

Leaders Interview

1

An Interview with Dr Uche Maraizu

Name: Genevieve Megwa

Course/Number: The Leader's Role in the 21st Century LEAD 704

Date: 11/06/2020

Instructor Name: Dr. Anyango Reggy Gregory

Leaders interview

Introduction

This assignment is aimed at ~~d~~Developing ~~c~~Cultural ~~c~~Competency ~~s~~Skills with a focus on acquiring leadership skills by listening to established leaders of other cultures and hearing and benefiting from their experiences. For this assignment.

I have chosen Dr Maraizu Uche, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Interlink Technologies and Management Systems Ltd and Palm nectar Breweries Ltd, Nigeria. He is my mentor and a very well established and successful business-man. Dr. Uche has a very peculiar story. He was being trained and having practiced as a medical doctor who veered off into the Information Technology and manufacturing world. He lives in both the United States and Nigeria, so he has a very unique perspective of life and leadership in both countries. The interview was exciting and very insightful.

I started the interview by addressing the obvious and asking why he decided to leave his medical career to start a business. He approached it by saying, that **“the first rule of leadership is for one to understand him or herself first, identify areas of personal interest from an early age and then develop the life and educational skills which will help in making him or her attain that goal”**. He continued to explain that most people erroneously, tend to start and pursue ventures because others shove, not really knowing if they

Leaders interview

understand, have the flare, or if they e-nor will be able to put in the requirements to sustain such dreams and ventures.

Dr. Uche He tied this narrative into his personal experience by saying he experiences his early cultural pressure early on in his life from his parents who fervently wanted him to be a medical doctor, as was customary in the region where he grew up. His parents pressured forced him to go into medicine even though he had made known his interest in the commercial and public service life. So as to satisfy his parents and the society at the time, he decided to become a doctor. He describes the choice as very challenging and fulfilling that prepared him for many things in life, and of course the profession has been very prestigious while opening many doors. At a certain stage in life, he decided to pursue and develop his primary passion, hence his foray into business and manufacturing.

As expected, he encountered stiff opposition from the family and society who didn't understand the concept at the time. He explained that he made up his mind to answer them all with success which would be easier than constantly explaining his choices; this has proved to be very poignant.

In all he found personal fulfillment regardless of the challenges and sees everyday as an opportunity to learn and teach while contributing to society.

Leaders interview

On the point of challenges and since he brought it up, I decided to inquire how [Dr. Uche](#) he navigates business in Nigeria with its inherent challenges.

~~He Dr. Uche~~ describes Nigeria as “a decision and not a trial”. Baffled, I asked him to explain. He stated that **“the identification of the problems, provides the opportunities” in business, leadership and life**. Nigeria, being a developing economy and essentially a third world country, is bound to have many needs and problems. [Dr. Uche continued to say](#), **“The leader does not dwell on the problem, rather looks for the solution and sees the opportunity within providing the solution”**. _

I asked if he could explain how these ties into his current businesses. He said that also living in a country like [the United States of](#) America where systems and society was based on established order and the drive for individual success with a clear reward at the end, he tried to identify what the core factor of “order” was. He said he identified the following six basic rules;

1/. Education

2/. Rule of ~~l~~aw

3/. Belief in ~~o~~ne’s dreams

4/. Reward for hard, clean work

5/. Respect for your fellow man

6/. Belief in God coupled with constant prayers.

He decided to focus on Information Technology and Computer Technology to help in training to assist in human capacity building, computer hardware sales to

Leaders interview

make available the computer as a readily available and accessible tool and database design and development to use the earlier tools and knowledge acquired towards applications to solve day-to-day life challenges.

Once again this went back to the identification of societal problems or needs and provision of solution towards developing a business.

He went further to state that, **“every society is built by visionary leaders who are able to learn from accepted norms, acquire the requisite education and exposure from local and wider societies. This knowledge and experience are then applied to solve local needs and at the same time help develop talent and manpower that will sustain hard work, reward and visible verifiable success.”**

A common and frequent problem is managing money, manpower and time so I asked [Dr. Uche](#) ~~him~~ how he gets around this aspect of business and life in Nigeria. **He maintained that, “**

As a leader one has to be able to prioritize those aspects of life and business which are important in order of ranking. Having understood and identified what it is you wish to pursue, it becomes imperative to seek the factors of life that will help you establish it. This implies the selling your passion, convincing the next person of your knowledge of the venture, its need and viability to survive in your locality and of course, its relevance.” It is this

Leaders interview

acquired skill which will attract investment either from a financial institution, family or friends.

Access to funds anywhere in the world is a fundamental challenge, ~~most~~ especially in a developing country like Nigeria. Furthermore, availability of funds for the payment of the service or product which you may provide, is very ~~much~~ limited. Most people are simply looking to take care of the essential of life, with very little to spare._

It ~~therefore is~~ becomes of immense importance to make proper, accurate life and business choices to forestall failure from the onset._

Leadership skills must be sharpened knowing that everything in life is in limited supply and will only be earned based on merit, focus and hard work. In the Nigerian setting, one has to work extra hard to earn even the more limited rewards of hard work, as a leader.

Dr. Uche pointed out that human resource management in Nigeria ~~is~~ has an unfortunate reality of poor individual commitment to work and a prevailing sense of, what he termed, “entitlement” with minimal work. I countered this notion stating that this can be seen everywhere and not just Nigeria. He went further to remind me of his earlier outline which included “the rule of law”. He stated that Nigeria has a challenge of enforcement of existing laws or the lack of the ~~political will will power~~ to enforce the said laws. This has pervaded through the society and affected work and followership. I was very interested to note

Leaders interview

how he approached this problem which seemed out of one's capacity of control.

He said the skill of a good leader is to engage, respect, and encourage his followers or workers. Continuously reinvent one's self and always update and implement new ideas. He added “~~that~~ when you make yourself, the project, the job interesting and exciting, the follower or the worker will be self-compelled to give his best with minimal coercion”.

The leader should be able to adapt him or herself to the peculiarities of his chosen society and try not to expect a replication of results of one place from the other.

Dr. Uche ~~He had~~ never mentioned anything about gender preferences s knowing how the African culture had such a bias towards men and belief that women are of less capacity in output. His answer was elucidated with an example. s “In a journey by boat on a river, 10 people set out, of which only one was a woman. Shortly into the journey the boat capsized. It just so happened that the woman was the only person who knew how to swim”. **At that time, for that need, for the project of saving lives, the woman was the most important person, the team lead, the decider of what to do.** s

He used the boat example to explain that gender does not define nor limit the evolution of a true leader. The leader has to make himself or herself relevant by basic universal rules like the six he outlined earlier. The output and ability to lead, will be evident and rewarded thereof.

Leaders interview

I interjected that it wasn't that easy in a place like Nigeria. He once again reminded me of the boat example and stated that **“if you see or believe that there are extra obstacles placed in your way for any reason, including your gender, one has to identify that as the problem and then arm yourself with more tools of self-development and skills, always striving to show your value above others”**. One's self-belief becomes more important at this stage.

[In *The Truth About Leadership*, Kouzes & Posner \(2010\) argue that, “Leadership is not about who you are or where you come from, it's about what you do” \(p. 4\).](#) [Dr. Uche - The truth about leadership.](#)

He explained that gender inequality has been a human problem for generations and is more pronounced in the developing countries, education and the evolution of the so-called “[kKnowledge bBased](#)” jobs, has allowed for the leveling of the playing field for men and woman. He stated that at his company, Interlink Technologies and Management Systems ltd., he has made it a standing policy that no person shall be discriminated against nor shall any female be disrespected based on gender. Infact, the way he described it that was one of his “[cCardinal cCorporate sSins](#)” is to disrespect or show insubordination to female junior cadre or management staff. The company has even put in place a form of *Affirmative Action* to deliberately assist women with training and project lead positions.

Interestingly, he described his experience with women as they being more honest, loyal, hardworking, firm and resolute than most men.

Leaders interview

Additionally, I

I recalled that Dr. Uche ~~he~~ outlined his strong belief in God and prayers in his earlier six-point fundamentals. I asked what role ~~how~~ faith plays in his leadership qualities. It didn't take a minute for him to respond by stating that **“a true leader understands the value of followership”**. There is no greater path to follow but that of Christ and his teachings. -

The ~~holy Christian~~ Bible should be the guide and blueprint of a good Christian leader. The Bbible gives us guidance and direction into almost all the paths and challenges of leadership. Mark 20:26 says, -

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.” (Include the translation of scripture you are using). Matthew 20:26

Jesus taught his disciples not to emulate the rulers of the Gentiles who exercised authority over them. - Instead, He taught them that in order for us to be leaders, we must become servants first. We must not conform to the status quo especially if it entails ruling through coercion and unjust deeds over our subordinates. 1
Thessalonians 5:14 says.

Leaders interview

“And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”

(What translation of scripture are you using?) 1-Thessalonians-5:14

Leaders are passionate about lifting people up in their organization. They realize the importance of getting everyone on board the same vision, so they work to achieve the same goal.

As we approached the end of ~~we concluded the interview,~~ I asked what was the one aspect Dr. Uche ~~he~~ could point to of all he outlined, ~~that stands out as the most important.~~

In his usual calm manner, he said that there was not one but a combination of all. Each was to be used in varying proportions depending on the need and the occasion as a leader. Dr. Uche maintained that, “

Leadership is in all of us just that some people develop it more than others. Cultural, societal, economic factors amongst others, may enhance leadership more in one person than the next.” He reminded me of the need of education and those six basic factors he reiterated in the course of our discussion as well as the need to identify that which we love to do and to teach to others.

In conclusion, I have come to subscribe to most of what Dr. Uche ~~he~~ said with a little variance in how he made gender capacity and competition a thing of hard work and merit. This may be true in most other western cultures, the deep

Leaders interview

seated African culture and norms work against the rise and progress of female leaders.

[What strengths and weaknesses did Dr. Uche share with you about himself as a leader?](#)

Reference

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2010). *The truth about leadership: The no-fads, heart-of-the-matter facts you need to know*. San Francisco, CO: Jossey-Bass. ISBN: 978-0470633540

God's Holy Bible, King James Version. (1999). Palm Beach, FL