

## ***Community Leadership: Inside and Out***

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“Wanting to lead and believing that you can lead are only the departure points on the path to leadership. Leadership is an art, a performing art. And in the art of leadership, the artist’s instrument is the self. The mastery of the art of leadership comes with the mastery of the self. Ultimately, leadership development is a process of self-development.”

- James Kouzes and Barry Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*

Effective community leaders rely on a blend of tools and personal skills. A community leader’s “tool box” can now contain some truly remarkable resources—instruments for assessing community assets, techniques for stimulating learning communities, teen-adult dialogue nights, and processes for involving hundreds of people in determining key indicators of their community’s health. However, the effectiveness of these tools will be determined by the breadth and depth of the personal skills of the leader(s).

In the case of community leadership—which I define as “the active process of weaving together the passions, talents, insights and experiences of a wide-range of people to create healthier communities”—there are five major leadership assets that one might identify and continuously develop. They are our leadership purpose, values, talents, vision and links to external resources.

### **Leadership Purpose**

“The quest for leadership is primarily an inner journey to discover our true selves, which includes our strengths, skills, prejudices, and talents, and a recognition of our unique gifts and some of our limitations. This inner adventure can also lead us to a better understanding of what we really care about. Our actions will then be filled with energy, caring, and commitment because we will have discovered our purpose and passion.”

- Lorraine Matusak, *Finding Your Voice*

Our leadership purpose serves as our compass as we go about the sometimes rocky, mostly rewarding process of building community. For most of us, it takes deep reflection to uncover the true identity of that purpose. There tends to be a person or an experience that has inspired us to step into a leadership role at a community level. Most of the time, we are also acting on some self-interest—our children’s health, our community’s economic well-being, threats to our local environment, etc.

Being clear about our leadership purpose is a source of great energy and commitment. Given that community change is a long, slow process, reminding ourselves of our purpose sustains us and holds our focus. Leading within a community is a complex task which requires clarity of purpose in order not to get involved in so many activities that effectiveness wanes, stress increases and burn-out sets in.

Reflection questions:

- What are three experiences, people, books, articles, tapes, movies, sayings, etc. that have had the deepest impact on your leadership philosophy?
- What insight(s) did you gain from each?
- When you think about why you lead (your leadership purpose), what action phrases come to mind?
- Examples: I lead to... inspire; I lead to... learn; I lead to...support.
- Using the action phrases, construct a one sentence statement for each that speaks to your leadership purpose (I lead to \_\_\_\_\_.)

## **Leadership Values**

“Values are deeply held views of what we find worthwhile. As with all mental models, there’s a distinction between our ‘espoused’ values--which we profess to believe in--and our ‘values in action,’ which actually guide our behavior. These latter values are coded into our brains at such a fundamental level that we can’t easily see them. We rarely bring them to the surface or question them. That’s why they create dissonance for us.”

- Charlotte Roberts, *Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*

Our leadership values are displayed in much of what we do. As leaders we strive to act consistently on what it is that we value most. The process of discovering the leader within involves identifying what it is that we stand for. The process of becoming an authentic leader involves the ongoing pursuit of closing the gap between the values we espouse and how well we live them.

Whereas community leadership involves working with many different types of people, there are certain values that will be essential to effectiveness. Collaboration, listening, empowerment, shared leadership, inclusivity and democracy are a few values that, when acted upon, build community.

It is within this arena of the art of community leadership where I have seen people stumble. One’s bag of tricks is pretty much useless if the values in action are not aligned with the implicit values of the instruments being used. A Future Search will not be effective if the community leader does not authentically and regularly practice the value of inclusivity. A Teen-Adult Dialogue Night will be less effective if the organizers do not value teenagers as resources.

When I speak of community leadership inside and out, I am describing the need for alignment between one’s values and the tools and techniques one uses to build community. As Richard Leider, author of the best-seller *The Power of Purpose*, points out “integrity is the integration of what one is and what one does.”

### Reflection Questions:

- What are your top three leadership values?
- Why is each value so important to you?
- For each value you identify, what do you consistently do now in your leadership capacity that demonstrates this value in action?
- For each of the three values, what are two things that you will either continue doing or start doing to more fully express your values in your leadership efforts?

## **Leadership Talents**

“A leader’s job is to duplicate oneself—leaders developing leaders who develop leaders.”

Carol McCall in *Fifty-Two Reflections for the Leader Within*

Colleagues and collaborators have very different “requirements” of their leaders today than they did just a decade ago. Today it is not job titles or years of experience that inspire partners and followers. They look for leadership talent. Effective community leaders draw upon their distinct talents. Tapping into their collaborative leadership values, these leaders use their skills to help others discover and use their leadership talents, as well. Doing so creates what I call a communitteam—a high-performing team at a community level.

### Reflection Questions:

- What do you believe are your top three leadership talents?
- For each, how have you recently demonstrated that talent?
- What skill area represents your greatest opportunity for growth and development and how might you improve in this area?

- How do/might you use your distinct leadership talents to further develop the leadership skills of others?

### **Leadership Resources**

“Our interconnections manifest themselves constantly. Drug problems have an impact on every taxpayer, as does the cycle of poverty or the number of drive-by shootings by street gangs. Child rearing practices in individual homes ultimately have a collective impact. The condition of our water, the stand of timber in our forests, the amount of pollutants in the atmosphere all merge together as part of the planetary condition. We are one, and the sooner we move beyond the belief that we are separate, the sooner we will support one another in creative and caring ways.”

- Beth Jarman and George Land, *Breakpoint and Beyond: Mastering the Future–Today*

As stated earlier, I believe that community leadership involves weaving together the passions, talents, insights and experiences of a wide-range of people. Part of this process is discovering and tapping into a variety of community and organizational resources. The most effective community leaders think beyond the traditional stakeholders and physical resources (money, buildings, etc.) to build community capacity. They use tradition, ceremony, events of other organizations, underutilized populations such as youths and community elders, even crises, as resources.

Effectively utilizing and networking community resources also requires an understanding of the self-interests of others and how they might be used to help meet our own self-interests, and vice versa. In their book, *The Quickening of America*, my former colleagues Frances Moore Lappé and Paul Martin DuBois propose that two prevailing views of how our “self” relates to “community life” need to be replaced with the concept of Relational Self-Interest–recognizing and tapping into our own interests as they are related to those of others.

As George Land and Beth Jarman suggest in the quote above, today’s community problems–violence, homelessness, poverty, environmental devastation, drugs, racism, etc.–are complex and interrelated. They touch us all, so the solutions require leadership that builds relationships that uncover the common ground between us. And the complexity requires numerous, diverse and creative actions that can only come about through collaborative action. Effective community leaders use their purpose, values and skills to work in partnership with others.

### **Reflection Questions:**

- Who within your organization or community might have a self-interest in helping you to achieve your vision and objectives? Why?
- Identify at least three resources that you can tap into for each of the following categories:
  - Others who have similar concerns/visions
  - People or organizations that might be allies if asked
  - Activities and Events that you could become involved with
  - Seemingly negative things that may serve as a resource
- Does your community have a vision of itself in a state of “health?” If not, who might you bring together to try to create this vision and to align resources to achieve it?

### **Leadership Vision**

“Vision is not analytical; it is intuitive. It is knowing ‘in your bones’ what can or must be done. In other words, vision isn’t forecasting the future, it is creating the future by taking action in the present.”

- James Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*

After reflecting on one's leadership purpose, values, talents and external resources community leaders carefully craft their leadership vision. This vision might well have several dimensions to it. We will want to be clear on what external changes we are striving for (ie- 20% reduction in local teen alcohol and other drug use) and we will want to have clarity on what changes we are looking for in ourself and, possibly, in the coalition of which we are a part.

Renowned futurist Avrim King suggests that our daily practices may at times be misaligned with our vision of the future. He points out that many Americans live their day-to-day existence as if Past + Present + Future. Avrim, like James and Jerry suggest in the quote above, challenges people to shift their thinking and "being" so that Past + Future = Present. That is, our past experiences and our vision of the future determine what it is we do today. Effective community leaders live within this paradigm.

#### Reflection Questions:

- Looking three years ahead, what is your vision for...
  - ... yourself?
  - ... your organization?
  - ... your community?
- How does your vision relate to your Leadership Purpose?
- What Leadership Values will guide you toward achieving your vision?
- How will you use your Leadership Talents to reach your vision?
- What External Resources will you draw upon?
- How will you know when you've reached your vision?

#### **Conclusion**

Leadership in all arenas of life, including communities, requires an integration of what one expert calls "form and essence." Author, lecturer and leadership coach Richard Leider speaks of the need for more than tools and techniques—what he calls the "form" side of leadership. He believes that authentic leaders integrate their skills with their "essence"—their leadership purpose, values, and vision. While we expand our community leadership toolboxes with new techniques and activities, we need to also continue to develop the leader within.

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*This article first appeared in Zip Lines: The Voice for Adventure Education; Project Adventure, Inc.; Fall, 1999*