

Leading Before the Title

Inside CIHP's Leadership Think Tank

By Queen Esther Markson

Leadership is not defined by the title you hold but by the influence you create

This powerful message resonated throughout the Leadership Think Tank, an inspiring leadership development programme organized by the Centre for Integrated Health Programs (CIHP) on 9th of July 2026 under the theme; **Leading Before the Title**. More than just a one-day event, the Think Tank challenged young professionals to rethink leadership not as a destination marked by promotions or prestigious titles, but as a daily commitment to influence, service, and personal growth. Designed specifically for CIHP's summer interns, the programme combined practical learning, interactive discussions, mentorship, and problem-solving exercises to prepare participants for the realities of leadership in public health and beyond. It encouraged them to think critically, embrace responsibility, and develop the confidence to lead from wherever they are.

Setting the Tone for Intentional Leadership

The day began with registration, followed by welcome remarks from **Dr. Bola Oyeledun**, Chief Executive Officer of CIHP, and **Dr. Andy Eyo**, Chief Executive Officer of Excellence Community Education Welfare Scheme (ECEWS). Their opening remarks established the central message of the programme: leadership begins long before an official appointment or promotion. Participants were reminded that effective leaders are intentional about their personal development. Leadership, they emphasized, is demonstrated through responsibility, integrity, consistency, and a willingness to serve others regardless of one's position.



Attitude: The Foundation of Leadership

An energetic icebreaker session titled '**Attitude Is Everything**' immediately transformed the atmosphere. Through engaging conversations and reflective exercises, participants explored what it truly means to be a leader and how personal attitude influences opportunities, relationships, and professional success. The session highlighted that technical expertise alone is insufficient. Great leaders distinguish themselves through resilience, humility, integrity, emotional intelligence, effective communication, and a positive mindset. These qualities, participants learned, often determine long-term success more than academic qualifications or professional experience.

Learning from Leaders Who Have Walked the Journey

One of the most memorable moments of the Think Tank was the Fireside Chat, where participants engaged directly with accomplished professionals who shared honest reflections on their leadership journeys. The distinguished panel featured; **Dr. Charity Usifoh Chenge**, Chief Executive Officer, Women in Public Health Leadership for Africa (WIPHLA), **Dr. Chris Obanubi**, Chief Executive Officer, Indigo Global, **Miss Praise Izinyon**, Chief Executive Officer, **Alex and Grace Izinyon**



Intern



Organizers

Foundation and Dr. **Prince Onua** a Medical Doctor. Rather than delivering formal lectures, the speakers shared personal stories of challenges, setbacks, career-defining decisions, and lessons learned along the way. Their conversations explored themes that resonate with emerging professionals: integrity, accountability, resilience, curiosity, continuous learning, mentorship, teamwork, adaptability, and purpose-driven leadership. They encouraged participants to view failure as an opportunity for growth, remain teachable throughout their careers, and understand that genuine leadership is rooted in service rather than recognition.

From Conversation to Action

The programme moved beyond theory through the Leadership Think Tank Challenge, facilitated by **Pharm. Ike Abobarin**. Working in teams, participants analyzed real-life leadership scenarios, developed innovative solutions, and presented their recommendations before colleagues and facilitators. The exercise demanded critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, effective communication, and the ability to make sound decisions under pressure—competencies that define successful leaders in today's dynamic workplace. Following the presentations, **Dr. Bola Oyeledun** and **Dr. Andy Eyo** led a reflective session that focused not only on the quality of the proposed solutions but also on the leadership behaviors demonstrated throughout the exercise. Participants were reminded that effective leadership involves listening actively, embracing diverse perspectives, communicating clearly, and guiding teams toward shared goals.

Character Before Competence

Another highlight of the programme was **Dr. Bola Oyeledun's** presentation, *Attitude Is Everything*; Her message reinforced a timeless leadership principle: while knowledge and technical skills may open doors, attitude determines how far a leader can go. She challenged participants to intentionally cultivate excellence, discipline, consistency, humility, courage, and a lifelong commitment to learning. Above all, she emphasized that leadership begins with developing the right mindset; one that values growth, embraces challenges, and inspires others through character. Her presentation served as a reminder that



Dr. Bola Oyeledun, CEO, CIHP



Dr. Andy Eyo, CEO, ECEWS



Dr. Charity Usifo Chenge, CEO, WIPHIA



Dr. Obanubi, CEO, INDIGO Global



lasting influence is built not only on competence but also on integrity and emotional maturity.

Building Networks, Sharing Ideas

The programme concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session, a working lunch, participant feedback through a Mentimeter survey, and closing remark. Beyond the structured sessions, the Think Tank created valuable opportunities for networking. Interns connected with experienced professionals and peers from diverse academic and professional backgrounds, exchanging ideas, building relationships, and expanding their professional networks. These informal conversations proved just as valuable as the formal sessions, reinforcing the importance of collaboration and mentorship in professional growth.

A Personal Reflection

As a participant, I left the Leadership Think Tank with a renewed understanding of what it truly means to lead. The programme challenged me to think differently about influence, responsibility, and service. It reminded me that leadership is less about authority and more about character. It strengthened my resolve to become an intentional leader, one who values integrity as much as competence, listens before leading, and seeks opportunities to make meaningful contributions wherever I serve. Perhaps the greatest lesson I carried away was that leadership does not begin when someone gives you a title. It begins with the decisions you make every day, the values you choose to uphold, and the impact you have on those around you.

Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders Today

In a world where titles often receive more attention than character, the CIHP Leadership Think Tank offered a refreshing and timely perspective. Through insightful conversations, practical challenges, honest reflections, and meaningful mentorship, the programme equipped young professionals not only with leadership knowledge but also with the confidence, mindset, and practical skills needed to create positive change. Its greatest achievement lies not simply in preparing participants for future leadership positions but in inspiring them to become leaders today—wherever they find themselves. For every intern who walked into the room seeking leadership lessons, the Think Tank offered something far more valuable: the conviction that true leadership begins long before the title.