

## **Collaborative Leadership: New Style, New Buzzword or New World?**

*By Ruth Purcell-Jones*

My friend Jeff Miller jokingly calls it “playing well with others” or “sharing our toys.” Jim Collins calls it “Level 5 Leadership.” Whatever its label there is a new paradigm emerging; one that holds great promise. We who are leading nonprofits (and any other types of organization) in the today’s world need to recognize the opportunity this new leadership provides for transforming our workplaces, community and planet. Am I being dramatic? Maybe a little...but consider this:

- What if we as leaders could openly acknowledge that we didn’t have all the answers and reach out to others from that place?
- What if the energy, knowledge and contribution of everyone in the organization (community, world or planet) were truly really valued and included?
- What if we expected to be responsible for each other and our results and openly, honestly communicate them?
- What if power were not determined by management level or salary, but by access to knowledge and ability to connect with others?
- What if we could create a vision that gave us a common language, direction and the inspiration to act on it?

Today’s traditional leadership paradigm is built on individualism, stability, bureaucracy and scarcity. Its top down, command/control style is giving way (thank goodness!!) to a new mind-set that not only positions organizations to thrive in this world of accelerating change, but has the potential to transform communities and workplaces.

This new approach to leadership appears under many names: an influence model, post-heroic leadership, and shared, distributed or collaborative leadership. The theme throughout finds leadership at all levels of the organization.

The new approach is characterized by network relationships with shared information, shared missions and continuous learning. It pictures the leader in the center of a circle (or web) with spokes extending outward as opposed to the traditional model of the leader at the top of the pyramid. In the words of David Gergen in his foreword to Enlightened Power, “Instead of hurtling thunderbolts from atop of Mount Olympus, the new leader persuades, empowers, collaborates and partners.”

This new style of leadership demands a new development model. Instead of linear cause and effect models, this model may be viewed as a series of concentric circles. The innermost circle is the individual leader. The development of this type of leadership begins from within. Individuals first master their own sense of self-awareness and discipline. The next large circle, containing the first, is the organization, of which the individual is a part. A great deal of leadership literature is devoted to this circle. And beyond that, an even larger circle exists in which leaders must become adept. These are the multitude of organizations, individuals and community with which the leader and his or her organization must cooperate, coordinate and partner.

Today's leadership must learn to work across sectors, collaborating and partnering with others to move work forward.

We, at Trustee Leadership Development, are committed to this transformational leadership work. Over the last four months, we have met with over fifty community and collaborative leaders, exploring our future, listening to community needs and discussing potential partnerships. We are committed to creating collaborative spaces and facilitating the opportunities for others to do the same.

We believe that collaborative leadership is the key to successful programs and services, to effective civic engagement, to stronger and healthier communities and...someday, perhaps...a new and different world. Don't you?

The focus of our leadership development is building community capacity through transforming governance leaders personally, organizationally, and in their community.