



Selflessness in Leadership



This is my third installment on the topic of leadership, and specifically the leadership characteristics necessary to achieve sector and national objectives. In the first two articles I discussed *vision* and *courage*, respectively. South Africa has visionary leaders, in both the public and private sectors, who have acted with courage during the toughest times in the sector and the development of the country. However, South Africa has remained in the category of 'having so much potential' for the past 10–15 years. Why is this so if we have such great and courageous leaders?

This question leads me to my discussion on the third trait of leadership – selflessness. What do I mean by this expression? Simply put, it is a person who acts without regard for self-gain, but rather to benefit others. It could be a distant reference to the 'servant-leader'. It is not my aim to cast judgement on selflessness, or enquire into its presence or lack thereof, especially as regards the individuals mentioned in my previous article. I'll let you, the reader be the judge for yourself. My aim in these discussion articles is to highlight the characteristic for its worth in a leader and in leadership.

Selflessness, in my view, is an important trait given the positional power that most leaders tend to occupy and enjoy, with access to unprecedented resources. The temptation for abuse of this power is undeniable but avoidable.

With the emerging trend of ecosystem concepts being adapted by business (which frankly remains misunderstood) and the adoption of digital technologies, selflessness as a leadership characteristic that prevails throughout the whole organization will be a determinant of success.

Here's where I am going with this: there's an increasing inevitability of stakeholder management and building of strong relationships. Successful organizations will distinguish themselves through the strengths of their relationships, where they will have contributed to the relationship for the combined benefit of the business and its partners in the relationships within their operating contexts. Organizations in these relationships will bring their best (the 'A-game') for the benefit of the relationship and the system, not for what the individual organization can obtain. The sustainability of the system results in each contributor thriving, with the outcome of increasing trust within the system and reinforcing the strength of the ecosystem relationships. This concept applies equally and as strongly on digital platforms.

Therefore selflessness is evidently going to be the foundation of building trust with our stakeholders as business leaders. This concept can be stretched further to address the perennial question of what the role of business is. Selflessness in the conduct of our mining operations has to be part of the response to that question.



First Article: Leadership, Vision, and Dreams



Second Article: Leadership: Vision, then courage to act

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