

## **EFFECTIVE LEADERS ARE CRITICAL THINKERS**

Having been accorded the opportunity to decide between who gets the punishment and who deserves the punishment was the closest I had ever come to applying critical thinking skills as a leader. It was a moment that made me realize that being a leader was such a big responsibility and I questioned my abilities to lead. I neither analyzed the facts nor evaluated the issue before me, hence, made a wrong judgement. That single day in high school where I abused my prefectural position by choosing to save my friendship over punishing the offender still haunts me to date. The experience left me wondering how many of our leaders in the world are biased and lacked critical thinking skills.

As an African child, with African history, it's evident that the ancient leaders were effective leaders as they incorporated critical thinking skills in their reign. An example of such leaders is Shaka Zulu who ruled South Africa and strategically protected the land with his critical thinking skills. Another great example is that of king Solomon who analyzed and evaluated the issue that was presented before him by his two wives who needed help in concluding whose child was still alive. Solomon studied and knew exactly what was required to solve the case, he formulated a scenario that helped him to study the reactions from the two women that stood before him and the scenario enabled him to pass a good judgement. The story of king Solomon from the bible shows more of the importance of critical thinking. Perhaps we can attribute the successful reign of these leaders to lack of internet and social media. Leaders that ruled in ancient times had only their brains to depend on hence made an accumulative percentage of good judgement unlike in our times where our decisions are corrupted and our judgement is influenced by people's opinions from all over the globe. Past leaders could foresee the future hence making wise decisions unlike today's leaders.

Drucker once said that management is about doing things right while leadership is about doing the right things. I couldn't agree more, the only way to overcome biasness in our current world is if our leaders can realize that anything and everything falls on leadership. Every person who occupies a position in any organization has the major responsibility of applying critical thinking skills to every situation as they hold the last say on every matter. This includes analyzing the facts, evaluating the issue, carrying out a research on everyone involved, disregarding unnecessary data and then passing a judgement.

Looking at the world today with emerging advanced technology, diverse culture, enormous influencers and social media at our finger tips, many have succumbed to the pressure of belonging and this has narrowed the number of people practicing critical thinking skills. Today every leader has got access to every website and many of these leaders have either forgotten about leadership lessons passed on from our forefathers or have chosen to give a blind eye. Most of the leaders nowadays are going with the social media trend and can hardly showcase confidence in their own opinions and decisions. The future would be enhanced if every individual is taught the importance of having critical thinking skills as each leader at every level would serve better in their capacity with such a leadership quality. Effective leaders are those with a vision and aspire to serve the people with integrity. A leader must be able to regulate what to do and not to do, however, this can only be achieved by a leader who is willing to go beyond

what has been presented in front of him. This means understanding that to be an effective leader, one must also be a critical thinker.

As a Zambian student, I feel the education system can implement courses or subjects to the curriculum that compose methods of learning critical thinking skills. University teachers should also encourage their students to apply critical thinking skills to every assignment or work given to them unlike encouraging students with good grades for their excellency in mastering what was taught by the lecturer. Governments, corporate world and employers must understand that today's student is tomorrow's leader hence the need to suggest and implement relevant courses to replace some of the irrelevant courses that we are subjected to. We spend many years in school, hence, the need to learn skills that are of value in the corporate world. Every graduating student should be tested on their ability to observe, analyze, interpret, reflect, evaluate, explain, solve problems and decision making which are all skills that are essential to a critical thinker. To teach children in school to rely on mastering whatever is taught, is to deliberately lay a foundation for a future that's full of leaders that lack critical thinking skills and a doomed future generation. The first step to adequately prepare the emerging generation to be critical thinkers is to teach them while they're young the importance of the skills and also help them see that critical thinking is not based on emotions or groupies. When you train up a child in a way he should go, it makes it hard for him to depart from that training when he is old. Therefore, parents must also take keen interest in their children and ensure that in one way or another, the child is assisted in acquiring the necessary skills required for critical thinking. This includes disciplining children by refusing to buy them gadgets with access to the internet when they are still young. Children should be given the opportunity to exercise critical thinking in their day to day activities without the help of the internet. By doing so, emerging leaders will be molded into excellent leaders too.

There so many factors affecting today's ability to exercise critical thinking skills. Most leaders have their decision making based on cultural systems way of ruling. A great example of cultural differences way of ruling is that of African and western worlds. Africans in most cases have their decisions influenced by nationals that lend them money and in most cases believe in ancestors to come to their aid when a major decision needs to be made. This culture inhibits the leaders to think on their own. An effective leader is one that can strike a balance between culture and modernized way of leading. A wise leader is one that does not disregard other leaders' way of leading, however, he must be able to discern what can be adopted and what should completely be disregarded. The internet is another factor that has contributed to today's lack of critical thinkers. The internet and social media has destroyed confidence, information and the ability to critically think in many individuals. This is evident in how many people access google per day even on things that are easier to tackle. We are living in a world that has highly encouraged laziness and completely disregarded critical thinking. The sad thing is that not so many people realize the harm that internet has brought. If choices and decisions can easily be accessed on the internet, then perhaps its high time we accepted that we are not leaders but simply individuals that are controlled and managed by technology. The greatest asset that humans have over robots is our brains and our ability to critically think but if that asset is replaced by internet then we have nothing left to boast about. Another factor that majorly contributes to lack of critical thinking in this modern day is peer pressure and influencers. These can be the board of advisers, friends,

family members or the environment of the leader. A leader who is unable to trust their abilities of critical thinking is likely to be controlled by his or her influencers. An effective leader should assess what is being said from his influencers and then critically think about the impact of what has been suggested to him in a long run. Effective leaders listen even when they don't agree, this is essential for good decision making.

Take a moment and imagine a world with one culture, boring right? -Diversity is good even when it comes to leadership. Different cultures bring different lessons to the table that help to manage, mold and lead society in the right direction. The west culture is one that mainly focuses on the individual. The western culture emphasizes that it's an individual's responsibility to care for themselves and look out for themselves. This practice or belief is different from the east as the eastern culture believe in collectiveness and togetherness. The eastern culture believes that it's a responsibility of everyone working together for the good of the society. Their interesting differences make them approach challenges differently however, a leader who can lead from the combination of the two makes an even greater impact in the world. Let me elaborate this point, life begins from a cell as taught from our biology. In the same manner, society begins from an individual. An effective leader is one who understands that developing an individual is developing the society. An individual with a mentality of creating a peaceful and better society for everyone is a developed individual. Thus, a great leader will focus on developing followers with such a mindset which results in the combination of both east and west cultures. To build a better world and phenomenal leaders, we must learn to embrace our cultural differences.

I have come to learn that most leaders that pass good judgement are those that are readers. I have had an opportunity to see how my father leads both in the shop he runs and also as the male leader in our home on a daily basis. He is simply never idle even when he is waiting for a customer to come by, he always gets a book to read. I recall him telling me that he attributes most of the challenges he overcame to reading books that challenged and changed his way of thinking. Reading and writing are two fundamental methods of developing, learning, improving and retaining critical thinking skills. Therefore, every individual aspiring to be a leader must incorporate the attitude of being a reader.