

Emerging leadership — becoming a chief through service

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In [my last blog post](#) I talked about the concept of tautua or service that focused on three spheres of service:

Sphere 1) Serve to Serve — understanding how to serve, knowing why we serve

Sphere 2) Serve to Lead — developing emergent leadership skills and

Sphere 3) Lead to Serve — enabling and leading the inter-generational process of leadership

I've just returned from visiting my ancestral homeland of Samoa and I wanted to talk about my own experience of being an emerging leader, as reflected in the second sphere in this model (see below) — as I received a high chief's title as recognition of my emergent leadership status within my full extended family and as an obligation to position my family within the Samoan community in its entirety.

Sphere 2: Serve to lead — (25 years to 50 years)

This next level usually comes after children have learned the basic tenets of tautua and they begin to understand how to develop their emergent leadership skills once they enter their mid-twenties.

Where will we expect to see some of these skills from these emergent leaders?

1. Immediate and extended family gatherings
2. Academic endeavours
3. Sporting, performing arts or visual arts pursuits
4. High profile careers where Samoans are the ethnic minority

Why is it important to become a matai?

Chief titles in Samoa are attached to land, to particular places or areas on the land. There are also specific titles attached to each individual village and the process for selecting chiefs in each village is a complex and intricate one. The collective word for chief is matai. There are two main types of matai — 1) high chief (ali'i) and 2) orator (tulafale). The function of an orator is to speak on behalf of a high chief.

As emerging leaders, particularly if you are born outside of Samoa, there is often the assumption that when you are recognised as an emerging leader, you will have only travelled back to the motherland just to receive a title and then return to your normal life in your diaspora society. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. A true chief understands that when they are bestowed a chief's title in their family, it has not been a decision that has been made lightly.

Tracing your lineage or birthright

In my father's village of Fasitoo-uta there are four distinct subgroups or sub sections of the village — Satui, Avano, Salioa and Mataiili. I guess if you could compare the way a Samoan village is organised to another culture, it is very similar to Māori culture, where families who live together (papakainga) live collectively in sub groups (hapu) within the village (iwi).

My father's full extended family on his mother's side all descend from a main ancestor and for just over the past 40 years were all led by one high chief in the family, known as the sa'o. The sa'o is someone who has the highest leadership role in the full extended family who will lead meetings (fono) to discuss family matters that will benefit or advance the family, usually discussing land issues, high expectations for codes of conduct and decision making for the greater good of the family.

How do you become a matai?

Months of preparation include family fonotaga to discuss suitable candidates to be put forward to represent branches of the family, pool together monetary gifts and material resources to take to Samoa, in order to gain the approval and consent of the wider full extended family. This step is important; gaining the approval of the full extended family as they can question your lineage or birthright based on your ability to prove your connection to the title being bestowed.

I see my peers of my generation and myself in the second sphere, as we are seen as emerging leaders in our own communities and within our own careers. The ability to be able to be adaptable and understand our roles and responsibilities to both our homeland — through our families and villages with the sending of remittances and the lands of our birth - the United States of America, Hawaii, American Samoa, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand continues to remain a challenge.



If the title is of high chief status, then the new chief's donations as part of his or her pooling of resources must be of higher value than that for the resources required for a chief with orator status. For example, if you are going to be a high chief you might need to bring \$3000.00WST and four fine mats to the family gathering. If you are going to be an orator, you might only need to bring \$500.00WST and four fine mats. These resources once they have all been collected by the full extended family are then divided and redistributed as monetary gifts to other orators and high chiefs who reside in the village, to all of the ministers, pastors and preachers who reside in the village, as well as subgroups within the village.

On the day of the actual ceremony, you will need to wear garments that include a headdress that is usually brightly coloured and decorative. It is also customary to wear necklaces adorned with money as well as bits of fabric to attach to your outfit. The money necklaces and copious amounts of fabric is collected by the village chiefs and distributed immediately following the event.

What happens after the ceremony?

You will need to register your new chief title with the village council representative by completing a registration form and then make your way to the Land and Titles Court to pay your \$100.00WST fee. After three months, all new titleholders will have their names published by the court in the Samoan newspaper so that everyone can read who the new chiefs are in all village title investiture ceremonies across Samoa.

In Samoan and even Pacific Island contexts, people will address you by your new title. It is common practice for new chiefs to change their names by deed poll so that they can include

the new title as part of their legal first names. This will probably be something that I will do once I graduate with my doctorate degree in Education, so that I can bring honour to the family name by attaching my chiefly title to my existing name.

There are specific ways to address a high chief as you would address an orator. For every high chief, there is an orator that is attached, who will speak on his or her behalf at events. It is commonly misunderstood that people who speak hold the power, but the skill of a Samoan orator is to bring honour and prestige to his high chief through speeches where the high chief is there to make decisions about how their family contributes.

What have I learned about becoming a matai?

As a new chief born outside of Samoa, there is so much to learn about being a matai.

Responsibility and legacy building

There will come a time when I will be expected to lead future generations of my family and make decisions now that will impact on their future and our land in Samoa.

Honour to the family name

Growing up in a Samoan church, I have had much practice about being a role model and setting a good example to others because it was what my parents wanted. The family values of pride, respect, love, unity and harmony are absolutely important.

Listen and learn

Even though I share the same title as my father Aiono Su'amamataia (Aiono for short), I recognise that he will be teaching and telling me stories of my ancestral past, legends of old Samoa, while I also sit quietly and observe him in his duality; absorbing the mannerisms and articulations of an orator who speaks with rich metaphorical language that will take me a lifetime to unravel, and the demeanour of a high chief calm and serene through any crisis.