

Practical Restoration Handbook

Leadership Skills

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1. Over the last century many studies into leadership skills have sought the elusive definitive model of a “good leader”.
2. Whether you are a ruler, head, chief, commander, director, governor, principal, captain, skipper, manager, superintendent, supervisor, overseer, foreman, kingpin, boss, number one or an innovator, pioneer, trail blazer, path finder, ground breaker or originator your role as a leader will vary according to circumstances. All the above “leaders” have in common a desire to drive and direct a group to a given end.
3. The following styles are covered in this chapter:
 - Leaders character ~ born or made?
 - Styles of leadership.
 - What makes an ideal leader?
 - The task of a leader in relation to waterway restoration.
 - Positive leadership & motivating volunteers.
 - Leaders ~ the public face of a group.
 - The relationship between leader, volunteer and governing body.
4. In the field of waterway restoration the job of the leader may be a long commitment, for example the completion of the restoration of a flight of locks or alternatively relatively short lived, for example looking after a group of first time volunteers on a Sunday afternoon. Both these leadership responsibilities are as important as each other.

Leaders ~ Born or made?

5. Before leadership roles can be understood, the leader's character needs to be examined more closely. It is often said that a good leader is born and cannot be made, that there are those who are natural followers and those who are natural leaders. To further complicate the equation there are “followers” who would, in certain circumstances, become leaders and leaders who would themselves rather follow, but find themselves thrust into leadership. Before leadership can be studied in more depth, the first task is to be able to identify potential leaders within a given group.
6. The answer to, “what makes a good leader?”, is not straightforward.
7. There are no sets of rules that can be followed. There are different theories concerning leadership all of which fail individually to provide a convincing definition, but combined, conclusions can be drawn.
8. There are good leaders that can be identified with and there are bad leaders from whom important lessons can be drawn.

Trait Theories

9. If the qualities and traits that produce a “good leader”, were identified and recorded, the list would be endless and by its very nature would exclude most mere mortals. There are lists in circulation that outline anything from twenty to seventeen thousand different traits. In the world of waterway restoration it could be decided that some of the most important traits would include possession of good communication skills, a sense of humour and organisational skills second to none.

10. There are great leaders involved in waterway restoration, but like leaders in other fields, some find communication a problem. They have great skill in organising, and are fun to be with but experience difficulties in their day to day dealings with people. This problem may be highlighted by different groups they are asked to lead because some groups require greater communication with the leader than others. Thus whilst communication may be paramount in one scenario in another it could almost be disregarded. The fluctuating make up of a group, which can change from day to day, or week to week, may result in problems with the leadership. Group dynamics may change leadership styles and consequently the traits that are most important and this is highlighted later.
11. It can not be concluded, however, that there are certain traits that make up a good leader and formulate a list of these. There are certain inherent skills that are common to most leaders, e.g. communication skills, knowledge of the particular task, empathy and initiative.
12. Someone should not be excluded from leadership who lacks one of these but who holds other traits. In this great care is needed when appointing leaders on their traits. Traits are important and should be borne in mind when appointing leaders, but they should not be the sole factor.
13. Hence the trait theory, when considered in isolation, is flawed.

Situation Theories

14. Good leaders are born it could also be argued that given the right set of circumstances the most suitable leader will come to light. This is known commonly as the “situation theory”. If there is a job to be done and a group is assembled the likelihood is that within this group are several “born leaders”, the most suitable of whom will guide the rest through the task.
15. This does happen and there are examples of volunteers achieving high standards of workmanship under the guide of a self appointed leader. However, is this an appropriate way to restore canals? Volunteers can be assembled simply enough: people will attend if the restoration project is advertised and being volunteers they will generally want to work.
16. A leader may or may not appear from within the group and keen volunteers will soon become disheartened without positive direction and clear goals. Alternatively, more than one leader may come forward, dividing the group into several parts pulling in different directions towards the same goal. This resulting divisiveness is weaker than unity, as several smaller groups may waste energy battling against each other.

Group Theories

17. The group theory considers a “leader” unnecessary, as a group of like minded people can work together as one and complete quite daunting tasks. These units can and often do, function effectively. Each member of this unit has leadership qualities; they can work on their own or as part of the group. Everyone’s ideas are listened to, considered, and the best solutions to any problem followed.
18. However with voluntary labour, organisations are trying to encourage new people into canal restoration. These people will have limited experience and will need leading and in this situation the group theory starts to fall apart. Although some of the travelling groups of the Waterway Recovery Group will testify to the success of workers co-operatives, some experience difficulty in accepting new blood.

Styles of leadership

19. Different leaders can be just as effective as each other but can have wholly different styles. In looking at these the advantages and disadvantages of each style can be assessed.

Authoritarian or the “I am in charge” style of leadership

20. This style of leadership is often disregarded in the field of waterway restoration, as it is often seen as heavy handed and unnecessary when dealing with volunteers. An authority figure has the tendency to reach deep into the subconscious and make us do as we are told and people have a tendency to follow a strong leader. A group is less likely to consciously contravene an instruction given from a leader if they fear the consequences.
21. However an authoritarian who lacks the respect of the group may find himself walking the plank into the canal at the hands of mutinous volunteers, if he lacked direction and a clear mind. An authoritarian leaders' authority would soon be undermined if he kept changing his mind about what it was he wanted the group to do and how he wanted it done.

Paternalistic

22. By comparison, a “paternalistic” leader will persuade the group into accepting their decisions more readily. This style of leader adopts a paternal role. There is little doubt about who's in charge but rather than telling the volunteers what to do, the instructions are put to them in such a way that they want to do the task for the benefit of the group. There is a saying that goes along the lines that, “you get more with sugar than salt”. By asking volunteers rather than telling them then the work is done more willingly and therefore it could be argued that it is more successful.

Democratic

23. This is a style of leadership that should be noted for its particular use with working volunteers as a group is more likely to achieve its set goals if the volunteers are motivated correctly. This leader is best described as a “vote taker”. The whole group has a say in the tasks ahead and the leader makes a decision based upon the groups' conclusions. The leader involves everyone in the decision making process but takes an authoritative stance because at the end of the day he still makes the decisions.
24. This style of leadership often produces good results because the work force is involved and motivated and an involved work force is more productive.
25. Most people in a leadership role would listen to some but not others. There are those volunteers whose opinion and ideas are worthy and therefore more valued. There are also the first time volunteers who are “green”, in that the nearest they have ever been to a construction site is passing one on the way to school! Is it a good leader or a bad leader that will listen to the latter as well as the former?
26. Consider the story of a bus stuck under a bridge. The engineers are standing by, trying to devise a solution to free the bus. A small boy, ignored by most, eventually finds an engineer who'll listen to his successful solution of letting the tyres on the bus down.
27. A good leader is one who will listen to all contributions and quickly identify those of value.

28. Leaders need to be authoritarian where authority is needed. A prime example is with regard to safety. Safety procedures have been developed over many years. They work perfectly well and therefore their interpretation is not open to debate or discussion. Waterway Recovery Group, for example, clearly state their safety policy at a special safety talk before work commences on a Canal Camp. Safety is one area where volunteers must do as they are told for their own well-being. Leaders also need to be paternalistic and manipulate the group to get the job done, in what he considers to be the best way. Finally a leader needs to be democratic, as effort and money saving ideas often originate from the least expected sources.
29. In summary, the mode of leadership to strive for should be a combination of all these styles.
30. In stating the obvious, a leader is, by definition someone who leads. However, the degree of leadership required varies depending upon the group. The job can be hard if the group are unwilling and easy if the group is like minded. It is therefore important that at the onset of a task the leader can identify the material he has to work with. A strong well experienced group should require less leadership than a team formed from generally inexperienced volunteers.

Identifying the character of the group

31. It will therefore help if leaders have some prior knowledge of the group. This can be gained in many ways: For example, with Canal Camps organised by the Waterway Recovery Group, lists of volunteers are sent to the leader in advance of the camp. These lists contain important information such as age, experience and the sex of the volunteer. Age is important, for a group of pensioners may not have the physical ability even though they have years of experience. Experience is valuable as it is an asset to be drawn upon. The sex of volunteers is relevant in considering the make up of each group and thereby ensuring that the most arduous physical tasks are completed effectively without risk to the individual.
32. Some groups, used to an authoritarian style of management may perceive a democratic leader as weak and in these circumstances this style of leadership is inappropriate.
33. A good leader will interpret all available information about the group and formulate an appropriate style of leadership.
34. Another method of ascertaining the volunteers' character might be simply to talk to them on the telephone before the camp or working party, or alternatively simply asking someone who knows them.
35. On meeting the group the leader will need to psychoanalyse the group to define its dynamics. There is no need to get each member on the couch and ask searching questions about their childhood, it is sufficient to simply observe. It is true to say that anything anyone does is done for a reason. Not all volunteers are involved with waterway restoration because of some deep rooted desire to see canals re-opened for boats. Some may be there to meet other people. Others may be there under duress, as part of a community service order or because their parents have told them to be there. Others may wish to drive heavy earth moving equipment or be taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's' Award Scheme. Some may even want to lead the group themselves.
36. A good leader identifies all the motivations of their volunteers and sees how the mixture forms the group. Every group of people will form into a whole. This may result in a group that works well together or one that tries to pull itself apart. The leader must help the group bond well together and try to satisfy everyone's needs.

37. In considering the example of the volunteer who wishes to be a leader, there are many options open to the leader in overcoming areas of potential conflict, including oppression. A weak leader may see this type of volunteer as a threat and resort to keeping them out of harms way and away from other volunteers he may otherwise influence. Surely a better solution would be to let him lead under supervision; put him in charge of a small group, give him a title such as “Ganger” with the effect that his leadership desires are fulfilled and there is no threat to the cohesion of the group. For example this small gang could be selected to include past leaders and those who can lead but would rather take a back seat; such people would not be offended by the appointment of a “Ganger” and would simply get on with the task at hand regardless. Hence a happy medium is struck.
38. The volunteer who wants to drive the heavy earth moving machinery can be accommodated too. There may not be time or opportunity during the working day but why not take time out, during lunch or after the working day? Half an hour of driving will mean that they can go home and tell their friends about their exploits in the excavator without too much effort on the leaders part.
39. Volunteers who want to meet people are not as easily accommodated as may at first appear. Some people have a strong desire to meet others and interact with them, however some of those who use voluntary waterway restoration as a means to this end are the very people who experience difficulties with social interaction. This may have a detrimental effect upon the members of the group who might find it difficult to tolerate them. The leader will need to assess the situation. The solution could be as simple as moving the individual to another working group or team. However the leader must bear in mind that the happiness of the majority must outweigh the happiness of the individual although every effort should be made to ensure all volunteers can go home wanting to return.
40. As each group of volunteers is made up of individuals every group will be different. Each group will have its own language. The leader must identify with this language and use it when speaking to volunteers ~ after all there is little or no point in directing the volunteers by using a language they cannot understand.
41. The identity of the group as a whole will vary and a leader should be flexible, working within the groups identity rather than trying to change it into one that he might find easier to deal with.
42. A leader may use psychology to another advantage with the group. Some jobs within canal restoration are mundane and therefore not particularly appealing. For example, there could be thousands of bricks to clean off. After the average volunteer has cleaned a few dozen bricks boredom can soon creep in and it may be difficult to maintain the groups motivation. A good leader would hand tailor the team in such a way as to overcome this. Alternatively he may decide to allocate the more mundane aspects of the work as a means of exercising his authority over the group. He may choose to share out the work among everyone to show that there is no favouritism and to promote team spirit, but this may mean the loss of the dumper driver for half a day. Another method might be to draft one or two very talkative members into the brick cleaning crew who would boost morale in the team and help time to pass. Alternatively brick cleaning could be made into a competition with a prize for the greatest number of bricks cleaned off in a given space of time. The options open to the leader are almost endless. The task must be completed and the volunteers are there to do it. It is up to the leader to make the right decisions for the particular task and particular group, in order to encourage them along the way.
43. The majority of the work we undertake is performed by volunteers and the resulting labour force is drawn from a wide source.

44. A leader is well advised to assume that his work force does not have the requisite knowledge. By clearly outlining goals and instructing all volunteers wherever possible, he will establish a team and ensure that the group operates as effectively as possible.
45. This idea is best illustrated by imagining we are on the first day, on the work site. The leader asks if everyone knows how to use a shovel: Some of the volunteers will indicate that it is obvious how to use a shovel. The others will remain silent. Each of the silent ones believes that he is the only one there with this particular lack of knowledge, and would feel foolish to draw attention to the fact. Alternatively another leader might ask if there is anyone who does not know how to use a shovel. The result would be the same - silence from those in ignorance. A better approach, however, would be to show the whole group the correct method. By involving everyone, the leader has established a common method and although those who already knew would probably find the demonstration a little strange, the rest would have learnt without being singled out and made to feel foolish.
46. It is an important duty of the leader to ensure that the volunteers enjoy themselves as well as work successfully. We need volunteers to return time and time again. We need therefore to look at motivation more closely and see how positive leadership can prompt a good return rate.
47. Therefore, at the outset there are a number of volunteers who will form the group. It is the leaders responsibility to motivate and help the group develop, work well together and to promote both individual contributions and team spirit. The group or smaller sub-groups should be observed by the leader to allow him to identify any members are being excluded. If this occurs, the manner of exclusion also needs to be examined. Under certain circumstances the exclusion can be wholly justified, at other times it might be unreasonable. Each situation, therefore, needs to be evaluated on its own merits and appropriate actions taken by the leader. Some volunteers may prefer to exclude themselves. If they are happy to do this and there is no detrimental effect upon the group, intervention by the leader is not necessary, as efforts to include this person could result in new complications.
48. The leader has a duty to ensure as far as is possible that the volunteers enjoy their time. There may be volunteers whose attitude to the work spoils the enjoyment of the others. It has often been observed that during voluntary working parties some quick witted members have the potential to upset others with their remarks. The leader must be aware of this and be prepared to diffuse the situation as necessary. This requires skill and diplomacy and if handled badly could cause disaffection within the group and the undermining of the leaders own position.
49. Not all volunteers will express their opinions. This may be most apparent if there are members of the group who use loudly expressed views to dissuade others within the group from contributing. A study of facial expressions, other non-verbal communications or tone of voice may help the leader understand more about volunteer feelings when they ask if volunteers are all right and happy.

Motivation

50. Motivation is that which will induce someone to act.
51. If our volunteers were employees then we could perhaps entice them with more money to help them be motivated. Volunteers are however unpaid for the most part, so the leader needs to identify other methods. It could be interpreted that the very nature of voluntary work means no motivation by the leader is required because the volunteers have already motivated themselves to volunteer. This assumption is wrong and

volunteers, like employees, need to feel motivated and encouraged. The leader would be well advised to try to empathise with the group and identify the group's needs.

52. An ideal way of achieving this is for the leader to visualise the work for the week or weekend as a whole and divide this up into sections. Targets can then be set for each period for the group to reach. A leader may decide, for example, that by the end of the working day six courses of brickwork need to be laid. If the group know this target they can work towards it and when this particular task is successfully completed they can have time off away from the work site. This leisure time could be filled with a trip or other social event. By doing this and setting realistic targets both the work goals and volunteer motivation are achieved. This is an improvement on the outdated method of setting a rigid working day which provides the volunteers with little to work towards.
53. Leaders should give praise where it is due. If a volunteer or group have achieved a high standard or made an extra special effort this should be noted and rewarded. Happy volunteers will work better and achieve more, especially if they believe what they are doing is appreciated. Similarly, it is also important that if a group works badly, completes tasks to a lower standard, or goes against the leaders instructions the leader needs to act. There is no point in thanking volunteers for building the wall in the wrong place when instructions were plainly given. This would undermine any positive feedback and there needs to be a balance.
54. Another method of motivating a team is for the leader to take time out at the end of each working day to give positive feedback and highlight strengths. If the group can understand why they are doing a particular task and see how that task fits into the restoration project as a whole they are more likely to be motivated into working effectively and feel a sense of achievement in their efforts.
55. Many sites have visitors, from local dignitaries to sponsors. A poor leader will take the credit for the works, whereas a good leader will highlight the groups efforts, giving credit to individual volunteers and teams involved in the work. The credit, after all, should go to them. A leader who responds in this way is held in higher esteem and gains the respect of the group, who are more likely to work harder as a result.
56. Unfortunately, volunteers come and go and leaders need to accept that although certain volunteers are highly valued, no-one is irreplaceable or more important than the overall project of waterway restoration.

Leading a Team

57. A leader is one who leads others, therefore, a leader is not one who does everything himself. Leaders should delegate responsibility to others. There is little point in delegating a task to someone and then spending time going over the whole thing checking on what's been done. If the leader finds himself having to check up on a delegated assistant leader then that may be the leaders fault. The person the task was delegated to was, in that set of circumstances possibly the wrong choice. If a task is delegated out, the leader should be prepared to leave that person alone to get on with it, but remain available to give support and advice if asked.
58. The role of the leader is many fold. Even though good leaders are born, given thought and experience good leaders can become excellent leaders.
59. Organisations expect much from their leaders. It is often noted that the leader will become the public face of a group, no matter how much he refers people to the group. As such he will have to behave in a manner

befitting someone holding this high position. The volunteers need to have confidence in their leader. It would be detrimental if the leader were unable to cope with the strain of his demanding role. To help avoid this good planning is a must. A leader who is too full of his own importance will find it difficult to relate to the group. However, leaders need to be very slightly removed from the working group. If a leader were to be too close to the group it could result in all manners of problems brought about by lack of respect. How would it look if the leader was the one on the floor in a drunken stupor having his eyebrows shaved? If the leader never mixed with the group the results would be equally as bad. It is acceptable to “muck in” when you are a leader. It is a case of common sense prevailing.

The Importance of Planning

60. Before any work starts the leader should be aware of the tasks ahead and how to complete them in the time allocated. A good idea is to break the whole job down into more workable elements. These elements can be looked at and problems identified and solutions sought, before you can commence the project. Perfect planning prevents poor performance.

Power Pyramid

61. If leadership and its relationship to the volunteers and the governing body were to be imagined as a pyramid, then the leader would be above the volunteers but below the governing body. Sandwiched in-between like this he is under pressure to please everybody where ever possible. Volunteers need to be looked after, yet it is the leaders job to take action if volunteers act inappropriately. He must be prepared to support his group through thick and thin to others, who may include the governing body.
62. At the start of a working week or weekend where new volunteers are involved the leader should welcome them personally. This however in the real world of waterway restoration is not always possible. There are last minute arrangements to be made, materials being delivered and other important duties to attend to. Eventually the leader and the volunteers will meet. Proper introductions are important as it is essential for the leader to learn the names of the volunteers. The leader should clearly outline his expectations of the volunteers. By doing this at the start the leader can identify the individual characters that will form his group.
63. Leaders are the people in charge on the ground. By the very nature of the work they are there with the group and are ultimately responsible for their well-being. Leaders should be aware at all times of factors that might affect the volunteers, for example, working in extremes of heat or cold ~ appropriate actions should be taken promptly.
64. More mature volunteers might, and often do, try to work harder and at the pace of younger members of the group. In these circumstances it can be difficult for the leader to tell an older volunteer to slow down or take a break. One method that might be employed is to be prepared to move the more mature volunteer to a less tiring task if necessary. A diplomatic pretext for this could be that you want them to sort out another problem elsewhere.
65. At the end of a working project it is often a good idea for leaders to treat the volunteers as a way of thanking them for their hard work. An example might be a last night meal cooked by the leaders, or the leaders abstaining from alcohol and driving to give the group an opportunity to let their hair down.

66. It must be remembered that leaders are volunteers too. This fact is easily overlooked and is sometimes forgotten by groups and by persons further up the power pyramid. A burnt out leader is of no use to the group and of no use to himself. It is all too easy to be so wrapped up in the needs of the volunteers and the task at hand that the leader may forget his own well-being. A leader should be able to identify the volunteers he can trust the most. If it is pointed out that they feel that the leader is working too hard, or suggest that the leader should maybe take an afternoon off then this advice should be listened to very carefully. There is no task connected with waterway restoration that is so important that it is worth the leader making himself ill over.
67. The flight of wild geese gives us an unusual example to illustrate the need for leadership and teamwork.
68. Geese fly in a "V" formation to reduce the amount of effort each goose needs to become airborne and fly in the right direction ~ as a result they have a 71% better flying range than if they flew alone.
69. * We achieve more as a team than working alone *
70. When the lead goose becomes tired, it rotates back into the formation and another goose flies to the front.
71. * Leaders need to be prepared to let others help! *
72. Geese in formation communicate with each other. Geese will encourage their leader to lead on. This spurs on those at the front with the knowledge that they have the support of their flock to do well.
73. * Leaders must also remember to encourage all in their group in the same way by giving praise. *
74. In an ideal world all the volunteers would be happy ones. The work would be completed to the required high standard without any major hiccups along the way. All the leaders would go away with the feeling of satisfaction borne out of this. However this is not an ideal world. The leader must accept that there will be problems along the way. There will be occasions where he is asked to deal with situations arising from a clash of character that he would rather be in ignorance of.
75. All that can be expected of any leader is that they genuinely try their best, that they make their decisions with thought, care and above all try to enjoy themselves.

Forty helpful hints that might help in the smooth running of a Canal Camp or similar type work camp

1. Draw up a rota to ensure even and fair distribution of chores among volunteers.
2. Delegate someone to charge the radio and telephone batteries.
3. Always refill the site water boiler after tea breaks.
4. Learn volunteer names and refer to them by the name they wish to be called.
5. Ensure first aid kit travels to site with first group of volunteers.

6. Insist that all volunteers remove boots in the accommodation if the site is muddy.
7. State a lights out and quiet time each day and ensure it is adhered to.
8. Write the name of the days duty driver on an information board each day.
9. Delegate someone to be responsible for taking adequate supplies of drinking water to site.
10. Keep written information of tasks undertaken by D of E volunteers, as this will help when writing up the books.
11. Ensure there are adequate evening snacks (e.g. biscuits and bread) to avoid the food stocks being devoured prematurely.
12. If adopting a no smoking policy in the accommodation ensure there is a suitable butt container placed outside.
13. Take time out to talk socially to the volunteers.
14. Monitor volunteers constantly to avoid fatigue whilst working.
15. Consider how your appearance as leader may be interpreted by others.
16. Remember the importance of the cook and stress this to the volunteers.
17. If there is no full time cook rota as many of the volunteers as possible. This will give everyone the opportunity to experience the difficulties.
18. Involve the local society or group.
19. Show the volunteers works already completed wherever possible.
20. Allocate part of the budget for special treats for the volunteers, for example "Ice pops".
21. Music in the accommodation can be a good ice breaker.
22. Try to boost the confidence of insecure volunteers. For example by giving them a special task to do.
23. Inform volunteers that if they have a problem that they feel unable to approach you with then "Old hands" are available, and point them out.
24. Hydraulic machinery does not require physical strength to operate.
25. Ask the volunteers to suggest what type of food they would like to eat.
26. Try to convey even bad news in a positive way.

27. With Canal Camps by Waterway Recovery Group, remember that leaders have the backing of the Waterway Recovery Group board of directors.
28. If leading for anyone other than Waterway Recovery Group confirm where your backing will come from.
29. Sometimes contractors or paid employees will need your leadership. Be prepared to deal with these in a positive way.
30. Make yourself aware of the correct procedure in disciplining D of E volunteers.
31. D of E books can only have positive comments. Remember that if the candidate was unsatisfactory then the book must not be signed.
32. Be prepared to send disruptive volunteers off the work site.
33. Give the volunteers clear explanations of what is expected of them and how their work fits into the restoration project.
34. Every minute spent explaining to and motivating volunteers will pay off ten fold later.
35. Explain to volunteers that as leader you appreciate that they are there to have fun as well as to work.
36. Explain the hierarchy, for example leader, assistant leader.
37. Inform the volunteers that as leader you are a volunteer too.
38. Set aside time to compile the D of E books.
39. Make sure volunteers appreciate the seriousness of the safety talk.
40. Reassure parents that their child will be looked after during their stay at a camp.