

Here is a series of leadership stories collected from across Scotland.

All stories have been passed on in good faith and the assurance of complete anonymity.

All participants were asked to share what they thought other people would benefit from hearing – not all accounts are about positive reflections. Pearls of wisdom, useful resources and anecdotes have made this collection of stories incisive, interesting and engaging.



M is a local authority manager with significant line management responsibility. Having a clear vision is an important part of being a leader; leading by example is critical. For M, an 'ideal' leader should be calm, reflective (not reactive), impassioned; a great leader will support people to grow and develop. "In social work, when you think you know all there is to know, it's time to go." M felt the importance of acknowledging and celebrating success cannot be understated.

B is a local authority manager with no line management responsibility. She feels the most important things a leader should have are a clear vision, an understanding of the direction of travel and courage to admit if mistakes have been made. She also states leadership is not management, they are two different things. Integrity featured heavily in B's leadership thoughts, without that, she states, you have no respect or believability.

E is a third sector manager with line management responsibility; he feels strongly that leadership is about leading by example. For E, making a positive difference to the lives of others is key to being a successful leader. Common sense, stamina, and the ability to visualise the future are all important. E thinks that "A lot of parents are leaders, they push to get what they want or need... they are citizen leaders" For E, leaders are the people around him that make a difference, not high profile, high level individuals. Effective leadership is an ability. "Leadership is about bringing together common sense, drive, knowledge and feasible ideas – it's about utilising existing resources in new ways."

E is a third sector manager with line management responsibility. He defined leadership as "achieving outcomes using a range of resources, some of which might be people." Leadership is an approach that has to be led by the heart, it's a spiritual task. He cited Winston Churchill as a great leader, because he reframed reality for people. If leadership is the exercising of power and influence, if experienced leaders exercise power through persuasion, the best leaders should grow great leaders. Great leaders should be prepared to make sacrifices for the greater good.

K is someone who is regarded by others as a leader; when pressed, he described himself as a citizen leader. K uses services. For K, leadership is important. He states “The powers that be don’t always have the money to provide services that are needed...it’s about taking the bull by the horns and making a success of something, we need to lead the way.” He feels that sometimes organisations are so involved in the day to day running of the service, that others need to tell them what they need to know to get started. Initially K felt that people at a strategic level didn’t listen to what people were saying but that now people who use services and carers are involved in policy and papers. K believes passionately in what he does, without passion he couldn’t continue to do what he does; it’s about making a difference. K states that his style of leadership “came from within, with a belief in people being able to do things, and plain talking.” Nothing is more important in making a difference, it is K’s “raison d’être”.

O works with children and young people and has line management responsibility. “Leadership is about remaining focused, exploring aspirations. Sometimes people get overwhelmed with the task in hand and lose sight of the people we are serving...” O reflected on previous colleagues who managed staff and ensured that procedures were followed and everything was done correctly, but they didn’t know why. For O, the end result is about improving the services people receive, that is the important part of being a leader, supporting people to make that happen. “Social work can be guilty of speaking empty words, service users aren’t always listened to by everyone. Aspiring for something more than just good enough should be one of the goals; most social workers came into the profession to make a difference, sometimes it’s about stepping back and looking at your original motivation.” A leader should always have the strategic planning underpinning the organisation – values, vision and mission statement have to be right and true.

K is an independent practitioner who is also studying leadership as part of a larger research project. For her, Florence Nightingale was someone who led others – in her view, she had respect from others which meant she was listened to; she was a visionary with principles. “Sometimes the powers that be don’t take the time to communicate with the people they are trying to lead.” Servant leadership featured highly in K’s thinking about leadership. Kay concluded that when it comes to effective leadership “Sometimes it takes someone else to shine the torch...”

