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Leadership is co-created with team members

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Subordinates must realise that for leaders to be effective they must join them on their journey and not let them flounder alone

I was sitting next to the Executive Director of a medium-sized company, in the electronic components manufacturing sector, and we were listening to the Chairman of a reasonably large pharmaceutical manufacturing company, whose talk was on effective leadership.

The notable speaker listed down, what he thought were qualities a ‘good leader’ must demonstrate and among the many qualities he emphasised were: A leader must be an active listener; He must nurture employees; He must lead from the front; He must provide a helping hand to employees; He must be a team player.

I noticed the Executive Director, seated next to me, feeling extremely



uncomfortable with such posturing.

Soon after the talk the floor was opened for questions, the Executive Director, who was next to me, rose and offering his

thanks for being allowed to ask questions, lambasted the earlier speaker.

He said, and I quote him, almost verbatim, “Sir, what you have shared about the qualities a leader needs and may demonstrate are well received, yet I say with humility you have placed on the leader’s shoulder all responsibility and in the process let his subordinates and employees of the organisation off the hook. We have heard enough of how leaders must behave so I urge you now to replace each term, i.e., ‘leader’ you have used, with ‘subordinate.’” So saying, from the note pad in which he had made his jottings he read out.

“A ‘good subordinate’ must demonstrate that he: Can also actively listen to his leader; can also nurture his leader by being empathetic; can be a good follower; can provide his leader a helping hand; is as responsible as his leader to make things happen.”

“Leadership Sir, is a co-created reality and is not the preserve of one individual. Leaders are like patrol leaders among scouts, and is just ahead of the pack but is as unclear on the path forward as are those who are following him. The leader is merely hacking his way through the undergrowth clearing the path for those who follow. To therefore place the onus on the leader alone will simply mean making the leader carry the weight of the world, as does Atlas, and in the process sooner than later the Leader will wilt under its weight.”

“Unless subordinates recognise that leaders are also human, need to be empathised with, shown compassion and care, they will place leaders on a perch from which leaders can never climb down.”

“Subordinates *must* realise that for leaders to be effective they must join their leader in his journey and not leave him to flounder alone. If a subordinate can do this for his leader he would be demonstrating not just good followership *but* true servant leadership.”

“I serve you to become a better leader not merely serve to increase your bottom line.” After he finished speaking, there were more people flocking to him, and interestingly many themselves ‘designated leaders’ than those who went to the Chairman who had delivered his address.

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