

**WORK ETHICS AND UNIVERSITY MISSION: CONTRIBUTING TO
EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE DELIVERY**

BEING THE TEXT OF THE LECTURE PRESENTED AT THE

1ST REGISTRY LECTURE

AJAYI CROWTHER UNIVERSITY, OYO

ON

27 MAY, 2015

BY

CHIEF MOJISOLA LADIPO, FNIM, mni

“Think not of yourself as the architect of your career but as the sculptor. Expect to have to do a lot of hard hammering and chiseling and scraping and polishing.” ~ B.C. Forbes

“Good, better, best. Never let it rest. Until your good is better and your better is best.” ~ Tim Duncan

“If a man is called a streetsweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of Heaven and Earth will pause to say, ‘Here lived a great streetsweeper who did his job well.’ ~Martin Luther King, Jr.

‘ ...to provide a living and learning environment which is influenced by Christian ethics and principles. –ACU Mission

...(the) Vision and Mission, as a Christian University, are founded on the Protestant ethics of hard work, justice, truth and honour.....

Protocols

The Vice- Chancellor,

The Registrar,

Other Principal Officers

My Colleagues

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Preamble

“You are requested to please feel free to decide on a topic that would be of relevance and interest not only to the Registry staff but also to the entire University community and the general public. In choosing the topic, you may wish to look at the right place of the Registry in University Administration and strategies for maintaining that place in the face of various challenges facing the Registry in the

performance of its roles in the recent and present times,” so said the letter of invitation to me from the Chief Scribe of this University. My first instinct was to check the website of the University and find out its Vision and Mission as these statements encapsulate the ideals and values of the University. It was no surprise that the core values of Ajayi Crowther University are in tandem with her Mission and Vision. They include; excellence, spirituality, moral rectitude, hard work and diligence. I thereafter suggested two topics to the Registrar and I was not surprised when the topic dealing with ethic was the choice. Ethics, to me make a man even though the saying goes, ‘manners maketh man.’ The ethics of a people, a nation, a family determine their reputation, their success or failure, their development or lack of it, regardless of the material, physical, intellectual endowment God has given them. If in doubt, take a look at the sorry state of our blessed Nation! You can definitely know a person’s relationship with God by his ethics, regardless of what he says to the contrary.

Introduction

Universities, worldwide have their own peculiar structure of governance and administration. This structure is hierarchical, bureaucratic but collegial. Decisions are arrived at by consensus through the committee system rather than by fiat. Autonomy and academic freedom are the cornerstones of teaching, research and service which are the main functions of the University. Yet, the Institution, like the Church, is governed and administered through a set of rules, regulations and traditions. Therefore, when the Church decides to employ people to run an institution on its behalf, it is expected that such an institution should operate in a way that emphasizes church principles and ethics. Are there any lessons for us as workers, whether teaching or non-teaching, as we strive to support and actualise our University’s mission and the quest for excellence? Do we, as workers, in our own little, subtle, often unnoticed ways, and through acts of commission and omission, contribute to the death of the ideals on which University education in this country was built and the dearth of commitment to institutional excellence, even in some faith based universities? It is on this note that I introduce the topic of my discourse today, i.e. **Work Ethic and University Mission: Contributing to Excellence in Service delivery.**

Conceptual Framework

In this discourse, we shall define a University and describe its mission. We shall examine the concept of ethic, and, in particular, work ethics; and **the interplay between work ethic and institutional excellence**. We shall consider the peculiar problems within our environment that militate over and over again, against the internalization of work ethics, thus detracting from our laudable objectives of contributing to our university's avowed mission. We shall consider, briefly, the contentious issue of 'the right place of the Registry in University Administration and strategies for maintaining that place in the face of various challenges facing the Registry in the performance of its roles in the recent and present times.' We shall conclude by proffering suggestions on excellent service delivery by all workers, especially the Registry, through 'best proven practices' by all stakeholders in pursuit of the mission of the university.

The University and its Mission

Constitution of a University

Any Institution, including Universities, is made up of people. It is not the magnificence of its buildings or the quality of the research work done in it, in spite of their great significance to image and reputation that constitute a university; rather, it is the people. The University of Ibadan Act, Section 2 (1) defines the **Constitution of the University** as follows:

'The University shall consist of :

- a) A chancellor;
- b) A pro-chancellor and a council;
- c) A vice-chancellor and a senate;
- d) A body to be called congregation;
- e) A body to be called convocation;
- f) The persons holding offices constituted by the First Schedule of this Act and not mentioned in the foregoing provision of this section;
- g) All graduates and undergraduates; and
- h) All other persons who are members of the university in accordance with provision made by statute in that behalf.'¹

¹ University of Ibadan Calendar 1996-1998, pg 32

The point being made here is that, by inference, the people, in particular the workers make the University. From the Vice- Chancellor and his senate to the majority of those who make up the bodies called congregation and convocation, as well as ‘all other persons’, whether members or not, but who are holding offices, we are referring to the workers. The students are very important and they often say, rightly too, that without them, there will be no university. However, students are there because there are teachers and those other workers who are giving service. These workers, especially in the so called service departments or units, may be unsung and unappreciated, but they make the university possible to work and live in. Even the computer has still not been able to displace people.

In order of hierarchy, as we have illustrated above, there is, first and foremost, a proprietor; that person or group of persons who conceives the notion and envisions the institution and sets out its purpose. This person is embodied in the office of the chancellor. Thereafter, the governance machinery is put in place to make policy, whether managerial or academic, hence Pro-Chancellor and council, Vice-Chancellor and senate. To actualize the policies, a Management is put in place to, as the name implies, to manage the institution on a day-to-day basis, hence the ‘other persons holding offices....’ The community comes next in the bodies called congregation and convocation before we have students! The issues raised above are meant to illustrate the vital role of workers, whether academic or not, in the fulfillment of a University’s mission and in shaping its fortunes. In other words, the Institution is built by people, supported by people and sometimes destroyed or maimed by the quality and ethics of the people who make up its workforce, its students and its management.

The University and its Mission.

A university is defined as an institution of higher education and research, which grants academic degrees in a variety of subjects. It is essentially a community of teachers and scholars and its main functions are teaching, research and service.

As universities became increasingly market driven, it became imperative for them to define their vision and goals and to articulate their mission statements as part of their strategy for effective and efficient management.

A Mission Statement is ‘a clear, succinct presentation of an Institution’s purpose for existence’.² Ideally, it drives the actions of that organization. Such mission statements also serve as points of differentiation for marketing and branding purposes in the face of stiff competition for customers, i.e. students, funding agencies, investors, research collaborators and even government interventions. For example, the mission of this university encapsulates what it sets out to achieve and it declares:

- i. **Provide admission to students and employment to staff without discrimination on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity and disability, religious and political persuasions**
- ii. **Produce graduates who are imbued with fear of God and a sense of service to humanity and who are endowed with a well-rounded education to enable them (to) operate successfully in the Nigerian environment, both as private entrepreneurs and as top-flight workers in the private and public sectors of the nation’s economy**
- iii. **Provide a living and learning environment which is influenced by Christian ethics and principles.**

Any discerning mind knows that there is a difference between going to school and receiving an education, between consuming by rote and learning, and between contributing to society and just running a business. With these mission statements, Ajayi Crowther University seeks to differentiate itself as an institution where people receive a holistic formation as students, teachers and researchers of the highest ethical standards. When the Institution invests in human resources, it is expected that such people, at whatever level and regardless of their area of expertise, would, along with all the stakeholders, work in concert to add value to the institution, commit to its core values and buy into the fulfillment of its mission.

Ethics

According to Wikipedia,³ “Ethics investigates the questions “What is the best way for people to live?” and “What actions are right or wrong in particular circumstances?” In practice, ethics seeks to resolve questions of human morality,

² Center for Business Planning: <http://www.businessplan.org/mission.html> 12/3/09

³ www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethics 10/05/15

by defining concepts such as good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and crime” In my opinion, ethics generally, involves making choices about one’s moral convictions on every day issues and occurrences and in every sphere of human endeavour. It is about deciding to enter into a Faustian agreement for that promotion or work hard and maintain Christian principles, even if it involves being passed over! It is a lot of hard choices all the way.

What then is work ethics and how does it impact on the mission of the university?

Work Ethics

Work ethics is a set of values based on the moral virtues of hard work and diligence. It is also a belief in the moral benefit of work and its ability to enhance character. An example would be the Protestant work ethic. It includes being reliable, having initiative or maintaining social skills. It is not only how one feels about his or her job, career or vocation, but also how one does his/her job or carries out the responsibilities attached to that job. It is about honesty and accountability, what is right and acceptable as against what is wrong and underhanded. In the final analysis, it is about doing your job well, valuing what you do, and having a sense of purpose or being part of a greater vision.

Ethics are intrinsic; they come from within. From a Christian point of view, work ethic comes from God the creator. God made humans in His image, and His Word proclaims these various work ethics -- honesty, integrity, doing a job well, being above board and being accountable. The Christian worldview holds fundamentally to two central work ethics -- humility and the treatment of others. Humility is being humble, no task is too demeaning. Humility involves servitude, which emphasizes placing other peoples’ needs before one’s own, treating others with decency and respect, valuing their contributions and knowing their worth. In other words, as bosses, we may disagree with others, but we should still treat them with respect. How many of us remember to say ‘thank you’ when we are served, even when it is that person’s duty? How many remember to add ‘please’ to our requests? When we are given compliments for having accomplished a task, do we return the compliments or simply accept it as our due? Yet, our attitude to those who give us service, whether they are our peers, our bosses or our subordinates, members of our family, perfect strangers

says more about our persons, our faith, our values than we realize. It defines our level of confidence in our skin.

In order to work in tandem with the mission of this university or any university worth its salt, excellence in all areas of service delivery is non-negotiable. Service delivery includes teaching and mentoring of students and junior faculty and non-teaching staff alike, provision and maintenance of those basic necessities that facilitate an environment conducive to living and learning, conducting research in full compliance with ethical standards and Christian principles, managing university resources, human, material and natural, in a transparent, accountable, cost effective and environmentally friendly manner. The identified essential work ethics that are mandatory for any staff committed to University mission are as follows:

1. **Attendance/ Job presence:** arrives in the office, lecture or any scheduled event, including meetings on time; notifies colleagues and superiors in advance of planned absences; and makes up assignments punctually.
2. **Character:** Displays loyalty, honesty, trustworthiness, reliability, dependability, initiative, self-discipline, and self-responsibility
3. **Teamwork:** Respects the rights of others; encourages and facilitates cooperation, pride, trust, and group identity, and displays a ‘we’ attitude, going beyond job specification to achieve team objectives; seeks opportunities for continuous learning from peers, subordinates and superiors.
4. **Appearance:** Displays appropriate dressing, personal grooming, hygiene, and etiquette, is concerned about the cleanliness of the work environment
5. **Attitude:** Demonstrates a positive attitude and has realistic expectations of self and others, displays a customer-centric attitude to service
6. **Productivity:** Follows safety practices; conserves materials; and follows directions/procedures and produces excellent work in a timely and cost effective manner. For the teaching staff, he or she prepares for teaching assignments thoroughly by updating knowledge regularly and being familiar with recent updates in the particular area of specialization. Evidence of this will be the quality of teaching and research or contribution to the academic reputation of the University.

7. **Organizational Skills:** Manifests skill in personal management, time management, prioritizing, flexibility, stress management, and proactively and positively embraces change
8. **Communication:** Displays appropriate written, verbal and nonverbal as well as the necessary listening and reading skills
9. **Cooperation:** Displays leadership skills; appropriately handles criticism and complaints; demonstrates problem-solving capability; maintains appropriate relationships with superiors and peers; and follows chain of command, working within the defined university structure
10. **Discernment:** Deals appropriately with cultural/ ethnic diversity and does not engage in harassment of any kind.

The list is endless. However, the discerning mind will observe that it reads like the Ten Commandments handed down to Moses on Mount Horeb! If the Management, staff and students of this University were to observe even five of the constituents of work ethics, what an excellent university we would have.

Environmental Deterrents

However, our very environment in this country militates against our best intentions. These include **underdevelopment, and corruption**, to mention a few.

One of the features of a good work ethic is Job Presence, for example. As defined above, it means that the worker arrives in the office, lecture or any scheduled event, including meetings on time; notifies colleagues and superiors in advance of planned absences; and makes up assignments punctually. That is a major task in a country with advanced underdevelopment, where there are no structures or institutions, resulting in total absence of basic infrastructure in spite of the stupendous blessings bestowed on us by God and in spite of our obvious religiosity. We lack public transportation, fuel, electricity, water, security, and everything that makes for efficiency, effectiveness and progress! How can one expect good work presence from a member of staff in such a situation, talk less of productivity? Can one really expect good interpersonal relationship from angry and hungry people? Do these lack of basic infrastructural facilities in themselves not breed corruption and dishonesty? How do we install transparency when the oversight institutions that should enforce laws as a deterrent to unacceptable

behaviour are comatose? The mind boggles! It is difficult to work hard and 'not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,⁷ with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men,⁴' when the sycophants and tale bearers get all the rewards and the corrupt officials get all the praise and the titles.

Yet, it is like the story of the chicken and the egg. Which comes first? We have no institutions and facilities because we lost our values and morals long ago. And at the same time, we have no morals or values because the basic necessities of life are missing, even for the rich, such that everyone is worried, anxious, and ready, even determined to join the fray for the least gain. Yet, we shall be saved by our individual contribution to the life and duties that God entrusted to us, regardless of the circumstances.

The Place and Role of the Registry in Institutional Mission

The Registry is that department where the University records, Seal and Articles of Authority and other documents pertaining to the governance, administration and management are kept and administered. The success or otherwise of the collegiality of the university is embedded in the duty of the administrator as secretary to all committees of Council, Senate, Congregation and Convocation. Hence, the Registrar, and by extension, his or her officers, is the official in charge of the life and times of the University. The Administrator in the institution keeps the system running by operating its bureaucratic and collegiate structure along predetermined rules and regulations which may change from time to time. It is part of the Administrator's job to facilitate these changes and manage them.

The Registrar, as the Chief Administrative Officer of the University provides services to enable the university to perform its tripartite function of teaching, research and community service by guiding and facilitating the work of the many committees set up for the proper running of the institution. He or she ensures the correct and proper interpretation and application of the laws, rules, and regulations of the university and the implementation of policy decisions of the governance bodies. The duties or functions of all career Administrators are embedded in the duties assigned to the Registrar. The Registry therefore represents the necessary

⁴ Ephes.6:6-7 NKJV

bureaucracy for the coordination of activities in the university. It should be noted, however, that the Registry extends to all the clerical, secretarial and administrative assistants who keep and administer the records, traditions, culture, and documents that actualize the academic values of the University

Needless to say, the effectiveness of the Registry is measured in terms of the achievement of the institutional goals and the extent to which these are met legally and legitimately to the satisfaction of the various constituencies. It stands to reason, therefore that the contributions of career Administrators are pivotal to the achievement of university mission and goals.

The Registry, Work Ethics and Service Delivery

We mentioned earlier in this discourse that in order to work in tandem with the mission of this university or any university worth its salt, excellence in all areas of service delivery is non-negotiable. The most critical service delivery lies in the Registry; namely, human resource management, admissions and examinations, student, staff and alumni welfare and records, committee work and other general day-to-day issues. Unless these services are diligently, transparently and cost effectively delivered in a timely and friendly manner, the Registry department becomes a cog in the wheel of progress for the university.

To illustrate the significance of adhering to good work ethics in the Registry towards excellence in service delivery, we shall consider one of its elements, namely, **cooperation**. This we defined as displaying leadership skills; appropriately handling criticism and complaints; demonstrating problem-solving capability; maintaining appropriate relationships with superiors and peers; and being able to follow the chain of command, while working within the defined university structure. In any service industry, there must be complaints and criticism. How do we as administrators respond to these? If we courteously, patiently but knowledgeably respond to staff, students and the general public, we would have gone a long way to build a solid reputation for our university as an institution that is responsive and customer friendly. What about having appropriate relationship with superiors, peers and subordinates and being able to follow the chain of commands?

The Biblical injunction says, ‘Go to the ant, O Sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer, or ruler, she prepares her bread in summer

and gathers her food in harvest'.⁵ How many workers actually diligently apply themselves unless the boss is around to breathe down their necks? How many take the pains to invest in their own career through appropriate acquisition of knowledge, skills and the right attitude except strictly for promotion purposes? Yet, this is the minimum that God expects from each of us and these are virtues that engender self fulfillment.

The appropriate communication skills enhance efficiency and effectiveness in the University. The main task of any University Registry is to communicate accurate information to others in a professional and courteous manner, and in a way that convey a willingness to assist, work to resolve conflicts and to identify solutions in which all parties benefit, and demonstrate concerns for treating people fairly and equitably by correctly interpreting and applying rules and regulations in a fair, just and humane manner.

As the saying goes,

Do not waste a minute, not a second, in trying to demonstrate to others the merit of your own performance. If your work does not vindicate itself, you cannot vindicate it, but you can labor steadily on to something which needs no advocate but itself.⁶

No matter how much significance a department wishes to arrogate to itself, the performance of that department ensures or endangers its relevance and eventual survival.

Of course, change, being a constant factor in life, global, local and technological changes also affect the relevance or otherwise of professions. For example, in spite of the indispensability of medical doctors to the well being of humanity, as a profession, doctors are no longer regarded as the all in all they were some decades ago. In this era of the internet, the computer guru probably takes first place in the

⁵ Prov.6. 6-8

⁶ Thomas Wentworth Higginson, "Letter to a Young Contributor," *The Atlantic Monthly*, April 1862

economy and the banker is the one most people want on their protocol list. The same goes for the professionals and careerists in universities. Time was, when the Registrar was next in line to the Vice- Chancellor on the scale of authority. I hesitate to make a guess on the level in hierarchy now. With this development, Registries of Universities will really need to go the extra mile, be innovative and proactive as well as highly knowledgeable and professional to retain their visibility and pride of place. It all begins with work ethics. The application of ethical principles to day to day administration ensures excellent service delivery which in turn enables university mission. That should be the goal of every Administrator and in fact every worker.

Conclusion

In this discourse, we defined a university, its constitution and mission and the place of the worker in fulfilling institutional goals of excellent service delivery. We examined the concept of ethics and work ethics in particular, along with some of the qualities that make up work ethics. We considered a few problems, peculiar to our environment, which may hinder our best efforts to be ethical in our jobs. We discussed the place and role of the University Registry in providing excellent service to the institution's stakeholders. We affirmed that an efficient, effective and highly ethical Registry is critical to the actualisation of University mission. We, however, noted that, in spite of the centrality of the Registry to Institutional goals, the inevitable global, local and technological changes, to name a few have eroded the pride of place formerly occupied by the Registry in times past. We suggested that the eventual fate of the Registry in universities depend on her ability to redefine and improve itself through the quality, timeliness, and ethical delivery of service to the community. We surmised that work ethics are Christian work values and should ordinarily form the basis of our work experience whether in the Registry or elsewhere, as long as we work in the university.

On a final note, I believe that given the caliber of the staff that have decided to work in this University, the future is bright and, cooperating with each other and adopting the highest ethical standards in accordance with the stated goals and values of ACU, they will collectively achieve the aim of the founding fathers, which is to make a positive difference in the educational landscape of Nigeria and

produce graduates who would have been truly found worthy, both in character and learning because they learnt from the best, they learnt from you and I.

Thank you for your attention.

Chief Mojisola Ladipo, mni.