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Leadership in Leisure: a challenge for the sector

Continuing the Leisure Review's exploration of leadership in an age of austerity, Christine Parsloe considers the challenges of allocating resources and anticipating the requirements of the future.

Martyn Allison has posed some interesting questions. What does good leadership look like in this age of austerity? What differentiates it from good management or for that matter from average leadership? Can we train people to be better leaders? Are great leaders born or made?

I share Martyn's opinion that in austere times we have to refocus, realign and find ways to continue to deliver leisure, sports and cultural services through different ways and means more efficiently, more effectively and, importantly, together with others. Delivery of this is in itself a demonstration of change, so is it that good leaders are those individuals who know how to change themselves and others around them, and have the skills and abilities to carry this through?

In my experience good managers know how to allocate and use their resources to deliver what is needed today but good leaders anticipate what is needed in the future, influence others to deliver a vision for tomorrow, know how to harness their resources and create pathways to achieve goals and outcomes. Before austerity, good leaders would have achieved all of this in partnership with other agencies and groups. Now, in times of austerity, we have relationships with our partners, a shared vision with shared outcomes and outputs, all to be achieved by shared knowledge, skills and resources so that together we can achieve our common goals.

Leadership may well come more naturally to some than others but I would say leaders are grown through experiences and targeted development. I am proud to be one of the alumni of the National Culture Forum's Leading Learning Programme's cultural leadership courses but I was funded part by bursary and the rest from my employer, the London borough of Merton. I was given the time, opportunity and support to complete the course. In these austere times it is this type of investment that all too quickly is removed.

As the Guardian public servant of the year, [see TLR news edition 78] I find myself trusted into a position of leadership and my opinion is sought to influence the thinking of others. But ultimately all I have to offer is my experience and passion for our industry. Can you teach someone to be passionate about our industry? I don't think so. Can you encourage someone's passion? Yes you can.

I believe we must search our industry to talent-spot and find the ways and means to train, develop and grow future generations of leaders. If we don't, we at best risk leaving our industry to managers and at worst will allow our industry to decline and lose the passion and depth of intent and value that we currently know.

We have good leaders, we have good managers, we have oodles of talent. So what is stopping us from fulfilling this need in our industry, this vision for the future that perpetuates our industry with the same sort of passion we have had for it? It is us. We need to stop trying to work in partnership each for our own ends. We need to start a relationship that www.theleisurereview.co.uk

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is built on honesty, integrity and trust, that combines to grow our future leaders because it is important to each and every one of us; and, more importantly, to the future of our industry. We have an opportunity, so let's take it.

I couldn't complete this article without giving some thought to the time that Martyn had taken in reviewing the many and great theorists on leadership to help him put pen to paper, so in responding I too looked for leadership inspiration through various quotes and quips (of which, I must say, there are loads). My favourite few I share with you:

"Leaders think and talk about solutions. Followers think and talk about the problems." Brian Tracy

"Outstanding leaders go out of their way to boost the self-esteem of their personnel. If people believe in themselves it's amazing what they can accomplish."
Sam Walton

"A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent."
Douglas MacArthur

For me leadership in austere times is change, change, change; and all about efficiencies; but it is also the opportunity to refocus, realign and, most importantly, share resources, ideas, workloads and to build relationships to achieve our shared vision, desired goals and outcomes.

Leadership at its best creates realistic and achievable visions and then takes people with them through the changes, finding the solutions, towards a common and shared set of outcomes and goals.

Christine Parsloe is leisure and culture development manager at the London borough of Merton and Guardian public servant of the year.

The Leisure Review, May 2014

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