

Leaders Light Candles, Not Merely Curse the Darkness

It was about 20 minutes into the meeting and I was experiencing that familiar sinking feeling. I was attending yet another FGD or “focus group discussion” aimed at eliciting views from participants of a programme. The fourth person had just begun to speak. It was yet another litany of complaints. We had started off well enough identifying what worked so that these practices could be affirmed but very quickly – and predictably - the conversations veered towards problems. The initial trickle became a steady stream.

It would seem that people are natural experts at identifying problems. This is not a new phenomenon. In Luke 9: 10-17, we read about Jesus feeding the five thousand. The crowds had learned that Jesus was in a town called Bethsaida, and followed him there. We are told Jesus welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God (V 11).

Jesus’ disciples, however, saw problems - how do we feed them? how do we shelter them? More importantly, *who* was to feed and shelter them? Certainly, not us – let’s send the crowd away...

We need leaders in all spheres of society – and the school and home are the primary places where we must start nurturing leadership qualities among our young.

It was a moment that required a leader – *someone who would light a candle rather than merely curse the darkness.*

It is noteworthy that in using this incident to teach his disciples about leadership, Jesus simply told them, “**You** give them something to eat.” (V 13, NIV)

Jesus’ message was clear: you have identified a problem – as a leader, how will you now act to solve or address the problem? Asking the crowd to leave does not address the problem – the people will still be hungry. Jesus then taught them what action meant. With the little that belonged to the disciples, Jesus fed the multitudes. Importantly, the disciples became part of the solution. They provided the five loaves and two fish, they helped organise the crowd into groups of fifty and they distributed the food and cleaned up after. They were solving a problem. They had started to act as leaders.

We need leaders in all spheres of society – and the school and home are the primary places where we must start nurturing leadership qualities among our young. We have certainly done well in raising children who can analyse, probe and ask pertinent questions about the things that affect their lives. They can identify problems. The next step is for parents and teachers to allow young people to ‘illuminate the darkness’ with solutions to the problems they identify. This can only be possible in an environment that is encouraging, forgiving and nurturing so that even mistakes can be viewed as learning opportunities for improvement. It will also require skill, commitment to change and the gumption to believe that because they will act and make a difference through their solutions, the Best is Yet to Be.

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