Appendix 5  Some Leadership Stories

Stories of leadership at its best

Mary – she was originally a colleague, an informal mentor, gave advice and guidance then became the senior; her style really motivated the team – clear vision, knowledge and understanding, able to share with all. Expanded team in the college and the community, College became leader in the sector in this area of work.
She was able to work alongside each person, understand difference, could also bring together as a team, work with individuals and get them to work as a team and make the best of them. Rare qualities of empathy and mutual respect.
Nothing she asked was something she would not do with you, gave you room and space to do own work. Listened and took on others ideas, staff never afraid to volunteer an idea, she would share ideas and create cooperatively, team got a lot but critically clients got a lot.
She was hugely motivated and motivating, she made me want to be like that and motivated me to go and do different work and expand my role. She enabled me to create a role to increase chances for other young people to access learning, inclusive learning. The work grew to be a full time post. Mary had her vision and helped me to grow leaders in the field.

In a community context I worked with someone who was very talented and a great communicator. He looked to see how local people and local organisations could be developed; he did not use outsiders, and portrayed himself as a spiritual/philosophical leader but made it clear it was the people of the community who would do the work as the management committee. From day one he said he would eventually leave so wanted to develop a really confident group to take it on.
He trusted the group, he knew what he was asking them to do – he had done it himself before, and people knew he had been out helping distressed and violent kids in the night.
He knew that what he was asking was within their competence level, he knew what the room was for stretch and he supported and gave confidence to people to achieve that stretch. He pushed people beyond their comfort zones but not so far that they would get distressed. What made it all work was the trust of the followers in the leader and all linked to the core purpose of the organisation.

In the civil service one of the best leaders I worked for was able in the midst of myriad negotiations to be clear what it was we were trying to achieve, he explained it really simply and communicated to the Minister, this year we are trying to achieve three and a half things. You all felt you were part of it = he was not warm or personable but was intellectually curious about you and what you were working on – he took an interest and could appear to be listening by actually listening, he was very clear about what success was and worked for it. He could pick good people to do things for him, but would always check how people were feeling etc.
He knew his own strengths and weaknesses and he had had a difficult time with politicians but was still able to build relationships with them – he would actively talk about putting himself in other people’s shoes. He made issues common cause and built really strong trust.

He really noticed if people were not feeling part of the team.

When he came the team was very Oxbridge and male, very competitive. He took in a guy who was not Oxbridge and who was gay, he noticed that this guy was really quiet, so he found out why and then went out of his way to promote this guys work and ensure he was not overlooked and his skills and abilities were fully recognised.

I was working with VSO in Nepal for a number of years in a very remote far western region, working in a food deficit area. I was expecting the worst of conditions, all the statistics were really depressing, short life expectancy, high infant mortality etc I went to this really small village expecting misery but the place had a real buzz, a real sense things were happening. It was down to one man, a Brahmin, high caste, who had once inhabited the role of leader through status. Post democracy he had travelled away from that approach and travelled physically to deliberately set up a real community for low caste people, women and children. He was motivated to bring about real change and social justice.

He faced embedded prejudice against women and challenged this and said it was not right, he challenged and you could feel someone cared and was making a difference, he was not a heroic person, but small and with a quiet sincerity and commitment to driving change and movement in this place. I saw real change happening that was making a difference to people’s lives.

Journeys to leadership

A lot of contradictory things. Being thrown in at the deep end early in my career, having to find out. Then later, once in managerial role, doing the formal learning through a diploma which gave some structure, tools and processes to follow.

Being given the freedom to be myself, where I was allowed to do that to think for myself I grew and learned most.

Being in British Railways the conditions of service were the bible. Being allowed to think for myself and to research things – write a new policy for example, meant I could get out and research, look at what was out there, the ability to do that means when you are talking to your team you can bring a view from outside the business, a point of reference to challenge thinking.

Having a good network, both within the railway and outside through CIPD and getting support from them so not floundering as much.

Work with the family mediation service early in my career gave me lots of responsibility. Later I went on a 2 week intensive management for women course with the Civil Service, this raised my expectations that I could do and achieve more.

Critical to my learning was my executive assistant, a man who was very bright
and able and could give very good feedback, could talk things through and I worked with him as almost a personal coach and consultant.

I was attracted to taking on a leadership/management role as a staff nurse as I realised within 18 months of qualifying that people were coming to me for direction and guidance rather than to more senior and experienced staff. My Ward Sister encouraged me to go for promotion which came as a surprise. A new ward was opening and another closing, Ward Sister gave me the keys and 2 members of staff and said just do this. I thought it was a bit daunting but I thrived and thought it was worth doing again. I thrived on the problem solving and heading a small team.

I was a shop steward, and working nights when a friend told me that the Chief Executive was setting up key performance initiative groups and one was on nurse agency spend. I wrote out the bullet points of how I would do it and gave it to my boss who gave it to the Chief of the Division. I was called in, I was very nervous, but the Chair wanted me to take the work forward and seconded me to do this. The man took a big chance on me and I thrived, really succeeded in that and then I was given more challenges. I enjoyed the challenges, the interaction and having expertise around me and learning as I went. I thrived on working collaboratively, learning from others and working with them as part of a team.

I am from a Council estate, I have no airs and graces, and I am not a Fettes girl. I started as an auxiliary nurse and worked up. I am glad I have that background as it has helped give me credibility with different people and helped me talk to people at different levels.

I then got onto the graduate programme, I think the scheme looks for what is natural in you and then shapes you. The manager has been wonderful, she believes in you, trusts, encourages and lets you grow and holds up a mirror to challenge you. I have been given access to coaching, action learning and inspirational role models, given the tools for learning and the opportunity to chose and the school you come from means nothing – this is what the NHS should stand for. I am the first in my family to have a degree, a masters and a really good job.

Not had much formal training, first step was MBTI, beginning to realise/recognise type of person I am but others are different, I learnt that and how to manage differently for different people.

Watching others, seeing how they do it and copying what you like and noting what you don’t like.

In personal life partner trained as a person centred counsellor so has deep interest in what makes people tick, this has been very important as he has articulated things that have helped me reflect.

Being Gay, the advantage is you have no assumptions about anything, as growing up the only assumption is that you will die young. You have no preconceptions but have to work out who you are, and be confident in you and what you are, this is key to coming out. You have to take the knocks of people being against you, it means you have to turn it round.

I had very good experience in school and in sport which really helped, they shaped my self belief and confidence.

Sport taught me about focusing effort, taking opportunities and creating the
right moment rather than pushing at closed doors. I am a risk taker but recognise others are not like that – so I need to prepare the ground be clear about the arguments and take people with me.
I think certain qualities are innate, being a bit bolshy, not afraid of authority, strong sense of equality and drive to bring on people who are undervalued.
I work very much with younger people and women to bring on their voices and assist them to be confident = it helps to really like people.
It is really important to live your values, mine around openness and transparency and respect.
I have had some formal training, a leadership course with peers, plus working on self-reflection.
I am not from this country and that has helped me look at things in rather a detached way, bringing experience from elsewhere to help me reflect and question things.

Developing leadership in others

In this voluntary organisation we have set up a development team made up of secondees, supported by myself and 2 staff. We take people on secondment for 1 year to work on a range of projects that they have suggested, and once they are successful they take the project back into operations.
The secondment opportunity is advertised to all staff, individuals then have a telephone discussion before coming for an interview. The purpose of the interview is find out about their basic approach, so they are given a task and asked how they would set about it. We are trying to find out if the time is right for them and then to ensure they have managerial support.
Those who are unsuccessful have their agreed development needs fed into their personal learning plans and fed back to their managers.
It is very exciting as we are watching people breaking into new areas and doing different things.
Each project that is taken on goes through 5 steps; proposal description (this can come from anywhere and anyone) analysis including an evidence review, test phase to test out the theory and assumptions rather than a pilot programme, review and the implementation.
In the first year 6 projects were proposed and 3 went through to the test phase, in year two 23 projects were proposed and 11 are now in test.
This approach is not related to position or formal learning, people are coming forward with projects they want to lead, they are then being supported to both learn and do.
This is all built on my personal experience of being trusted and challenged early in my career to take on a major project, with support and time for reflection.

I worked for a large charity that had a very structured approach to management and leadership development. A real drive to get women into management, with networking support, support for BME workers networking and a really positive approach to building diversity – 50% of the management team in London was BME.
It all happened in work time, as a junior member of staff I was invited into the women into management group – they pro-actively supported potential. Really
positive approach to changing the balance of who was in management, gave it profile and importance by making it part of the working day and saying this is a valued activity.

There is a huge amount out there that is not being tapped into, for example I am doing some work with a youth organisation and seeing young leaders, but they are not being developed or seen as leading. There are real opportunities to develop leaders and leadership at school and through voluntary clubs. The three things we could do better are:

- More intergenerational contact in communities
- Learning how to spot talent
- Get people away from qualification driven approach to entry and progression.

Key question is how to develop the developers?
The new leadership has to be about increasing diversity but within one globe, so it is about connections, working through conflict and recognising the new leadership.