

Hands-on

Learning from our implementing partners

Perspectives on Leadership Development – Lessons from Life and Practice

Introduction to TSiBA Education

The Tertiary School in Business Administration (TSiBA) Education is an innovative higher education institution, providing high-quality education to young people who would otherwise not have access to tertiary education. TSiBA ensures that economic disadvantage is not an impediment to accessing tertiary qualifications by offering every successful applicant a full tuition scholarship. TSiBA also addresses educational disadvantage by offering a bridging year (the Higher Certificate in Business Administration) that is followed by an accredited Bachelor in Business Administration (BBA) degree in Entrepreneurial Leadership. Alongside academic tuition, students receive psycho-social mentoring and counselling, daily meals, and additional curriculum focussing on attitudes, skills, and knowledge tailored to excelling in the workplace throughout their four years of full time study. TSiBA operates as a not-for-profit organisation and sources funding from private institutions, individuals, corporates and foundations so that students with potential do not need to pay TSiBA back for their scholarships. Our focus is on enabling leadership and encouraging the philosophy of 'Pay it Forward'. In this way we try to foster a multiplier effect that truly ignites opportunity.

Exploring Leadership Developing in SA

TSiBA also aims to make a contribution to public debate about the issues that affect our work and students. As part of this contribution, TSiBA endeavoured to explore the state of leadership development in South Africa's social sector. We were conscious of the significant body of knowledge and expertise about how to develop leaders that exists in the corporate environment, but there seemed to be less attention paid to development

of public leadership. As a country that has given rise to world famous leaders of great integrity, we were convinced that untapped wisdom was close at hand and were curious to learn about what other practitioners who sought to advance the public good (and not only private good) knew. The overarching impetus was to explore two key questions: "Where will the next Mandelas, Tutus and Rampheles come from? And what do we know, collectively, about helping to nurture them?"

The Interviews

In order to explore this field, we set out to interview 25 thought leaders from 24 diverse organisations – people across civil society, politics, education, and business who have sought to support the development of emerging leaders, either explicitly or through their general practice. These interviews will form the basis of a publication that TSiBA hopes to bring out in October this year.

Each interview conducted had three parts. At the outset, the interviewers guessed that the life journey of those being interviewed may well give some important insight into what happens on the way to becoming a recognised thought leader. In the spirit of Appreciative Inquiry, they were asked to reflect back on their own lives and answer questions such as:

- How did you become a leader? What was your journey? Where did it begin? What was the first step that you took?
- What experiences shaped you as a leader?
- Who shaped you into the leader you are today? Who was influential in your journey?
- What particular tools, methodologies and practices have helped you to become a better leader?



- What are the qualities that you admire in other leaders?
- What do you value about yourself as a leader?

The answers to these questions were perhaps the most fascinating element of the interviews. Secondly, the thought leaders were asked specifically about their approach to leadership development. In particular, some questions were:

- What is your organisation's definition of leadership?
- What is your philosophy about developing leaders?
- How does your organisation go about developing leaders? What tools and methodologies do you employ?
- What is unique about your approach to leadership development?
- What have you learnt about leadership

development? What have been your big take aways and surprises?

- What are you grappling with, with regard to leadership development? What are the questions/puzzles you are holding?

Towards the end, we asked them about their success stories, and who they are keeping their eye on:

- What does success look like in your organisation in terms of successfully developing leadership?
- What success stories do you have to tell about your organisation's work/ leaders you have developed?
- Which young leader are you keeping an eye on? Who inspires you?
- What change makers/ activists do you know who are working on the ground and making a difference?

List of Interviewees:

- Fred Swaniker, CEO, The African Leadership Academy
- Isaac Shongwe, Founder, The African Leadership Institute
- Anthony Farr, CEO, Allan Gray Orbis Foundation
- Dirk Visser, Chair, Brightest Young Minds
- Peter Willis, Director, Southern Africa Director, Cambridge Programme for Sustainable Leadership
- Ferial Haffajee, Editor, The City Press
- Elspeth Dixon, Director, Common Purpose South Africa
- Penny Tainton and Marike Groenewald, The DA Young Leaders Academy
- Mark Gamble, CEO, Educo Africa
- Pip Wheaton, Director, Enke: Make Your Mark
- Anthony Prangley, Director of Centre for Leadership and Dialogue, Gordon Institute of Business Science
- Joy Olivier, Founder and Managing Director, IkamvaYouth
- Colin Hall, Founder and Director, Learning to Lead
- Ilana Wetzler, CEO, Lucca Leadership SA
- Shaun Johnson, CEO, The Mandela Rhodes Foundation
- Anisha Archery, Head of HR, Old Mutual
- Kim Hickley, Student Development Officer, TSIBA
- Jonathan Jansen, Vice-Chancellor, University of the Free State
- Shirley Harding, Principal, Wynberg Girls' High School
- Wayne Blaauw, Programme Manager, Western Cape Education Foundation
- Wendy Luhabe, Social Entrepreneur
- Pat Pillai, Founder and CEO Life College; Ashoka Fellow
- Febe Potgieter-Gqubule, ANC NEC

A video about five of these young change makers was made to coincide with the 35th anniversary of the Soweto Uprisings of '76. This video, called Tomorrow's Leaders Today, can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/user/tsibaeducation>

Reflections on the Process

Initially we set out to find 'thought leaders' but very quickly began thinking of our interviewees as 'thought and action leaders'; for indeed, this was one of our most fascinating findings. Even the most well-established leaders that we engaged with noted that they did not think of themselves as leaders, or if they did, it was a recent and still somewhat uncomfortable change in their sense of identity. None of the people that we interviewed set out to be leaders. Instead they repeatedly described seeing a need and rising to the challenge in front of them.

We came to realise that perhaps a more accurate description of leadership is people who are willing to take action to address the challenges they see around them. Our leaders recognised in themselves a very strong urge to do and be involved in whatever was going on around them, often from a young age. As a result we've come to appreciate that leaders develop because – if anything distinguishes them – it is that they are



willing to take initiative and try things out. For this reason, we titled our presentation of preliminary findings (which is available at www.tsiba.org.za/news/resources) 'Learnings from Those Who Do'.

This said, it was almost impossible to extract a common definition of leadership from our leaders themselves. Many felt that being of service is a distinctive feature; and that being a driver for change is a hallmark of a leader. Another important theme was being true to oneself. The majority of the people that we interviewed held the firm belief that every human being has the potential to be a leader; that leaders are not born with some magic infallible toolkit, but are shaped by their journeys and experiences.

We learnt, from their stories, that life experience, and often adversity, remains the very best developer of leaders; but that life experience is enhanced by a willingness to self-reflect and do personal work. This insight caused many to ponder their role more deeply. If life develops leaders best, in a manner that can never be planned, what then is our role as leadership practitioners? How can what we offer aid and facilitate the people's journeys?

The answer, it seems, is also not new to any of us but is still profound. We have learnt, and experienced in our own lives, that demonstrating that we believe in another person is still one of the most

significant ways that we can develop those around us. The boon of having such a person (or people) in their lives, particularly in their formative years up until their twenties, was mentioned by many and the confidence that this engendered was critical. The gift of an effective leadership developer is to truly see potential everywhere and in everyone. Parents and teachers were often mentioned and we believe that, although obvious in some ways, this is a significant finding that is worth pondering. When we asked about traits that people admire and value in leaders the words that were frequently mentioned included authenticity, compassion, conviction, courage, humour, humility, integrity, listening, passion, reliability, creativity and transparency. This list is important if we believe that our role is not to develop leadership skills as much as to support and model particular attitudes and values. We need to ask ourselves if the programmes and communities that we offer provide opportunities to experience these emotions and traits and to develop confidence in demonstrating them.

Tools of the Trade

Philosophies and methodologies combined in the wide range of approaches to leadership development that our interviewees described. These were as diverse as one-week intensive programmes to four-year full time programmes. Some thought of their programmes as lifelong projects of fifty years at least. Perhaps, most resoundingly, many concurred that it is crucial to develop a community of authentic connections amongst their developing leaders by nurturing reference points, frameworks, visions and values that will be common to them; for this enables leaders to be accountable to each other.

The tools and approaches that were emphasised or mentioned often included coaching, dialogue, inspiration, play, exposure, experiential learning and other opportunities that support people in developing confidence. Many concurred that leadership cannot be taught. Significant emphasis is therefore placed on providing people with an opportunity to experience leadership and practise decision-making by enabling them to create or join a real-world project - and mentoring their endeavours.

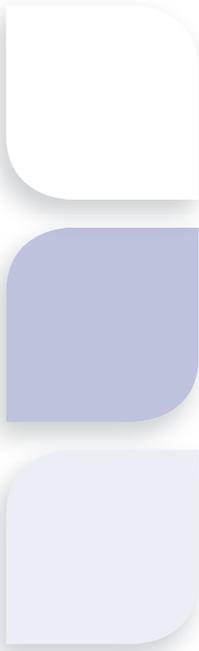
Prof. Jonathan Jansen

"I am a tactile leader, I like to hug people and have a feeling of what you are concerned about. A lot of my leadership is intuitive so I can pick up problems before they happen, I can sense people struggling before they say it and so



Prof. Jonathan Jansen

on. Fundamental to my leadership is acknowledgment. Not agreement, but acknowledgment. Acknowledging pain on the other side, which is very difficult in South Africa. Being able to think beyond your own epidermis. Being able to empathise deeply and sincerely for those who struggle. Being able to acknowledge, not just others, but your own brokenness."



In reflection on their greatest learnings, with regard to developing other leaders, our subjects returned once again the profound impact that believing in another person can be. People continued to surprise and delight them and, in the course of their work, they had experienced for themselves that many more leaders existed than they had initially thought. Furthermore many agreed with one interviewee who, after trial and error, had come to the conclusion that no “customised, shrink-wrapped, perfect leadership model” exists.

We found it intriguing that many agreed that it is almost impossible to measure or take credit for success in this field. Most encouraged a long-term view and also questioned just how much credit leadership development programmes really can take. They agreed that there are inherent limits in attributing success to one particular programme or experience and therefore it is hard to assess the effect of our contributions. One person described their shift from focusing on what people go on to do to “just making sure that they are full when they leave”.

Where to from here?

The book publication of edited interviews will be made available in a limited edition from TSIBA in October 2011. This forms part of a broader move to open space for dialogue and sharing in the leadership development sector. As a multiplicity of organisations go about working to support and developing emerging young leaders, our work can only be enhanced by understanding and exploring the work of others. It is hoped that this book, and the full interview transcripts

(available at www.tsiba.org.za/news/resources), can kick-off a conversation such as this. We are also exploring the possibility of creating a community of practice for those who work in leadership development. For more information please contact leigh@tsiba.org.za

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**Photo courtesy of Anna Morris, <http://www.annashoots.com/>*

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The DG Murray Trust encourages its implementing partners to share their experiences and learning in the form of a Hands-on learning brief. Download guidelines on writing a Hands-on brief from <http://www.dgmt.co.za/what-we-learned/>.

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