

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY AMBASSADOR OMBENI SEFUE,  
FORMER CHIEF SECRETARY AND CHAIRPERSON OF  
UONGOZI INSTITUTE BOARD AT THE 5<sup>TH</sup> LEADERSHIP  
GRADUATION CEREMONY BY UONGOZI INSTITUTE**

13 May 2022 | Dar es Salaam

Honourable Deogratius John Ndejemi (MP), Deputy Minister of State,  
President's Office (Public Service Management and Good Governance);

Eng. Zena Ahmed Said, Chief Secretary, The Revolutionary Government of  
Zanzibar;

UONGOZI Institute Board Members: Dr. Laurean Ndumbaro, Vice-Chair of the  
Board; Prof. Samuel Wangwe; Ms. Iina Soiri; and Ms Susan Mlawi;

Dr Timo Voipio, Head of Development Cooperation, Finnish Embassy  
(representing Ambassador Riitta Swan);

Kadari Singo, CEO, UONGOZI Institute and Staff;

Prof. Pekka Mattila, Professor of Practice, Aalto University;

Class Presidents;

Graduates for Postgraduate Diploma in Leadership (PGD) in Leadership (Cohort  
5);

Graduates for the Certificate in Leadership (Cohort 2);

Incoming candidates for the PGD in Leadership (Cohort 6);

Family and friends of graduands;

All honoured guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I consider it a great honour to join those of you graduating today in celebrating  
what I hope was a time well spent at UONGOZI Institute, and in congratulating  
you for your successes in further developing your leadership skills.

There are those who believe leaders are born. There are those who believe leaders are made. For me, neither is 100% correct; there is some truth in each. That is why UONGOZI Institute is here.

At the launch of his autobiography on his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday, former President, the late Benjamin William Mkapa said:

A future leader could be born with natural leadership talents; yet even divinely bestowed qualities of leadership need nurturing and enhancement to make them relevant to contemporary challenges.

And I agree with him. However divinely gifted with leadership traits you are, UONGOZI Institute can still help you become a better leader.

For those of you graduating today, I trust you have been given what it takes to become better leaders. I believe you have received the specialised support you need to grow your strength and lessen your weaknesses. For, no one is ever perfect.

And remember: Programmes at UONGOZI Institute aim at “motivating participants to become better versions of themselves and apply knowledge gained to drive positive change.”

I hope you all leave here equipped, inspired and motivated to become better leaders as intended.

But **what is leadership?**

**Leading is about making a difference.** If you can't make a difference, and only keep the place open, and regardless of the big title you might have, in reality you are not a leader; and frankly, no one will ever remember that you were once there. And, of course, you would have wasted your time at UONGOZI Institute.

Truth is: Leadership is about **influence**, about **motivation**, about **inspiration**. It is not about the possession and wielding of power.

Some leaders can be intimidating, whether they intend to be that way or not. I was once told of a boss who when he says to his subordinates, “Sit down!” they don't even look for a chair.

But, the ability to inspire fear is not what makes a leader great or effective. Rather, it is the ability to inspire and motivate. Period. That is why a central pillar of programmes at UONGOZI Institute aims at imparting emotional intelligence and other soft skills to be able to do so.

Leadership is also about **bringing the best out of the people** around you. Remember: No one is completely useless. *“Hata maji machafu yanazima moto.”* Even dirty water can put out a fire, so says a Swahili proverb.

I have experienced this in my leadership journey. There were times when I would be told that so and so is “completely useless”; only to find out later that they were not “useless” but that the best in them had never been nudged and helped to come out. With a little empathy, sensitivity, acknowledging effort and encouragement, creating mental space for them to grow, flourish and bear fruit, I was always amazed by what they eventually became.

A few leaders may have an inherent, naturally endowed capacity to bring the best out of subordinates. But, believe me, these would be a small minority, maybe not more than 10%. The majority would need to learn and relearn how to do this. I hope that UONGOZI Institute has been able to help you with this, opening up your perspective on what can bring the best out of different kinds of people in different circumstances.

Believe me: When eventually you leave your position, a few of your staff might remember you for the great mission statements you crafted, the goals you pursued and even accomplished. But the majority will sincerely and fondly remember you, not for those fine documents and performance results, important as they are, but for how you helped them unearth the talents and abilities even themselves were not aware of.

Good leadership is **ethical leadership**. And ethical leadership is much more than not breaking any laws or rules or codes of conduct. It has to come out of a deep sense of right and wrong. Caesar's wife must be above suspicion.

Good leadership also presupposes a desire for **lifelong learning**.

The founding president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere, exhorted us to pursue lifelong learning. He said *“Elimu haina mwisho”*. Education has no end. And he lived this maxim. He had a very large library filled with books on very

many different subjects. He read a lot, as a result of which he was amazingly knowledgeable about all manner of things.

He showed us that learning and the pursuit of knowledge is, and has to be, a lifelong human endeavour. Uongozi Institute, with its programmes and resource centre, provides a perfect vehicle and opportunity for undertaking this endeavour for leaders, and I congratulate you for joining the ever-growing list of this institution's alumni.

But lifelong learning in its broader sense does not have to depend on attendance in academic institutions. The quest for new knowledge has to be self-motivated and driven. It is not just about acquiring capacity building for professional development; it is also about knowledge for the sake of knowledge, about stretching the length and breadth of the human intellect.

I always see the human mind as a rubber band; it will stretch as you stretch it. If you don't make an effort to stretch it, it will remain as short as it is. The choice is yours how you want your mind to be.

Many years ago, I had an encounter with a minister in an airport bookshop. I already had a number of books in my shopping bag. He asked me, "Ambassador, are you still reading such serious books? What more do you want to become?" I replied, "If I don't acquire new knowledge, pretty soon I become irrelevant in the changing world."

And remember the Swahili proverb: "Wealth, if you use it, comes to an end; learning, if you use it, increases."

So, I ask you to make a lifelong commitment to learn and to use your learning.

## **Conclusion**

Let me conclude by cautioning you on two fronts.

The first is in relation to **blame attribution**. When things go wrong, when targets are not met, when results are not praiseworthy, the easiest thing for some leaders to do is attribute this to poor staff performance. Maybe yes, and address it if it is; but this can also be a depiction of an inherent leadership problem. The problem could be, yes, YOU!

So, ask yourself always: Do I want to be a feared leader, an average leader, or an exceptional leader.

I hope that your time at Uongozi Institute has helped to strengthen your character, and that this will be helpful as you go back to your work; character that will prepare you well to be an exceptional leader, a leader that is able to deal with any difficulties or challenges you might face.

The second thing I want to caution you on is in relation to those **leadership challenges**.

As Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. said: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy."

And I say to you, the ultimate measure of your leadership will not be during moments of comfort and convenience, but in difficult times, because for sure difficult times will come.

Regardless of all the leadership tools and skills that Uongozi Institute has given you, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. In the real life, leadership is not a bed of roses; not least in how you handle the challenges inherent in leading human beings.

When I was appointed Chief Secretary, and hence Head of the Public Service, I received, as you would imagine, an avalanche of congratulations, but not much counsel on how to lead so many different types of people.

And you too, at your level, will lead all kinds of people: the prima donnas – vain or undisciplined people who find it difficult to work under direction or as part of a team; the know-alls, with a sense of entitlement; the well-connected who would want you to always remember that; or the rabble-rouser, thriving in office gossip, naysaying, fault-finding and trivialising everything; to mention but a few.

But take comfort in the knowledge that there are also very good people; and they are the majority. So, I would advise you to take heed to the counsel of William Shakespeare: "Love all, trust a few. Do wrong to none."

And above all, be principled and learn to balance well the boss-leader dichotomy. Over a century ago someone wrote something in relation to this dichotomy:

He said:

"The boss drives his men; the leader coaches them."

"The boss depends upon authority, the leader on goodwill."

"The boss inspires fear; the leader inspires enthusiasm."

"The boss says 'I'; the leader, 'we'."

"The boss fixes the blame for the breakdown; the leader fixes the breakdown."

"The boss knows how it is done; the leader shows how."

"The boss says 'Go'; the leader says 'Let's go!'"

**(Harry Gordon Selfridge, Sr. (11 January 1858 – 8 May 1947))**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Plato, the Greek philosopher, once said, "Wise men talk because they have something to say; fools because they have to say something."

I hope I was wise in your eyes, and have not made a fool of myself. I hope you found that I had something useful to say to you; and that I have encouraged you to go and be more of leaders, and less of bosses; though bosses you sometimes have to be, as sometimes I too had to be.

I thank you for your kind attention, and again all the best in your careers.