

Chapter 15

Enduring Repeated First-Time Leadership: The Case of Africa's First Republic

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ABSTRACT

Some observers blame Mrs. Hilary Clinton's failure to become president on the unwillingness of Americans to endure repeated first-time leadership. After two successful terms of President Barrack Obama—first Black President of the United States of America, plus the first woman president—would have been a repeated first-time leadership. Generally, nations select a new type of leader once, then recline to the traditional type of leader—an older, highly educated male, from the upper class and predominant race. Liberia, on the other hand, has successively elected a first-time leader on three different occasions. What are the results in terms of human, economic, technological, and infrastructure development? The chapter examines the leadership of non-college educated military sergeant, female president on the African continent, and superstar international soccer player. It summarizes Liberia's economics and healthcare infrastructure.

INTRODUCTION

Our observation of three successive first-time leaders, from diverse backgrounds, reflects on the age-old question about the origin of leadership: Are good leaders born or do they acquire leadership by time? The below traits of our three First-Time-Leaders show that successful leaders are born, though some may be acquired (Steinhoff, 2015):

- charisma,
- professional talking skills
- confidence.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7592-5.ch015

The above traits can also be increase or decrease by time depending on experiences and situations the potential leader encounter through their lives. This school of thoughts insists that leadership cannot be acquired. The evidence to this theory come from several studies that have shown bad leadership demonstrated by certain people who have spent life-time taking courses on confidence, professional presentation, charisma without any significant change in the level of influence on others (Steinhoff, 2015). Such evidence makes it impossible to determine whether leadership is innate mostly with working on acquiring certain skills.

The second school of thoughts promotes that leadership can be acquired. There are countless number of research providing evidence that people who identify their short-comings at an early stage of leadership and make a conscious decision to seriously focus on learning skills to overcome such impediment, do succeed in demonstrating impeccable records of good leadership (Novo et al, 2017). Behavioral theories believe that people can become leaders through the process of teaching, learning and observation. Research work in this area show that leadership is a set of skills that can be learned by training, perception, practice and experience over time. It further show that great leaders commit themselves to learning as a lifetime activity. They continuously seek out development opportunities that will help them learn new skills.

One of these presidents demonstrated that a first-time leader can develop leadership by experience and interaction. However, the effectiveness depends on the leader's success in creating ascending trust spirals with knowledgeable partners who share with him the know-how and *phronesis* (Greek for practical wisdom) which they acquired by education, specialization, experience and learning in communities of practitioners. The tenure of another president shows that while first-time leaders can be born leaders, that individual has to learn tools and techniques for effective leadership. The person needs to develop perfection through education as a leader and creating practical experience in this function. Unlike an acquired first-time leadership is completely dependent on the education and experience gained in practice.

Some authors have promoted leadership as a gift which needs to be equipped with education, experience, vision, transformational change skills, and forecasting skills (Novo et al, 2017; Reynolds & Warfield, 2010). As practiced by one of the presidents we observed in this chapter, additional skills allow for a first-time leader to become more "conscious" and aware of the deeper and subtle dynamics of transformation, especially regarding people and process dynamics. The first-time leader can then apply this increased awareness to expertly lead people through the process of change to co-create a future that will enable the country to win in the ever increasingly competitive marketplace. Thus, supporting that a born first-time leader can gain greater experience over time, whereas a first-time leader who learns in the social and cultural environment, is able to acquire first-hand knowledge over time.

Africa's First Independent Country

Situated in the West Coast of Africa, Liberia compares in size with Ohio State. In 1820 the American Colonization Society (ACS) purchased a 50-mile stretch of malaria-ridden land, on the West coast of Africa between two French colonies (Guinea and Ivory Coast) and British colony (Sierra Leone), from 6 Bassa (one of 16 indigenous tribes) chieftains for \$100,000 (Tyler-McGraw, 2007). The money had been voted on by the US congress 2 years earlier to start the colony as a settlement of freed US slaves. An initial group of 86 immigrants—mostly from Georgia and the Carolinas area first arrived in Liberia and established a settlement in Christopolis (later renamed Monrovia, after U.S. President James Monroe) on February 6, 1820 (Tyler-McGraw, 2007).

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