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In the first of a new series on Leadership, Dennis Hardy interviews His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Seychelles, James Michel.

Mr. President:

You have been in office now for seven years and before that you held ministerial positions for a further twenty-seven years. Based on your long experience in government, what would you say makes a good leader?

A good leader, I believe, must always stay connected to the people. If you approach people in a true spirit of humility they will tell you what it is that matters in their lives. It is from their various aspirations that policies can be developed to create a brighter future. The job of the leader is to express coherently what will be done and to show how it will be in the best interests of the people. Some leaders lose touch with the grassroots and quickly become unpopular.

This approach works whether the issues are small or large. Seychelles, like other countries in the world, has had to take tough action to tackle its economic problems. We have succeeded because we first went out to speak to the people, and we listened to what they had to say. The steps we had to take were difficult but we did it together; the people understood the reasons and what we were jointly trying to achieve.

A good leader must also be well connected to the rest of the world. I have personally engaged on a mission to convince other leaders of the credibility and visibility of our small nation. I keep my word, and as a result I believe that I have gained respect in the international community.

Commentary on the views of leadership following an interview with the President of the Republic of Seychelles
John Wallace

How important in the development of your own leadership qualities is the influence of a mentor?

My predecessor was in post as President for twenty-seven years and, of course, I learnt a lot from him. At the same time, as human beings we are all different and follow different paths. When I assumed the presidency myself in 2004 I had two years before the next general election to convince the people that I was my own person and that I had the capacity to lead the country. When it came to the election, I was returned with more than 53% of voters supporting me.

The fact is that we are all constantly evolving and learning from experience. I observed the leadership style not only of my predecessor but also of other leaders around the world. As a result, I developed my own style of leadership, reflecting my personal qualities as well as the particular needs of Seychelles.

Do you think that the leadership qualities to run a country are necessarily very different from those required to run a corporation?

Seychelles is a small nation—although with diverse activities—and I suppose, in one sense, there are similarities with a multi-national company. You could also say that both are about creating wealth. But there, of course, the similarities end. A nation's creation of wealth is not the same as making profits. In the case of the nation, wealth is created for the public good and it is the job of the leader to ensure that this is fairly distributed.

I see my task as being to create a framework within which individual corporations can create wealth. It is important that I keep in close touch with the corporate sector so that I am aware of its own needs.

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To what extent do you think you have reflected on your own experience as a leader, and perhaps changed your style over the years?

I believe that we all evolve and I know that my style itself has evolved as a result of what I have experienced. As a young man I was quite impetuous but now I am much calmer and more measured in my approach. Mind you, when there is something I really want to see done I am not always so patient!

I am a good listener and will respect what anyone has to say, whether a fisherman on the beach or one of my own ministers. I know that no one person has a monopoly of good ideas, so it is important to listen before making a decision. No matter how urgent they may seem, decisions should always be carefully thought through.

There is always time to reflect, always time to learn. It is important to do so.

Thank you, Mr. President, for this exclusive interview for the *Gibaran Journal of Applied Management.*

Commentary on the views of leadership following an interview with the President of the Republic of Seychelles

John Wallace[1]

This commentary was prepared following an exclusive interview with the President of the Seychelles. The purpose of the interview was to seek the views of the President on the subject of leadership in relation to leading a small nation as compared with leading a corporation. The answers provided by the President touch on what makes good leadership and mentorship as well as comparing the challenge of leading a nation to that of leading a corporation.

The conceptual framework of leadership that has been used for this commentary is the interaction model of leadership proposed by Hughes, Ginnett and Curphy (2012) and the Situational Leadership Model (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson 1996). The interaction model with a focus on the leader, the followers and the situation (and the Situational Leadership Model which looks at similar areas and particularly the leader and the followers) provides a foundation that parallels the leadership views of the President of the Seychelles.

In relation to what makes a good leader, emphasis was placed in the discussion on the importance of remaining connected to the people as a leader, taking into account the situation being faced. This approach is consistent with the interaction model of leadership (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy 2012) as well as the situational leadership approach (Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson 1996). The interaction model and the situational leadership model looks at the connection between a *leader*, their *followers* and the *situation*. As the situation changes, the approach needed by both the leader and the followers must adjust accordingly. On the basis of approaching people "…in a true spirit of humility", reference can be made to the idea of

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servant leadership (Greenleaf 1998). There is also the notion of charismatic leadership and transformational leadership as well as the importance of facilitative leadership (in speaking with the people and listening "…to what they had to say" and then working together to achieve an outcome) (Hoffman, Bynum, Piccolo & Sutton 2011; Weber, cited in Pugh & Hickson 2007; Amy 2005; Schwarz 2002).

Good leaders require a range of interpersonal skills that include listening, empathy, feedback, self-reflection and decision making. Knowing what you intend to say, expressing it in the best way, ensuring you have been heard and seeking feedback are all important skills for leaders at all levels (Bolton 1996; Browde 2011; Krasman 2011). As a leader you need to be able to build credibility and influence others. You must also be open to the ideas of others. A great leader is one who recognises that they do not have to know everything. This is where working with a team is important for reaching the best decision in a given situation, whether that is running a country or running a corporation (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy 2012; Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson 1996; Pugh 2007).

On the question of mentorship, and what one can learn from a predecessor, there are also interesting links with theory. Mentoring is said to occur when a senior colleague gives advice to a junior colleague and acts as a role model. Coaching tends to be quite goal-focused, whereas mentoring discussions will probably be more wide-ranging (O'Connor & Lages 2004, p. 169; Browde 2011; Ellinger & Bostrom 1999). Other areas relevant to the discussion are self-reflection and learning from experience. Both these elements are considered important for leaders to improve qualities of leadership (Yoong 1999; Raelin 2001). A concept expressed by Jim Collins is that of moving from good to great or Level 5 leadership (Collins 2001).

When it comes to the leadership qualities required to run a country, as opposed to those for a corporation, we can look again at the interaction model and the situational leadership model mentioned earlier (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy 2012; Hersey, Blanchard & Johnson 1996). In the case of a country, the government represents the interests of the people (the followers)

and their needs (the situation). National leaders attend to running the country and dealing with situations as they arise through planning and execution (e.g. wealth creation). A corporation, on the other hand, is concerned with profits, and with shareholders' interests rather than the public good that is the focus for a government (Hughes, Ginnett & Curphy 2012; Pugh 2007).

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