

Choosing leaders for New Malaysia

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“LEADERSHIP must come with integrity – there is no compromise. Without integrity talent is a liability.”

Malaysia Baru has given us a unique chance to reset and relaunch our future. For the first time in history we have representatives from four generations (Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y) working towards making Malaysia better, stronger, more prosperous, and with a higher level of ethics. We have a Prime Minister, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is 93 years old (Traditional generation) and a minister, Syed Saddiq Syed Abdul Rahman, who is only 26 years old (Gen Y).

Having national leaders at both ends of the generational spectrum have inspired many to relook at what is young and old in completely new ways. I have met many who are in their 60s and 70s who have decided to do more and stop thinking of slowing down. They feel that they can still contribute. And they want to play a part in rebuilding the nation, too.

Similarly, I have met numerous young Malaysians whose minds have been altered, declaring, “If a 93-year-old man is pushing himself hard every day to make this coun-

try better, how could I just sit and do nothing?”.

Furthermore, in Syed Saddiq they see a fellow millennial who has been provided an opportunity to lead, to learn, to make mistakes and be counted. This gives them an upbeat feeling about the direction of the nation.

However, in moving forward, we must set some general rules. We need strong processes and systems that can create a positive and powerful culture, and weed out old cultures that are not in sync or, more so, go against the goal of a better, stronger, more prosperous country with higher ethics. This is especially true in choosing leaders.

Here, I would like to share with readers a method used by corporate leaders in choosing top talents and planning for succession in their organisation. To make it easier to recall, it is called C.A.P.I.

Capacity: A person’s capacity is the basic foundation of his or her ability to deliver. No amount of training or exposure can bring out what is expected from a talent if he or she lacks the capacity.

Like a car engine, capacity determines the ability to perform under different circumstances. The larger the capacity, the greater the propensity to deliver. As an analogy,

we cannot expect a car with a horsepower of 100 to perform like a powerhouse that churns 700 horses no matter how much we try to modify it. That would be setting up the person for failure. Thus, the first criteria in choosing our leaders is checking their capacity.

Achievement (performance): True achievement is about results; not efforts, not promises, not words. Top talents focus their energies on where the results are, they make things happen, they deliver. They perform and avoid giving extrinsic excuses – like lack of funds or competition. They work with what they have – making the best of resources. They spend more time doing and delivering.

They don’t talk as much. When they do talk, it is to engage people to perform. They lead people to actions that are based on clear goals. So the second test in choosing our leaders is performance. We must choose leaders who deliver.

People skills: Top talents deliver by working with and through people. They harness and focus the energy of others toward common goals. They are team leaders. Talent that prefers working alone are specialists and they can be great support for top talents, help-

ing in strategy. They can be resources for think tanks and policy institutes.

We must choose talents that work with others in their effort to move up in an organisation, not those that rise up by stepping on people. We want talents who know how to place the nation’s goals higher than theirs – and, as such, can be professional. They can even work with their “enemies” as long as it is for the nation’s good.

In the Malaysian context, it is crucial that we also choose leaders who believe in diversity and inclusion. They must be people who are willing to listen to and work with not just one particular race but every ethnic group. Not just with their religious grouping but those of other faiths, too.

They’re in sync with the peninsula and also Sabah and Sarawak and vice versa. They care for and consider those in urban and rural areas plus are willing to engage not just the old but also the middle-aged and the young. They care about gender issues too. They stay focused on the poor but do not neglect the nation’s economic growth.

In short, we must choose an inclusive Malaysian leader. Not a leader who claims to lead a segment of the country that he or she

identifies with and sees the rest as secondary.

Integrity: The fourth criteria is integrity. Leadership must come with integrity – there is no compromise. Without integrity talent is a liability. No matter how brilliant, knowledgeable or successful, lack of integrity disqualifies any and all talent for any leadership position. We must check their track record for any propensity to lie, practice double standards, or to say one thing and do the other.

New Malaysia must not compromise on integrity. That is why we need to deal with much sensitivity and seriousness any aspect of integrity or the lack of it. Things like graft, hiding the truth, using government assets and resources for personal use, and criminal breach of trust. The recent news about fake degrees is a case in point. We need to deal with this issue with seriousness and without compromise. Failing which, we send the wrong signals to the young.

In short, in choosing our leaders and talents, integrity is the final sift that must not be put aside no matter what.

Malaysia Baru, we can do this.

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