

Accounting for your Stewardship

The concept of stewardship as it applies to those who lead or manage organizations, revolves around the placing of trust in the individual (s), with the understanding that they are account for their performance. Good stewardship is said to be grounded in the effective communication. Those who volunteers who lead and manage organizations such as trade unions, have an ethical responsibility to act on behalf of others and to honor the responsibilities of service, rather than to pursue one's own self-interest.

Whereupon trade unions operate on the principle of volunteerism, it is known that the management of some trade unions is placed in the hands of appointed and/or paid officers. Such persons are employed under a contract of employment. There are responsible and accountable to the Executive Board or Council which is made up of volunteers. The Executive Board or Council assumes the responsibility for directing policy. The paid officer who serves as the General Secretary or Deputy General Secretary, is required to report to the Executive Board.

It should not be overlooked that the membership at all times retains control of what should happen within the organization. It is the membership who entrust responsibility to the elected officials to nominate persons for appointment to key paid positions such as the General Secretary. Usually, they reserve the right to ratify these appointments. Basically speaking, the membership are the ultimate decision makers in the hiring and firing process.

Executive Boards or Councils are elected and entrusted to act on the behalf of the membership. It is not to be expected that they are reduced to operating on the basis of reporting on a daily basis for the purpose of decision making. However it is expected that the leadership establishes means of communication to keep the membership inform on matters. The process of consultation and dialogue should be an integral part of the communication process. Members should be insistence that these means of communication are practiced

The membership must take a greater interest in what is happening within their organization, and demand information from the leadership and management. There is the need for the membership to be forceful in putting forward their demands on those who lead and manage. This notion held by leaders and some managers that it is the membership or the people have elected them, and therefore they have an exclusive right to act on their behalf without interference, must be out rightly dismissed as a misguided notion and nothing short of arrogance.

The absconding of the responsibility by the membership to call on trade union leaders and management to account for their stewardship as it relates to decision making and actions, can only be to the detriment of the organization. By not paying attention, being inactive and non-participatory in the life of their trade union, members are contributing to a sense of inertia to prevail. This can gives rise to abuse of power and authority that can potentially damage the image,

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reputation of the organization. Further, it can be the basis for creating divisions and tensions amongst sections of the membership.

Trade union members must understand that beyond having to pay membership dues, an observing the rules of the organization, that they have an overarching responsibility to hold those whom they elect or appoint, to act in their interest, to account for their stewardship.