and development alone. Successful development is dependent on collaboration with varied segments of people, institutions and nations. Collaboration requires relationship building with both people who are like-minded and those with contrasting views. To be successful in relationship building and networking, collaborative leaders reach out to other people as peers rather than subordinates (Andrews et al 2010). We need leaders who will fill-up the leadership space with those who complement their skills in other to maximize development. When a leader fills the space with only people whose views match theirs, they have indeed created a big loophole that could bring about the collapse of the system they are leading. Let me tell you more about the image of the peaceful leader.

The fundamentalist mindset of the perceived image of 'a peaceful leader' is one that has been called the 'Superhuman'. The 'brave' individual is typically male or an 'odd' woman and located at the top of an imaginary pyramid. He or she accomplishes exceptional things because of his or her exceptional abilities and skills.

Given the emphasis on the individual and her/his exceptional abilities, it is not surprising that there are many parallel lists of key characteristics or 'traits' that, when encountered together in one individual, tend to make that person quite exceptional. Some of the important talents are not only intelligence but also creativity; emotional intelligence and strong interpersonal skills which includes strong communication skills; self-confidence and courage; self-knowledge and authenticity; and a great capacity to adapt.

Core things that such exceptional individuals do and do very well are: grasping the broader picture (a holistic perspective or 'organizations sensitivity') and making sense of it; building broad networks of relationships within and across institutions of varied differences; creating a fascinating and captivating vision of the future, and managing the various tasks to achieve that vision, often in inventive ways.

It has been understood that 'peaceful leadership' largely begins and takes off in 'small group' situations, maybe a team of close advisors, a Cabinet, or an informal or formal setting with 'key people' from other institutions. Yet peaceful leadership also involves the ability to connect to and communicate directly with large crowds and audiences. In both situations, verbal and non-verbal communication skills are very important.

A distinction tends to be made between 'transformational' and 'transactional' leadership. 'Transformational' leaders are those that seek to go beyond the status quo and business-as-usual, and appeal to the higher motivations of their followers i.e. their ability to see beyond their immediate self-interest and mobilize for a greater common good. It is sometimes argued that 'transformational' leaders largely use 'soft power' i.e. the art of persuasion. 'Transactional' leaders by contrast stay within the confines of the current situation, tend to appeal to more basic motivations such as greed, fear and even hatred, and largely use 'hard power' i.e. the (threat of) rewards and punishment (Koenraad, 2012).

A distinction can be made between a peaceful leader's image and his aura. The 'image' is the supposed trait people want to see while the aura is the actual impression made on the followers. While a leader is portrayed as a functional operator, using the rules and formal authority to keep institutions going, they can be contrasted with 'Peaceful leaders' who aspire to often times initiate mutual effective change, and who rely on vision, values and trust more than the rule of the book.

There are also peaceful leaders and conventional leaders. The conventional leader is one seen as an exceptional individual. They are exceptional in that they manage to mobilize significant numbers of people to achieve or try to achieve exceptional –and positive– things. We believe they can do this because they have exceptional skills. Great 'business' leaders build very successful businesses more or less from scratch, or are applauded because they manage to turn around a failing company. Bill Gates for Microsoft, Steve Jobs for Apple, Jack Welch for General

Electric and Lee Iacocca, who revived the Chrysler Company in the 1980s. Nandan Nilekani, CEO of Infosys Technologies Ltd. and Mo Ibrahim, founder of Celtel and creator of the Mo Ibrahim Prize for Achievement in African Leadership, are other outstanding names. The peaceful leader or true leader is seen to embody and carry both the conventional and peaceful skills of a supervisor or guide. Leadership for peace encompasses a willingness to explore the implications of ones actions and select options that institutionalize peace.

I started my story today with mentioning examples of leaders who exemplified peace. The likes of Nelson Mandela distinguished himself as a person of peace who refused to pay back those who colonized them and institutionalized apartheid with a continuation of the "monster" they created but instead chose to promote reconciliation of people of African and European descent. Martin Luther King Jnr. devoted his life to the quest for freedom of African Americans. He inspired hope in the people of the United States with his speech, "I have a Dream." Pope John Paul II broke several barriers in his lifetime. He visited many countries urging them to respect people of all colours, languages, cultures and racial profiles. He exemplified social justice in his life and he visited and forgave the young man who shot him. Mother Theresa of Calcutta promoted social responsibility and peace by making herself available to serve the downtrodden of the society. Her life consisted of "Making People Beautiful for God." Ghandi prayed, fasted and suffered to bring his people out of distress. He protested against their oppressors peacefully.

I want you to remember that you have what it takes to be a Nelson Mandela, a Martin Luther King Jnr., a Pope John Paul the second, a Mother Theresa of Calcutta and a Ghandi of our time. If it is possible for you, find the biographies or stories of these individuals and read them. You would find out that they were ordinary people like you and me who accomplished great peaceful actions in their lives. I would like you to take a moment and reflect on your own attributes. Would you say that you a peaceful leader or rather a person who embraces leadership for peace. I am hundred percent sure that there is someone somewhere who would be thinking that this story is for those in high or political offices. Hello my dear, my story on leadership for peace is for all of us ordinary people, you and me. It concerns you the husband and father of the house, it concerns you the wife and mother of the house, it is for you the child in the house, it is for you the office clerk, sales lady, salesman, secretary, computer operator, accountant, manager and chief executive officer. It is for you student, tutor, lecturer and professor. It is for you and me. Please join me as I take a stand to support leadership for peace. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.