

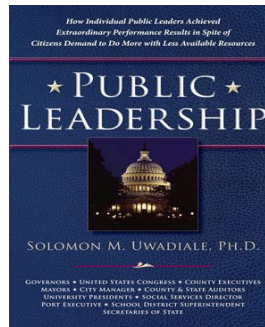
Trafton International Management Consulting Group

Leadership and Inclusiveness: How Leaders Can Promote Inclusiveness within Their Organization



Solomon M. Uwadiale, Ph.D.

LD Article Volume 04-15



Excerpts from my book: PUBLIC LEADERSHIP – How Individual Public Leaders Achieved Extraordinary Performance Results in Spite of Citizens Demand to Do More with Less Available Resources. My interview with Ron Sims.....

Ron Sims, former King County Executive and Deputy Secretary of HUD under President Barack Obama administration is a leadership expert that has built his career in public service around the progressive principles of social justice, good government, and environmental stewardship. He has a national reputation for boldness and vision, and a champion of reforming government processes to better serve the people of forward-thinking Puget Sound region of Washington State.

The Conversation:

Solomon: What were some of your critical strategies used to promote inclusiveness within your administration, as the County Executive? Specifically, how did you make sure that robust lines of communication were woven into the fabric of your organization?

Ron: When I first became Executive we were going to be as inclusive as we'd ever been in King County which means racially, economically, ethnically, and religiously. There was just a mandate that diversity works along with inclusiveness. I tell you I have some department heads that are no longer with me today because they used the wrong word. They said, "I'm tolerant."

Now, I'm Black, don't tolerate me because I'm Black. Don't tolerate me because I'm Gay. Don't tolerate me because I'm Japanese or Phillipine. Don't tolerate me because I'm from Africa. Don't tolerate me because I'm multi-lingual. Don't tolerate me. Tolerance for me is a form of arrogance. I tolerate you? That is such an arrogant statement. So when I hear people use it? They are gone because they have failed me. There is no correlation between inclusiveness and tolerance.

Inclusiveness means that you belong there. Tolerance means, I'm allowing you in my presence. So I have told people that we are inclusive, by behavior, design, and attitude. And we are, in the government. We are inclusive. And we hire the people with developmental disabilities here. Why? We believe that everybody has a role. You can't tell that we are the largest employer of the developmentally disabled in the country. These are populations that were written off. Now these people are doing valued work. I mean inclusiveness says that everybody belongs, and everybody is part of a fabric, and a network. That's what inclusiveness means to me, because a true leader doesn't talk about tolerating anybody. What a true leader talks about is including everybody.

Everybody's a part of the fabric, and everybody's a part of the element of success, and everybody's on the team, and everybody counts. And you are only as strong as your weakest member, and you only move as fast in society as the slowest member. So everybody has to count. Everybody has to be integrated. That's inclusiveness. And that's what I drive into my department heads, and I think you can see it. We have deep reach programs where we identify people who are not even in management, with the idea of moving them up into management over the long run. And we've got some incredible people, such as Theresa Jennings.

Theresa Jennings is stunningly beautiful and incredibly smart. She is an African American woman, who was buried down in the bureaucracy as a finance person who is now the director of our Solid Waste Division, and doing a marvelous job. I'm her biggest fan. I think there's nothing she can't do. She has amazing talent. But I can remember, you know all of a sudden, here she is, an African American woman, head of the Solid Waste Division, you know how rare that is in the United States today? And she did our power contracts, and I remember hearing her talk—this is before she became Solid Waste director, I didn't want her to leave. I was just trying to make sure she'd stay with us because she was such a marvelous talent. We had a power shortage in the region. Certain people said, you guys don't know what you're doing. Not only were they saying that you have a Black woman, but you have a woman there who doesn't know what she's talking about in power contracts. But she was so bright. I was sitting across from her in a meeting, and I was just looking at her and, finally, I was listening to her.

Then she said this is what you should do on the power contract. I'm sitting there thinking—hold on a second. I have a person who I think is brilliant. I do, I think she's brilliant. And she's giving me a direction as to what I should do, and she's so knowledgeable about this, but she's new to it, right? She's not a power expert, right? Here I've got Snohomish County PUD heading in a different direction; I have Seattle City Light heading in a different direction and I've got my staff up here telling me that the direction that I'm heading is different from those two entities. And she's saying; trust me, so I did.

Now Seattle is paying a billion dollars more for its juice [power] than the market demands. Snohomish County PUD is trying to figure out how to reduce its contract obligations, and we came out smelling like a rose. So I look at Theresa, because to me she embodies leadership and presence. And she has intellect and skill and ability. One might look back and say, you know,

inclusiveness. We had to get a Solid Waste Division staff to understand that you don't have to "tolerate" Theresa. She will run this place.

And that's what she does. And everybody's like me now. In Solid Waste, if Teresa wants to do this, we'll all go do it, because she's so thoughtful and approachable and like I said, I'm her biggest fan. I just think she's incredible. I think I'm lucky to know her; I'm lucky to have her as my employee. I think she's unbelievable. I think she's fantastic. I have nothing but high accolades for her. But you know Theresa would not have been a person that would have moved up in our system, had we had a "tolerant" society, and tolerant government, because tolerance is arrogance. Inclusiveness means that everybody has value, and so you have a different perspective — you look at who has value, and you "woo" people who have value.

When I first got my job as County Executive some people said certain things. The people who said those comments are no longer working for us today and the reason why is that they didn't realize the importance of relationships. They didn't realize the importance of what a person has to offer.

Nobody in this place is saying such things about Theresa anymore because she has the ability and people are attracted to her. She's got brains, she's got skills, and she's creative. She can motivate, she has presence, and she has style. Remember the issue was people working out of a tolerant environment. They were looking at who needs to be here, instead of an inclusive one, and realizing that different personalities can weave a fabric that allows you to have a successful office. I look at her office and her group, and that's where the successes come from. They are people you can rely on — they'll walk the walk for you.

So like I said, to me it's inclusiveness. You hire people — you put people in positions that understand that. Are we perfect? The answer is "no." Are we getting better? The answer is "yes, we are." General John Stanford, when he was the Superintendent of Seattle Public Schools, used to say, "I'm perfect and getting better." So I look and say, "I'm perfect and we're getting better." Here was a person who all of us today remember — he was a huge legacy in Seattle school system. But all he ever did was get people to believe in the school system.

My job is to get people to believe in King County government. I have a few people not doing that yet, but we'll get them there. We clearly have gotten the employees to believe in themselves, and that's the first step you ever take in an organization.

Solomon: So what did you do when managers tried to circumvent your directives/ or don't meet your expectations of inclusiveness?

Ron: They didn't. Circumventing is gone. People know why. Those who are here now or have been with me for a long period of time realize I'll let you hang yourself if you don't believe in inclusiveness. Everybody knows that—it's not a quota system. I had a person, who is Hispanic, and he was brutal, and he's gone. Another person who was Asian — brutal, they're gone. It is how you talk to employees, how you address employees, and basically your fundamental life's

view. Question - were these people bad or were they incompetent people? They were not bad; they were not incompetent in any way at all. They were just arrogant.

Solomon: I want to thank you for taking the time to have this conversation with me regarding your leadership experiences and challenges. I really learned a lot from you. Thank you very much.

Ron: You are very welcome. I enjoyed it very much. Good luck!

Your Next Move

Please check out our upcoming Leadership Development Workshops at www.trafton-group.com Click on Conferences/Workshops. Thanks! Sol...

Solomon M. Uwadiae, Ph.D. is a management consultant, principal of Trafton International Consulting Group, executive coach and global strategist, who consults with Fortune 500 companies as well as public sector enterprises to help develop integrated leadership strategies that positively impact business practices throughout the organization. He partners with organizations to be more efficient and effective to increase their bottom-line (profit) Solomon has more than 25 years of experience working with both private and public sector organizations, domestically and internationally. He is the author of *Public Leadership: How Public Leaders Achieved Extraordinary Performance Results, Opportunities Created By Customer Complaints: Using Customer Complaints As Your Free Research and The Rules of Engagement*. You can contact Sol through e-mail: sol@trafton-group.com or visit his website at www.trafton-group.com.