

Being An Effective Leader for Your Organization

Regional Economic Development Branch

Factsheet

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(replaces OMAFRA Factsheet 94-081, *How You Can Be An Effective Leader*)

INTRODUCTION

Who is a good leader? Chances are, someone you know comes to mind. What makes them a good leader? What qualities do they have? Anyone can become an effective leader, with the willingness to learn and practice the necessary skills. You bring a unique set of competencies, life experiences, and values to the table which are the building blocks for making you a good leader.

As a board member you probably have a deep and vested interest in your organization and its mission. You are involved because you want to contribute to its success. Now, as a leader, you have the opportunity to play a stronger role in steering the board toward its vision, inspiring other board members, and shaping the future of the organization.

This factsheet explains what it means to be a leader, some of the competencies you will need, common pitfalls you might encounter, and ways to develop your leadership skills.

Reflect: What do you think makes a good leader? Do you know someone who is a great leader? Why do you think they're effective?

LEAD WITH VISION AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Whether you volunteered, were elected, or appointed, like other leaders, you probably have strong ideas about where you'd like the organization to head, and what you'd like to accomplish before your term ends.

Sometimes we equate a leader with a manager or boss. If we think about it though, the word "leading" really means to be out in front, showing the way. As a leader, your role is to inspire and guide people to reach solutions together, not manage them.

"Management is efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines if the ladder is leaning against the right wall." —Stephen Covey

Reflect: Why did you accept the leadership position? What's your vision? What would make you happy to achieve in your term? What's the difference you want to make?

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES: YOUR LEADER TOOLKIT

Leadership experts and authors like Stephen Covey, Ken Blanchard, Peter Drucker and Peter Senge have spent a lifetime researching what makes an effective leader and developing leadership models. It would be impossible for one person to model all the behaviours or acquire all the skills they suggest. But if we look at the commonalities of their research, we can compile a list of competencies, traits and qualities that many good leaders demonstrate.

Think of this list as your Leader Toolkit. The more of these competencies (or tools) you can retrieve when needed, the more successful you will be at leading. When the job calls for a screwdriver, you want to be able to look in your toolkit and find a screwdriver. If all you have are hammers, then you're not going to be effective.

LEADER TOOLKIT

Place a checkmark in the “High” column if you think your skill level is HIGH in any of these competencies. Place a checkmark in the “Medium” column if you think your skill level is average or MEDIUM. Place a checkmark in the “Low” column if you think your skill level is LOW.

Leader Competency	Description	My Toolkit Score Yourself		
		High	Medium	Low
Vision	Leaders have a future orientation. Their focus is on the long-range perspective and where the board is going. They are change leaders.			
Communication	Leaders are equally as good at listening as they are at speaking. They are sensitive to the needs of others and willingly provide support and advice. They can motivate, inspire, enable, persuade, and negotiate using effective communication. Leaders skillfully choose the best form of communication, and communication technology, for the situation (e.g., face-to-face, email, telephone, group meeting, Twitter)			
Collaboration	Leaders are people-focussed and good at relationship building. They value diversity and differing opinions. Leaders work effectively with other board members and encourage collaborative decision making. They engage stakeholders and welcome partnerships.			
Innovation	Leaders stimulate fresh thinking and new ideas from the board. They look for creative, new ways to do things. Leaders promote originality, leverage innovations, and will take a chance on trying something different if it will help the organization. They stay abreast of relevant new trends and technologies.			
Integrity	Leaders are reliable and trustworthy. They inspire trust in others, instill a sense of ethics, fairness and equality, and ensure board operations are transparent.			
Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	Leaders challenge processes in an attempt to come up with the best solution. They ask “why?” and question the status quo to reveal all possible options and alternatives. Leaders persevere until they get the best answer to the problem and explore all avenues.			
Decision Making	Leaders make good decisions based on critical thinking, risk assessment, and often collaborative consultation. They are action oriented with a focus on helping board members do and achieve.			
Flexibility and Adaptability	Leaders are agile and know how to manage change. They are continuous learners. They readily change their leadership style to match the task or people at hand.			
Motivating and Inspiring	Leaders model the behaviours that they want to encourage and always represent the board well. Leaders ‘walk the talk’. They set standards and expectations, then measure outcomes. They recognize and reward success.			
Commitment	Leaders strive to balance their personal life, work, and board duties. They are able to allocate appropriate time and energy to their leadership role.			
Knowledge	Leaders have a sound knowledge of the board or organization and its work. They know how to run meetings and understand the core content or subject matter of the organization’s business.			

Reflect: Which competencies and behaviours are your strengths? Which ones need more work? Do you have a quality that is not mentioned here that would be an asset to you as a leader? Which skills do you want to develop?

KNOW YOUR JOB

The first step in being an effective leader is knowing what is expected of you. Some of your duties are common to most leadership positions, but some may be specific to your unique situation and board. You may be able to consult:

- other board members
- your board's policy manual that outlines roles responsibilities, constitution and by-laws
- your peers in other organizations or boards
- available resources and materials

Some of the duties you might have to perform are:

People-Oriented

- Resolving interpersonal conflict among board members.
- Welcoming and encouraging differences in opinion to gain a well-rounded perspective.
- Recognizing generational differences and opportunities.
- Leading committee work.
- Participating as a full board member – thinking, asking, helping.
- Engaging, motivating and supporting board members.
- Attracting, recruiting and orientating new members.
- Mentoring future leaders.

Task-Oriented

- Delegating and assigning people to tasks that need to be done.
- Planning agendas and chairing meetings.
- Overseeing and/or writing year end and other reports.
- Evaluating effectiveness of the board and organization.
- Upholding the governance of the board (e.g., terms of reference, constitution, policies, by-laws, running the annual general meeting, election of officers)

- Overseeing financial administration and stability of the organization.
- Overseeing human resource activities if staff are part of the organization.
- Promoting and marketing the organization.
- Performing other functions specific to your organization.

Reflect: What are some other jobs you might have to do? Add them to the list above. Put a star beside the jobs that you should learn more about. Who could help you?

MATCHING LEADERSHIP STYLE TO TASK

You bring a specific set of skills, attitudes, knowledge and experience to the board, and so do each of your board members. Your group dynamics and how you interact with each other are unique. As a leader, you have to navigate your team through ever-changing circumstances while never losing sight of things like vision, mission, budget and time!

“...great leaders choose their leadership style like a golfer chooses his or her club, with a calculated analysis of the matter at hand, the end goal and the best tool for the job.” —Robyn Benincasa

A single leadership approach will not be effective in every situation, so leaders must be flexible and adaptable. They evaluate each circumstance and choose the right approach for the task at hand. There are many on-line sites that you can access to learn more about leadership styles (see Resources). The following chart provides a basic overview of how to adapt leadership styles to different situations.

MATCHING LEADERSHIP STYLE TO TASK

Scenario: The grant application to get much needed funding is due next week! Here are four different leadership approaches to this scenario.

Situation Assessment	People Assessment	Leadership Style
Nita and Joe have grant-writing experience and have volunteered to do it.	Nita and Joe have a High Skill Level in grant writing and a High Level of Enthusiasm to do it.	Delegate: Give the responsibility to them and trust them to get it done!
Aurelia and Ono have no grant-writing experience but are the only ones who have volunteered to do it.	Aurelia and Ono have a Low Skill Level in grant writing, but a High Level of Enthusiasm to try it.	Coach: Give them the guidance, direction and support they need to get the job done. Encourage them so it is a positive training experience.
Gabriela and Andy are the only ones on the board that have grant-writing experience, but they don't want to do it.	Gabriela and Andy have a High Skill Level in grant writing, but a Low Level of Enthusiasm to do the job.	Participate and Support: Be sensitive to the fact that they are reluctant to do it. The leader and all board members provide help and support, and come to an agreed upon strategy for completion of the task.
Dat and Ana don't have any experience writing grant applications and don't want to do it.	Dat and Ana have a Low Skill Level in grant writing and a Low Level of Enthusiasm to do it.	Tell and Direct: Provide direction and encouragement to get the job done. You will need to provide structure and explicit directions — who, what, where, how and when — and be available to provide advice and support as needed.

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

Effective leaders don't always have the answers, but they know how to ask good questions! Drawing out the best from your board members and yourself means asking lots of questions. Leading a constructive dialogue, helps visualize the future, experiment with new approaches, stimulate fresh thinking, or identify values. Here are some examples:

- What if...?
- What are other ways of doing this?
- What can we do right now?
- What are your thoughts and ideas about this?
- What's your opinion?
- Who else can we include or ask? Who are the stakeholders?
- How can we improve? Change?

“A team leader’s most important task boils down to only two key questions a week that he or she should ask every team member:

1. *What are your priorities for the week?*
2. *What can I do to help?”* —Marcus Buckingham

WATCH OUT FOR PERSONAL PITFALLS

It's no surprise that even the best leaders have to watch out for setbacks. Knowing in advance what might occur and thinking about how to respond, is good planning. Your anticipation may help you avoid the pitfall all together. Here are some common ones with suggestions on how to handle them:

Pitfall	Remedy
Lack of understanding of the organization you are leading.	Read board documentation, such as meeting minutes, governance documents, constitution, by-laws, year-end reports, literature produced by the organization (e.g., brochures); speak to board members (e.g., treasurer, secretary, vice president).
Losing perspective and becoming a micro-manager or too laissez-faire — letting everyone do as they please.	Evaluate the task at hand and alter your perspective to suit the job: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If it is a big picture task, like developing ideas for the new webpage or identifying goals for the next 2 years, don't get caught up in specific details because it will bog down the entire process. • If it is a small picture task, like making sure the meeting minutes are accurate or special event logistics are in place, you can't leave this to chance and have to pay strict attention to detail.
Doing too much or being a solo leader tends to make you a martyr and the other members complacent and disengaged.	Learn to delegate and trust those who are capable to complete tasks. Coach others so they develop skills and are comfortable assuming more roles. Practice collaborative decision making so everyone has ownership for the work and results. Try to distribute work evenly so no one feels burdened.
Focussing too much on fundraising at the expense of other important initiatives.	While fundraising is often a crucial component in the survival of many organizations, leaders can't let it overshadow other important initiatives. Plan agendas that give adequate time to all aspects of the organization.
Ineffective Communication (e.g., not communicating enough, not listening or using the wrong communication method for the situation.)	Listen first, speak second. Stop and plan your approach rather than reacting by instinct. Ask for clarification and don't make assumptions. Welcome new perspectives and be respectful of other viewpoints. Select the right medium for the message. For example, email communication is inappropriate for sensitive or contentious issues; a face-to-face meeting is more appropriate. Twitter is great for announcements, such as "check out Claudia's great report at...", but it is inefficient for coordinating a group meeting time.
Lacking personal time and commitment.	Honestly assess your ability to commit the necessary time to being leader. If you find that you are missing meetings, getting other people to fill in for you, or not completing important tasks on time, it may be time to step down or adjust other facets of your life to enable you to continue leading.

Reflection: What are some of the pitfalls or challenges that you think you'll face with your specific team or board members? Look at the Leader Toolkit again and your identified low skill areas. How might you overcome these challenges? **Brainstorm some ideas.**

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY: HOW TO USE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership trends show a growing reliance on collaborative or collective leadership because it is becoming more difficult for one person to do it all! Sometimes other board members can share leadership tasks with you. In this manner, you are engaging the power of the whole group and using it to the best advantage.

Example: If one of your board members is an extremely persuasive and effective presenter, let them take the lead in the next major presentation.

Example: If one of your board members is well versed in understanding and leveraging technology, ask them to inform and guide the board on those matters.

You are not abdicating your responsibility for these functions; you are acknowledging your personal limitations and how to compensate for them. A good leader recognizes the strengths in others and uses them to the benefit of the organization.

A WORK IN PROGRESS

Becoming an effective leader is a process and great leaders never stop learning.

Reflect: Think about your role as a leader each day:

- What am I expected to do?
- Why is it important?
- How can I create the spark to motivate and inspire others?
- How can I build and strengthen relationships?
- How can I help others improve and develop skills?
- What changes can I anticipate?
- Where can I go to get help?

Take the time to evaluate yourself and identify skills you can improve. Read some of the resources at the end of this factsheet and see which ones resonate with you. Network with other leaders and share experiences and advice. Learn from mistakes — that's how you get better!

RESOURCES

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