

# Solutions to human challenges: The imperative of culture and values



Ekene Okafor Dec 15, 2021



Respect for people is one of the solutions to human challenges

Someone once said something along these lines “... work is for the people and not the people for work.” This was the context in which the seminar on the topic- Solutions to Human Challenges: The Imperative of Culture and Values, was held by the **Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics**, LBS, and the Humanistic Management Network (HMN). Five speakers spoke at the event and this article summarises the brilliance of their presentations.

Human beings are to be respected and not things. This is a key message the Humanistic Management Network is trying to pass across to the world. People are not made for the work, but the work is created for the people. This idea shows in the way and manner in which we treat our subordinates, our co-workers and even our

superiors. Everyone deserves respect. You do not need to raise your voice or use foul language on your staff to get the best from them. This just lowers the self-esteem of the individual and causes an inferior complex.

In Nigeria and generally all over the world, there is an invisible pressure to maximise profit. It is the key factor in the display of unreasonable behaviours towards the employees. Yes, everybody wants to do well, everybody wants to be rich, but this should not be at the detriment of the next person's time or peace of mind. At the seminar, Rose Ogbechie, a panelist, pointed out that people at the management level nowadays, do not mind overworking employees, as far as the work is completed. Just because one is lower than another in terms of rank, doesn't mean you get to use them as you like until you are tired or done with the work. Encroachment on time is a lack of respect for the time of the employees and a lack of sensitivity towards the feelings and life of the employees. She also explained that some of those in management have the "they need work and so they will do whatever," attitude.

Therefore, with that already in my mind, the treatment of the staff will be one of "doing a favour" for them because they need the job and are not indispensable. It is a joy to see one leave a toxic work environment as it tells the employer that he/she will be fine without that job and its onerous conditions. Iyore James, a panelist, pointed out that to be humane, we must operate on a standard that values humans above all. Like the doctors who take the oath of doing no harm to their patients, we also as human beings need to be our brothers' keepers and always have this thought that all humans are of value. We are all expected to respect the value of each person around us; in our homes, workplaces, sports clubs, on the road, etc. This respect for people is one of the solutions to human challenges and we have to start from somewhere.

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Professor Akinyeye, another speaker took us back to the old African culture where if anyone found themselves destitute, he or she need not worry but go to a farmland, eat to his fill and move along, as far as the individual doesn't carry the produce away. This shows that there was a bit more humanity shown towards people in the olden days. Why it has changed now is a cause for concern. In those times, it was the

responsibility of the rulers and members of the community to help those in need in whatever form. In comparison to these days, it is an “all man for himself” situation. The communal living culture is not present anymore, as a result of technology or a decline in economy, I cannot say, but what is clear is that each man has to fend for himself and if he cannot, he suffers alone.

In the western countries, there are niceties like unemployment benefits, workhouses where the destitute can go to sleep, soup kitchens which offer free food to those who cannot afford to feed themselves, etc. Professor Akinyeye is of the opinion that to mitigate the effect of the western culture on our culture, the old African rules need to be married with the modern ones. The state needs to take charge of the destitute in the society. The individuals need to also think about the others by developing a no wastage culture and giving out things not in use to mitigate the harsh effects of poverty. These precepts also need to be passed down to upcoming generations so that sustainable solutions will be created and not merely a meal during the holiday season.

When we help the individual to grow up properly, we have a healthy individual. This cannot happen if we do not have healthy parents. In Nigeria a lot of focus is placed on the government, on leadership and very little on followership. Fatai Olajobi explained that yes, we need to make our leaders accountable but we also as individuals need to be accountable to ourselves. What am I doing to better the community or my immediate environment? Leaders were once followers and a vicious cycle forms where the followers learn from the bad leaders and when their time comes, they become bad leaders also.

If as an individual, we keep focusing on what someone did wrong, complaining at newspaper stands, complaining at gatherings, we will never focus on what is right, or how we ourselves can be better versions of ourselves. If the common man decides to do right by his immediate community, raising upright children, the effects on the society will be clear. Individuals make up the society and have influence on the society and vice versa. Fatai Olajobi asks us, what are we doing for the community? What am I doing to help others? Because as I help others, I help myself.

As Nigerians we tend to turn the search light on others rather than ourselves. In relation to the bible verse, we pick the speck in people's eyes and forget the log in our eyes, Professor Ojebode challenges us to join networks, participate actively in something as little as neighbourhood associations and not just send our dues. To pay attention to the effects of human actions because our actions will yield either a positive effect or a negative one. We cannot be the change we want by wishing it.

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