Book Review

The Promises of Giants: John Amaechi

I had the privilege of attending the CST Conference on 15th and 16th October. This book review comes on the back of hearing John Amaechi speak and being gifted a copy of his book. John's session came at the end of the conference, after two days of intensive activity and at the close of Term 1. The conference hall was a little less full than it had been earlier in the event, and I was feeling somewhat weary. However, this session delivered the equivalent of a much-needed afternoon espresso. It spoke to me in a way that is difficult to put into words. It felt like a calling.

John is a giant, standing at 6 feet 10 inches tall. Drawing on both his physical presence and other aspects of his identity, he shared personal stories of power, exclusion, discrimination, influence, and the potential to do both good and harm. The session began in an engaging and interactive way, centred on self-awareness. He took us on a journey that led to a simple but powerful realisation: we are all a giant to someone.

Understanding myself has been central to my own leadership practice, my personal development, and my doctoral studies. I know that, as a leader, I have power. How I choose to exercise that power is governed by my values. Through my behaviour, I can include or exclude, to build up or tear down, to generate hope or hopelessness, to be kind or unkind. We all possess this power because we are all a giant to someone.

The book sets out fourteen promises for self-development; commitments the reader makes to become the very best version, of themselves, the best leader. These include acknowledging mistakes, committing to success even when it is difficult, embracing vulnerability, challenging discrimination, accepting discomfort, rejecting excuses, looking after oneself, being present, taking responsibility for culture, recognising the gap between what is said and what is truly experienced, and having the courage to call out dissonance however uncomfortable it may be, to be critical, of both ourselves and others, being kind.

As we prepare for Term 2, I have been reflecting on the promises I will carry forward.

John speaks passionately about his mother as a guiding light in his life. He tells the story of waiting up late for her to return home after a shift as a doctor. She was a single parent in Stockport, raising three children. John stayed awake well past his bedtime because he had missed her and wanted to give her a giant's hug when she arrived home. Because he loved her so much.

It was after midnight when she finally returned. Yet it was not his affection that concerned her. It was the fact that he had not completed his chore of hoovering the landing. Her message was simple: if you really loved me, you would have done your chores. Hoovering the landing was the expression of love. It was the act of putting values into behaviour.

The lesson for the giant, for me, is that it always begins with self. I must recognise the impact of my behaviour.

Everyone is a giant to someone. Everyone's behaviour has an impact.

I will hoover the landing.

Kerry Jordan-Daus CEO

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go" Dr Seuss