

Henri Boyi: A Multi-Faceted Leader
By Melanie Chin

Upon sitting down with Henri Boyi, it is immediately evident that he is a warm and inviting individual, and after some conversation, it's also clear that the man is truly a remarkable leader. Boyi suggests that, "No one is born a leader; it is something that is learned." He firmly believes that leadership should be encouraged from an early age so that it can be cultivated, for there are values associated with leadership that must be learned. He elaborates, "We were not born with these values; rather we develop them through our education: at home, at school, in the community." When questioned on what he would consider the most vital quality in a leadership context, Boyi indicates *respect* and *authenticity*. He implores a need for a high degree of integrity and humility directed towards others because "if we intend to lead people, we have to gain respect from them." He stresses that effective leaders should be true to themselves, and true to others. "We should be able, as leaders, to really truly care and show that we truly care, otherwise it is a façade, an improvisation."

Henri Boyi is an extraordinary individual, whose entire life is inundated with leadership. He himself says taking on positions of responsibility is an "ongoing journey." Boyi was born in the small country of Burundi (Campus 2008), located in Eastern Africa. By grade six, he had already become inspired by his teachers, whom he describes as being "fair and caring," to pursue a career as a leader and educator. In high school, Boyi recalls his principal cultivating leadership within the student body by encouraging the formation of clubs which provided opportunities for organizing peers. Throughout all four years of his undergraduate degree at the University of Burundi, Boyi humbly recalls how he was a student representative, directing events and acting as a role model for other students. By

age 31, Boyi was elected Dean of Arts and Humanities at the University of Burundi, taking on a leadership role and even presiding over some of his former professors! By 1994, he arrived in London, Ontario, embarking in a career as a professor at Western University, while serving as a board member within many humanitarian organizations.

Presently, Boyi is passionately dedicated to the continual development of the course, "Rwanda: Culture, Society and Reconstruction," which he founded at the University of Western Ontario. The academic calendar describes this as "an interdisciplinary experiential learning course, where students have the opportunity to learn more about society and about themselves by serving in an international social and cultural setting" (French 2012). In brief, students spend a semester studying the history and culture of the Rwandan people, and then accompany Professor Boyi to Rwanda in order to fully immerse themselves in a vastly different cultural environment. While in Rwanda, Boyi's students spend four to six weeks participating in service-oriented learning activities. For the morning, each student is placed in an elementary school classroom and responsible for teaching English to youth; then, in the afternoons, the students visit orphanages or rehabilitations centres and engage with the children there. Tara Dupuis, a former participant of this course, comments that the experiences "undoubtedly had an impact on the lives of the people we worked alongside, however the impact that was made on [us] is something that will last a lifetime for we shine with respect, integrity and leadership" (Dupuis 2010). Boyi appears to be so committed to leading such a course at Western because it encourages students to become leaders, not followers.

Although an exemplary professor, with deep interest in his students' holistic education, Boyi is also a notable and active leader within the London community. This past year, he was honoured by the London Mayor's office with recognition for his humanitarian

work in the community. An article written by *Western News* describes how Boyi “has been a highly-engaged citizen and a tireless advocate for [immigrants]. He has made a personal commitment to ensure full integration of children in their new London schools and even facilitated a children's summer camp program” (Campus 2008). Currently, Boyi chairs the Board of Directors for the Cross Cultural Learning Centre (CCLC), which is an organization that strives to “provide settlement services and support to newcomers in the London community, and to promote intercultural awareness and understanding” (CCLC 2012). This is consistent with Boyi’s leadership style because he believes true leadership hinges upon universal values. He maintains, “If you can be a leader here, you should be able to be a leader anywhere else for universal human values can be applied anywhere you go. *That is true leadership.*” Thus, he generously contributes his time and energy to an organization like the CCLC, which is dedicated to promoting a welcoming, accepting and diverse London community.

In addition to his involvement with the CCLC, any person with an internet connection at their disposal is quickly capable of finding a myriad of other organizations to which Boyi has been linked. These include the United Way, the Central Council for London Immigrants, and the Board for the Francophone Community. Paired with his responsibilities as a dedicated educator, it is no surprise that when queried about the challenges he faces, Boyi cites time constraints the primary impediment. He explains how it is difficult to “find time to do all the things I really want to do. I can’t be everywhere, and I can’t do everything. So yes, lots of commitments are a challenge.” He faces this obstacle by openly recognizing and accepting he has limitations, which can be observed as yet another indicator of his remarkable leadership qualities.

At the culmination of the interview, Boyi remarks on the Culture of Leadership course, offered by the English department at Western. He pronounces, “I’m very glad our

faculty is starting such a course on leadership. I believe that the Arts and Humanities faculty is a very appropriate place to study leadership because we have the word 'humanities' in our name. If we are to label ourselves as humanists, we must learn about caring and supporting other human beings...I hope this new course will achieve that goal."

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