

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.



S is a local authority social service worker and has been for a number of years. He cites ‘traditional’ leadership skills as strength; personal self-confidence; integrity; accepted responsibility, flexibility and risk-taking. “Social care is not a business industry; leadership is not about control, it’s about collaboration...we do a job for humanity, not the state..” S stated that the importance of helping people to improve their own quality of life is one of the things that motivates him to do his job. S asked some searching questions of himself and what makes a great leader; he came to a number of conclusions. He felt quite strongly that previously social service workers who challenged their own practice and that of others were welcomed into the profession. In his opinion now they are seen as a resource that needs to be managed. He goes on to say that “In trying to be more professional, we have become quieter, there’s a generation of managers who are used to hierarchical structure – they now have to change.” The best leaders motivate people; they find the way to do it.

D is a local authority worker with no line management responsibility. He observed that “Often the best social service workers went on to become managers without experience; this is not the right thing to do.” Can leaders be made? Can we make charismatic leaders? Probably not was D’s conclusion. Individuals can be taught everything except charisma. D pondered around the perceived current focus on leadership – is leadership the latest thing? Informal leaders can sometimes cause trouble; other people, with the right intention, are often naturally listened to. A leader should be inspiring, motivating, courageous, confident and have vision. A great leader can get ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Y is a senior manager in an independent sector organisation. Y reflected back on her time as a front line worker. She described the transition to management as poacher turned game-keeper; you can’t see it until you encounter the challenges first hand. The ‘command and control’ approach to leadership doesn’t work; it’s important to identify people’s strengths and let them get on with the job. Being a leader is like conducting an orchestra; there are some people who can read music, others who are tone deaf and a whole section of the orchestra who try to get the piece of music right and play the tune the conductor wants; a great leader will support everyone to play the same tune.

