



Creating a Personal Approach to Leadership

The information was sourced from the Learning Kit on Leadership published by the CCCF. The text is from the research paper in the kit written by Diana Smith. She was the first Executive Director of the Canadian Child Care Federation and is considered to be a leading expert in leadership in the sector.

The Leadership Learning Kit is available for sale at <http://www.cccf-fcsge.ca/store/page/3/>

Leadership is ultimately a choice to act. When we conceive of leadership as action, many of the apparent conflicts and paradoxes found in review of research become resolved. The imperative then becomes to explore and inquire into both the personal and collective meaning of leadership for each individual and group. What is your authentic self-expression of leadership that contributes to the collective good in some way? These are pathways to exploring that territory which emerge from the research on leadership:

Be authentic: A leader must be true and real to him or herself. Anything contrived will be seen for what it is – an attempt to manipulate or control. This implies that learning leadership is fundamentally different to learning other skills. Leadership is about the expression of our authentic selves – our whole selves. It is less about techniques and more about developing the confidence to simply be the person we really are and that means learning new behaviours, noticing the gap between our intent and impact, being sensitive to different situations, and acting consistently and appropriately.

Establish and nurture connected relationships: We know that formal, aloof, hierarchical leadership no longer works. So we have adopted more participative, consultative styles. But there is a further step to be taken. Organizations

are complex social systems which increasingly resist the imposition of ideas. Instead, ideas and meaning emerge from an often chaotic process of interaction between all members of that system. Leaders have to be skilled in facilitating processes that encourage the emergence of that meaning.

Understand the purpose: *What work is leadership expected to get done?* The work of leadership is to set direction, create alignment and generate commitment. That is an ongoing conversation, to engage with others in creating possibility, aligning around a shared direction, being open to feedback, and redefining and adapting as we go along.

Be open to learning and self-discovery: Effective leaders work hard to hone their style; they practice strong discipline; they strive to become more effective. The challenge for each of us is to mould a leadership style around our core and in so doing to become an authentic and powerful leader. What really matters is developing the self-awareness to see ourselves as others see us, to acknowledge and work with both our strengths and blindspots – this wins trust and engagement.

Come from a place of integrity: Being aware of our fundamental values and remaining true to them and expressing those values in the communities of which we are a part is a foundation of ethical, principled leadership.

“Take care of yourself, take care of each other, take care of the world.” –Margaret Wheatley

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

–T. S. Eliot