

**PREPARING FOR, GETTING TO AND STAYING AT THE TOP: BEING A LECTURE
DELIVERED BY YUSUF ALI SAN, FCIArb AT THE LUBCON 31ST FOUNDER'S DAY
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INTRODUCTION

'The companies that focus most on profit are not necessarily the most profitable companies' most politicians tend to care more about short term votes and not future good or future value. Our society seems to encourage our elected representatives to offer the very antithesis of vision and leadership, which is why it is so difficult to get great young people to aspire to political roles. We need to work out how to change this and how to inspire people to look beyond their limited political boundaries and think of new leadership models that address the many pressing global issues we are facing.'

(Richard Branson)

I wish to express my gratitude to the Management of LUBCON Limited for counting me worthy to participate in the Founder's day celebration of a Company that has provided impressive services in the petroleum sector for over 3 decades. A Founder's day celebration is a day that celebrates the anniversary of the establishment of an organization and focuses on honouring the Founder.

Today, we celebrate the founding of the LUBCON Limited and its achievements as an establishment. As I have been given the liberty of speaking on a topic of my choice, I feel it is a good occasion for a discussion on leadership and all it entails. I have chosen to speak on the subject matter of leadership, considering the fact that only excellence in leadership could have sustained the company for the 3 decades of its existence. I find it imperative to share some of the principles of leadership, peradventure we have people present who aspires to attain the kind of height the Founder has achieved through excellence in leadership.

The word '**LEADERSHIP**' refers to the state or position of being a leader'. It is also used to describe the process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal. It is the art of motivating a group of people to act toward achieving a common goal. I will briefly talk about how to prepare for leadership, what it takes to become a leader and what is required to maintain your position as a leader.

THE FOUNDER

This is a convenient juncture to say a few words about the founder of LUBCON Group of companies, **Alhaji (Engr.) Jani Ibrahim mni**. Alhaji Ibrahim has demonstrated, by the successes that have attended this company, that his 1st Class degree in Engineering from Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) was earned and not a fluke. This old boy of Kings' College, Lagos, who made a Grade I in his school certificate 48years ago and who made a 1st Class honours in Mechanical Engineering at Greenwich University, London, has shown that academic success can also be translated into professional excellence, with great impactful business acumen.

Engineer Ibrahim states that he stands for:

- a. **Job creation**
- b. **Agricultural revolution**
- c. **Natural resources development and**
- d. **Industrialization of Kwara State.**

I should add, perhaps, that his vision of industrialization has gone beyond Kwara State and Nigeria. It has extended to the continent of Africa. No doubt, Engineer Ibrahim, who is the acting Chairman of Heritage Bank, is a man with a leader's touch. Any discussion about the success of LUBCON Group of Companies, without the mention of Engineer Ibrahim is like talking about a vehicle without an engine. I now go to the text of the paper.

PREPARING FOR LEADERSHIP

What do you need to prepare for leadership? As the saying goes 'Success is 90% preparation and only 10% perspiration'. This segment will therefore consider factors that are important when preparing for leadership..

1. **Vision:** Having a vision ensures that all the decisions made are properly aligned with what one hopes to achieve. As a leader, acting on your vision will provide you with the focus needed to accomplish your set goals. Vision helps leaders work on what is important to achieve the end results and not get caught up in the mundane stuff. A visionary leader who clearly and passionately communicates his or her vision can motivate followers to act with passion and purpose, thereby ensuring that everyone is working toward a common goal. The end result is that everyone contributes to the group's forward momentum. Invariably, having a vision as a leader, has the follow effect:
 - a. Vision shows us where we are headed.
 - b. Vision provides motivation and inspires us to keep on going.
 - c. Vision provides focus.
 - d. Vision gives us meaning and purpose to what we do.

- e. Vision helps to keep us moving forward and move through obstacles.
2. **Mission:** Having a mission, either as an individual or as an organization, provides one with a clear and effective guide for making decisions. Mission-driven leaders help their followers understand why their organisation exists. They boldly affirm what the group hopes to achieve and push toward the desired results. One of the common attributes of organizations that have high performance workplace cultures is that they have a clear, well-specified purpose that state both how and why the organization makes a positive impact on the world. It's their fundamental reason for existence beyond just making money.
 3. **Knowledge:** Knowledge, they say, is power. Possessing this quality has a dual role to play for every leader. The first role is knowledge as a valuable resource and value driver for organizations, regions and nations. As to the second role of knowledge as a basis for decision-making, leaders should be able to take well-informed and well-considered decisions from multiple perspectives and choices. True leaders work with others to translate their knowledge into initiatives that benefit their organization. It can be said without equivocation, that knowledge is the kernel of decision-making by leaders. *To know more is to be more*, so said Uthman Dan Fodio.
 4. **Courage:** Courage is the key to great leadership. It is hard to argue that other traits such as integrity, honesty, altruism, communications skill and decisiveness are not qualities of a good leader, but leaders cannot display

these traits if they do not have courage. Great leaders are said to demonstrate bold but reasoned judgment, spirited but calculated risk-taking and an assertive but reflective disposition. With less fear and more courage, followers take on harder projects, deal better with change and speak up more willingly about important issues. In short, courageous followers try more, trust more and tell more. As a leader, your job is to instill courage in the people i.e. to encourage them.

5. **Determination:** Determination is the quality of being resolute, firmness of purpose. The persistence involved in determination allows leaders to carry out plans and strive to achieve their purpose with strength and consistency. Where a leader is determined to pursue his or her vision, he stands out.

6. **Goal setting and Goal Getting:** Goals setting help leaders stay focused on what truly matters. Leadership goals are important because they help leaders decide what their priorities should be. When you create goals with your followers in mind, you can work toward being a more efficient and effective leader. Goals can help you meet your organization's expectations and give you the skills to help your team grow in their roles.

GETTING TO THE TOP

What do you require at the top?

1. **Re-learning and unlearning of wrong notions and ideas:** In the words of Alvin Toffler, a futurist & philosopher, ***"The illiterate of the 21st century will***

not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.” Many of us already know we’ll need to absorb new knowledge and pick up new skills in order to stay competitive. However, it is still easy to forget that it will mean forgetting—or rather, unlearning—the skills, habits, and ideas that got us where we are. Unlearning has become a key imperative for Leadership across industry sectors. Holding on to stubborn, outdated beliefs and mistaken assumptions can make you obsolete in a business or industry without ever knowing why. To become (and remain) a strategic, lifelong un-learner, you need to consciously challenge what worked in the past. Be paranoid and prove yourself wrong.

2. **Godliness:** This means taking every step and decision with the fear of the Almighty. Godliness is not a status or entitlement; it is a state of being in which a person emanates Godliness not just in his or her ethical beliefs and conduct, but in the very spirit and aura that emanates from and enfolds such a person.
3. **Integrity:** Integrity in leaders refers to being honest, trustworthy, and reliable. Leaders with integrity act in accordance with their words (i.e. they practice what they preach) and own up to their mistakes, as opposed to hiding them, blaming their team, or making excuses. Integrity also involves following laid down rules, regulations and laws. In other words, before one can be said to have integrity as a leader, he must set a good example, take responsibility for his actions and honour commitments.

4. **Focus:** Focus is how someone pays attention or concentrates on a particular issue or thing. When someone is focused, their attention is centered on a focal point. In terms of work, a leader is focused when his/her attention is geared toward completing the organization's main goal or objective. Staying focused helps to build momentum, increase productivity, reduce stress and produce better quality of work. Every leader needs to cultivate a three-way form of focus — an inward focus, a focus on others, and an outward focus. Focusing inward and focusing on others helps leaders cultivate emotional intelligence. Focusing outward can improve their ability to devise strategy, innovate, and manage organizations.

5. **Empathy:** Empathy generates an interest in and appreciation for others, paving the way to more productive working relationships. As leaders sharpen their empathetic leadership skills, they improve their leadership effectiveness and increase their chances of success in the organization. Empathy encourages leaders to understand the root cause behind poor performance and allows leaders to help struggling followers improve and excel. It allows leaders to build and develop relationships with those they lead. A leader that has empathy will build loyalty in his work force.

6. **Wisdom:** Wisdom is effective in decision making. Wise people are wise because they make the right decisions. The more aware you become of consequences through time and space, the greater your potentials for wisdom. A wise leader assembles as much knowledge and understanding as possible to empower him to make the right decision in a timely manner. This

is because wise leaders have been through many different experiences and have maintained their integrity through it. This is why wise leaders surround themselves with the best people. Strong character produces wisdom which leads to the ability to positively impact others. If you are intentional in maintaining your character and growing in wisdom then you will be unstoppable.

7. **Considerate:** A good leader thinks of their employees as people first, ahead of their skills. Leaders treat their employees with respect and understanding that there are important needs outside of the office, too. When leaders treat their employees with the dignity they deserve, everyone wins. Considerate leadership is a particular characterization of a leader's behavior that emphasizes commitment to developing personal relationships with followers, care and concern for others, willingness to attend to the unique preferences and work styles of subordinates, and facilitating cooperation among members of an organization.

8. **Humility:** As rightly put by **John Baldoni**, a sense of humility is essential to leadership because it authenticates a person's humanity. When team members consider their leader as "one of them," they're inspired to follow and trust their leader. Humble leaders listen more effectively, inspire great teamwork and focus on everyone (including themselves) on organizational goals better than leaders who place importance on performance. Humble leaders understand that they are not the smartest person in every room. By admitting their own shortcomings or failures, acknowledging the capabilities

and achievements of others and demonstrating a willingness to learn, the humble leader makes it feel safe for others to speak up, to voice opinions, share an idea and get creative.

9. **Positivity:** Great leaders are always positive because they know that it helps them, and their teams to be more productive and reach their goals. Leaders with positive attitude leave a lasting impression on the members of their organization. They often have these qualities kindness, forgiveness and objectivity. They are patient with others, and refrain from venting by saying negative things about others.

10. **Acceptability:** Successful leaders are accepting. Great leaders appreciate people as human beings with their uniqueness and natural imperfections. They perceive people as human beings with emotions and do not view them like robots. Acceptance in leading is simply recognizing others and comprehending that it is an important step towards understanding. A good leader avoids pointing the finger at others for their differences but rather thinks about how each follower can move towards positivity by establishing an accepting environment.

11. **Initiative:** Initiative distinguishes a leader because it's not just about doing what he is told, but rather finding new ways to do more. A leader's job is to build progress and initiative on how progress can be made. Leaders understand that you have to find new paths and creative modes in order to accomplish something. Teams with leaders that take the initiative

demonstrate better creativity, communication, decision making, trust, respect, and productivity.

STAYING AT THE TOP

1. **Have short term, mid-term and long term plans:** Being able to set and follow through with short-term and long-term goals are also key elements of what makes a strong leader. Short term and mid-term goals build up your team's confidence and spirit. Achieving individual or collective benchmarks in the short-term will help your team feel like they are doing a great job and indicate to you their strengths and weaknesses which are vital for continually improving the quality of service your establishment provides.
2. **Invest in people by doing mentoring:** Organizations with a strong presence of leadership mentoring, or the practice of having senior executives mentor more junior employees, tend to enjoy greater performance. Cultivate human capital carefully by thoughtful approaches to their well-being and open communication. Human capital development is a sine qua non to the growth and sustainability of the organisation.
3. **Establish a workable succession plan:** The purpose of succession planning is to make sure a company always has the right leaders in place should a change happen suddenly. By failing to establish an orderly plan for succession, your establishment may not get a second chance if it doesn't adapt immediately after a key player leaves the organisation. Having a succession plan also gives the opportunity for knowledge transfer and process refinement as well as preservation of the brand integrity and reputation.

4. **Set boundaries from the start:** Setting boundaries is a major part of any leader's skill set and helps in making you a strong leader. Strong leaders must set healthy boundaries when it comes to their team. You must be able to provide guidance and a support system without being so available that you stifle your team's growth potential. When business leaders set healthy boundaries in the workplace, it can transform their ability to manage and motivate others. Boundaries can dramatically improve business performance, and they can create freedom for employees to be more creative and more productive.
5. **Expect that you will at times fail, and accept that failure comes with the territory:** To become a great leader, you have to be comfortable with things going wrong. Great leaders see them as learning opportunities, rather than setbacks. As long as you learn from the mistakes you make, failure is a worthwhile endeavor. Recognizing and learning from failures means taking the focus off yourself. Leaders must demonstrate the no-ego mindset and build a culture that encourages the same by openly acknowledging failures and staying open to feedback.
6. **Surround yourself with people who are positive, uplifting, add to, rather than take away from your values:** Choose the people around you wisely, carefully and deliberately because they will significantly impact your potential and how successful you become. If you surround yourself with wise people who are trying to improve and better themselves, those qualities will help push you to be better.
7. **Seek out people who speak the truth to you and will give you sound feedback:** It's perfectly natural to want to be with people who agree, support

and praise you all the time but beware of suck-ups and yes-men. If you find that your trusted advisors are indiscriminate in their praise, it may be time for self introspection. If you hear only the things you want to hear, then it is a fertile ground for failure.

8. **Do not loose connection with your maker.** The place of spirituality cannot be undermined if one is to be a strong leader: A leader's spirituality affects their vision and behavior and the subordinates' commitment is greatly influenced by the leader's vision and goals.
9. **Accept your limits. You are human, not super human:** Know your limitations, you will lead better. The best leaders recognize their weaknesses and struggle through them. Do not be the all-powerful Napoleon and the all-knowing Solomon. Don't set unattainable goals for yourself and others. Recognize that we are not all endowed the same way.

CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by saluting the Founder of this great Company, and in so doing, acknowledge the courageous role of leadership he has displayed and which has brought the Company thus far. I also admit that it is not an easy task to be in the saddle as a leader. I challenge you all to keep up the values you have learnt thus far under this leadership and utilize it in becoming the new generation of thought leaders, global thinkers, decision makers and change makers that our world sorely needs.

So, this is the point to remember. This founder's day represents a very important kernel in the existence of LUBCON Limited, a commitment to progressive, engaged and equity-minded service, a service that has always defied boundaries. We should all be grateful for that and should never forget it. I know you will all do your part to carry this legacy into the future. So, let me end by saying 'Happy Founder's Day to all of you and Happy 31st Birthday, LUBCON Limited.

Have a wonderful programme.