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## **Nehemiah: A Strategic Leader Worthy to be Rivalled by Organizational Leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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# Nehemiah: A Strategic Leader Worthy to be Rivalled by Organizational Leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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## Abstract

There are many examples of strategic leaders in the Bible that are motivational to the 21<sup>st</sup> century organizational leaders. Nehemiah is one of the prominent strategic leader in the Old Testament who accepted to be used of God in the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem that were in ruins after the Babylonian's attack. There are a many lessons to learn from his experience of strategic leadership especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where not many people in God and His power and enabling to achieve great things as a strategic leader. According to Ahiamadu (2011), Nehemiah's story and his work is one of the greatest in faith and perseverance. Amid great hardship and great opposition, Nehemiah strategically kept on working until he successfully completed the work. He also reinstated cultural reformation and moral life of the Jews. Chiegboka (2012) posit that Nehemiah reawakened the moral and cultural consciousness of the people through renewing the covenant they had with God and the restoration of the true worship of God which people had abandoned.

**Keywords:** *Nehemiah, Strategic Leader & Organizational Leaders.*

## **Nehemiah: A Strategic Leader Worthy to be Rivalled by Organizational Leaders of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

From the many examples of strategic leaders in the Bible, this study will focus on Nehemiah in the Old Testament. He allowed the Lord to use him in realizing the vision of rebuilding the Jerusalem wall that was in ruins. He earnestly sought the Lord in prayer for discernment of the vision and the Lord helped him to be the reputable Bible strategic leader. As a strategic leader, he communicated the goals and objectives that need to be achieved to the King and further, to the coworkers. He had to gain the people's confidence and support first and so he had to keep them informed of all the progress of the project (Ayedun, Durodola & Akinjare, 2011). Furthermore, Nehemiah employed the strategy of developing people. Nehemiah as a strategic leader new very well that he could not handle everything by himself, so he developed people under his authority into able leaders and delegated responsibilities to them (Ayedun *et al.*, 2011).

### **Nehemiah's Preview of His Work as a Strategic Leader**

One of the compelling strategic leader in the Old Testament is Nehemiah. Nehemiah was involved in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's wall following attacks by the Babylonian Empire. Nehemiah reveals an incredible capability not only in leading but also in planning, strategizing and executing this major project. This aspect is well emphasized by MacDonald (1995) positing that "if you are having any sort of a building program and are having trouble getting people involved, Nehemiah is the book to read. The leadership questions needed to get a nearly impossible job done are wonderfully exemplified in this 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Hebrew leader" p. (481).

First and foremost, Nehemiah, did recognize the political administration and defense of Jerusalem (Comay, 1978) as depicted in Nehemiah 2:7-9 "I also said to him "if it pleases the King, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the royal park, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?" (NIV, 1984).

Nehemiah did not pursue this mission and vision alone. He had people who supported him in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem's wall including; Eliashib the high priest, priests, officials, notables and the heads of artisan guilds were involved in realizing this vision. Nehemiah had this brief eloquence that seemed to succeed always in gaining the hearer's reaction (Nehemiah 2:17;

5:7; 13:25). All the participants responded with enthusiasm as he called them to cooperate in rebuilding the wall as stated in Nehemiah 2:17 “Let us rise up and build”.

The work was carried out amid rigid opposition from the Samaritans, Sanballat and Tobiah. As the opposition increased, Nehemiah came up with strategies to keep the work going on at the same time fighting the opposition as postulated in Nehemiah 4:16-18. “From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked” (NIV, 1984). What a brilliant strategy!

According to Ahiamadu (2011), Nehemiah’s story and his work is one of the greatest in faith and perseverance. Amid great hardship and great opposition, Nehemiah strategically kept on working until he successfully completed the work. He also reinstated cultural reformation and moral life of the Jews. Chiegboka (2012) posit that Nehemiah reawakened the moral and cultural consciousness of the people through renewing the covenant they had with God and the restoration of the true worship of God which people had abandoned.

### **Nehemiah’s Strategic Leadership Practical in The Contemporary Time**

A strategic leader always communicates the goals and objectives that need to be achieved to the coworkers. This is practical in Nehemiah’s strategy, that after he received the King’s approval and support, he travelled to Jerusalem and set off the task of reconstruction. This work was dependent on the good will of many people and thus Nehemiah communicated to all of them his vision before work commenced. He had to gain the people’s confidence and support first and so he had to keep them informed of all the progress of the project (Ayedun *et al.*, 2011).

Another strategy that Nehemiah employed was the ability to develop people. Nehemiah as a strategic leader knew very well that he could not handle everything by himself, so he developed people under his authority into able leaders and delegated responsibilities to them (Ayedun *et al.*, 2011). Further, Nehemiah was a great motivator, mobilizer and passionate about his work. He was a great administrator who delegated duties effectively to people based on their skills and talents.

## Nehemiah's Leadership Strategies

### Prayer

Clinton (2018), postulates that “at the heart of leadership is communication between God and the leader. A leader must know God’s purposes for a group before he can communicate them” p. (7). When Nehemiah received work of the Jews’ suffering, he immediately asked God for discernment and sought His counsel. Nehemiah 1:4, Nehemiah writes this “When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (NIV, 1984). Nehemiah realized that “Prayer is a necessary leadership habit that enhances communication with God and secures vision for ministry” p. (7). His prayers continued until the completion of the project.

### Provides a Vision

Strategic leaders are individuals who have a clear vision of the organization’s future state (Northouse, 2013). It is this vision that directs followers towards a common goal. It also empowers them with knowledge to know that they are part of the key component though serving in various capacities in accomplishing the desired goal. Nehemiah had the vision of Jerusalem’s wall in mind and he clearly communicated it to others. According to Hawkins (2008), communicating the vision as a solution to a problem that needs quick attention is very key.

Nehemiah did not state the vision to King Artaxerxes only, but he communicated to all the stakeholders in Jerusalem from whom he garnered support. This was done 3 days after his arrival in Jerusalem, there was no delay exercised here. In Proverbs 29:18 it clearly states that “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (NIV, 1984). Nehemiah successfully directed people towards the planned future goal. He energized people and garnered commitment that gave them meaning to the work and he did establish a standard of excellence (Haque, TitiAmayah & Liu, 2016).

### Leverage Power

Snyman and Kruger (2004) postulate that strategic leaders make use of all available resources of power and influence to deal with the myriad of situations that they face and they are needed to handle. Nehemiah’s position as the royal cupbearer to the King permitted him the capability to exercise influence on the King’s policies (Rom-Shiloni, 2013). This is what strategic and successful leaders do, they use the leveraging power to their advantage. Nehemiah being

known to the King as a man of integrity and character, the King granted his request and gave him letters of reference and the government funding for building materials (Skinner, 2013).

### **Foresight**

Nehemiah's request for the letters for the governors of Trans-Euphrates and that for Asaph the royal park, he demonstrated forward thinking strategic management wisdom. This is what is referred to by Schwartz (2010) as "strategic conversations" which is the process of observing and interpreting the collaboration of forces that may affect an individual, organization and community at large. By Nehemiah assessing the possible risks a head of time, he arrived in Jerusalem equipped for the task at hand.

### **Attending to the Followers Needs**

According Northouse (2013), strategic leadership comprises the course of collaboration between the leader and his/her followers. Such a leader tends to attend to his followers' needs, moral and values. Nehemiah deeply cared for the anxieties of his people. His whole vision was catalyzed on hearing of the distress of the postexilic people of Judah and Jerusalem. He was not only set out to reconstruct the walls of Jerusalem but majorly, to restore the worship of God and rescue the poor from slavery and oppression. Further, Nehemiah refused to receive his rightful allowances from the people while he was the governor but gladly cared for their moral and spiritual needs. This he achieved by addressing the issue of intermarriages (Rom-Shiloni, 2013).

### **Idealized Influence**

According to Hollander (1992), behavior is not only learnt by conditioning but greatly by emulating a person who the learner identifies with and whom he/she takes as a model. Northouse (2013) indicate that followers imitate their leaders with perfect influence because they can identify with them. Such followers appreciate that the leaders "have very high standards of moral and ethical conduct and can be counted on to do the right thing" p. (191). Nehemiah provided a positive role model to the people of Jerusalem and Judah. He reserved nothing to himself but always shared with the poor around him which is clearly captured in Nehemiah 5:17-18. By Nehemiah taking the position as a role model, he became that leader who knows the way, goes in that way and shows the way to his followers (Wang, Lu, & Liu, 2017).

### **Adaptability**

Strategic leaders adapt well to opposition and change. According to (Hughes & Beatty, 2011), “the dynamic strategic planning process must be monitored constantly for significant shifts” p. (17). By Nehemiah paying a closer ear to his people, he stayed well-informed of change and readily and effectively adapted to them. When he saw the external threats from his enemies, he prayed. Prayer was his first and foremost mechanism of facing threats. He further went ahead to develop a plan on how to handle the threats whole work was in progress. Time here was of great essence. Work was not going to stop because of the threats to cause unnecessary delays. Nehemiah welcomed conflict as a heart-shaping tool from God (Scales, Kelloway & Francis, 2014). Nehemiah prevented an impending crisis by paying attention to his staying informed of what was happening around.

### **Perseverance**

Although many people stop trying to get to their goals when trouble comes their way, those who persist, move on and they eventually see their commitment through to its completion (Hughes & Beatty, 2011). Despite the oppositions Nehemiah faced from his enemies, he persevered and showed great tenacity throughout the whole period of doing this project. He pressed forward with the task at hand and not allowing opposition to turn him off his focus. He successfully completed his project within the stipulated time.

### **How the Strategic Leadership Schools Come into Play**

Nehemiah comes out as a strategic thinker with the three core elements; he made collaborations as a priority, he thought about the present then and what he desired for the future and he proved to be both creative and analytical. Here the entrepreneurial school comes to play. The visionary process takes place in the mind of the founder who is the leader. This school stresses the most innate of mental states and processes which include; intuition, judgement, wisdom, experience and insight. The top leader is the architect of the strategy and in this case Nehemiah was (Ahlstrand, Lampel & Mintzberg, 2008).

Nehemiah’s insight and foresight led to motivation that culminated in the realization of the vision. Regardless of the challenges he faced, he rallied the entire Jewish community to contribute their skills and talents in order to accomplish the vision (Thomas, Hebdon, Novicevic & Hayek,

2015). Nehemiah took time to first assess the damage using his quantitative skills, then he came up with an action plan. The learning and planning schools come to play. The learning school proposes a viewpoint to both the leadership and the stakeholders involved in the implementation of the strategy (Ahlstrand, Lampel & Mintzberg, 2001).

Further, certain tools and techniques like SWOT analysis need to be employed in order to successfully achieve the learning process (Hughes & Beatty, 2011). The planning school posit that the entire process and plan is documented making it a distinctive process. In this school, the plan is given more importance whenever decisions are made by management. The plan in hand enables the management to acquire clear direction to move the organization forward in a steady manner. There is need for proper predictions to be made and considered when coming up with the strategic plan due to the inevitable changes (Ahlstrand *et al.*, 2008).

The need for qualitative skills were just as important as he led the entire team to realize the vision of not only rebuilding the wall, but also the restoration of the relationship between God and His people. Further, Nehemiah predetermined the course of action by laying out goals, adjusting the priorities and notifying the key workers. He allowed them time to scrutinize the vision and accept it. With all the foreseen challenges, Nehemiah put measures in place to face them and always he pointed the workers to the success of the project as he daily reviewed the plan. This is purely under the planning school that if not well done, the strategy stands to fail (Ahlstrand *et al.*, 2008).

Continually, Nehemiah promoted the vision for the rebuilding of the walls. As a strategic leader, he created the buy-in to the vision or rather support for the vision. He understood well the art and power of delegation that led to the accomplishment of the work within the set time (Hughes & Beatty, 2011). There was great opposition but this did not deter Nehemiah from accomplishing his vision. There were many uncertainties and resistance, but he kept on encouraging his coworkers to focus on the vision and sure enough, they realized their goal. Nehemiah built trust with leaders and workers. He involved them in the mission and vision and he connected to the hearts of others thus building and sustaining the momentum (Hughes, Williams & Harris, 2014).

### **How the Biblical Strategic Leadership Be Applied in East Kenya Union Conference**

East Kenya Union Conference being a Christian centered institution, Nehemiah's strategic leadership is very practical. The leadership should always seek the Lord in prayer for discernment



and get God's counsel before engaging in anything. The moment the leadership will realize that prayer is a necessary habit that enhances communication between them and God (Clinton, 2018), they will have taken the right direction to realizing the organization's vision. After discerning the vision the Lord want them to pursue, they should communicate that vision to the relevant stakeholders (Hawkins, 2008).

Further, the leadership should learn to make good use of all available resources of power and influence to enable them deal with diverse and numerous situations that they will face and will need to handle (Rom-Shiloni, 2013). Foresight is a key component for success in the Biblical strategic leadership. Have a view of the future and seriously plan and get ready to face the future. The forward thinking strategic management is the way to go (Schwartz, 2010). For any strategic leader to emerge victorious, he/she must be keen in attending to the followers' needs (Northouse, 2013). The leaders ought to make great sacrifices for their followers if they need success according to God's will. Leading by example yields much. Let the followers emulate the leaders because they can identify with them as role models (Hollander, 1992).

Further, the leadership need to equip themselves with the ability of adaptability. They need to adapt well with opposition and change. Thus, they need to keep themselves always informed of what is happening and the changes as they come (Hughes & Beatty, 2011). Finally, the leadership ought to persevere. Nothing should stop them from realizing the God given vision. They need to show great tenacity throughout their leadership tenure.

### **Conclusion**

Nehemiah's way and qualities of Biblical strategic leadership are very educative. Any leader who aspires for excellence and success need to keenly study the book of Nehemiah and see how Nehemiah accepted to be used of God to restore Jerusalem's glory that had been in ruins. Foresight is a key component for success in the Biblical strategic leadership. Have a view of the future and seriously plan and get ready to face the future. The forward thinking strategic management is the way to go (Schwartz, 2010). For any strategic leader to emerge victorious, he/she must be keen in attending to the followers' needs (Northouse, 2013). This is lacking in many organization thus having employees who don't enjoy doing their work but grudgingly do it because they do not have a better option. It is evident that very little can be accomplished from

such people. There is a lot that is expected from the leadership if they have to qualify to be strategic leaders especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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