

**A PAPER PRESENTED BY ARCHITECT OLUSEGUN ALUKO PHD, RECTOR
FEDERAL POLYTECHNIC ILARO ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2021 ASUP ZONE C
CAPACITY BUILDING /RETREAT FOR UNION LEADERS AT MICCOM GULF
HOTELS AND RESORT ADA, IBOKUN ROAD, OSUN STATE FROM WEDNESDAY
15TH SATURDAY – SATURDAY 18TH SEPTEMBER 2021**

The National President of ASUP, Comrade Anderson Ezeibe

Past Chairmen of ASUP here present,

The Zonal Coordinator Zone C, Engr. Comrade Yekini Nureni Asafe

Chapter Chairmen here present,

Other Union leaders,

Distinguished ladies and Gentlemen

It affords me a great privilege and honour to be back in the midst of my people with whom together we have shared struggles in advancing the cause of education in Nigeria and particularly the cause of the Polytechnic sector. I want to appreciate you all for still keeping the flame burning. May the Almighty God continue to bless our efforts.

May I commiserate with the Union on the sudden demise of one of the Union's former Presidents, Mallam Ali Kabir. While I pray that Allah grants the departed aljannah firdaus, I also wish to pray that may God grant the family the fortitude to bear the great loss.

It is quite pleasing and reassuring that the Union is still on the noble path of progress and productiveness. This is evident with this capacity building/retreat that Zone C has organized for its union leaders. This is quite fascinating and impressive. Indeed, it is a pointer that the union is heading in the right direction. Training and retraining are necessary tools of growing the knowledge base and skills of staff and are worthy ingredients towards achieving greater performance and higher effectiveness. Training according to Nassazi (2013) 'is the process of conveying essential skills, programmed behavior, so individuals become aware of rules and procedures to guide their own behavior to accomplish their job effectively'. Nassazi (2013) further asserts that 'it may be seen as the holistic, long term growth of individuals in order to

perform future roles and responsibilities'. The place of training cannot therefore be overemphasized. It is in the light of this, that I commend the organisers of this event for their forward looking and proactive disposition. I pray that the Polytechnic system will continue to grow from strength to strength.

The topic I have been asked to talk on is '**Learning from Experience: Changing Roles of Academic Trade Union Leaders in Executive Management Level**'. Let me begin by thanking God for the gift of life, His abiding grace and the opportunities he has afforded us thus far. The protean nature of life affords mortals the imperative of changing roles to conform to the varying dictates that life offers. But what is most helpful in life are the personal attributes and the training that one has internalized over the years such as the one being held here and the personal developments that one is equipped with. It is instructive to fore warn that different roles come with different challenges, impositions and demands and indeed different responsibilities. For instance, while as a Union leader one's major responsibility is to agitate for members' welfare, and manage the few resources available for sundry union matters, the chief executive caters for the entire workforce in the Polytechnic viz a viz the academic staff and the non-academic staff. Though both the Rectors and the Union Chairmen engage in taking care of the staff, the Rectors operate at a higher level and on a wider scope.

An individual should possess or develop good character traits such as integrity, honesty, courage, humility, kindness and fairness amongst others. These traits come handy in managing effectively any of life's changing climates. Being a thorough-bred unionist prepares one for the different roles and responsibilities that life may throw at us. This is having in mind that a unionist must imbibe good virtues such as discipline, perseverance, forthrightness and transparency among others. There is the need to be focused on set goals and remove or minimize distractions. Also important is being altruistic, indeed considering others first. It is also pertinent to create and uphold the integrity of the system at all times and in all situations. The interest of our institutions must come first.

Let me specifically mention some of the tools that have worked for me in transmuting from a union leader to a chief executive.

Reality Check

It is important for a union leader who has found himself or herself executive position to carry out an objective assessment of self, the new responsibility and the realities surrounding the present office. The union leader must know that no matter how grounded he or she may be in the workings of the system, at best he or she is an 'outside insider'. The new executive role will dawn a new reality and indeed confer a new perception on him or her. The new position therefore demands that the unionist in an executive position should be ready to learn, unlearn and relearn. Indeed the new executive should shed the toga of agitation that unionists are accustomed to. It is important to note that as the chief executive now he or she receives the agitations and that he or she is the one under pressure not the one mounting the pressure. As the chief executive, the access to hitherto inaccessible documents and policies brings a new cognition that would change perspective, orientations and stereotypes. But having been in the shoes of the unionists before, it is imperative for the chief executive to deploy productive and unbiased strategies to relate with the union leaders in a way that their trust is earned. More importantly, the chief executive should ensure that his or her vision for the institution is built around the welfare of the staff. Laying a foundation of trust and confidence would start by attending to some the staff welfare even before they are demanded would be a good starting point of building and cementing a solid relationship with the union leaders.

Open Communication

The contemporary world is an age of information where knowledge is the most valued commodity. No modern human can shut himself or herself completely out of the ever flowing stream of information flow of the modern world. Communication openness is the ease of talking to each other and the extent of understanding gained when talking to each other (Ayoko 2007). Open communication is borne out of honest listening, frankness, trust and supportiveness (Rogers 1987). Open communication fosters accessibility and creates an effective communication climate where information and knowledge are shared freely upwardly, downwardly and indeed horizontally among the staff of the Polytechnic. Similarly, open communication enables an engaging relationship between all rank and file of the workforce thereby yielding strong feedback and a satisfactory job climate. It also affords a supportive management system, effective strategic planning and prompt responses to certain situations

which otherwise may impede work flow or degenerate into full blown industrial crisis. It is important to see the new executive position as an opportunity from God to serve the Creator and indeed humanity. One should therefore not allow the pomp and the glamour of office to shut out people from oneself. It is good to remember that people would always remain an irretrievable part of the invaluable assets that one would continually need to achieve success in any endeavor. It is also important for the chief executive to take advantage of the open communication approach to share his or her vision with the workforce, explaining to them the benefits therein for the institution and for themselves.

Equal Opportunities

Equal opportunities is often described as a crucial element in fostering and improving job performance and essentially in achieving social justice in our institutions. When power is appropriately dispensed, it helps engender peace and unity in the workplace. Though favour and resources may be scarce, it is important to be just and equitable in distributing these and such other favour that staff may want to curry for from time to time. There should be equal treatment to staff. There should not be any discrimination against any staff on the basis of creed, religion and sex. One should remember that as a unionist one would have frowned at preferential treatments where only a segment of the staff appears to be enjoying all the favour while others seem deprived. However, there must be a good reward system in place where hard work is adequately rewarded, outstanding performances compensated and incentives instituted to promote and boost staff morale.

Justice and Fairness

Justice should be seen as a fundamental foundation for a just association. The theory of social contract as espoused by John Locke, Immanuel Kant, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau suggests fairness among individuals. They assert that it is one condition to guarantee peace among individuals and in assuring peaceable social relations in the society. It is therefore pertinent that one of the conditions to certifying peace in our institutions is by ensuring justice and fairness in our dealings. It is one of the surest ways to prevent rancor, disaffection and disharmony. Being union leaders who have criticized, condemned and fought management over perceived injustice, we cannot come into the executive saddle and begin to practice what we have censured. In

achieving this, law is no respecter of man, same measure of laws and punishments should be applied to all individuals without bias, favour or preference. Learning to rule by the books is a good way to maintaining justice and fairness. The chief executive should be proactive in availing the statutory books to all staff so that every staff becomes familiar with the processes and procedures upon which the system is driven. Seminars, workshops and lectures can also be organized to help sensitise the staff with some of the contents of the statutory books. It is also instructive to be flexible where need be as laws are made for man and not vice versa. But proper conduct of staff and work ethical values must be maintained and guarded jealously to achieve productiveness and excellence.

Transparency

Transparency ensures openness. Transparency must be embraced in the three metaphors of it as identified by Carolyn Ball (2009) namely one, as a public value embraced by the society to tackle corruption. Two, as a tool of achieving open decision making and three as a complex machinery of emplacing good governance generally. Transparency must be all embracing in terms of financial transparency, opening up government policies through constant explanations to the staff and other stakeholders in the system and indeed in being seen as following the laid down procedures in arriving at decisions and policies and especially in the implementation and execution of projects. It is a great virtue to always be ready to open the financial books of the institution to the union officials and other stakeholders. When they see things for themselves they tend to reason more with the management rather than explaining the financial state of the institution to them in abstraction. There is always the tendency to believe that something is being hidden. Running a transparent government takes off a lot of burden from the chief executive as everybody is not left in doubt about how the institution is being run.

All Inclusive Policy

Running an all-inclusive administration offers a platform to bring many people on board. Having been a union leader, allows one to have a fair knowledge of some of the staff of the institution especially the Academic Staff which happens to be one's immediate constituency. This opportunity is brought to bear by peopling the different committees in the institution with staff who are loyal, hardworking and experienced. In achieving this, the committee system is the most

efficient method of job delegation. It brings more people into running the affairs of the institution. It also allows the tapping of knowledge from all staff no matter where and how they are placed in the system. It enables the convergence of both the academic and the non-academic staff to rub minds and find solutions to the different tasks that may be placed before them. The committee system also allows the chief executive to place many academic staff, his or her immediate constituency to serve the institution. It is on record that most of the committees in the Polytechnics are headed by academic staff and having been a unionist offers a leverage to select from a wide pool on who can deliver on certain job tasks. For instance, the Academic Board a vital decision making body in the Polytechnic system is majorly peopled by academic staff. Thanks to the Amended Polytechnic Act which has made all Chief Lecturers members of the Academic Board. It is noteworthy to mention however that this has for long been the practice at The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro. Similarly, at The Federal Polytechnic Ilaro, committees such as the SDC, Loans Committee, Staff Welfare Committee, ACTU, the Examination Committee, Time Table Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee among others are headed by academic staff and the membership cuts across the academic and the non-academic staff. The truth here is that as a union chairman you should know your people well enough to be able to bring them on board to assist you and in forging progress for the institution. The more people that are brought into the decision making process the more they own the decisions and are able to defend them when the need arises.

Goodwill

Goodwill according to Merriam-Webster dictionary is ‘a kindly feeling of approval or support’. It is therefore a good and happy feeling of concern for something. Lord Macnaghten in 1901 quoted in Curtis John (1983) defines goodwill ‘as the benefits and the advantage of the good name, reputation and connection of a business. It is the attractive force which brings in the custom... Goodwill is composed of variety of elements. It differs in its composition in different trades and in different businesses in the same trade’. Unionists as part of pressure groups rely majorly on their ability to influence policies, debates and parliamentary proceedings. They therefore know the importance of goodwill in achieving their set goals and desires. This tool therefore comes handy for a unionist becoming a chief executive to deploy goodwill among all the stakeholders in the system vis a vis the regulating bodies such as Ministry of Education and

NBTE, other government agencies, the Parliaments, among heads of other sister institutions, alumni associations and the host communities among others. Similarly, individuals who could contribute positively to the system should be identified and cultivated to assist in developing the system through infrastructural upgrade especially in the building of classrooms, provision of laboratories, road construction, donations and endowments. This would go a long way in complimenting government efforts at creating an enabling environment for our tertiary institutions.

Creativity

As unionists becoming chief executives of our various institutions, we must be creative in all ramifications, thinking out of the box most times to proffer solutions to some of the challenges confronting the sector. For instance, it is imperative to increase the Internally Generated Revenues of our institutions to be able to meet most of the union demands that are solvable locally. This would help ensure stability of our academic calendars and indeed in our institutions. This would also enable good and effective planning. Some of the viable ways to shore up the IGR is by innovatively creating more programmes but in tandem with NBTE guidelines. Increase in the number of part time programmes too would mean greater IGR for the institution. Similarly, certificate programmes capable of attending to the immediate needs within the host community may be considered. It is also a way of shoring up the corporate social responsibility of the institution. In addition, the activities of consult unit of the polytechnic can be enlivened through identifying profitable business areas. Agriculture has proven to be a major money spinner; it is therefore advisable for institutions to venture into the different arears it offers taking cognizance of arears of comparative advantage. An institution with a solid IGR base has a propensity to take care of the welfare of its staff.

Internally Generated Rector (IGR)

The Polytechnic sector is our own and as a major stakeholder in the system we must individually and collectively ensure its sustenance and growth. We must therefore put in our best possible at all times not only to ensure that the system thrives but that it excels always. We must build on our strength as a practical oriented system and strengthen the workforce especially the academic cadre to be able to compete favourably with their counterparts in other tertiary institutions. In

this regard, it is gladdening the number of PhDs that we have in the system. I am also sure that the number would soon increase tremendously based on the number of our lecturers that are presently on their PhD programmes. Distinguished comrades, to sustain the Polytechnic system, we must always ensure that we have Internally Generated Rectors. It is the lifeline of the system and we must never compromise this under any guise. The truth is that nobody can love us more than ourselves. I am a product of IGR and I am sure my people do not have any regrets having me as their Rector. Indeed we have together raised the bar of our institution and indeed the Polytechnic system and we shall not relent, we shall not despair, we shall keep marching on.

Conclusion

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, all I have shared above points to the fact that even in our changing roles, we should always stick to virtues, adhere to good principles and practice the golden rule of life which is 'Do unto others as you want them to do unto you'.

I must say that I appreciate the opportunity and the honour bestowed on me to share my experiences with my colleagues. I also must put it on record my delightedness in being with my people once again after so many years of having been my chapter chairman. It is quite a reliving experience. Again I must acknowledge the fact that having been a unionist gives me a great leverage in the discharge of my present responsibility as Rector. Distinguished comrades, ladies and gentlemen, I appreciate you all once again for the honour and for your attentiveness. May the Polytechnic sector continue to grow and may your struggles never be in vain. Thank you all and God bless.

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