

LEADERSHIP: VISION, COMMITMENT, ETHICS, COMMON SENSE, SPIRITUALITY

---Whitman T. Browne (December 30, 2009).

It seems like only yesterday when the whole world was caught-up with our entering into the twenty-first century and Y2K. Suddenly, we are almost at the end of the first decade in the 21st. century; and we have had problems. While our islands and the wider world are presently engaging some, others more challenging are looming. There is no escape from the oncoming, complex challenges of our times. How then do we confront, engage, and survive such impending challenges? One short answer is, "LEADERSHIP". The leadership referenced here is not leadership of position. Successful leadership in the twenty-first century must be leadership with action! Among the characteristics of that leadership are, vision, commitment, ethics, common sense, and spirituality. Long ago, royal families and leaders were supposedly born. But not today! Good leadership is more complex than lineage, race, some prior experience, charisma, or a worldview. Today successful leaders must bring knowledge about leadership and quality training, to the leadership experience. Mistakes by incompetent leaders can be very costly. Consequently, trial and error leadership will not be a useful approach to the political, social, environmental, and global challenges we will face into the twenty-first century. However, the argument that one who holds a position of leadership is entitled to lead because of the experience in the position is nonsense. Leadership is never position. It should always be a critical evaluation of a leader's actions. How productive and successful has the leadership experience been, not for the leader, but for the community - the prince and the pauper?

A leader without a VISION of where he/she should go is like a ship without a rudder. It wobbles and dances with the current, or simply remains ashore when there are seas to conquer. Further, a leader's vision cannot be a secret. Leaders do not lead for themselves. In every organization there is a leader and there are followers. The successful leader shares his/her vision with the persons being led. Once the vision is shared with those led, there should be deliberate efforts made to have followers buy into it.

The successful leader is very aware of his/her constituency, understands the challenges in leading that constituency, and shows total COMMITMENT to his/her constituency. There are those leaders who lead people but know and care nothing about their wellbeing. Evidence abounds indicating that when leaders understand their constituencies and are committed to their success, a symbiotic relationship develops between leaders and those being led. That picture was seen throughout the history of labor unionism in the Caribbean. There was a time when Bradshaw, Bird, Jackson, Ottley, and many other labor leaders did not have to fear elections. They expected success in elections, and won repeatedly, because of true commitment to, and real caring for, the people they served. In turn, the people appreciated the commitment and kept promoting the political success of labor unionism.

All leaders in organizations are challenged to be moral and to pay attention to their ETHICS. Leaders who are openly biased, who show favoritism, and who become embroiled in immoral activities, as they lead, are bound to fail. Unethical leadership creates conflicts, leads to unimaginable forms of dissent within organizations, and can eventually destroy them. It may be tempting to use a leadership position to satisfy one's whim and fancy. However, if a person misuses the legitimate power and authority which comes with a leadership position, it is always important to reflect on the disruptions which can be brought to relationships within an organization. Shakespeare is still correct: "Peace hath its victories, no less renown than war."

Too many leaders forget that although prestige, status, and influence come with leadership, there is always a need for – COMMON SENSE. Leaders may be highly educated with access to power and authority. But they must always take the time to make good, practical, and reasoned decisions. When leaders fail to do this, they can miss the big picture and lose out as effective leaders. There was a case in early US history, when Thomas Paine reflected on the folly of King George III of England. The king was bent on using his power to humiliate its US colonies. In response, Paine wrote a memorable pamphlet – *Common Sense*. King George III did not listen. But Paine's pamphlet has spoken truth to power across the ages.

Leaders and all other human beings must face the reality of a shared SPIRITUALITY. It is something inherent in human biology. Whatever one's

religious beliefs or affiliations are, every human being has a spiritual responsibility to the creator and in acts to his/her fellowmen. One day our actions will be accounted for, not our positions. Death is more than the great leveler to the human social being. It is also a powerful reminder that none of us lives or dies unto himself/herself. After death, there is an eventual accounting for all our actions – those who lead and those who follow.