HABITS FOR HIGHLY EFFECTIVE YOUTH LEADERSHIP

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AUTHOR'S DETAIL:
PROSPER BAZAANAH
(PROGRAMMES, MONITORING & EVALUATION OFFICER)
DON BOSCO YOUTH NETWORK WEST AFRICA
P.O. BOX 776, ASHAIMAN, GHANA
OFFICE: +233-302-969-565
MOBILE: +233-208-084-676
E-MAIL: pbazaanah@yahoo.com
prosper.bazaanah@dbyn.org
SKYPE: PBAZAANAH

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INTRODUCTION

The youth, undeniably, are considered the followers of today and leaders of tomorrow. To enable us understand this topic, we need to briefly define the concept of youth and leadership. The definition of youth and leadership is highly subjective, depending on the time or context in which the two concepts are used. Generally, the period between childhood and adulthood is called “Youth”. During this period a person prepares himself/herself to be an active and fully responsible member of the society. It is also a period of transformation from family dependant childhood to independent adulthood and integration in the society as a responsible and patriotic citizen.

The National Youth Policy of Ghana defines “youth” as “persons who are within the age bracket of fifteen (15) and thirty-five (35)”. Ghana’s definition has been informed by those used by the United Nations Organisation and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The youth age groups in Ghana are presented with diverse opportunities, potentials and constraints. To succeed then, in the midst of turbulence and challenges, the youth will require effective leadership attitudes and attributes to sail them through the difficult times (Ministry of Youth & Sports, 1999; 2010).

Leadership, in this context, means a process of social influence in which one person enlists the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task/goal. Four key issues are apparent in this definition. These are: social influence, individuality, team support/assistance, goal accomplishment. A youth leader therefore is an individual who has the capacity to influence or persuade a team to support his/her vision and ideas in other to achieve set goals for the group. Effective youth leadership therefore means being
able to develop the skill and positive habits of being proactive, anticipating challenges, reacting quickly and decisively in a pressured and team situations.

HABITS FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP

To be an effective and respected youth leader, you must develop good habits in dealing with people, both peers and subordinates alike. These habits are summarily presented in the acronym “LLPTCHF” which means; Listening & Learning, Pro-activeness, Team working, Commitment, Honesty & Foresight. As a leader, being able to nurture and practice these habits will improve upon your confidence level, boost your moral and faculty to stand tall in the midst of uncertainties, turbulence and crisis situations.

According to Stephen R. Covey, habits, whether good or bad, are choices that everyone has to make by him/herself. For Covey, your life doesn't just "happen." Whether you know it or not, it is carefully designed by you. The choices, after all, are yours. You choose happiness. You choose sadness. You choose decisiveness. You choose ambivalence. You choose success. You choose failure. You choose courage. You choose fear. Just remember that every moment, every situation, provides a new choice. And in doing so, it gives you a perfect opportunity to do things differently to produce more positive results (Covey, 2003: 26).

The first habit youth leaders must cultivate is the habit of listening and learning (LL). There is a marked difference between hearing people and listening to them. You can hear someone without really listening to the person. When you listen, you understand what people say and apply their input to your response. An effective youth leader always learns
to listen to others opinion and views, whether s/he agrees with what is being said or not. A good and effective youth leader understands that s/he does not know everything there is to know and that continues listening and learning from varied opinions is essential for moral and personal growth, intelligence gathering, knowledge sharing and professional development. As a youth leader, you should not be bossy and all-knowing, but be humble to enable you learn new things, broaden your knowledge base and gather intelligence for your team.

The second habit for youth leaders is pro-activeness. Being proactive means taking responsibility for choices you make in life. Simply put "stopping blame game" (Khera, 2003; Covey, 2003). As a leader, you must guide against the temptation of blaming everything on your team members, parents, peers and the devil. According to Covey (2003), proactive people recognize that they are "response-able." They don’t blame genetics, circumstances, conditions, or conditioning for their behaviour. They know they choose their behaviour. Reactive people, on the other hand, are often affected by their physical environment. They find external sources to blame for their behaviour. If the weather is good, they feel good. If it isn’t, it affects their attitude and performance, and they blame the weather. As a youth leader, one of the most important things you choose is what you say. Your language is a good indicator of how you see yourself. A proactive person uses proactive language--I can, I will, I prefer, etc. A reactive person uses reactive language--I can’t, I have to, if only.

Another habit is team work. Simply put "Avoid one man/woman show". Youth leaders need to learn how to include other people in all group activities. You cannot lead when you do things on your own. Unearth team talents, skills and abilities to the group's advantage. Repose confidence in your team, share tasks and promote collective action. Avoid dealing
with problems in isolation and victimizing individuals in the group. Adopt the “we can do spirit”. Avoid selective justice and favouratism and give equal opportunity for all to actively contribute towards the goals of the group.

Commitment, honesty & foresight are the next virtues for effective youth leadership. Youth leaders must make examples of themselves by committing themselves to the goals of their groups. By remaining committed to goals, a leader gives others a model to follow, and that can be a powerful way to inspire loyalty and passion from team members. As a leader, commit yourself to time, stop procrastinations and prioritize group events, bearing in mind the need for collective effort and team work.

Besides, integrity, decency, truthfulness, honesty, sincerity and credibility should be your hallmark at all times. This should be part of your everyday life. Though some leaders occasionally sacrifice the truth in order to motivate team members into action, in the overall scheme, I suggest that a Christian youth leader must present the truth, defend the truth at all times and commit to the truth to gain respect from team members. Just as Jesus Christ, our truth model and shepherd, lived, suffered and died for the truth, youth leaders must learn never to sacrifice the truth for any material reward. Beware! You may be name tagged, persecuted, misunderstood, and even sometimes rejected by close associates and family members for your staggering and non-negotiable commitment to the truth. In all this, I admonish you, never give up!

Finally, youth leaders should have clear vision /foresight of the goals of their group. Vision is derived from the Latin word “videre” which means to see. Vision is a thought or an object formed by imagination. It is a manifestation to the senses of something immaterial. Vision
is based on the principle that all things are created twice; a mental (first) creation, and a physical (second) creation. The mental picture/creation follows from the physical creation, just as the imagination of a building follows a blueprint/building design. Leaders should make conscious efforts to envision the desired direction and destination for their group and the resources needed to achieve the vision. Just as the thought of a car results in car production, youth leaders must begin with the end results in mind. When a group sets out a project goal, all of them may not completely understand how to reach the goal. An effective leader knows the results s/he wants, and s/he understands the process and resources needed to achieve that result. Beware! Failure to visualize as a leader empowers other people and circumstances to shape you and your life by default.

CONCLUSION

The article admonishes youth leaders to nurture and practice certain habits to enhance their leadership skills and enable them handle challenges in their communities, schools, families, churches and society in general. This will further instill in them good qualities, and attitudes to enable them take their rightful place as leaders of tomorrow.
REFERENCES:


