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Thinking of a career in politics?

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SO you managed to score high marks in our quiz? Congratulations!

You've taken the first step to being a politician. Then again, you may have expected this result. And how not to when so many have said "you were cut out to be a politician", what with your natural leadership qualities, the gift of the gab, charisma, aura, stage presence, flair...

Now, where do you go from here? Picking up some good books to read could really help you kickstart your career.

Dr Wan Kadir Che Man, a political science lecturer at the International Islamic University Malaysia, said the book *Government and Society in Malaysia* by Harold Crouch is a good guide.

For history on local politics, political science lecturer from the University Malaya, K.S. Balakrishnan, recommends K.J. Ratnam's *Religion and Politics in Malaya*.

Other books include *Malaysian Politics Under Mahathir* by Diane K. Mauzy and R.S. Milne as well as *Paradoxes of Mahathirism: An Intellectual Biography of Mahathir Mohamad* by T. Khoo.

Here you will find that the road towards a career in politics is not as easy as compared to law or engineering, as everything about you is put under scrutiny.

While climbing the political ladder, the honorable thing to do like defending your own principles can spell doom.

Even Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was not spared. He was expelled from Umno in 1969 for "serious breach of party discipline", just months after losing his Parliamentary seat to the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (now Pas) in the year's general election. The following year, his book about a subject close to his heart - his people, entitled *The Malay Dilemma* (about Malays who were marginalised), was banned.

Now if Dr Mahathir had felt disillusioned and given up after these episodes, a lot of Malaysian history would have had to be rewritten.

That's why patience plays a big role in a politician's life. Dr Mahathir's perseverance paid off when he was appointed Prime Minister in 1981, nine years after rejoining Umno.

Twenty-one years on and he is still our Prime Minister.

With his departure on October next year, Dr Mahathir would have left an enduring legacy of a commitment to excellence among other things, for our next Prime Minister, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, to carry on.

So what is his secret to being a successful politician?

Maybe his speech during the recent 56th Umno General Assembly at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur could provide us with some pointers. Among others, he stressed on the need to stand up to one's principles.

"It is meaningless if leaders become followers and remain silent when seeing the followers doing what is wrong (and) that what will hurt all, leaders as well as followers," he said.

Dr Mahathir continued: "... as a person who has been chosen to lead, shouldn't I say what is true with good intention? As a leader, am I required to follow only, so as to be popular with the supporters?"

So there!

As long as you uphold your integrity and stand firm, you can change the fate of your people, just like what he has done for us in the last two decades.

A good politician also needs excellent communication skills.

Dr Mahathir's example of using simple words, punctuating the hard facts with brilliant humour, has always won many hearts. For instance, at the recent Umno assembly, he did not address the party members as a politician but rather, as a father speaking to his children.

Even those at the foyer of the hall were transfixed by his speech.

He also doesn't resort to the use of obscene words or name-calling like some others. "I don't use filthy words nor do I call anyone by shameful names," Dr Mahathir told the assembly.

Also showing much promise was Terengganu Puteri Umno head Nordiana Shafie who successfully caught the audience's undivided attention and received thunderous applause after her speech.

This newcomer scored full marks for wisdom, keeping her speech short and sweet.

Yes, wisdom is definitely one of the more important qualities that makes a wholesome politician, according to several new and veteran Umno and Wanita members.

"In politics, you have to have wisdom, courage and a good set of values," said Umno Tanjung Bungor head (Lipis division), Siti Zainab Mat Ripin.

"With wisdom, conflicts within party members can be resolved without turning ugly. It also ensures a good relationship between you and your people."

A member of the Umno Youth Senai division, Zulkifle Mohd Payeng, concurred. He said a good politician always uses "hikmah" (wisdom).

"Some quarters have criticised Umno Youth head Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein Onn for not being vocal enough in expressing his criticism, but some may view his non-aggressive approach as being more practical in this time and age.

"Even the Prime Minister uses hikmah to shake the Malays up from complacency... He knew that the best way to do this was to talk about it openly as he did at this assembly," Zulkifle said.

"People are clever nowadays. They can tell between a rich but 'fake' politician and the less wealthy but sincere ones," Zulkifle said.

Although there are politicians in the corporate sector who are more well off than others, what is more important is sincerity, he added.

Sincerity also ensures one's survival in the political arena, said Siti Zainab, who has been in the party for over 30 years. She joined the party to champion women's rights.

"You should have a clear idea of why you join a political party and it shouldn't be for material or personal gains and popularity. For me, I work for the people in my kampung."

Zulkifle agreed, adding that he joined Umno because "I was intrigued by Umno's history and its success in championing our rights."

And you don't have to have a degree in political science to be a politician. Our Prime Minister is a qualified medical practitioner while Hishammuddin holds a Masters degree in Law.

"What's important is that he always gives priority to his people and frequently visits them at grassroot level," Zulkifle said.

Hishammuddin proved that constant interaction at grassroot level helps. He was made the Youth and Sports Minister at a relatively young age.

"Meeting people at the grassroot level also brings you closer to the people and ensures your popularity. Moreover, people need to know who they voted for," Zulkifle said.