

## **My Dearest Reader,**

If this letter has found its way to you, then it is most certain that you are now part of CFI. First and foremost, allow me to extend my sincerest congratulations, for you have indeed found yourself in the right place. How do I know this? Because I, too, once stood where you now stand.

It has been years since I bid farewell to the halls of my dear fellowship, and yet, the lessons I gathered within those walls remain ever close to my heart. Permit me, then, to indulge you in a tale—one that I hope shall inspire and strengthen you for the path ahead.

Picture this: A girl with terrible stage fright. Every time she stepped on stage, she stuttered. She fumbled over her words and barely made eye contact. That girl was me when I first joined CFI.

And yet, fate—or rather, divine orchestration—had a most curious way of leading me to a destiny I had never dared to imagine. For though I entered CFI as the most timid of souls, I would one day leave its embrace as the first female pastor ever and a secretary-general for three years.

A most extraordinary turn of events, would you not agree?

Enough of the Bridgerton-style English—let me get real with you now.

And since I'm a storyteller, you're in for a long story- there are so many stories I could tell, but I will short it to just 4 stories, let's start with this one.

## **STORY 1: The Role I Never Wanted**

When I was first given the role of Secretary-General (SecGen), I didn't want it. In fact, I ran from it. I ran from leadership entirely.

At the time, our fellowship was still young—either just a year or two years old. I didn't want to be given any leadership position, so I did my best to stay in the background. But somehow, despite my best efforts, I was chosen. That was how it all started.

I won't sugarcoat it—my first year as SecGen was rough. The president and I were not on good terms. We just didn't see eye to eye. There were constant back-and-forth disagreements, misunderstandings, and moments where it felt like we were always clashing.

I still remember our first handover ceremony. That very day, we argued. In meetings, there was tension. If you're someone currently struggling with leadership conflicts, trust me—I understand. I've been there.

Looking back, I can't even pinpoint exactly what caused the friction. But what I do know is this: the same person I struggled to work with back then is now someone I reach out to anytime I need help. As I write this in 2025, he's one of the people I can count on.

So, what changed?

I had to sit myself down and ask: *What does leadership truly mean?*

Whether I was older, smarter, or had more ideas than him didn't matter. He was my president. And if I was going to serve, I had to do it wholeheartedly. Leadership isn't about how much you know—it's about loyalty, submission, and responsibility.

Most importantly, I realized that how I treated my leader would reflect in how those under me treated me.

That first year humbled me. It shaped me. And it prepared me for what was to come.

Moving on to the next story

## **STORY 2: Correcting with One Hand, Appreciating with the Other**

Like I said earlier, my fellowship was still young. We were just in our first few years, unlike other fellowships that had been around for decades. Because of this, most of our leaders were 100-level and 200-level students—people who were still new to both school and fellowship responsibilities. Getting commitment from them was tough.

Now, as a Secretary-General, you know the role required me to be the enforcer—the one who ensured that things were done right. And because I was always the one correcting people, I quickly noticed something: people were scared of me.

There were times I'd call to check up on leaders, and they wouldn't pick up my call—not because they were busy, but because they thought I wanted to scold them over a late report or something they forgot to do.

That's when I realized something: If all people hear from you is correction, they will begin to avoid you. But if you balance correction with appreciation, they will listen.

So I had to learn how to scold with one hand and appreciate with the other.

One particular Sunday, I knew the leaders had been falling short in many areas—lateness, lack of commitment, and other responsibilities not being taken seriously. And I knew that in our meeting that day, I would have to be firm.

But I had a plan.

With my own personal money, I bought snacks and drinks for everyone. I had already informed my president about what I was going to do.

During the meeting, I went all out. One by one, I called out the issues. If you had defaulted in one area, I asked you to stand. If you had been late, I asked you to stand. No one was spared. I made sure they understood that my corrections were never personal—they were simply because I wanted them to do better.

After the intense session, I did something unexpected.

I brought out the snacks and drinks and shared them with everyone.

That day, a shift happened. The leaders began to see me differently. They understood that correction was not punishment—it was guidance. And most importantly, they saw that I genuinely cared about them.

This was something I continued to do throughout my leadership. Because the truth is, when you only scold, people begin to think you're attacking them. But when you balance correction with appreciation, they are more likely to receive your words with the right mindset.

And that's what CFI is all about. Love.

We correct because we love. We serve because we love. We build each other up because we love.

So, if you're currently in leadership, here's my advice: Learn how to stretch out the arm of love even while you correct. It makes all the difference.

### **STORY 3: Being Proactive**

Like I mentioned earlier, when I joined CFI, we were still in our early years. We didn't have the kind of well-established systems that older fellowships had. Everything was still taking shape, and because of that, there were a lot of gaps—one of which was structural reporting.

There was no clear way for unit leaders to submit reports. No format. No proper documentation. And because of that, things were all over the place.

Now, I could have ignored it. But one thing CFI taught me was proactiveness—if you see something that needs fixing, don't wait for someone else to do it. Fix it.

I sat down and asked myself some key questions and from there- I designed a monthly report template for all unit leaders. Each leader received a structured format to fill in at the end of every month, making it easier for them to submit detailed reports.

This single decision changed the way our fellowship operated and when it was time to defend reports at the Board of Executives (BOE), there was no confusion—everything was documented properly.

Being proactive isn't about waiting for the perfect system to appear. It's about seeing what's missing and stepping in to build it.

And that's what leadership is about.

## Final Year: Learning to Balance Leadership and Friendship

By my final year, I had a unique challenge ahead of me. I was going to be a pastor, a secretary general, and at the same time, still remain a friend to the people I was working with.

Funny behind story: I was given the nickname PSG( Pastor Sec Gen)

It was one thing to lead people who saw me as their senior in fellowship. But here I was, in a CEC filled with my course mates—people I had laughed with, studied with, and been friends with for years. Most of us were in 500-level engineering, and suddenly, I had to work & lead them while maintaining our friendship.

One of the toughest moments came when one of my course mates had an issue that required disciplinary action. She had done something that, according to fellowship standards, was unacceptable, and as secretary, I had to spearhead her suspension.

Imagine the dilemma—this was someone I would still sit with in class, gist with, and hang out with. But at that moment, I had to set friendship aside and do my duty.

I remember calling her and saying, *"This is me speaking to you as the secretary, not as your friend."* I explained what she did wrong, why the disciplinary action was necessary, and what she needed to do moving forward.

The amazing thing? It didn't affect our friendship. She understood that I wasn't acting out of malice but out of love and responsibility. When it was time for official fellowship matters, I handled them as a leader. But outside of that, we were still cool.

This experience taught me boundaries—how to switch between roles without compromising relationships. I learned that you can be a friend and still hold people accountable. Leadership isn't about favoritism; it's about doing the right thing, even when it's hard.

And that's a lesson I still use today. Whether in family, friendships, or career, knowing when to correct, when to support, and when to simply be present is key to growth.

## Final Words

Leadership isn't always easy. People will annoy you, your efforts might go unnoticed, and sometimes, it will feel like you're doing more than your fair share. But at the end of the day, a work done well is a reward for the person who does it.

And so, with great patience and unexpected lessons, I learned to serve. But let's be honest—back then, I was just trying to survive those meetings without losing my mind! Lol.

So to every CFI leader reading this—keep serving. You may not see the full impact now, but trust me, you're being shaped for something greater.

With love,  
Semiosoghwe Elias

Secretary General, CFI FUPRE - 2021