

The establishment of the Rhodes University *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics* has its roots in three factors.

First, the Rhodes University slogan is *Where Leaders Learn*. We say to our students that we look to them to lead, re-imagine and reshape our future, to conduct our affairs in an ethical manner, and ensure that people, human development and social justice are at the centre of all actions.

We urge our students to exercise, with humility, *leadership* wherever they find themselves. We remind them that their knowledge and expertise must be put to work not only for their private benefit, but also for the benefit of society at large.

A second factor is that a recipient of a Rhodes honorary doctorate challenged us a few years ago to take heed of the 'emergence of a strange breed of leaders', to be concerned about the extent to which we have an 'accountable democracy,' and suggested that 'we have a duty to call to book the putative leaders who cannot lead.'

A third and critical factor is that Allan Gray, a Rhodes University alumnus, great philanthropist, and the pioneering founder of the Allan Gray investment company, awarded Rhodes R 12.4 million to promote work in the area of leadership ethics.

Novel about the *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics* is that unlike many leadership centres, which are housed in business or management schools, it is located within the department of Philosophy.

For if the concern is leadership *ethics* and ethical agency more generally, philosophy is an appropriate place to begin, given that it has grappled with this issue for over 2000 years. Of course, other disciplines such as history, psychology and education also have much to contribute.

Our reality is that too many who occupy positions of power, and are entrusted with the leadership are sorely wanting in the core values and conduct that are associated with ethical leadership.

Witness the flagrant abuse of power for private self-enrichment, as manifested in corruption, fraud and dubious tenderpreneurial activities, in anti-democratic practices, and the perpetuation of macho masculinities and women's oppression in the name of culture.

Witness, too, the failure of key officials who lead economic, educational and health institutions to grasp fully their profound constitutional, moral and social responsibilities in a society that proclaims a commitment to human dignity, social equity and justice.

While the economic and political elites of our country have recourse to private and Model C schools, private hospitals and private cars, the poor of our society depend hugely on public services for their basic needs and for improving their lives and those of their children.

The lack of administrative leadership and the shortcomings in critical public services undermine the dignity of the poor, retard the educational development of millions of children and youth, thwart the realization of constitutional goals and, ultimately, violate human and social rights.

Indisputably, one of our great challenges is to improve the quality of our schools. Our schools cry out for courageous and effective educational leadership on the part of state departments and school heads.

The shenanigans of businesspersons, politicians and bureaucrats make for depressing reading. Regularly, we are shocked by the brazen sense of entitlement, the emphasis on the legal instead of the ethical, and by the impunity with which 'leader's redeploy resources for private benefit.

Perhaps the pervasive shortcomings of those in leadership have numbed us into silence. Perhaps we assume that our duties as citizens extend no further than voting every five years. Or perhaps, thoroughly discouraged, we cannot conceive how we, as ordinary citizens, can become agents of change.

But silence is not an option. It simply leaves the door wide open for irresponsible and unaccountable leadership, and a culture of impunity, greed and crass materialism in which self-interest, material wealth, profits, and performance bonuses become the new gods.

We also cannot afford cynicism and despair. Tatamkulu Mandela writes that 'there were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.' Like him, we must remain optimistic, keep our 'head pointed toward the sun, (our) feet moving forward.'

In creating the *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics*, Dr Gray and Rhodes University are of one mind: to imaginatively investigate what constitutes leadership with ethics, promote such leadership in diverse contexts, and develop concrete education and training initiatives.

There is no off-the-shelf or 'customised, shrink-wrapped, perfect leadership model.' It is also unlikely that leadership can be simply taught, or that theory alone or building skills is enough.

In building ethical leadership we must take history, culture and context seriously. We need a situated leadership appropriate to our conditions and which is distributed institutionally, rather than one that is centred on the usual 'big man'.

We are blessed to be able to draw inspiration from those who provided selfless leadership and paved the long path to our democracy – Luthuli, Mandela, Tutu, Hani, Lillian Ngoyi, Amina Cachalia, Helen Joseph, Oom Beyers Naude, Jakes Gerwel and many others: men and women, black and white.

We can also take inspiration from the imagination, positive outlook and promise of numerous current youth initiatives, which quietly but with great commitment and determination strive to secure social justice for all, deepen our democracy, and protect our planet.

In *Enlightened Rule: Portraits of Six Exceptional Twentieth Century Leaders*, Paul Maylam argues that respected leaders cherish 'some key fundamental values.' They believe in the 'innate worth and dignity of all human beings' and understand that leaders 'bear the responsibility to create conditions in which all humans can realise their potential.'

They have 'an unwavering commitment to democracy and human rights,' 'popular participation', 'proper access of all to education, health care, personal security' and 'social and economic justice.' They have a 'generosity of spirit,' and an 'egalitarian spirit,' and 'a sense of obligation to further the common good'.

They also have an unwavering commitment to non-racialism, non-sexism and great respect for difference and diversity, whether related to 'race', gender, nationality, sexual orientation, language or culture.

At the heart of ethical, responsible and accountable leadership is *integrity* and *honesty*. Ethical leaders, in the words of the great African leader, Amilcar Cabral, 'tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories.'

Without integrity, there can be no principled conduct; no prospect of winning trust and inspiring and uniting people and society around a vision; no effective communication, no ethical and responsible leadership.

It has been noted that 'effectively to give birth to the new, we must be angry at our past.' Given the lack and shortcomings of leadership, perhaps, anger and shame at the present is also justified. A wonderful Sotho proverb, however, says: 'No matter how hot your anger may be, it cannot cook.'

*The Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics* seeks to make the real fire that cooks, to embrace the critical task of promoting ethical agency and leadership and, through this, contribute to a much fairer, kinder and decent South Africa and world.

*Edited speech by Dr Saleem Badat, Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, at the recent launch of the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics in Cape Town.*