

**Public Launch of the Rhodes University  
*Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics***

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The CEO of the Allan Gray Orbis Foundation, Mr Anthony Farr, our keynote speaker, Prof Njabulo Ndebele, the Director of the Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics, Prof Pedro Tabensky, ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of Rhodes University, welcome to the public launch of the Rhodes University *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics*.

A number of factors combined to result in the establishment of the *Rhodes University Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics*.

One is that the Rhodes University slogan is, of course, *Where Leaders Learn*. We are wont to remind our students that they are among the most talented of our society; and that it is to them that we look to lead, to re-imagine and reshape our future, to conduct our affairs in an ethical manner, and to make people, human development and social justice the vital centre of all their actions.

We say to our students that it is to them that we look to exercise, with humility, *leadership* wherever they find themselves – in the classrooms and schools of our lands; in the theatres, galleries and concert halls; hospital and clinic dispensaries; in legal practices, prosecution offices and courts; in scientific laboratories and research institutions; in financial services and the public service, and in the media and universities.

We also remind them that, of course, this leadership and their knowledge and expertise must be put to work not only for their private benefit but also for the benefit of society at large, to advance the general public good.

A second factor is that an honorary doctoral graduand of Rhodes challenged us a few years ago to take heed of the ‘emergence of a strange breed of leaders’, to be concerned about the extent to which we have an ‘accountable democracy,’ and suggested that ‘we have a duty to...call to book the putative leaders who...cannot lead.’<sup>i</sup>

A third and critical factor is that Dr Allan Gray, a Rhodes University alumnus and honorary doctoral graduand, a wonderful philanthropist, and the pioneering founder of the Allan Gray investment company, awarded Rhodes some R 12.4 million to establish a *Centre for Leadership Ethics*.

Novel about the *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics* is that unlike many leadership institutes and centres, which are housed in business or management schools, the *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics* is located within the Rhodes University Department of Philosophy.

If it is leadership *ethics* that concerns us, philosophy as a discipline is an appropriate place to begin, though the concern with leadership, and ethical agency more generally, will necessarily also lead to drawing on number of other disciplines and fields, including history, psychology and education.

Sadly, too many who occupy positions of economic, political and administrative power, and are entrusted with the leadership of society and key institutions, are sorely wanting with regard to the core values and conduct that are congruent with ethical, responsible and accountable leadership.

Witness the flagrant abuse of power for political, economic and private gain and self-enrichment, as manifested in corruption, fraud and dubious tenderpreneurial activities, in anti-democratic practices, and the perpetuation of macho masculinities and women's oppression in the name of culture.

Witness, too, the failures on the part of those entrusted with leading critical economic, social, educational and health institutions to grasp fully their profound constitutional, moral and social responsibilities in a society that proclaims a commitment to human dignity, social equity and justice.

Recall how a contestation on the cause of HIV/AIDS led to a stultifying absence of leadership to deal with the pandemic, and how the tardy response in rolling out anti-retrovirals resulted in unnecessary delays in treatment and the tragic loss of lives.

Recall, too, that we were promised an innovative 'Public Service that will provide an excellent quality of service,' be the 'servant of the people (and be) 'accessible, transparent, accountable, efficient and free of corruption.'<sup>ii</sup> *Batho Pele* (People First) was to be the watchword of our Public Service.

Instead, in many areas, there is a widespread culture of disdainful conduct and service, sheer indifference to the basic needs of people, and a sore lack of ethical and accountable leadership.

While the economic and political elites of our country have recourse to private and Model C schools, private hospitals and private cars, the poor of our society depend hugely on public services for their basic needs and for improving their lives and those of their children.

The lack of political and administrative leadership and the shortcomings in critical public services undermine the dignity of the poor, retard the educational development of millions of children and youth, thwart the realization of constitutionally and legally enshrined social goals and, ultimately, violate human and social rights.

Indisputably, one of our great challenges is to improve the quality of our schools. A key distinguishing feature between well-performing and poorly performing schools is effective *leadership*. Our schools cry out for courageous and effective educational leadership on the part of state departments and school heads.

The shenanigans of various businesspersons, politicians and bureaucrats make for riveting, if depressing, reading. Regularly, we are shocked and awed by the brazen sense of 'entitlement,' the glib emphasis on the legal instead of the ethical, and by the impunity with which so-called leaders redeploy resources for private gain and benefit.

Perhaps the pervasiveness of the shortcomings of those in leadership has numbed us into silence. Perhaps we assume that our duties as citizens extend no further than voting every five years. Or perhaps, shocked and awed, or just thoroughly discouraged, we cannot conceive how we, as ordinary citizens, can become agents of change.

But silence is not an option. It simply leaves the door wide open for irresponsible and unaccountable leadership, and a culture of impunity, greed and crass materialism in which self-interest, material wealth, profits, and performance bonuses become the new gods.

We also cannot afford to become cynical or despair. Tatamkulu Nelson Mandela writes that ‘there were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.’ Instead, we must remain optimistic, keep our ‘head pointed toward the sun, (our) feet moving forward.’<sup>iii</sup>

In creating the *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics*, Dr Gray and Rhodes University are of one mind: a vital task is to imaginatively investigate and conceptualise what constitutes leadership with ethics, ethical agency more generally; to promote such leadership in diverse contexts and circumstances, and to develop education and training initiatives to foster such leadership.

There is no off-the-shelf or ‘customised, shrink-wrapped, perfect leadership model.’<sup>iv</sup> It is also unlikely that leadership can be simply taught, or that theory alone or building skills is enough.

In building leadership we must take history, culture and context seriously. We need to develop a situated leadership appropriate to our conditions; and we need to forge a leadership that is distributed institutionally, rather than centred on the ‘big man’ – and usually it is the big man!

Given the pressing challenges of poverty and unemployment, hunger and disease, social equity and justice, and deepening and consolidating our democracy, our task is to cultivate, grow and institutionalise ethical, responsible and accountable leadership across our society.

We are blessed to be able to draw inspiration from those who provided selfless leadership and paved the long path to our democracy – Luthuli, Mandela, Tutu, Hani, Lillian Ngoyi, Amina Cachalia, Helen Joseph, Oom Beyers Naude, Jakes Gerwel and many others: men and women, black and white.

Down to earth, fallible people with good values and *isthunzi* (presence); mindful of people’s aspirations, anguish and needs; with the courage to challenge the status quo and the passion to pursue change; committed to service and perseverance to overcome obstacles; knowing that to lead means doing what is right rather than what is popular among followers.

We can also take inspiration from an emerging generation, the youth of our country – not the pompous, verbose, self-aggrandizing lot who regularly amuse and bemuse us, but those who humble us by their imagination and positive outlook, and by their quiet, committed, and determined striving through numerous projects to secure social justice for all, deepen our democracy, and protect our planet.

Prof. Paul Maylam in his book, *Enlightened Rule: Portraits of Six Exceptional Twentieth Century Leaders*, argues that luminous and respected leaders cherish ‘some key fundamental values.’

They believe in the ‘innate worth and dignity of all human beings’ and understand that leaders ‘bear the responsibility to create conditions in which all humans can realise their potential.’<sup>v</sup>

They have ‘an unwavering commitment to democracy and human rights,’ including ‘popular participation’ and ‘proper access of all to education, health care, personal security’ and ‘social and economic justice.’ They also have a ‘generosity of spirit,’ and an ‘egalitarian spirit,’ and ‘a sense of obligation to further the common good.’<sup>vi</sup>

Ethical and responsible leaders also possess certain key qualities. They take learning, education and knowledge seriously. They understand that these are vital for understanding our world, for gaining insight into the real nature of our problems and challenges, and for finding solutions.

They have an unwavering commitment to non-racialism, non-sexism and great respect for difference and diversity: whether related to race, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, language or culture.

They refuse to be paralysed by our history, legacy and contemporary problems. Instead, they inspire us by reminding us of our remarkable ingenuity and courage in fashioning a fabulous Constitution and winning our democracy; they call on us to draw on these to confront our challenges.

At the heart of ethical, responsible and accountable leadership is, of course, *integrity* and *honesty*. Ethical leaders, in the words of the great African leader, Amilcar Cabral, 'tell no lies. Expose lies whenever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories.'

Without integrity, there can be no principled conduct; no prospect of winning trust and inspiring and uniting people around a vision; no effective communication, no ethical and responsible leadership.

But ethical and responsible leaders also look beyond themselves. They see potential all around them, seek to build new generations of leaders who will be better than them, to create opportunities for developing people, to provide them with experiences and space to learn lessons, and strive to be role models by living out values associated with ethical and responsible leadership.

The Taoist philosopher, Lao Tzu, writes

The leader is best  
When people are hardly aware of his existence  
When his work is done, his aim fulfilled  
The people say, 'We did it ourselves.'<sup>vii</sup>

It has been noted that 'effectively to give birth to the new, we must be angry at our past.' Given the lack and shortcomings of leadership, perhaps, anger and shame at the present is also justified.

A wonderful Sotho proverb, however, says: 'No matter how hot your anger may be, it cannot cook.' Our challenge is to make the real fire that cooks, to embrace the critical task of producing the competent, responsible and ethical leaders that our society cries out for.

With these words, welcome to this launch and we look forward to your continuing support as the *Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics* strives to contribute to ethical agency and leadership in South Africa and through this a fairer, kinder and more decent society and world.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.moneyweb.co.za/mw/view/mw/en/page292516?oid=566137&sn=2009+Detail>

<sup>ii</sup> *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development*, 23 November 1994, Government Gazette, Vol. 353, No. 16085

<sup>iii</sup> Mandela, N. (1995) [\*Long Walk to Freedom: Autobiography of Nelson Mandela\*](#)

<sup>iv</sup> Tsiba Education (2011) *Perspectives: The Search for Tomorrow's Leaders*. Cape Town: Tsiba Education

<sup>v</sup> Maylam, P. (2011) *Enlightened Rule: Portraits of Six Exceptional Twentieth Century Leaders*. Bern: Peter Lang

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.inspirationalspark.com/leadership-quotes.html>