

Leadership of servants



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The ultimate aim of leadership is to serve the people. I was part of a recent discussion on the topic. "If you go by the law book, what are we for?" a local leader asked a new police officer. The officer was determined to follow what his teachers had taught him at the training academy.

One of the participants made a very interesting point. "The cops suffer from a schizophrenic syndrome and have a split culture. They depend on politicians for survival and on law for accountability."

Said another officer: "If appointments are not in the hands of the police leadership, then who is accountable?" Enough of quotes. This is the time for action. There is a compelling need to restore leadership where it belongs and clarify accountability. Once the proper person is made accountable, it becomes his/her responsibility to deliver trust. The equation is simple: The person delivers or quits. It is also imperative that electoral accountability stays in place. But this is now getting lost.

CONTRADICTIONS

One often hears of debates titled, 'Challenges in leadership for public servants'. This is an amazing contradiction: Public 'servant', 'leadership', and 'challenges'? A 'servant' is expected to be obeying all orders. He can at best be a good housekeeper. For example, he may keep the house clean, cook and serve, deal with visitors, answer phone calls, record appointments, attend to the aged, take care of children and even drive when there's a need.

But how can such a person have leadership? Can he decide to renovate the house? Or get new furniture? Or buy new gadgets? Or send the child to a different school? Or tell you what to wear? So when there is



only routine work, where is 'leadership' which is synonymous with challenges?

FREEDOM IS THE KEY

Only a free person can exercise leadership and housekeepers are never free. They are expected to do as they are told to. They can be dismissed whenever they show disobedience or indiscipline. It does not matter whether housekeepers are skilled or not. They must wake up before the master does and sleep after the master has retired for the day. They have no right to any rest. In brief, they are slaves.

However, the housekeeper is the owner when the master is away. He can steal, entertain friends, sleep through, eat what he wants, and even reveal secrets. After this, should we continue to address officials in public service as public servants? 'No', was the unanimous answer.

They're public officials. Thus, the first step to be taken is to change the nomenclature — stop calling persons in government service 'public servants', call them 'public officials'. Their responsibility is to

provide efficient and responsive administration. They are selected, appointed and trained officials in administration.

Once viewed as public officials, these so-called housekeepers will have to necessarily develop a whole new mindset of leadership. It is only then that they will accept challenges. Being a public official implies respecting authority without getting enslaved, taking initiatives, sharing credit, breaking the culture of negative control, encouraging growth, acquiring soft skills, empowering people, being trustworthy, communicating more, practising team work, showing integrity and working with a missionary zeal.

The biggest problem faced by officials is resistance from closed mindsets and vested interests from within and without. And their biggest challenge is the choice they make. This will depend on individual attitudes, beliefs, needs and compulsions.

The final question before each person in the government service is: Whether to be a public servant akin to a housekeeper or a public official we really need?