

Baber shares insight on being authentic, flexible leader



FNU Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching Prof James Pounder (left) and Gareth Baber during the conversation series.

Fiji's national 7s team Head Coach, Gareth Baber, highlighted that successful leaders must have philosophies that drive their approach, whilst being open to dialogue with others in their team to ensure that everyone achieves the set goals and objectives.

Speaking at the Fiji National University's (FNU) Successful Leaders in Conversation Series at Nasinu Campus yesterday, Baber said being in a leadership position meant one had the power to influence the lives of others, provide necessary guidance in the right direction and work towards achieving the desired results.

The Welshman said this positive impact on others was a factor in his transition from a rugby player to being the coach of a diverse group of players.

"When you find yourself in a leadership position, you've got to hold yourself to philosophies but you also have to have the flexibility to adapt," commented Baber.

"You need to know the people you work with, know what makes them tick and their views on the world, their systems of learning and how they operate as a group."

"How I view the world myself, is that I like how other people are different, I like that diversity. I think that brings the best out of people and it's my job to see how you marry that all together to get what you want in terms of success," he added.

As a coach, Baber said he observed how Fijian players operated as a unit, especially when travelling during tournaments. The coach said he then had to determine how this could be factored into the success of the team.

"I've never been involved with a group that is so communal. When we travel overseas, we do not move unless all the boys

are there. They move as a group. We go to the airport as a group. We check-in, they're in a group. We go into the lounge, they're in a group. We go on the plane as a group. We get off as a group," said Coach Baber.

"I had to see how that could factor into performance because ultimately, the only thing that I am looking at is 14 minutes of rugby. Everything I do and everything we do in terms of planning and development is for 14 minutes. That 14 minutes, basically, is a mirror to what we are as a group, the bad and good."

"That is where the leadership really comes in, how do you evolve and develop that, bearing in mind the scrutiny that these players are under," explained Baber.

According to the top coach being a leader meant being authentic and consistent with your behaviour and providing exemplified feedback so that team members are clear on how they can improve individually and as a team.

"I think the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and then put yourself in a view of the relationship between three or four people is important. In leadership, what might happen with one person is not necessarily the same way all three of them will see it. You should be able to cut through that and see how everyone operates together."

"The last is have fun," Baber said. "I ensure we enjoy doing something beyond the normal rudiments."

FNU Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, Professor James Pounder, said the leadership insight shared by Baber was not just for the rugby field and could be applied by anyone.

"He thinks deeply about what he does. It's been wonderful to have him and I hope that we can have him again at some point in the future," Professor Pounder said.

"The wisdom he shared is fundamental, not just for rugby but for being a leader in all variety and walks of life."

The conversation series aims to expose FNU students and staff to valuable skill sets beyond the strict confines of their academic and vocational discipline that was vital to success in any field.

Baber answered questions from the audience on leadership qualities, philosophies, handling pressure situations, high expectations and moulding a winning combination with new and experienced players.

The Welshman was presented with a plaque after the event as a memento by FNU Vice-Chancellor Professor Nigel Healey after the event.

The event was also streamlined live to FNU's other four Colleges and other centres in Nadi, Lautoka, Ba and Labasa. Close to 200 people attended the event.



FNU Vice-Chancellor Prof Nigel Healey (right) presents Gareth Baber with a token of appreciation.