

Penyampai : TAN SRI DATO SERI AHMAD SARJI BIN ABDUL HAMID
Tajuk : THE LAUNCHING OF THE ASIAN STRATEGY AND LEADERSHIP
Lokasi : INSTITUTE THE BANKER
Tarikh : 15-09-1993

I would like to thank the management of the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute, or ASLI, for inviting me to officiate the launch of their new organisation. With the corporate sector in Malaysia and the region expanding and developing in leaps and bounds, there is a correspondent increase in demand for skills development for managerial and executive personnel. At the same time with the rapid changes in management and administration systems and practices, there is a need for an up-to-date information and resource pool which can serve both the public and private sectors in skill upgrading. I am confident that this new Institute, ASLI, with its twin focus on strategy and leadership, has the capability and capacity to fill a significant niche as a resource centre in the area of management and leadership training and development. Most importantly, ASLI should assist in the national human resource development programme so critical to ensure the availability of trained personnel capable of moving the country towards its long-term goal of making Malaysia into a fully developed nation. Both the civil service as well as the corporate sector have a major role to play in ensuring the achievement of the objective. A key ingredient for the success of organisations is Leadership.

There can be little doubt that the well-being and success of any nation or organisation is heavily dependent on good and effective leadership. History has shown clearly that great nations and great organisations are often the result of great leadership. Nations or civilisations have been known to fall or disappear completely due to leadership failure or the lack of a strong leader.

What makes a good or strong leader? What are some key qualities or skills required of a leader? To me, a good leader is one who has a clear vision where his organisation is headed, that is, he knows the desirable destination and which path should be taken in order to reach that destination in the shortest time and with the intelligent use of available resources. A good leader, is therefore, something of a visionary, who constantly envisages a better future for the organisation that he leads.

However, to be an effective leader, he should be able to communicate this vision of betterment to the others in the organisation. A leader on his own could not achieve his vision for the organisation. He needs the support and commitment of others in the organisation to translate that vision into reality. Someone has said once before that "successful companies have a consensus from top to bottom on a set of overall goals. The most brilliant management strategy will fail if that consensus is missing". To garner this consensus and support from within the organisation, communication of the vision to others such that they clearly understand and desire the achievement of the same goal is paramount. An important leadership skill is, therefore, the ability to encourage and motivate others to mentally visualise the same goal or objective and muster the same enthusiasm to want to achieve that goal. They must see these goals as desirable, something which they on their own would find meaning and benefits from; and, most importantly, the goals must seem realistic and achievable.

Those in the organisation must be given the confidence that the leader has their needs at heart as well as the ability and resilience to lead them to the destination.

Communication skills, therefore, are important for the leader, to assist him to convey his message clearly and in a manner which can inspire others, such that there is common identification with the vision and it becomes a shared vision.

However, vision-setting alone, does not suffice. It is easier said than done. An important leadership ability, therefore, is to translate the vision into reality or in other words, make things happen. An effective leader must be able to pull resources together, to work towards the achievement of the vision. He must ensure the identification and implementation of the necessary strategies, programmes and projects which can lead the organisation towards the realisation of the vision. He needs to put in place the relevant systems and procedures which support and assist in the process of moving towards the ultimate goal. He must constantly monitor and guide the implementation process, adjusting and fine-tuning programmes, in

line with changing environment. Such a process may involve making quick and strategic decisions and often unpleasant decisions. Here is where a strong leader displays his unyielding commitment to the achievement of the vision, his will to lead without balking at the difficulties encountered on the way. Without such close nurturing and guidance from the leader, there may be derailment on the way, with the vision remaining a distant dream.

While providing strong leadership from the top, a good leader also galvanises the support and commitment of his people to the implementation process. This is considered to be "managerial implementation". He also defines two key attributes of this managerial implementation. Firstly, managerial implementation is always done through other people. Secondly, managerial implementation almost always involves changing people's values, attitudes and behaviour.

Getting things done through other people is indeed a sound management principle, for not only does this release the leader from implementation nitty-gritty for other more strategic activities, but it also gives the necessary hands-on experience to others while increasing their feeling of ownership of the process and its ultimate goal. A good leader empowers and energises his people to give them the opportunity to act or react in particular situations. He allows for creativity and innovation within the broad framework. Such empowerment is invaluable for invoking the feeling and sense of power among the people that they are ultimately responsible for their own destiny. Such empowerment is what makes for commitment to the cause. With such transformation, thousands of innovative actions taken day in, day out by members of an energized, performance-oriented work force would add up to the constructive change in the organization at large.

The second attribute involves value, attitudinal and behavioural changes. This is definitely the more difficult realm. The implementation of any change programme invariably demands a new mind-set and new attitudes and values to be internalised within an organisation. This often makes for the creation of a whole new organisation culture. Effective leadership involves identifying the appropriate values, norms and work ethics. This is particularly critical in sustaining the integrity and moral character of individuals within the organisation as well as the organisation as an entity. At the same time, the leader needs to establish a systematic process by which these values and norms are instilled. We recognise that while it's hard to confine and define a culture, it's even more difficult to change one. However, experience has shown that attitudinal change involving the assimilation of new values and norms which eventually lead to a new organisational culture can be brought about through a systematic and unrelenting programme of change management. This has been amply demonstrated through our experience in the civil service in instilling a quality culture among civil servants, a culture which gives premium to service excellence through customer focus. The process of introducing the new culture involved clear delineation of the new values, norms and attitudes required to be practised by the civil servants as part of the new civil service culture. In this context, two books on values were published namely a book entitled "Values and Ethics in the Public Service" and another book entitled "The Twelve Pillars - The Absorption of Values, Norms and Service Ethics". The required values and ethics, such as timeliness and customer-focus were also built into the Administrative Development Circulars which were introduced into the Public Service for implementation in 1991. A systematic programme for wide information dissemination to ensure that these new values and norms were clearly understood and accepted was also put into place. Other measures included constant reminders through keynote speeches by the higher level civil servants, role models, training on the various circulars, giving recognition to those who conform and action against those who go against rules and regulations and the code of conduct namely Chapter D of the General Orders. Through these, it has been possible to instill a new civil service culture. In the same way, it is indeed possible for an effective leader to establish a new corporate culture within his organisation. Yet another critical task of a leader is the encouragement of the development of leaders and leadership skills within the organisation. This is, in fact, a fundamental responsibility of a leader, to nurture and develop leaders at the various levels of the organisation. A really strong organisation is one which not only has a strong leader at the helm, but also one where leadership qualities abound in the ranks. This is critical for not only the success of the organisation but for its continued survival. Such an organisation will not flounder when its leader is gone, for there will be an abundance of choice for the next leader from among those who have participated in the identification and implementation of the long-term vision. My view is that the leader who offers a clear vision that is both coherent and credible, and who lives by a set of values that inspire

imitations, has a fundamental source of power - that is being able to get things done, to mobilize resources, to get and use whatever it is that a person needs for the goals he is attempting to meet.

How do we then find good leaders? It is said that some are born great, that is, there must be the strong inherent leadership qualities inherited on birth; some achieve greatness and others have greatness thrust upon them, that is to say that leaders emerge when the situation demands it.

Whatever may be the case, fortunately for us, leadership skills can be acquired or learnt. Even inborn leadership skills can be fine-honed through education, experience, exposure and skill training. Here is where organisations such as ASLI can play a key role in the development of leadership skills. Good leadership and strategic thinking must in the end result in higher performance and productivity. Improving productivity is an art, not unlike medicine. It begins with diagnosis, for which the practitioner needs instruments for determining the patient's condition. It depends on knowing the patient, as well as common malfunctions and their symptoms. The ability to choose from among treatments depends on familiarity with all the options, including their mechanisms, time frame, risks and side effects. The more the professional knows about the underlying anatomy and organic processes, the more likely the treatment will prove effective. But there is no absolute certainty. This is why improving productivity is an art. And that is why feedback is essential. Your patients are, therefore, work organizations, to keep determine whether and where problems exist, to review such common systems of trouble such as delays, poor quality and low morale.

I would like to welcome The Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute into our fold and wish them luck in their endeavour to become a prominent member of not only the local fraternity but also a regional centre for management excellence and to contribute in a positive way to the development of trained manpower to meet the needs of national development.