

'Leadership as a Step Towards Personal Growth'

Keynote Remarks by Ambassador Amit Narang

At Toastmasters International Oman Annual Club Officers Training Program 2023-24

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Distinguished Toastmasters, Directors and valued members of the Oman Club of Toastmasters International,

Distinguished guests, ladies and Gentlemen.

Good afternoon, A Salam Alaykum, Namaskar,

It is a privilege to be invited today to speak to the wider membership of Toastmasters International Oman, a gathering of dedicated individuals - both Indian and Omani - from diverse segments of society who are committed to personal growth and leadership excellence.

I am happy to speak on a thoughtful topic selected by the organizers that resonates deeply with all of us: "**Leadership as a Step towards Personal Growth**". It is a vast topic and I hope to do justice to it with some perspectives from my own experience.

Before I do that, let me take this opportunity to commend the excellent work that Oman Club of Toastmasters International has been doing. This is an important platform that empowers individuals to find their voice, conquer their fears, and take on leadership roles.

The supportive and nurturing environment provided by Toastmasters promotes personal growth by encouraging members to step out of their comfort zones and makes them ready take on larger leadership roles in society.

The emphasis on effective communication, active listening, and critical thinking that Toastmasters instills in its members directly benefits communities and these are attributes that are increasingly salient in both our personal as well as professional lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good leadership is surely a combination of several attributes, each important in a dynamic mix that cannot be quantified. Good leadership also responds to different situations and changing times.

Leadership skills in one context may differ quite starkly from what is required in another. A leader also has to adapt according to the group he or she is leading, not to mention the timeframe in which that leadership is exercised.

Then there are cultural, educational and linguistic factors that are equally relevant.

In other words, there is no formula for good leadership.

And yet, there are some essential attributes that transcend situations and contexts and constitute what can be called as the essential ingredients of leadership.

But even before we come to these attributes, 3 myths about leadership that also need to be debunked.

First, that leadership is about lofty titles and that it exists only at the top. When talking of leadership, we often take examples such as global CEOs, famous Generals and successful politicians. Yet, leadership exists and is equally important for success at all levels.

A good platoon leader can determine the fate of battles that ultimately bring laurels to Generals winning wars. An effective floor manager in a factory plays a central role in producing output that makes the global CEO famous.

We should not therefore equate leadership as something that is at the pinnacle of organizations and societies.

In other words, your position does not make you a leader. But how you lead can determine your position.

Second myth is that leadership is about lofty speeches. Yes, public speaking is key to good leadership, but high sounding speeches do not alone a good leader make. It is but only one ingredient of leadership success.

Third myth is that leadership is a rare skill and good leaders are born not made. While some are undoubtedly born with innate skills that other may not have, the attribute of leadership is more often than not, a combination of small things, which good leaders learn and imbibe in their journeys.

Returning to the ingredients of leadership, 3 such attributes that come to my mind are **Vision, Communication and Action.**

A leader is one who has a **vision** about the organization that he or she is leading. Where does he want the organization to go, how to transition it from the present to the future? What would that transition involve, how would that transition be achieved?

Without this overarching vision, a leader is a mere controller.

A good example of a great vision guiding the work of a great leader is that of former Sultan Qaboos bin Said.

His leadership transformed Oman's barren deserts into thriving landscapes, mirroring his vision for a prosperous and united nation. The vision of his leadership was defined by empathy, humility, and a deep connection with the culture and people of Oman. He understood that leadership is not a solitary journey; it's a collective effort that harmonizes the dreams of many into a reality of progress.

If Vision is at the pinnacle of leadership, at its heart lies the art of **communication** - a dynamic force that not only shapes visions and strategies but also empowers leaders to inspire, influence, and guide with clarity.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of successful leadership, serving as the bridge that connects vision with action. A leader's ability to articulate ideas, inspire others, and convey a compelling narrative is what propels their vision forward.

In today's era of social media, effective communication skills have become more vital than ever before.

With the rapid dissemination of information, the power to convey ideas clearly, persuasively, and responsibly is paramount. In a landscape where words can traverse the globe with an instant click of a mouse, the ability to navigate diverse audiences, engage in meaningful conversations, and discern credible knowledge from the noise is what separates influential voices from the rest.

Strong communication skills enable us to build connections, trust, and contribute positively to the digital discourse that shapes our world today.

When talking of communication, we need to look no further than Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi. He is the perfect example of how a effective communication effort is key to good leadership.

While his oratory skills are legendary, more important is how PM Modi has leveraged his communication skills in the new media environment to connect with a vast and diverse population. Even though he grew up in an era when we did not even have telephones in India, his early adoption of social media tools like Twitter (now X) for mass messaging is something of a case study in mass communication schools.

Through initiatives like "Mann Ki Baat," where he directly addresses millions of Indian citizens, he cultivates a direct connection with people, enabling them to understand their leader and to also contribute to policy discussions. This two-way communication has not only facilitated his own growth as a mature leader but also contributed to the growth of a more informed and engaged society.

His dynamic and engaging speeches, combined with his active use of social media, have allowed him to share his vision directly with millions of citizens, instilling a sense of involvement and ownership in national progress.

Perhaps the least emphasized aspect of leadership is **action** which manifests itself in management. It may not be as esoteric as lofty visions and inspiring communication skills, but is equally critical to leadership success.

To support his or her vision and communication, a leader must also be able to deploy effective management skills to harness his or her team to work as one and achieve outcomes effectively. This is a vast area and includes selecting the right people for the right jobs, prioritizing outcomes, allocating scarce resources, monitoring performance and stepping up with remedial actions when things are not right.

A steep vision and good communication can both falter if the leader is unable to manage the nuts and bolts of the daily grind.

Dear Friends,

Leadership is a transformative journey and inextricably linked with personal growth. Both contribute to each other.

Without consistent personal growth, you cannot aspire to be a good leader. Personal growth through constant learning, un-learning and re-learning is critical.

As the former CEO of General Electric Jack Welch said *“Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others”*.

At the same time, as individuals assume leadership roles, they embrace challenges that compel them to stretch beyond their comfort zones, develop new skills, enhance self-awareness, and refine decision-making abilities.

This path demands introspection, adaptability, and resilience, propelling individuals to confront their limitations and evolve into more empowered versions of themselves.

By guiding others through their visions, making voluntary collaboration happen through effective communication, and navigating complexities through credible management, leaders themselves go through a journey of self-discovery that fuels their own aspirations, nurtures their intellectual growth, shapes their personality and ultimately leads to their own holistic personal growth.

A leader is compelled to confront reality in a manner that a mere individual cannot do. A leader is trained by his experience to look at the larger picture, rising above from individual to organizational and even societal levels, thus propelling an intellectual journey otherwise not possible in our daily lives.

More than anything else, leadership teaches responsibility. It enables us to rise above the selfish and immediate interest and to look at possibility of collective human endeavor to solve complex problems.

When you are a leader, you cannot say its not my problem, because most often it is! The buck stops with you. You learn to take control, assume responsibility, and find solutions.

In this sense therefore, leadership is a journey towards personal growth. The very act of leading transforms us, molding us into better versions of ourseleves.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A true leader is one who shows the path, but walks the talk.

To paraphrase the famous Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, a good leader works in a way that when his or her work is done, the team says ‘We did it ourselves’.

We should therefore see leadership as an opportunity - to shape collective outcomes, inspire those around us, and create positive change.

I am humbled to share my thoughts on the occasion of Club Officers Training Program and to witness the commitment of Toastmasters in Oman towards personal development and societal progress.

Thank you to the organizers once again for inviting me today.

I hope the workshop today will enable all participants to embark on a journey of leadership, growth, and positive change.
