

# **A Better Future: Teaching Leadership in African Schools**

**Marett Peets**

In order for Africa to reach its full potential, the next generation must be taught leadership and governance from a young age. The African Leadership Academy is a school for 16 to 19 year olds, based in Johannesburg, with branches in both Mauritius and elsewhere in South Africa. Its founder, Fred Swaniker hopes to open twenty-five more academies throughout the continent by 2060. He received a commendation from U.S. President Barack Obama for helping young people hone their leadership skills to provide a more optimistic future across the continent. Swaniker told CNN “the greatest equalizer in life is education” (Parke, 2016). He believes this long-term approach will help bring Africa to the forefront of the world stage through leadership and entrepreneurship while helping to bring prosperity to all, not just to the privileged. He “realized leadership was the single biggest thing that was holding us back from achieving our potential as a continent” (Parke, 2016). He hopes that young leaders will help move the continent towards an era of prosperity, development, and peace.

Swaniker envisions a better future for the continent as a result of improved leadership skills of both those in government and business owners. “If you can give people a chance to get this education, then we can actually get people out of poverty, and into the middle class, and then eventually creating wealth for others” (Parke, 2016). By providing economic stability, violence is statistically less likely to occur. His mission is to empower young leaders, as he believes they are the continent’s greatest resource, and conversely he feels too much focus has been put on raw resources that can be mined and sold for profit in the global north (Parke, 2016). Swaniker also hopes to encourage “ethical leadership” for Africa’s future (Parke, 2016). This ethical leadership will help to establish a more stable political environment for development and growth.

Swaniker believes that African businesses will be more innovative and dependable if the upcoming generation has the opportunity to gain experience as entrepreneurs before entering the workplace and setting up their own companies. This will contribute to a strong and sustainable economy throughout the continent, which will in turn spark development and provide opportunities for a younger generation. The Academy has 1,085 internship opportunities and job placements for its students to gain this experience (African Leadership Academy). He hopes this idea will spread not only within more African Leadership Academies, but also in other schools throughout the continent (Parke, 2016). Currently, the school currently boasts students from 45 countries and a network of 853 ‘young leaders’ (African Leadership Academy). This statistic in itself shows the promise this sort of education holds for the future.

Swaniker understood the impact of leadership and responsibility from a young age. He gained the position of headmaster at his mother’s school in Botswana when he was only 18. It became the best school within the country under his leadership after only five years. He says his mother told him that three things drive success within schools: “great teachers, great students, and [a] great curriculum” (Parke, 2016). He

has lived in ten countries and was born in Ghana. At Stanford Business School, he was an Arjay Miller Scholar, which indicates that he was in the top 10% of his graduating class. He had an impressive work history before starting the African Leadership Academy. After working with McKinsey and Company, he became a Fellow at the Aspen Institute's Global Leadership Network (Nkosi, 2016a). Therefore, one can understand why he aspires to motivate his students to become leaders and entrepreneurs.

Some examples of the success stories from the African Leadership Academy's past ten years are:

"Sophie Umazi Mvurya is a young woman from Kenya who is getting some much deserved attention. She was profiled on BBC as one of the "Ten Teens Who Changed the World" for developing a social campaign called "I am Kenyan". She has since been awarded the Stanford Africa MBA Fellowship Program to study an MBA at Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Ngor Majak Anyieth from South Sudan was named a 2015 Dalai Lama Fellow for his project "Build South Sudan." He is currently completing a bachelor of Pre-professional Studies at the University of Notre Dame in the United States.

Lillian Maboya from South Africa is an ALA alumni who graduated in 2008. She has taken up a position with GE's Johannesburg office in their Power and Water Department. She is also ALA's first ever graduate to serve on ALA's Board of Trustees along with experienced executives from across Africa!" (Nkosi, 2016b)

In addition to these notable stories, there are the 128 students who have attended well-recognized universities all over the world and attained \$74 million USD in scholarships (African Leadership Academy). These universities included Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and Georgetown among many others. Perhaps more notably, 131 businesses both for and not for profit have been founded in 21 countries by the Academy's alumni. This illustrates that the mission of the Academy is already being accomplished even though it has only been open a decade.

By training an entire generation to become leaders and entrepreneurs, Swaniker is helping to transform the continent into a place for sustainable growth and development throughout the next generation's working years. Furthermore, this new generation will also help root out corruption and methods of manipulating the population. If Swaniker's students make the change he hopes they will, we will witness a tremendous increase in Africa's productivity and economic stability.

*You can check out the African Leadership Academy's Twitter @ALAcademy and their website at the following link: <http://www.africanleadershipacademy.org>.*

## **Bibliography**

Parke, Phoebe. "The academy revolutionizing African leadership." *CNN*. Cable News Network, 9 Nov. 2016. Web. 04 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/06/africa/fred-swaniker-teacher-leadership-africa/index.html>>.

Nkosi, Thuli. "Fred Swaniker: A Quest to Transform Africa." *African Leadership Academy*. N.p., 27 Dec. 2016. Web. 04 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.africanleadershipacademy.org/fred-swaniker-quest-transform-africa/>>

Nkosi, Thuli. "Young African Leaders Making an Impression on the World." *African Leadership Academy*. N.p., 15 Dec. 2016. Web. 04 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.africanleadershipacademy.org/young-african-leaders-making-impression-world/>>.

"Home." *African Leadership Academy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 04 Jan. 2017. <<http://www.africanleadershipacademy.org>>