

FOCUS

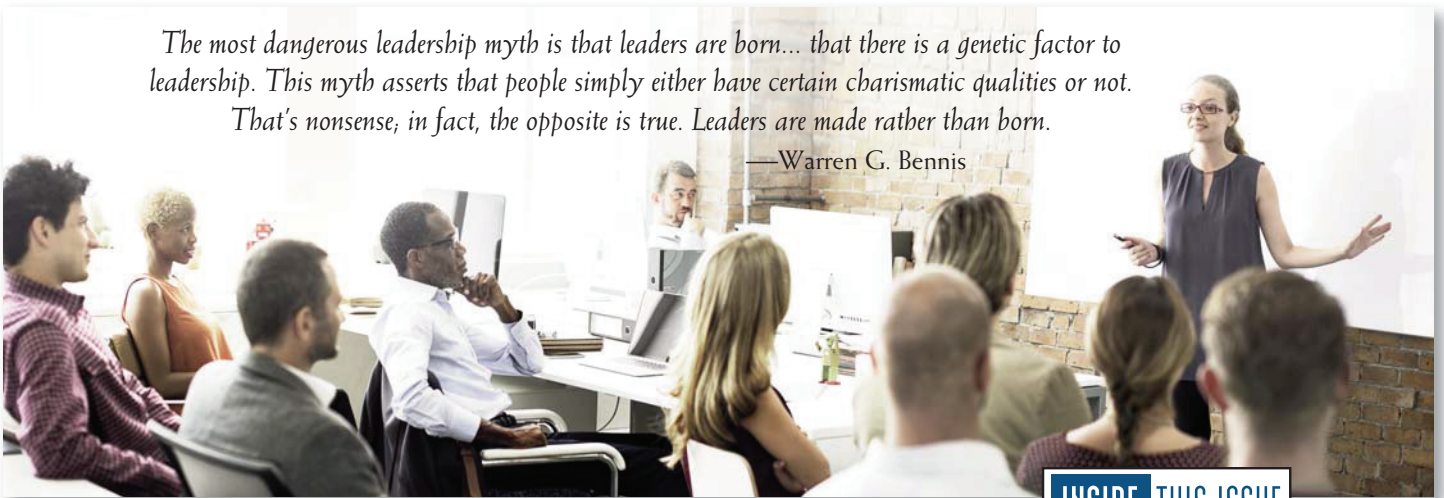
Newsletter of the Family Focused Treatment Association



Developing Future Leaders —by Steve Howe, MSW

The most dangerous leadership myth is that leaders are born... that there is a genetic factor to leadership. This myth asserts that people simply either have certain charismatic qualities or not. That's nonsense, in fact, the opposite is true. Leaders are made rather than born.

—Warren G. Bennis



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Are leaders born or are they made? If we believe Bennis's contention that leaders are made, the challenge to our organizations, and to us as current leaders of our organizations, seems to be ensuring that we accept as one of our responsibilities the development of our future leaders. And if we accept this responsibility, how do we implement it? How does it look at the individual and organizational levels, and what role can our association, FFTA, play in helping our member agencies prepare their leaders for today and tomorrow?

The Children's Guild, a multiservice organization serving students in the Baltimore/Washington, D.C. corridor, was growing at a steady pace and needed leaders to support this growth. As the leadership team monitored this growth, we became concerned that the most recent three leadership positions had been filled by candidates from outside the organization. They are all talented and strong leaders, and our organization is stronger because they joined us, but how do we demonstrate a career path within our organization if promotional positions are consistently filled by those from outside? The issue was not that internal candidates had applied and not been selected but, rather, that no internal candidates had applied. As we polled our more senior staff about why they had not applied, two consistent responses were that staff members did not feel prepared for the position and that the talents of those we had hired reinforced those beliefs.

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EDITOR'S COLUMN

—by Beverly Johnson, LCSW

Thank you to all who were able to attend the FFTA 31st Annual Conference in beautiful Chicago this July alongside more than 700 colleagues. With 735 attendees, the “Winds of Change” conference had the 3rd highest attendance in FFTA history. It was wonderful to see so many professionals hungry for new information, new resources and new strategies to serve children and families. Amidst the concern that many of us have about the future of health care and social service programs relied on by the children and families we serve, it was so encouraging to witness the energy, optimism and drive of the current and future leaders in our field. In the words of Martha Duarte, FFTA President, during the keynote session, “the time for bold leadership is now—for the sake of the thousands of children and families we collectively serve.”

To drive the field of child welfare in a positive direction, effective leadership at all levels is key, and developing new leaders is essential to organizational health. In this summer's edition of FOCUS, we hear from leaders in our field about the necessary soft skills and philosophical bases of leadership as well as the more tangible ways to develop leadership. Steve Howe shares how The Children's Guild addresses succession planning and developing a future bench of leaders with a view toward cost-effectiveness. Turn to Alistair Deakin and Eric Strickland's article to prepare your organization to manage change as it comes. Debi Grebenik's article will help you take a look in the mirror and develop your own capacity to lead your team. Gerald Nebeker shares his insights on how relationships matter. In business and in life, fostering relationships and following the Golden Rule of being genuine and blurring the boundaries between business relationships and friendships are keys to success.

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Developing Future Leaders

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Growing other leaders from the ranks isn't just the duty of the leaders, it's an obligation. —Warren G. Bennis

The leadership team discussed the responses from the staff and came to the conclusion that we needed to take responsibility, in some fashion, for providing leadership development for those staff members who did want to move into leadership roles but felt unprepared. Although the total responsibility did not fall on our leadership and organization, we felt the need to provide an avenue for leadership preparedness for those who were willing to put in the extra work to be prepared for promotional positions. Our leadership team explored various options for preparing staff for leadership positions. One critical factor in these discussions was the organization's foundational beliefs—that organizational culture has the most powerful impact on promoting growth and change in the children and families we serve and that the thinking and behavior of the organization's staff are the most important determinates of this culture. Another factor was what qualities the literature, as well as our foundational beliefs, identifies as necessary for effective leaders. Although there are many good trainings and seminars on leadership and leadership development, we decided that with our limited budget we would make a first attempt at creating something ourselves in order to ensure alignment with our organization's values and beliefs.

What Are the Characteristics of a Great Leader?

As a leadership team we identified those leadership characteristics and several questions that we wanted to initially focus on, based on alignment with our organizational values:

- Emotional intelligence (EI) and its components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill
- Self-awareness: know thyself, improve thyself, and complement thyself
- Management of oneself: know your strengths, your values, and how you best perform
- Organizational culture: how to identify it, how to create and impact it, cultural due diligence, and the role of the leader in measuring and impacting culture
- What are the qualities of an inspiring leader?
- How do great managers discover, develop, and celebrate what's different about each person who works for them, and how does that approach impact the organizational culture and performance?
- What are the qualities of an effective servant leader?
- Level 5 leadership = humility + will

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Editor's Column

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Are you looking for a concrete tool to help you formulate the most effective teams with the staff you have? Angela Edmonds writes about her experience using the DiSC assessment tool to enhance leadership and create more balanced and efficient teams. Rounding out this edition is a word of THANKS! from Laura Boyd, FFTA Public Policy Director, for all your leadership efforts this past year in ensuring that legislation that is good for children and families stays intact.

We hope this issue of *FOCUS* will guide you to assess your current leadership style and skills and inspire you to help your staff to become impactful leaders.

Beverly Johnson, LCSW, is the Chief Program Officer of Lilliput Children's Services. She is a member of the FFTA Board of Directors and serves as the Chair of the FFTA Editorial Committee.



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Selecting the Participants

The next task became how to select the participants for this developmental process. We considered identifying those whom we considered emerging leaders and inviting them to participate. This approach, we decided, took away the ability to measure the motivation and commitment that individuals had for professional and personal growth. In addition, we did not want to miss out on someone who may not have necessarily come to our attention but had great potential for leadership.

Our decision was to open up the group to anyone who had been with us at least two years, had received positive evaluations and was approved to apply by the individual's supervisor, and was willing to commit to the monthly readings and discussions. In addition, the application asked people to explain why they wanted to participate, to list what they anticipated the outcome(s) to be, and to describe a person they know and perceive as a great leader and explain why. We considered holding an interview with each candidate but decided it was not necessary once we evaluated the quality of the applications. Eight staff members applied, and all eight were selected.

We did not want to miss out on someone who may not have necessarily come to our attention but had great potential for leadership.

The Format

We decided to begin with a book club format—assign a reading and discuss it at the monthly meeting, focusing on the following questions:

- What did I learn from this article, and what spoke to me most poignantly?
- How does this characteristic of leadership align, or not, with the values and beliefs of our organization?
- Does this article change my thinking or behavior in any way? If so, how, and what am I going to commit to doing differently?

Following this discussion, a program leader would introduce a real-life situation that presented a leadership dilemma and then ask group members to discuss how they would handle that situation and why. This activity created some lively discussion, and the program leaders would challenge the participants on their responses, sometimes using role-playing to get the challenge and issues fleshed out. The group actually jelled very quickly so that the lively discussion and debate occurred almost from the very beginning. The feedback from the

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participants indicated that they enjoyed this part of each meeting.

Before the first meeting we purchased for each member the book *StrengthFinder 2.0* and asked participants to complete the assessment and bring it to the meeting to discuss their identified strengths, whether they were surprised, and the impact of those strengths on their leadership perspective. We wanted to show that everyone brings strengths to the leadership table.



Sustainability

At the end of the first year, group members held a happy hour to celebrate their achievement and to commit to a second year. They further committed to reading *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* by Stephen Covey over the summer and discussing it at the first meeting of the new school year. At the end of the second year, the group decided at their celebration to read *Leadership Wisdom From the Monk Who Sold His Ferrari* by Robin Sharma over the summer, and for Year 3 to meet every other month, to rotate the facilitation of the meetings among themselves, and to discuss a book selected by that session's facilitator. The Children's Guild purchased the selected books for the group. Although the program leaders still attended, their role was not one of leadership but of discussion participant.

This decision for group members to rotate serving as facilitators allowed the program leaders to create a second leadership development group and begin the process over again. Year 1 for this group is now complete, and members have committed to a summer book and a second year. The members of the first group will now become the discussion facilitators for this new group, continuing their leadership development themselves.

Was It Effective?

Although we don't have a formal evaluation of the process, and probably should, we do have one objective measure—when a supervisory vacancy arose this spring, three participants from the leadership group applied, and one was selected.

Comments from participants included the following:

I have learned that a leader doesn't need a title to lead and make an impact.

I now have a better understanding of my strengths and weaknesses in interacting with others... I am gaining a stronger sense of how I can better lead others in my current role and strategies I can use to lead in the future.

I liked the fact that we came together from different programs and perspectives... I loved the access it has allowed me to have to our leaders in our agency... and see the thought process it takes to make decisions for our programs.

From the program leaders:

Although I liked the concept of leadership development training, I was pretty skeptical... However, over time I began to notice that the reading and conversations taking place were broadening each employee's perspectives on themselves as a leader and the organization.

It has built my confidence not just as a female leader but as an African American female leader. I have come to the conclusion that it is my responsibility to teach and develop my staff to be leaders.

Steve Howe, MSW, is the Vice President of Services to Children, Families and Communities of The Children's Guild. Steve is a Past President of FFTA and currently serves on the Board of Directors.