



CLILEADERSHIPBRIEFING

# Stay With Me

*Mane Nobiscum*

Leadership Accompaniment for the Future Think Tank

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Adapted from a reflective presentation delivered at The Exchange Junction hosted by SIVIO Institute

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## Source Note

This briefing is an edited and expanded written adaptation of a reflective presentation delivered by Dzikamai Bere at The Exchange Junction on 29 July 2026. It draws on the findings from the 2025 Civic Leadership Pulse Report, forthcoming from the Civic Leadership Institute.

## Executive Summary

Across the continent, civic leaders are being asked to carry institutions, movements, communities and public expectations through a period of turbulence. This briefing argues that the leadership model required for this moment is leadership accompaniment: long-term relational support given and received in real time, in the dust of action.

The briefing begins with the image of the baobab. The baobab stands across generations. It has deep roots, enduring strength, nutritious fruit, medicinal seeds and longevity. It offers a civic metaphor for the kind of institutions and leadership practices that can survive beyond grant cycles and serve the next generation.

The central claim is simple: no one doing the important work of serving our communities should walk alone. Civic leaders need companions. They need communities that anchor them, peers who carry values with them, institutional architecture that makes courage cultural, memory that keeps leadership historically conscious, and the next generation prepared to carry the mission forward.

### Core proposition

The leader of the future is a believer, giver and receiver of leadership accompaniment.

## Key Messages

- Civic leaders are operating in a dark night marked by deep isolation, executive loneliness, values on trial and extreme exhaustion.
- Sustainability must be understood as generational service, not only organisational survival.
- Leadership accompaniment goes beyond episodic capacity building; it is relational, long-term and grounded in the real conditions of leadership.
- The framework of accompanied leadership has five movements: walking with communities, leading with others, leading through architecture, leading through memory and generational accompaniment.
- Think tanks and civic institutions must become clock builders: institutions that build systems, values and organisational capacity that can keep time beyond individual leaders.



Figure 1: Baobab Leadership - deep roots in the community, serving across generations. Image is AI generated.

# 1. The Dark Night of Civic Leadership

The conversation on future leadership must begin by naming the condition of the leader. In the journey leading to the formation of the Civic Leadership Institute, more than 43 leaders participated in reflective spaces over 18 months. Across these conversations, a quiet plea emerged: stay with us; stay with me.

This plea was not always expressed directly. Sometimes it appeared as tiredness. Sometimes as uncertainty. Sometimes as the weight of unspoken responsibility. At other times, it appeared as the simple desire for a trusted companion who understands the burden of civic leadership.

## Four Pressures Facing Civic Leaders

| Deep Isolation                                                                       | Executive Loneliness                                                                          | Values on Trial                                                              | Extreme Exhaustion                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Leaders are cut off from genuine accompaniment, reflection spaces and trusted peers. | The weight of decisions, responsibility and uncertainty often rests on one pair of shoulders. | Principles are challenged, compromises are demanded and integrity is tested. | Emotional, mental and physical depletion accumulates through sustained struggle with scarce resources. |

These pressures make leadership accompaniment urgent. They also explain why the future of think tanks and civic organisations cannot be secured by technical competence alone. The civic leader is not merely managing programmes. The leader is carrying moral responsibility, institutional continuity and community expectation.

## 2. The Baobab as a Leadership Lens

The baobab offers a powerful African image for thinking about sustainability. It is not a seasonal plant. It stands across generations. It feeds, heals, shelters and outlives. For civic leadership, the baobab invites us to ask whether our organisations can serve beyond the next reporting cycle, beyond the next project period and beyond the tenure of the current leader.

### Baobab leadership

Deep roots. Enduring strength. Nutritious fruit. Medicinal seeds. Longevity.

The question is therefore larger than survival. A surviving institution may still be hollow, tired and unable to serve. The deeper question is whether the work can continue to nourish the next generation. Leadership for the future must therefore build institutions with memory, courage, values and continuity.

## 3. What Is Leadership Accompaniment?

Leadership accompaniment is long-term relational support given and received in real time. It happens in the arena, in the dust and in the battle. It is not simply advice offered from a distance. It is a disciplined commitment to walk with those carrying the work of serving communities.

Accompaniment is therefore goes beyond conventional capacity building. Accompaniment stays longer. It attends to the leader, the assignment, the community, the institution and the burden that comes with responsibility.

The future-ready leader must therefore be a believer in accompaniment. This leader must also be a giver and receiver of accompaniment. The leader who cannot receive accompaniment is in danger of isolation. The leader who cannot give accompaniment fails to reproduce courage, values and wisdom in others.

### Guiding Philosophy

Leadership accompaniment means no one doing the important work of serving our communities should walk alone.

## 4. The Framework of Accompanied Leadership

The framework developed in the presentation has five movements. Together, they describe the forms of companionship that future civic leaders and think tank leaders need if their work is to outlive crisis, personality and short-term funding cycles.



### 4.1 Walking with Communities

The first companion of the civic leader is the community. The leader of the future is rooted in the communities they serve. They do not enter communities as distant experts or owners of solutions. They enter as servants, listeners and fellow sojourners.

This requires a shift in posture. Communities are not merely beneficiaries, respondents, evidence sources or programme targets. They are sites of knowledge, moral authority and memory. A leader who walks with communities learns to hear what the soil knows.

For think tanks, this means that policy analysis must remain connected to lived realities. Communities must not simply validate what has already been designed. They must accompany the thinking from the beginning.

### 4.2 Leading with Others

The second movement is leading with others. The past often celebrated the heroic leader: the courageous individual, the face of the struggle, the person who carries the institution by force of personality. That model is fragile. Organisations built on individual brilliance are vulnerable when that individual tires, exits or closes the ceiling above emerging talent.

The future-ready leader builds a tribe of values. This is not a fan club around the leader. It is a community of people who can carry the mission, protect the values and exercise leadership even when the founder, director or public face is absent.

Leading with others means creating space for talent to grow. It means trusting younger colleagues, sharing platforms, multiplying responsibility and building loyalty to the mission rather than dependence on a single personality.

### 4.3 Leading through Architecture

The third movement is leading through architecture. Courage is often attributed to the individual leader, but courageous decisions are frequently made possible by the architecture behind the leader. This architecture includes

systems, values, policies, decision-making practices, accountability mechanisms, institutional memory and organisational culture.

Where architecture is weak, courage remains personal. Where architecture is strong, courage becomes cultural. The question is no longer whether one leader is brave enough. The question becomes whether the institution has been built in such a way that different leaders are likely to make principled decisions because the architecture supports them.

This is the shift from time telling to clock building. Time telling responds to every emerging issue. Clock building creates the systems that allow the institution to keep time even when the current leader is no longer present.

## 4.4 Leading through Memory

The fourth movement is leading through memory. African futures cannot be imagined without historical consciousness. We cannot build the future by pretending we are starting from nowhere.

Memory keeps leadership humble. It reminds leaders that they inherit struggles, wounds, wisdom, sacrifices and unfinished work. It also helps leaders recognise the woundedness of the communities they serve. A leader without memory can easily reproduce harm while believing they are offering solutions.

For think tanks, memory is a discipline of historical consciousness. It asks: what legacy is in the past? What wisdom must be carried forward? What pain must not be reproduced? What unfinished work has now been placed in our hands?

## 4.5 Generational Accompaniment

The fifth movement is generational accompaniment. We must be obsessed with setting the next generation up for success.

Generational accompaniment begins with the recognition that the future is already among us. The people who will carry the mission forward are often already in the room. They are watching how leadership is exercised, how decisions are made, how mistakes are handled and how values are protected.

The task of the future-ready leader is to invest in their growth, give them opportunities, share knowledge, build confidence, walk beside them and step back when they are ready. The strongest legacy is not that the leader was indispensable. The strongest legacy is that the mission travelled well into capable hands. This is why John C. Maxwell teaches, “Legacy is not what you leave for people. Legacy is what you leave in people.”

# 5. Implications for Think Tanks and Civic Institutions

The Exchange Junction brought together institutions that do the work of thinking, convening, analysing, interpreting and shaping public questions. The leadership challenge for such institutions is not only to read the times. It is also to build the clocks that help societies, organisations and communities navigate time differently.

Think tanks and civic institutions can therefore serve the sector in at least four ways:

- Create accompaniment spaces where leaders can think honestly about isolation, fatigue, values and institutional risk.
- Develop tools that help organisations strengthen architecture: governance, decision-making, succession, systems, culture and accountability.
- Build communities of practice where leaders learn with peers rather than consume expertise alone.
- Invest in generational leadership pipelines that prepare the next generation to inherit institutions with courage and clarity.

This is the leadership task that sits beneath sustainability. It is not only a fundraising question. It is a question of institutional imagination, civic architecture and accompanied leadership.

## 6. Conclusion: Stay With Me

The title of the presentation, Stay With Me / Mane Nobiscum, is more than a phrase. It is the cry of leaders carrying heavy assignments in a difficult season. It is also a call to think tanks, donors, communities, peers and institutions to stay close enough to understand the burden.

The future of civic leadership on the continent will be shaped by leaders who know how to walk with communities, lead with others, build through architecture, listen through memory and prepare the next generation. These are leaders who understand that no one doing the important work of serving our communities should walk alone.

### Invitation

Stay with communities. Stay with one another. Stay with the values. Stay with the architecture. Stay with memory. Stay with the next generation.

## Conference Report Summary

In his reflective contribution, Dzikamai Bere argued that the future of think tanks and civic institutions on the continent depends on a renewed model of civic leadership: leadership accompaniment. Drawing on the image of the baobab, he framed sustainability as generational service and named the pressures facing civic leaders, including deep isolation, executive loneliness, values on trial and extreme exhaustion. He proposed a five-part framework for accompanied leadership: walking with communities, leading with others, leading through architecture, leading through memory and generational accompaniment. The central message was clear: no one doing the important work of serving communities should walk alone.

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## About the Civic Leadership Institute

The Civic Leadership Institute is a civic leadership think-and-do institute working at the intersection of thought leadership, leadership accompaniment and institution building. CLI serves those who serve communities by accompanying leaders, strengthening institutions and contributing to the architecture of the new civic renewal.