



Leadership lessons from President Kagame and Rwanda's success story

BY VINCE SININING

When you google articles on lessons in leadership, you will get 560,000,000 results in 49 seconds. For many years that I have attended the general assembly of world leaders at the United Nations in New York, during my time as an Adviser to the Permanent Missions of the Republic of Nauru and the Republic of the Marshall Islands, I am always fascinated to see and hear world leaders deliver their national statements and their achievements in global affairs and sustainable development of their respective countries. But there is one leader that continues to inspire many of us on the core attributes and best practices of highly effective leaders, is His Excellency President Paul Kagame of Rwanda.

About President Kagame and Rwanda

"President Kagame grew up in a Ugandan refugee camp in Uganda. Tutsi monarchs ruled Rwanda for centuries until the majority Hutus turned the tables in 1959, killing hundreds of Tutsis and causing many others, including President Kagame's family, to flee for their lives.

"A soldier by training, he joined a Ugandan rebel group shortly out of high school, rose up through the ranks and then did a short stint at the staff college at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as part of the Pentagon's efforts to make African armies more professional. President Kagame is recognized as Spartan, stoic, analytical and austere, he is said to routinely stays up to 2 or 3 a.m. to thumb through back issues of The Economist or study progress reports from red-dirt villages across his country, constantly searching for better, more efficient ways to stretch the billion dollars his government gets each year from donor nations that hold him up as a shining example of what aid money can do in Africa. He is a regular at Davos, the world economic forum, and friendly with powerful people, including Bill Gates and Bono. The Clinton Global Initiative honored him with a Global Citizen award, and Bill Clinton said that President Kagame "freed the heart and the mind of his people."

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/08/magazine/paul-kagame-rwanda.html>) [accessed 25 July 2018]

President Paul Kagame led Rwanda in liberating the country from the devastating genocide in 1994 that resulted in the loss of almost a million lives. He has been President since 2000 and has imposed order, transforming Rwanda into a much more peaceful place that continues to have a strong and consistent growth. Rwanda's income per person has dramatically increased to \$700. This revival involved a great deal of foreign aid. In 2006 aid was a quarter of GDP and half the government's budget; those figures are now 5% and 17%, respectively. For the most part, this cash was neither squandered nor stolen. Organisations that provide development aid love Rwanda. Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair considers President Kagame "a visionary leader", foreign Business executives are quoted saying about Rwanda as "the best-run country in Africa," says one. "It's a shining star," says another. "The professionalism; the way the government deals with us...everywhere else in Africa you feel [corruption] from the traffic cop to the top. Here, no one has asked for a bribe." Buoyed by better farm incomes, since 2000 Rwanda has notched up growth rates of 8% a year, making it one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Many talk of a "Rwandan miracle", and look to it for lessons in development."

(<https://www.economist.com/briefing/2017/07/15/paul-kagame-feted-and-feared>) [accessed 20 July 2018]

Essential leadership traits

Vision

Leadership gurus agree that successful leaders in business or in governance have a clear vision of the future, and they paint a picture of the desirable outcome by thinking big.

Elon Musk, one of the business entrepreneurs that continue to inspire many of us said, "Your vision can only be as inspiring as the amount of people that it positively impacts. Effective leaders inspire others and help their lives improve. They imagine a future, and persevere, take risks, and they are willing to fail and continue to persevere.

Mindset

Dr. Myles Munroe --- International Bestselling Author, Lecturer, Teacher, Leadership Mentor, Life Coach, Business and Government



Consultant --- reiterated in one of his leadership talks that the spirit of leadership is your mindset. What you believe you can do opens doors to endless possibilities. The mindset of a leader defines his success. Many leaders are the product of their circumstances that forced them to think differently.

World-renowned Stanford University psychologist Carol S. Dweck, Ph.D., After decades of research, discovered a simple but groundbreaking idea: the power of mindset and wrote a book "Mindset: The New Psychology of Success". In this brilliant book, she shows how success in school, work, sports, the arts, and almost every area of human endeavor can be dramatically influenced by how we think about our talents and abilities.

President Kagame, since from the beginning was very focused on finding ways to help improve the lives of his people by setting up specific goals that shows us how he developed his mindset and vision. Thus, not only he serves as a good example of a visionary leader, but as well as a transformative one, emphasizing the core values of unity and accountability.

I had the pleasure of reading the inspiring, life-changing bestsellers by Simon Sinek (a) LEADERS EAT LAST, (b) TOGETHER IS BETTER and my all-time favorite (c) STARTS WITH WHY: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action". I consider this book a required reading for all business owners, aspiring leaders and entrepreneurs.



I was inspired of Simon Sinek's work after watching his 2009 Ted Talk, where he discussed about his "Golden Circle" theory. According to Sinek, most people talk about WHAT they do - the products or services that make them money. Some talk about the HOW - the process they use that sets them apart. But Very few people talk about (or even know) their WHY - the reason why they do things or lead their business and organizations in the first place.

Sinek argues that when we start with WHY in everything that we do, we inspire action in a way that WHAT doesn't. That's because WHY engages our emotions, while WHAT engages our logical brain.

Learning from President Paul Kagame's leadership style, one will notice that his success as a leader is the result of his own fundamental choices that guided him in rebuilding the country from the very beginning. Fundamental choices that guided his leadership principles of Unity, Accountability, and Vision. And these choices are the clear roadmap for starting with "why" he became a successful leader today.

During his talk at Wharton School of Management at the University of Pennsylvania on 15 September 2015, President Kagame, a true visionary leader, has clearly set his mind of transforming Rwanda with his three fundamental choices that guided him in rebuilding and leading the country.

1. We chose to stay together.

President Kagame said his leadership of the country "started with being together and unified. The country had historically been divided and divisive politics contributed to the tragedy of 1994. So I was trying to bring people's attention to the importance of being together as a nation, even if there is diversity in our society. We are different, we may think differently, but at the end of the day, we have to bring our energies together for the common good instead of breaking our nation apart. We've learned lessons from the genocide."

2. We chose to be accountable to ourselves.

President Kagame emphasized "the importance of accountability. We won't achieve unity and progress unless, in the exercise of our freedoms, we are able to think about the interests of others and not just think about ourselves. There comes a point when every one of us has to be responsible and accountable to each other. We have to hold ourselves accountable so that we don't end up hurting

somebody else. This originates from our own history where division was the order of the day and people had been told to hurt each other. People started seeing other people as different, and not only different, but they thought they should get rid of them. accountable so that we don't

2. We chose to think big.

President Kagame's third fundamental choice was "about thinking big." And he continued to explain, "We came out of that tragedy 21 years ago and have come a long way to arrive at where we are today, which gives you the sense that nothing is impossible if people set their minds to do something that is good for them. Nothing is impossible to achieve. President Kagame reiterated that

"Rwanda had all kinds of challenges. We were a small, land-locked economy in the middle of Sub-Saharan Africa. We were short of almost everything. We lost about one million people and millions of others were displaced and impoverished by the genocide. You know, if you think about it like this, it is easy for somebody to despair and say, "We can't get out of this. This is impossible to change." But if you believe everything is possible from that point, and if you think beyond these problems and really want to achieve something big, you will get there. That's our experience in the last 21 years."

In every success story, a leader is highly instrumental, and President Kagame, austere in his approach and clinical in his execution, is nothing short of being Visionary. He is known to be the kind of leader that requires all his cabinet members and senior officials to set their goals and are held accountable for their outcomes.

Rwanda's success story tells us of the following achievements so far:

- The economy has grown by an average of nearly 8% a year since President Kagame was elected to office in 2000. The World Bank estimates annual growth will hit at least 7% in the next three years. Overall, per capita income in Rwanda has more than tripled during the past 14 years; more than one million people have moved out of poverty; infant mortality rates have been cut by two-thirds; and Rwanda has achieved nearly universal access to primary and secondary education.

- Distribution of millions of mosquito nets and widespread spraying campaign to reduce malaria-related deaths. As a result, life expectancy in Rwanda has shot up to 56 percent from a mediocre 36 in 1994.

- Building hundreds of schools and investing in infrastructure including high-speed fiber optic lines.

- Tracking down on corruption and making the best use of aid money. Rwanda ranks a respectable 55th on Transparency International corruption index, ahead of fledgling economies like South Africa, Brazil, India, and Mexico

- Nation-wide ban on plastics. Possession of non-biodegradable polythene bags in Rwanda is illegal. Border security or customs may search your luggage for plastics.

- Umuganda: Mandatory community service from 8:00 am to 11:00 am on the last Saturday of every month. Every adult between 18 and 65 years of age is required to participate in Umuganda. They contribute on various projects like cleaning the neighborhood, building schools, medical centers.

- In the year 2000, Rwanda adopted a long-term vision charter named 'Vision 2020' to transform itself from a poor agricultural country to middle-income service oriented economy. Most of the goals of this plan have already been realized, and the country is on track to meet most of the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

- Gender equality is another distinct characteristic of Post-genocide Rwanda, unlike most African countries. Women occupy more than 60 percent of seats in the Lower House of Rwandan Parliament, highest in the world.

To be Continued*

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