

Reactions to Views and Constructs about Leadership

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Patrick Awuah on Educating Leaders - TEDGlobal 2007

Patrick Awuah, a native of Ghana, left his position at Microsoft to return to Ghana where he co-founded Ashesi University. Ashesi is a small liberal arts college, with an emphasis on critical thinking, ethical service, and leadership. These are constructs that Awuah feels are lacking in African education as evidenced by stories he knows and experiences--a basic lack of preparedness in a hospital that has had horrific outcomes on patient care, a government that repeats its economic mistakes over and over, and the attitude of entitlement that is not the responsibility of those in power.

Awuah is passionate in his beliefs that Ghana, and possibly other struggling countries in Africa, can be transformed with good leadership. However, he knows good leaders need to be created. Caring leaders need to understand the importance of community, of how to help others make life better for themselves by empowering them, and how to think critically to solve problems in creative and ethical ways. As Awuah so notably states, “The business of leadership is to serve humanity.” Awuah understands that good leadership is shared by people who care about others and who want to make a positive contribution to society.

After deconstructing the present government and those who hold other leadership roles in Ghana, he feels strongly that these existing leaders don't understand the attributes of good leadership and more importantly, what the purpose of leadership is. Ashesi University was developed to address these needs.

Awuah's concept of leadership and how he has chosen to lead is incredibly honorable, selfless, and significant. Caring school communities, where shared leadership is the norm, are emotionally healthier places where students and staff want to be and parents are more inclined to be involved. When schools are inviting and nurturing places, where problem solving and ethical

behaviors are emphasized and input is valued, students and staff feel empowered and accountable.

Sheryl Sandberg: Why we have too few women leaders – TEDWomen Dec., 2010

Sheryl Sandberg, C.O.O. of Facebook, discusses why “women are not making it to the top of any profession in the world.” She explains why she feels women tend to step back in the workforce when faced with the choice between their personal and professional lives. She emphatically states the messages or perceptions that working women need to hear and believe.

Ms. Sandberg, a mother of two, successfully manages her roles as mother and career woman. She is a risk-taker and not afraid to “own her success.” She offers three key strategies to effectively balance the major responsibilities she has chosen for herself and offers them as advice for other women.

Complacency is clearly not something she embraces. Women who expect to make it to the top in their chosen profession must have confidence and courage, even though both of those attributes in women are still perceived negatively by both genders. As someone who is still unsure as to where her career is headed, I find value in Sandberg’s ideas. I am probably too confident in my abilities; however, I am just learning how to assert myself enough “to not leave before I leave.” I have realized that my career has evolved just as it was supposed to. As I grow older and truly internalize and appreciate all I have learned in the last two years, especially how to approach issues and to think about them from multiple perspectives, I feel I have the courage to move forward, whatever that may look like for me. I feel as if I am first approaching what a strong, effective “female” leader should face and be able to accomplish in the world of K-12 public education. I am secure in what I believe in and how to get others to believe in it as well. This would manifest in what exemplary teaching practices look like and the outcomes that

should be achieved, how good curricula is developed to meet the needs of any school culture, being able to understand and recognize challenges and implement any new mandate put forth, foster a positive and inclusive school community, etc. It is about accepting responsibilities for my actions because I feel confident, secure, and empowered.

JK Rowling – The fringe benefits of failure – TEDTalks June 2008

As JK Rowling delivers her commencement address at the Annual Meeting of the Harvard Alumni Association, she speaks from heartfelt experience to the best and brightest 22-year-olds in the world. Interestingly enough, her message discusses the fear of failure—something most Harvard students have probably never faced.

Failure and poverty are something Rowling experienced in a very large way at a fairly young age. One step away from homelessness, a single parent, and with no prospects of employment, her failure taught her to appreciate and understand her will to survive on her own terms. Her passions and belief in herself would guide her through the toughest of times. Rowling eloquently shared that once you have nothing, you truly appreciate what is important. As she called it, the “inessentials” are stripped away. She was set free because her greatest fears were realized--all pressure was off. Because of her failures, Rowling understood life was difficult and complex.

Rowling also talks about the importance of imagination. The context in which she places it is inspiring. She defines imagination as “the uniquely human capacity to envision that which is not, and, therefore, the fount of all invention and innovation.” She concludes her description of imagination with “it is the power that enables us to empathize with humans whose experiences we have never shared.” She ties her thoughts together by quoting Seneca, “As is a tale, so is life: not how long it is, but how good it is, is what matters.” Learn from failure in whatever form that

comes in, and always feel empathy for others. These are powerful constructs we should all live by.

As educators, these are principles that should be part of our social and emotional being. In order to model them in our daily practices, they must be embraced and truly internalized. One of our most important roles is to create honest and good human beings--those capable of caring for others in unselfish ways. Children need consistent examples. They need adults who can earn their trust by building honest and open relationships. If those who work in a school cannot provide that for their students, they should not be there.

This past year in our school, we collaborated with the Long Island Mentoring Partnership. Staff and faculty are being trained to develop valuable and trusting relationships with students in need of support. This is an on-going collaboration that will continue to foster worthwhile connections between staff and students--hopefully, ones that will make a difference.

Gayle Tzemach-Lemmon: Women entrepreneurs, example not exception – TEDxWomen

2011

Author and journalist Gayle Tzemach-Lemmon is also a Fellow and Deputy Director of the Women and Foreign Policy Program with the Council on Foreign Relations. Women in business are the focus of her talk. She discusses the depth and breadth of the influence of women entrepreneurs around the globe. The primary message of her talk is no one is really aware of the impact and why that is so. She uses specific examples of women in third world countries (Afghanistan, Bosnia, etc.) who braved danger to become bread winners. Their businesses might be simple in theory but they greatly contribute to their local economies by providing employment and wages. Very often, women in these countries are counted on for the

survival of their families. She points out that 30% of business in China is run by women.

Statistics in other countries are even higher.

Ms. Tzemach-Lemmon argues that globally “we aim low and think small when it comes to women.” Bankers and investors will not take chances on women. Loans to businesses run by women are significantly smaller than their male counterparts. As a whole, we don’t invest in women. She emphasizes that successful women are seen as the exception—worldwide, that is not the case. Ms. Tzemach-Lemmon passionately notes that women are at a disadvantage because their successes are overlooked. Unfortunately, women need to take risks and aim higher in order to be recognized for their achievements. Perceptions will change when women can overcome the message conveyed by their male counterparts and society as a whole—that men count more. “When we change the way we see ourselves, others will follow!”

Interestingly, when reflecting on this talk, I once again thank the strong women in my life—my mother, grandmother, and aunt, who were successful businesswoman and financially independent although they were married and had families. My female frame of reference has always been these strong, independent women. I always felt that was the expectation. When I think about my female cousins, we are all fiercely independent—emotionally and financially. However, I truly understand why this talk is important. As an educator who can affect thousands of children--half of them female--growing strong, independent girls should be explored. What are the best ways to teach girls inner strength and passion for what they think is important? How does one make it come alive so they will be recognized for their achievements? Are there resources out there to help young women recognize and deal with biases and to learn to overcome them? Successful women are not the exception—they are just hidden behind societal constructs.

Unlike Sheryl Sandberg, who discusses powerful women, Tzemach-Lemmon talks about recognition of success that most will not acknowledge. Everyone knows who the highly successful women are in big, powerful organizations; however, do they know who the successful women are in small ones?

