

Executive coaching

Reflections on Leadership, Responsibility, and Respect

Stepping into an executive role, whether as the head of your own business or as a leader within an established company, comes with significant pressure and responsibility. Achieving such a position is rarely accidental—someone somewhere noticed something unique and valuable in you. My own journey to executive leadership is a testament to the impact of dedication, reliability, and a willingness to exceed expectations.

From Hard Work to Executive Status

Interestingly, most of my executive appointments were not the result of academic qualifications, but rather of consistently performing above expectations in the roles I was hired to do. I was often the "Johnny on the spot," ready to tackle challenges as they arose and committed to delivering results, which naturally led to promotions and greater responsibilities.

I recall an interaction with an employment agency that asked about my academic degrees. While I hold a trade certificate in panel beating, what truly set me apart was my "DBE"—a Degree By Experience. Over 53 years in top management roles, I learned that experience is an invaluable teacher. My career progression was built on doing what was required, taking initiative, and never shying away from difficult or unfamiliar tasks.

Embracing Responsibility: The Buck Stops Here

One of the most critical lessons I learned early in my career is that many people hesitate when confronted with tasks they do not fully understand or fear they might get wrong, especially in front of others. This reluctance creates opportunities for those willing to step forward.

A memorable example of this came during a road trip with my daughter. Over the course of four hours, I fielded 23 calls, each presenting its own problem. My approach was always the same: listen, ask questions, and then assure the caller, "Leave it with me; I will get that cleaned up for you." My daughter later asked when I planned to accomplish all the things I had promised. I explained that many people lack the necessary skills to resolve certain problems and, left to their own devices, would likely leave these tasks incomplete. By taking ownership, I could ensure results and peace of mind, often working through the solutions in my mind overnight and addressing them first thing in the morning.

The Rewards of Leadership

What did I gain from being the person where the buck stops? First and foremost, job satisfaction. There is a unique pride that comes from knowing you are the one people rely on to get things done. Additionally, I was rewarded financially, earning a \$498,000.00 pay slip for five years in a row. But looking back, the most important reward was something less tangible yet far more meaningful: unquestionable respect.

Conclusion

Executive roles demand much more than technical skills or academic credentials. They require initiative, accountability, and the willingness to do what others might avoid. The real degree that matters in leadership is often earned through a lifetime of experience—by being present, stepping up, and consistently delivering results. In the end, respect and job satisfaction are the true hallmarks of a successful executive journey.