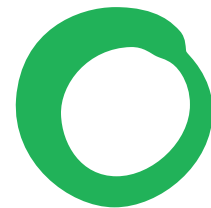


HOW TO: BE AN EFFECTIVE LEADER



**Friends of
the Earth**

Ever wondered what makes an effective leader? Or what it is about some people that inspires others to follow them? Perhaps your local group would like to move towards a more collective model of leadership? Network Developers **Jess Dolan** and **Matt Sellwood** explore what it takes to be a good leader and how Friends of the Earth local groups can help lead their communities towards positive change.

With a new Executive Director at the helm of Friends of the Earth and the organisation taking on its new strategic plan, there's never been a more important time to explore the meaning of leadership. To achieve our goals over the next five years, we will all have to show leadership; both at national level and locally in our local groups and communities. But what exactly does that mean?

DEFINING LEADERSHIP

Leadership is one of those terms that is frequently used but rarely defined consistently. When asked to describe an effective leader, people tend to list qualities and values such as:

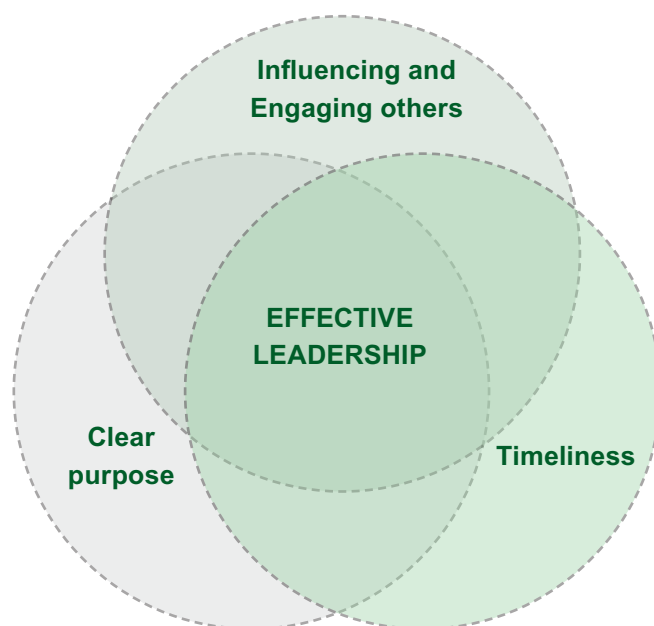
Integrity ● Honesty ● Passion ●
Commitment ● Enthusiasm ● Principles
● Knowledge ● Ability to inspire

However while all of these attributes are valuable qualities, alone these characteristics are not enough.

There are three key factors that make up effective leadership:

- Influencing and Engaging others
- Clear purpose
- Timeliness

In this pull-out we explore these key factors both you and your group will need to harness in order to bring people with you.



WHAT IS A LEADER?

- ▶ *“Leadership is empowering others to meet a shared goal; the supporting and harnessing of human potential.”* www.levelheaded.org
- ▶ *“I must follow the people. Am I not their leader?”* – Benjamin Disraeli

INFLUENCING AND ENGAGING OTHERS

ACTION POINT: ACTIVE LISTENING

Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker. Here are a few key principles of active listening for you to practice:

Check your understanding of what is being said to you – summarise what you have heard the other person say, and check whether your interpretation matches with what the person has been trying to express.

Don't make assumptions – don't presume that you know what someone else's thoughts or responses are before they tell you.

Stay focussed – don't spend the time the other person is talking thinking about what your response is going to be, pay attention to what is actually being said.

Take notes – this can be a useful way of reminding you what has been said after the event, as well as being a helpful way of capturing someone else's ideas when in conversation.

"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people" – Mahatma Gandhi

One key aspect of good leadership relates to how you come across to the public and how you communicate with other people. Effective leaders need to be able to speak well and inspire people, whether on a one-on-one basis or in front of a large public audience. Every conversation is an opportunity to engage people with your ideas and to inspire them to take action.

It is important to remember that leadership is not about controlling people, but about inspiring them sufficiently to make them want to follow you. But you also need to be able to hear what other people are saying. Without listening carefully and actively to others, it's easy for leaders to lose touch with their supporters. It is important not to underestimate the role that listening has in effective leadership. Remember: "A leader without followers is just someone taking a walk".

CLEAR PURPOSE

"A leader is a dealer in hope" – Napoleon Bonaparte

To be an effective leader you need to be able to clearly communicate what it is that you stand for and what you are trying to change. If you think about the most iconic leaders in history, the tendency is to automatically associate them with one particular issue – e.g. Martin Luther King and the American civil rights movement; Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid, Aung San Suu Kyi and democracy in Burma. You need to articulate

clearly what it is that you want to achieve and what needs changing. It is equally important to be able to communicate this at different levels, from short sound-bites for the media right through to a detailed explanation of what your vision for change is.

Think about ways in which you can communicate your group's vision to the wider community. Do people know what you stand for, what you want to achieve and how you want to achieve it?

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

"A community is like a ship; everyone ought to be prepared to take the helm" – Henrik Ibsen

Both collectively and as individuals, members of Friends of the Earth local groups are well placed to act as leaders in their communities. Campaigns run by a local group should always be:

Focused (clarity of purpose) – with a clear campaign aim that all group members help develop and agree on. All group members should be able to clearly explain what the purpose of the campaign is to others.

Engaging and persuasive – campaigns are run to encourage more people to get involved with a specific issue or to persuade a key decision maker to listen to your point of view.

Timely – Timeliness is essential to the effectiveness of a campaign. For example, it's more effective to

run an anti-incinerator campaign when incineration is being discussed as a possible option locally rather than trying to run an ongoing anti-incineration campaign without clear targets or a defined end-point.

Great leadership doesn't necessarily depend on one person acting as the figurehead. Local groups can work together to build relationships, influence decision-makers, share knowledge, inspire others and stay focussed on environmental solutions; all the things that an individual leader would do. Every local group acts as a leader and exemplar within its local community through its campaigns for positive solutions and by running practical projects that make real changes to people's lives.

"I start with the premise that the function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers" - Ralph Nader

TIMELINESS

ACTION POINT: SKILL-SHARING.

Remember that those who are currently leaders within your local group should not remain the only people with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil that role. An important part of making your local group sustainable is skill-sharing – transferring vital knowledge and abilities to other members of the group. This helps to spread the workload between more people and avoids the leading activists burning out. Why not try to arrange a skill-share session for your group? Start by conducting an audit of transferable knowledge that members possess and a survey of who would like to learn new skills. Your Network Developer (see back page for contact details) can help facilitate this skill-share or help you plan a session that will work for your group.

"Time is neutral and does not change things. With courage and initiative, leaders change things" Jesse Jackson

The third important factor is choosing the appropriate moment to take on a leadership role. Great and inspirational leadership tends to occur when circumstances demand a leader. While Martin Luther King possessed a clear purpose and was an outstanding communicator, he may not have been able to achieve success in the 1800s – for all his personal attributes, the conditions were not right at that time for a breakthrough in civil rights.

For modern campaigners this means carefully examining what you need to do, when you need to do it and who is right to lead the activity. Someone who was the right leader several years ago for one campaign may need to nurture another leader for a different campaign in different circumstances.

DYNAMIC GROUPS VS. GROUP DYNAMICS

Your local group may have several people who are in a position to take a lead role. If this is the case it is worth spending some time as a group thinking about how to manage this and how group dynamics might be affected. Frequently the coordinator of a group can feel under pressure not only to coordinate the group's activities, but also to act as a leader for the group. It is important to remember that this does not need to be the case. The primary role of the coordinator is to:

- Keep the group focussed
- Encourage the group to work as a team
- Keep the group organised

The coordinator's role demands a specific skills set and it is not necessary for the coordinator to act as the group's leader if that isn't possible or desirable. Other group members can take on leadership roles, either by acting as lead campaigners on a specific issue or motivating people to keep going when a campaign goes through a rough patch. The important thing is that both the group as a whole and the individuals involved recognise when this happens, and that everyone is clear on what their responsibilities and remits are.

DISCUSSION POINT

Think about the dynamics in your group. Are there individuals who are leaders on specific issues? Are they working with the group as a whole to ensure that tensions don't develop between the group's agreed focus and their leadership qualities? Spend some time at your next group meeting discussing whether specific individuals are able to act as leaders in particular areas and identifying ways your group could be seen as a leader in your community. Use Chapter 2 of the Local Groups Handbook to help structure this discussion. For example, Case Study 2.1.2 provides a great example of how South Cheshire Friends of the Earth ensures that they are working together as a team, with everyone sharing leadership responsibility.

GOING FORWARD

Here are some ideas you could take forward as a group:

- Make a list of the qualities and behaviours that generate effective leadership.
- See how many of the qualities and behaviours you already display as a group.
- Discuss how you could develop those elements that you don't currently exhibit/possess.
- Keep the idea of effective leadership in mind when you develop your campaigns and when speaking to people. It may be helpful to use the diagram included in the article as a visual aid when planning your campaigns.
- When promoting your group think about the ways you can get across the message that it is a leader in its field.
- If your group is currently struggling with leadership issues or campaign planning, why not get in touch with your Network Developer who can offer help and advice. See back page for contact details.

RESOURCES

The following resources might be useful supporting documents to help guide your discussion of group leadership:

- The Coordinator "job description" http://community.foe.co.uk/resource/guides/coord_job.pdf
- The Teamwork chapter of the Local Groups Handbook: <http://community.foe.co.uk/handbook>
- How to Campaign Strategise: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_39_campaign_strategise.pdf
- How to Make an Impact: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_71_make_impact.pdf
- How to Engage New People: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_67_engage_new_people.pdf
- How to Raise Your Profile: http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/how_tos/cyw_63_raise_profile.pdf