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# *What Namibians can learn from empathic and emotional intelligent leaders*

The character traits of empathy and emotional intelligence are critical elements to inspire people by providing hope in dysfunctional societies.

In Namibia people are overwhelmed with enormous complex challenges such as inequality, the second highest inequality in the world as measured in terms of the Gini-coefficient; unemployment of 37%; and a Transparency International corruption rating of 4.8 (average) out of 10 (with 10 as 100% corrupt). It is clear why people need inspiration in the Land of the Brave.

## **OPRAH AND DIANA**

Some of the most influential and empathic leaders are Oprah Winfrey and Princess Diana. Diana was for example extremely successful in changing people's perceptions about people affected with HIV/Aids.

Oprah and Diana are change agents in changing perceptions about religion, gender and culture.

Winfrey pioneered empathy for the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender (LGBT) community. She also made it acceptable for anybody – including leaders - to talk about their emotional challenges. She demonstrates that leaders can cry on television and can and should be emotional in order to relate to people.

Showing emotion and being open about their weaknesses demonstrates leaders' vulnerability in that they are the same as "normal" people – inherently all people have similar emotions. Such similarities between leaders and people provide hope to the hopeless.

As a spiritual leader, Oprah demonstrates that positive thinking and emotional intelligence are critical in "vibrating" (sending and attracting) positive energy to enable positive change.

She demonstrates that adversity can be overcome, for example, she was sexually harassed and became pregnant at 14 years of age. Despite and/or partially as an indirect result of such enormous challenges, she excelled to become one of the most influential and benevolent women in the world.

Princess Diana was so popular that her influence became a threat to the conservative British elite and the Crown. She was the "Princess of the People", she challenged British traditions and changed the perceptions and hearts of people and the elite. She received so many flowers after her death that many streets in the vicinity of the Queen's Palace were inaccessible – an illustration of her popularity and influence. She has broken down barriers between



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the people and the Crown.

## **LEGACIES**

Other great leaders with empathy include Mother Theresa and Florence Nightingale. They served people

with passion, commitment and all their energy. They demonstrated that the greatest wealth is not material wealth, but the legacy of love you leave in the hearts and minds of people.

Compared to our Namibian leaders, especially the most important decision makers, it is not clear what legacy they want to leave, except material wealth and greed?

Leaders with empathy have the ability that people can relate to them, they can identify with them. If people can relate to leaders, such leaders can inspire them.

Leaders that act aloof and with exaggerated status conscience, find it very challenging to relate to people. Leaders need to have the ability to put themselves in the shoes of the people they want to influence.

If people perceive leaders as so im-

portant that they will not be able to understand their challenges, people tend not to approach such leaders to solve their problems.

Emotional intelligent leaders can "read" people from their body language, the most influential form of communication and an illustration of emotional intelligence. Such leaders have exceptional listening skills, e.g. Abraham Lincoln. Such leaders do not only have the ability to relate to people, they have the selfless ability to serve people.

Shejvali indicated that five percent of people surveyed contact their MP when they have a problem, 6% contact their National Council Member and 16% contact their political party official, compared to 38% and 32% that contact their religious and traditional leader (Afrobarometer Survey of 2017). In the Land of the Brave, it seems that leaders are not serving the people. Namibian leaders need to learn how to relate to people, to be empathic and emotionally mature.

## **References**

Shejvali, N. 2018. Afrobarometer Survey 2017. Though a leader in gender representation, Namibia still has work to ensure full equality. Dispatch no 224, 24 July.