

Zeti Akhtar Aziz: International thoughts on leadership – “Too many bosses, too few leaders”

Opening address by Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz, Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia, at the launch of Leading Voices and the International Centre for Leadership in Finance's (ICLIF) latest publication, Kuala Lumpur, 23 May 2011.

* * *

Today I am pleased to launch the first session of LEADING VOICES, an international thought leadership series presented by The ICLIF Leadership & Governance Centre. This is where you will come up close and personal with exceptional and extraordinary leadership from various industries to exchange leadership thinking and realities in our now highly dynamic operating environment.

Any individual who has assumed a leadership role – at any level in any type of organisation needs to have a platform that will provide an opportunity to meet other leaders and leadership thinkers to exchange and learn from each other's leadership experience. Leading Voices is that platform. These sessions will be arranged by ICLIF, starting with this inaugural session today.

While leadership requires distinct behaviors, there are wide ranging leadership styles and approaches that have been successfully adopted. Moreover, the now highly dynamic operating environment has become more complex, ambiguous and uncertain. What are the ways then to lead and bring success to our organisations in this more challenging environment.

While the foundations for leadership are essential, we also need to keep abreast of the new developments taking place and the new leadership capabilities needed in this ever changing environment. Having an understanding of the range of possibilities, having the ability to make sound strategic decisions and excelling under the different circumstances also becomes important.

The ICLIF leadership centre was established in 2003 as part of Bank Negara Malaysia's commitment towards providing a focused and coordinated approach to enhance leadership capability and to develop world-class leaders. It was initially for the financial services industry, post the Asian Financial Crisis, with the aim of producing a new generation of leaders to steer the industry in a fundamentally transformed financial landscape. It has since been extended to corporate and public sector participation. The Centre, the first of its kind in Asia, focuses on the emerging market experience, contextualized mainly to Asia.

ICLIF has now grown to offer a wide range of services in the areas that include leadership development, organizational performance, corporate governance and advisory services that are designed to enable sustainable and responsible business growth. In 2010, the ICLIF has further repositioned itself through the setting up of a new governance centre with a vision to promote high impact boards and develop world class directors who are advocates of best practices and excellence in corporate governance. Known as the Financial Institutions Directors' Education Program or FIDE, it is currently the only governance initiative in the region that focuses exclusively on the financial sector and has trained hundreds of directors since its inception. The Centre has now been renamed as the ICLIF Leadership and Governance Centre with an enhanced faculty comprising renowned experts from the world leading institutions. ICLIF is also currently expanding its outreach beyond the Asia Pacific, Middle East and African regions.

These initiatives are based on the conviction that human capital development needs to also include the leadership level. Human capital development in general is of strategic importance and is integral to the success of any organisation. Building human capital capability has never been more important in today's world. Successful businesses of the future will be the

ones that are able to fully harness their pool of talent. This more difficult operating environment demands new abilities to manage the new challenges and the new emerging opportunities, and the ability to deal with the high level of unpredictability.

The role of leaders in such an environment is to create organisations that are able to effectively respond to the changing environment and at the same time nurture flexibility and innovation. Also important is that it is also supported with high values. Effective leaders in this era, will be those that can deliver results in this environment. It is all about having clarity of purpose and aligning the entire organisation to achieve these goals. Thus, the investment in leadership development is vital to equip leaders and future leaders with the necessary capability to perform their role in the organisation.

This brings us to the second part of our event today – the launch of one of ICLIF's research studies which has been written by Mr. Rajeev Peshwaria, the CEO of ICLIF, published globally as a book entitled "Too Many Bosses, Too Few Leaders" by Simon Schuster of New York. The book illuminates on what it really takes to be an effective leader. The book extends beyond the advice on the distinct behaviors and attributes required of leaders to providing "a clear path", "a road map" to achieving leadership excellence at every level in the organisation.

In my own experience, the core foundations to achieve superior performance set out in the book is essential. Defining with great clarity the purpose and values of the organisation and articulating it throughout the entire organisation is key towards achieving these desired results. Then, it is sustaining the high level of energy and talent at all levels of the organisation is what will ignite the motivation to achieve the breakthroughs – that will achieve the ground breaking results – that will bring the organisation to the frontier of the business.

Energy is the one thing you need heaps of in order to lead. Such energy to stay on course despite the most formidable of obstacles needs to be sustained. Not only must you find your own sources of energy, but you also have to energise others around you. The book discusses how to find that personal energy and how to energise others in an intrinsic way.

I will let Mr. Rajeev Peshawaria give you a bit more flavour about the book later. You will find it both practical and inspiring. We are also pleased to have with us today Datuk Seri Tony Fernandes, the Group CEO and Director of AirAsia Berhad who is also the founder of Tune Group Sdn. Bhd. He is a corporate leader and a personality that needs no further introduction. He will today share his leadership experience in our inaugural LEADING VOICES session.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to officially release "Too Many Bosses, too Few Leaders".