



When Leaders Fall – A Respectful View

Everyday the news headline features stories and events that reflect an aspect of our society at any given time. Sometimes this reflection is positive and other times it is negative; more often than not—due to the nature of the news media today—the reflection is negative. However, beneath most headline news lie lessons—important messages that may be obvious or subtle.

Most people, by now, have heard of the recent story about the demise of Governor Eliot Spitzer of New York State (USA). The allegation against the governor—as reported through March 14, 2008—is very serious and indeed consequential. For the benefit of the Ektimis international audience a brief background on the allegation is presented in the sidebar.

Since March 10, 2008 when news reports about the governor broke there have been varying opinions—expressed through every news media imaginable—by news analysts, politicians, legal practitioners, legal scholars, psychologists, psychiatrists, professional counselors, TV comedians, and more. Some have downplayed the significance of the alleged sexual misconduct by the governor, while others have underscored it; some argue that unless a crime was committed there should be no discussion of any significant penalty because the governor is, after all, human like the rest of us; and others make the case that if the allegation of sexual misconduct is true, and there was no crime committed, the governor should still pay a price.

Within 48 hours of the story breaking the governor announced his resignation, thus lending some truth to the allegation. Which ever way you look at it and whatever position you may hold, the sad truth is that the governor's family—his wife and three children—are innocent victims in all of this. If the allegation—of sexual misconduct and any other alleged crime—is fully uncovered and proves to be true, his family will continue to suffer dearly for his actions for a long time to come. They—the family—are at the heart of current and more collateral damage that will ensue in the aftermath of any proven allegation, and they will need the continued support of those close to them and the well wishes of everyone. This is the first major lesson in this unfortunate case.

Background on the Allegation (As of March 14, 2008)

On Monday, March 10, 2008 headline news across the United States broke a story about an alleged connection of New York State governor, Eliot Spitzer, to a prostitution ring that operated in New York, Washington, Miami, London, and Paris. The ring, which managed about 50 high-priced prostitutes, had been exposed by federal authorities not long ago.

Reports indicate federal wire taps that implicate a specific client (Client #9)—believed to be the governor.

Sources: NY Times, Int'l Herald Tribune



From a vantage point of “respect” there are many factors at play here and these (factors) convey many other lessons—for all of us, especially young adults, persons in positions of power, and individuals aspiring to positions of authority. In *RESPECT: Gaining It and Sustaining It* I cover, in great detail, the topic of Positional Respect, one of the three types of respect between people. I distinguish this type of respect as the only one that is a result of a role, or position, that one may hold in society and, as such, is inherited by the occupant of the position while serving in that role.

I also present—in the chapter on Positional Respect, in the book—ten societal drivers that create roles and positions in society that command positional respect. These drivers—societal forces—have existed for centuries and are in place for the benefit and advancement of society. One of these drivers, *leadership*, is primarily responsible for the role of a governor in today’s society. Long after an occupant has served tenure in a role of leadership many others will do the same (serve in that role) thereby affording society the continued benefit of leadership.

A role of governor, being one of leadership, comes with certain standards established by society. These standards are set very high—given that a governor is an elected position—and they include moral (ethical) standards. Moreover, these standards are in place because society values the role of a governor very highly—relatively higher than most other roles that exist—and this high valuation allows an occupant to command due respect (Positional Respect).

If the allegation against Governor Spitzer is ultimately proven to be true, with or without a criminal component, then he would have indeed brought disgrace to his office and his resignation would be justified, regardless of how we may all feel. This action—his resignation—preserves the integrity of the role of governor for the benefit of future occupants and for the sake of the same society that created it in the first place. This view does not reflect one of self-righteousness or superiority, nor does it reflect better of one political view over another, but rather one of valuation for the good of society. To remain in his role would have sent a clear message that society does not uphold the high standards associated with the role (of governor) and this, in turn, would have reflected a society that devalues itself—that is, shows lack of respect for itself—and this point needs to be emphasized and taught. Respect, after all, is all about valuation— isn’t it?

The Two-edge Sword

A role that commands Positional Respect comes with higher standards established by society. To serve in such a role an occupant must adhere to these higher standards to preserve the integrity of the position.

If society permits an occupant to violate these standards, with no consequences, it devalues itself.



Many have questioned why the governor—a highly educated man and an accomplished professional—could apparently have exercised poor judgment and allegedly engaged in high risk behavior; some have leveled accusations of hypocrisy against him, while others have seized the opportunity to ridicule him. The answer to the question of why he may have exercised poor judgment is best left to him and his family to resolve and work through; he may yet face prosecution—and possibly imprisonment—for any proven criminal action. Regardless of the way he may have acted (professionally) in the past to engender current extreme public outcry, he has done the honorable and respectful thing—promptly resigned his position—thus preserving the integrity of the role of governor for future occupants. This (again) is a point that needs to be underscored. While the investigation into the allegation against him continues, the most appropriate reciprocate action by everyone would be to respect his privacy—if not for his sake, at least for the sake of his innocent wife and children—as he deals with the difficult task of healing his broken family. (Reader views welcome: ektimis@ntaiwo.com)

Cheers and thank you - N. Taiwo