

WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS NEEDED FOR ETHICAL LEADERSHIP?

By Dr Janette Minnaar-van Veijeren, Owner, ProEthics

It is very true that we need ethical leaders in politics and in business, but WHY do we need ethical leaders and WHAT defines an ethical leader? Which qualities are needed to not only be ethical as a person but also to promote ethical behaviour amongst those that one leads?

The American leadership guru, Dr Ken Blanchard, defines leadership as “*the ability to teach or influence the thoughts, behaviour and development of others*”. If a person cannot put his/her trust in a leader, it is very unlikely that he/she would do what the leader asks. To gain this trust with one's followers, it is paramount that a leader must have integrity. In other words, the leader must be known as a person who keeps his/her promises. Leaders with integrity are trusted.

In addressing a social investing conference on the 11th of April 2016, South Africa's Chief Justice, Mogoeng Mogoeng, justly said that ethics aren't optional when it comes to leadership and that our country can only move forward if leaders do the right thing. Mogoeng quoted the words of Montgomery van Wart in defining what integrity is and the qualities possessed by such persons of character. Prof Van Wart, Director of the Centre of Public Service at Texas Tech University, defines integrity as “*the willingness to talk the truth, being consistent, treating others the way one would like to be treated oneself, using the necessary discernment in taking decisions, striving for excellence in all one does and showing remarkable candour*”. A high level of conscientiousness is demonstrated by persons of integrity and they will follow through on promises and show unusual astuteness (wisdom) in meeting competing interests.

Justice Mogoeng describes the characteristics of a person with integrity as someone who follows through on commitments, is fair in all dealings, acts with wisdom and applies diligence in all he/she does. He believes that a leader with integrity will be able to influence, inspire, direct,

mobilise, encourage and activate his/her followers to pursue a common goal with commitment while keeping momentum, confidence and courage.

The South African Constitution starts with the following phrase: "We, the people of South Africa recognise the injustices of our past ...". Justice Mogoeng believes that it is only through ethical leadership that these recognised injustices can be remedied. The divisions of our past cannot be healed when leaders do not keep their promises and only serve their own interests. Our business leaders should govern their company affairs in such a way that a meaningful contribution is made to change our country for the better (to serve the greater good). It is clear that there is no room for unethical leadership and corruption. If leaders are dishonest, their followers will do the same. Being unethical as a leader violates the principles of, and the reason for the Constitution.

Integrity is a characteristic that all leaders should possess and their values are the standards they must live up to in all they do. Without integrity inside and outside the workplace, no leader will be trusted and the very essence of leadership, namely to influence, motivate and inspire others cannot be achieved. Being ethical and having integrity is non-negotiable.

18 April 2016