

**The Mediator as Leader and the Leader as Mediator:
Building Democratic, Ubiquitous, Collaborative Leadership Skills**

By Kenneth Cloke and Joan Goldsmith

Democracy, as a collaborative form of self-government, uniquely invites *everyone* to participate in leadership, and “followership” as well. Because democracies thrive on diversity, they require leaders who can bring diverse ideas, talents, perspectives, cultures, values, and constituencies together to form an integrated, dynamic, collaborative whole. Democracies need leaders who stand *with*, not over, above, or against those who *choose* whether to follow.

For this reason, democracies—whether in couples, families, teams, groups, neighborhoods, organizations or governments—require leaders who can listen, empower others, generate trust, build relationships, negotiate collaboratively, and resolve conflicts— *ubiquitous* leaders who can follow and build consensus. Democratic leaders are therefore mediators, and mediators are democratic leaders.

Unlike hierarchical, bureaucratic and autocratic forms of leadership, democratic leadership is exercised not only at the top, but also at the bottom and throughout. Like mediation, it seeks to balance power and challenges the very *existence* of top and bottom. In democracies, as in mediation, everyone needs to become a responsible, collaborative leader, a team member who helps run the show.

Democratic leaders embody a commitment to values, ethics, and integrity. They inspire collaboration, stimulate synergistic connections, support honest interactions, build trusting relationships, and encourage self-management, diversity, and integration across boundaries. Democratic leaders connect people through problem solving, dialogue, and collaboration so they can intelligently seek solutions. They synthesize diverse approaches, theories, orientations, and discoveries; spark innovation, and create synergies that strengthen consensus and inspire collaboration.

Leadership is a skill. It is not inborn, dependent on money, power, or titles. It is something everyone does at multiple points throughout their lives, whether they consider themselves leaders or not. We all have led someone somewhere sometime, and can do it again—consciously, collaboratively, and effectively. Here is how.

Some skills, behaviors, and traits can be directed or mandated by others, such as attendance (“Be here at 8:00 A.M.”), sequential actions (“Do this first and that second”), politeness (“Don’t yell”), and repetitive movements (“Tighten this nut”). But there are others that cannot be mandated, lie entirely beyond autocracy’s reach, and must instead be led, facilitated, encouraged, supported, mediated, mentored, or coached. For example:

Trust
Caring

Love
Dedication

Creativity	Self-management
Curiosity	Honesty
Insight	Courage
Synergy	Empathy
Integrity	Compassion
Consensus	Understanding
Craftsmanship	Wisdom
Values	Passion
Perseverance	Forgiveness
Initiative	Unity
Flow	Trustworthiness
Collaboration	Follow-through

These are the most important elements in every relationship. Yet hierarchy, bureaucracy and autocracy—whether in families, organizations or governments—interfere with all of them. This does not mean creativity and trust cannot be enhanced, but they cannot be commanded, controlled, ordered, predicted, mandated, regulated, administered, or required, because they depend on spontaneous, voluntary, unregulated, collaborative, *democratic* activity, on choice, and on play.

All democratic relationships require a combination of diversity, consensus, dialogue, teamwork, and mediation to encourage participation in problem solving and decision-making—including picking leaders, not alone but with often a need for courageous, unpopular leadership, which is not always ubiquitous, mediative, or democratic.

We distinguish three styles of leadership: *autocratic*, hierarchical, controlling leaders who take responsibility and make decisions for others; *anarchic*, bureaucratic, detached leaders who administer but abdicate responsibility and let others take the blame; and *democratic*, ubiquitous, collaborative, mediative leaders who inspire, encourage, empower, facilitate, critique, and support.

Democratic leadership is diverse not only in race, gender, age, culture, and sexual orientation, but in experiences, perceptions, thinking preferences, problem solving abilities, communication styles, emotional makeups, and personalities. The primary competencies of leadership, identified by Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith in *Learning to Lead*, (#6 was added by us) are:

1. *Mastering The Context:*
Understanding the big picture, considering political, economic, social issues, along with science and art; and taking time to learn.
2. *Knowing Ourselves:*
Being aware of neurophysiological patterns and our own issues that are triggered by people in conflict; understanding our limits and skills.
3. *Creating Visions and Communicating Meaningfully:*

- Focusing on the future, having an inspiring vision and being able to communicate it so others can align and collaboratively implement it.
4. *Empowering Others through Empathy, Integrity and Constancy:*
Building trust through empathy, empowerment, unconditional integrity, and congruence in beliefs and actions.
 5. *Realizing Intentions through Action:*
Turning visions into practical solutions, commitment, and strategy; realizing intentions through action.
 6. *Preventing and Resolving Conflicts through Collaboration:*
Preventing and resolving conflicts through systems design, consensus, collaboration, and shared values.

The skills of democratic mediator-leaders, we believe, coalesce into five different configurations:

1. *Linking Integrity with Behavior: Skills in Leading by Values:*
Leading by values means empowering others, encouraging self-management, and helping people define and express themselves in diverse ways. It means building trust, communicating honestly and empathetically, and inspiring personal commitment. It means being true to one's self.
2. *Linking Change with Ideas: Skills in Revolutionary Thinking:*
Revolutionary thinking begins with utopian vision, and seeks to translate it into reality. It means being open to ideas that fundamentally critique existing paradigms and seeking to transform them. It therefore originates in conflicts, anomalies, mistakes, disharmonies, and problems, and the sounds made by the cracks in a system.
3. *Linking Feelings with Balance: Skills in Emotional Intelligence:*
Democratic, collaborative, mediative leadership requires emotional intelligence because everyone is emotional, and all relationships need to be designed with human beings in mind.
4. *Linking People with Each Other: Skills in Relationship Building:*
Relationship skills are needed to balance unity and diversity, deepen trust and mutual support, keep collaboration alive, support difficult decisions, struggle for consensus, strengthen emotional intelligence, negotiate differences, and resolve conflicts in ways that repair relationships and end in reconciliation.
5. *Linking Intention with Results: Skills in Committed Action:*
Committed action requires democratic leaders to radically expand participation and available options, winnow them down through consensus, and design experiments or pilot projects if consensus fails.

Democracy, collaboration and mediation, above all, require a sharing of power. For them to become consistent and widespread, we need to become *owners*, and

not merely renter of our lives and relationships. And who is going to design, build, own, and sustain these leadership skills? The only answer, in democracies, is *we will, together*.