

Everyone is a Leader

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Peter Drucker writes “*no institution can possibly survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized in such a way as to be able to get along under a leadership composed of average human beings*”. This view of leadership is critical in dealing with the complex world we work in today; indeed, without everyone thinking and acting as a **leader**, we will not take advantage of the opportunities moving to community governance has for improving quality of life for people with a developmental disability.

Leadership means influencing the people around you. This differs from the traditional approach that says the person at the top is the leader and that s/he simply has to work hard, tell people what to do and all will be well. The old approach is simplistic and cannot help us to move forward effectively on the issues we face. Rather, we need to

- Create coalitions to stimulate creative thinking and practices
- Learn from each other to help us better understand issues
- Speak up so our principles centre us on the challenges and desired outcomes

What does this mean for the average person in an organization? Everyone has a role in dealing with the constant of change – such as what is happening now in community living. We all need to develop our leadership capacity. If the literature on leadership is accurate, this can happen because leaders develop; they are not born. But they do not develop by playing it safe, or being silent or cynical. The new leadership is embraced and demonstrated when people see themselves as learners and:

- Actively participate and seek to understand shared problems
- Are intentional and take responsible actions that may involve risks
- Are self-aware, curious, reflective and build relationships
- Are willing to engage in trial and error
- Are creative, ethical and learn from mistakes



Autumn is here. We have colored leaves, overcast skies and shorter days. A strong signal fall has arrived are Canadian geese flying south in a V formation.

Scientists say geese fly 70% farther because they work together, not in isolation. And the goose at the front isn't necessarily the leader! They take turns leading. As one bird tires and drops back, another takes its place.

Having a common direction and taking turns with challenging tasks actually supports getting to one's destination.

These qualities and skills are there for us to develop. One way to start is for 3-5 people in a team or organization to have a focused conversation. This does not need to take a lot of time, but each person needs to answer these questions:

- How is leadership part of your role?
- What challenges and excites you about being a leader?
- What does it mean to be a leader in your role?
- What can you do individually, and collectively, to develop your leadership capacity?

There are many examples of leadership in British Columbia in community living.

- CLBC came about because many self-advocates, families, community and government members worked together to develop an alternative approach to creating and governing supports and services for people with developmental disabilities and families.
- [You've Gotta Have Friends](#) is a group of Langley citizens assisting people with a disability to have people involved in their lives with whom they share friendship and belonging. This initiative, sponsored by [Langley Association for Community Living](#), addresses the fact “services” do not always lead to a “good life.”

Peter Senge says “*leadership of the future will be distributed among diverse individuals and teams who share responsibility for creating the organization’s future*”. When thinking about developing your own leadership, remember those geese. Sometimes they break away from the formation to look for a better wind current. It seems they know about getting new perspectives or experimenting with new ways. They have much to teach us about how we can make our organizations better places for the futures we are creating.

The authors are interested in hearing about your views of the idea that everyone is a leader. Comments or your experiences with the focused conversation activity would also be appreciated. As well, please let us know about *Acts of Leadership* in your area. We will continue to share these examples and other thoughts on leadership throughout the year.

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