

Promoting your rights and leadership skills development

By Martin Pistorius

Table of contents

Your rights as members of society	1
Introduction	1
Knowing your rights.....	1
Advocacy	1
The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities	1
Leadership skills	4
Introduction	4
Attitudes for Leadership	5
Developing Leadership skills	5
The leader within.....	5
Leading by example	6
Steps to help you develop your leadership skills	7
Conclusion	8
Further reading.....	9
References	9

Your rights as members of society

Introduction

Throughout most countries in the world today people have rights, although the extent to which rights are known, respected and enforced as well as the number of rights in existence vary from country to country.

A human and/or civil right can be defined as a legally binding proclamation usually forming part of a country's constitution or contained within a separate document (e.g. The bill of rights) that accrue to all citizens of a country, irrespective if the existence is publicly known or not, a guaranteed privilege, power/s or freedom; such as rights to equality, freedom of speech etc.

Knowing your rights

Why should I know my rights?

Knowing your rights empowers you to ensure you are treated in a fair and just manner. You can learn about your rights by reading about them online and at libraries, as well as by contacting governmental departments and/agencies.

Advocacy

Advocacy is the act of pleading, speaking, writing or arguing in favour of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy. Knowing your rights and taking an active role within your community will not only help to ensure your, and other members of society are not violated but will create a greater awareness of the community's rights and may even result in changes and/or new policies being developed. Being an advocate will also assist you in developing your leadership skills.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

[1] The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol was adopted on 13 December 2006 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York, and was opened for signature on 30 March 2007. [2] At the time of writing (July 2009) 139 countries have signed the convention, 82 the Optional Protocol, 58 have ratified the Convention and 36 the Protocol.

It is the first comprehensive human rights treaty of the 21st century and is the first human rights convention to be open for signature by regional integration organizations.

The Convention marks a "paradigm shift" in attitudes and approaches to persons with disabilities. It takes to a new height the movement from viewing persons with disabilities as "objects" of charity, medical treatment and social protection towards viewing persons with disabilities as "subjects" with rights, who are capable of claiming those rights and making decisions for their lives based on their free and informed consent as well as being active members of society.

The Convention is intended as a human rights instrument with an explicit, social development dimension. It adopts a broad categorization of persons with disabilities and reaffirms that all persons with all types of disabilities must enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms. It clarifies and qualifies how all categories of rights apply to persons with disabilities and identifies areas where adaptations have to be made for persons with disabilities to effectively exercise their rights and areas where their rights have been violated, and where protection of rights must be reinforced.

[3] There are eight guiding principles that underlie the Convention and each one of its specific articles:

1. Respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own choices, and independence of persons
2. Non-discrimination
3. Full and effective participation and inclusion in society
4. Respect for difference and acceptance of persons with disabilities as part of human diversity and humanity
5. Equality of opportunity
6. Accessibility
7. Equality between men and women
8. Respect for the evolving capacities of children with disabilities and respect for the right of children with disabilities to preserve their identities

[4] According to Don MacKay, Chairman of the committee that negotiated the treaty, the Convention endeavours to elaborate in detail the rights of persons with disabilities and set out a code of implementation.

Countries that join in the Convention engage themselves to develop and carry out policies, laws and administrative measures for securing the rights recognized in the Convention and abolish laws, regulations, customs and practices that constitute discrimination (Article 4).

As a change of perceptions is essential to improve the situation of persons with disabilities, ratifying countries are to combat stereotypes and prejudices and promote awareness of the capabilities of persons with disabilities (Article 8).

Countries are to guarantee that persons with disabilities enjoy their inherent right to life on an equal basis with others (Article 10), ensure the equal rights and advancement of women and girls with disabilities (Article 6) and protect children with disabilities (Article 7).

Children with disabilities shall have equal rights, shall not be separated from their parents against their will, except when the authorities determine that this is in the child's best interests, and in no case shall be separated from their parents on the basis of a disability of either the child or the parents (Article 23).

Countries are to recognize that all persons are equal before the law, to prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability and guarantee equal legal protection (Article 5).

Countries are to ensure the equal right to own and inherit property, to control financial affairs and to have equal access to bank loans, credit and mortgages (Article 12). They are to ensure access to justice on an equal basis with others (Article 13), and make sure that persons with disabilities enjoy the right to liberty and security and are not deprived of their liberty unlawfully or arbitrarily (Article 14).

Countries must protect the physical and mental integrity of persons with disabilities, just as for everyone else (Article 17), guarantee freedom from torture and from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, and prohibit medical or scientific experiments without the consent of the person concerned (Article 15).

Laws and administrative measures must guarantee freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse. In case of abuse, States shall promote the recovery, rehabilitation and reintegration of the victim and investigate the abuse (Article 16).

Persons with disabilities are not to be subjected to arbitrary or illegal interference with their privacy, family, home, correspondence or communication. The privacy of their personal, health and rehabilitation information is to be protected like that of others (Article 22).

On the fundamental issue of accessibility (Article 9), the Convention requires countries to identify and eliminate obstacles and barriers and ensure that persons with disabilities can access their environment, transportation, public facilities and services, and information and communications technologies.

Persons with disabilities must be able to live independently, to be included in the community, to choose where and with whom to live and to have access to in-home, residential and community support services (Article 19). Personal mobility and independence are to be fostered by facilitating affordable personal mobility, training in mobility skills and access to mobility aids, devices, assistive technologies and live assistance (Article 20).

Countries recognize the right to an adequate standard of living and social protection; this includes public housing, services and assistance for disability-related needs, as well as assistance with disability-related expenses in case of poverty (Article 28).

Countries are to promote access to information by providing information intended for the general public in accessible formats and technologies, by facilitating the use of Braille, sign language, augmentative and alternative communication and other forms of communication and by encouraging the media and Internet providers to make on-line information available in accessible formats (Article 21).

Discrimination relating to marriage, family and personal relations shall be eliminated. Persons with disabilities shall have the equal opportunity to experience parenthood, to marry and to found a family, to decide on the number and spacing of children, to have access to reproductive and family planning education and means, and to enjoy equal rights and responsibilities regarding guardianship, wardship, trusteeship and adoption of children (Article 23).

States are to ensure equal access to primary and secondary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning. Education is to employ the appropriate materials, techniques and forms of communication. Pupils with support needs are to receive support measures, and pupils who are blind, deaf and deaf-blind are to receive their education in the most appropriate modes of communication from teachers who are fluent in sign language and Braille. Education of persons with disabilities must foster their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self worth and the development of their personality, abilities and creativity (Article 24).

Persons with disabilities have the right to the highest attainable standard of health without discrimination on the basis of disability. They are to receive the same range, quality and standard of free or affordable health services as provided other persons, receive those health services needed because of their disabilities, and not to be discriminated against in the provision of health insurance (Article 25).

To enable persons with disabilities to attain maximum independence and ability, countries are to provide comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services in the areas of health, employment and education (Article 26).

Persons with disabilities have equal rights to work and gain a living. Countries are to prohibit discrimination in job-related matters, promote self-employment, entrepreneurship and starting one's own business, employ persons with disabilities in the public sector, promote their employment in the private sector, and ensure that they are provided with reasonable accommodation at work (Article 27).

Countries are to ensure equal participation in political and public life, including the right to vote, to stand for elections and to hold office (Article 29).

Countries are to promote participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport by ensuring provision of television programmes, films, theatre and cultural material in accessible formats, by making theatres, museums, cinemas and libraries accessible, and by guaranteeing that persons with disabilities have the opportunity to develop and utilize their creative potential not only for their own benefit, but also for the enrichment of society. Countries are to ensure their participation in mainstream and disability-specific sports (Article 30).

Countries are to provide development assistance in efforts by developing countries to put into practice the Convention (Article 32).

To ensure implementation and monitoring of the Convention, countries are to designate a focal point in the government and create a national mechanism to promote and monitor implementation (Article 33).

A Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, made up of independent experts, will receive periodic reports from States parties on progress made in implementing the Convention (articles 34 to 39).

An 18-article Optional Protocol on Communications allows individuals and groups to petition that Committee once all national recourse procedures have been exhausted.

Leadership skills

Introduction

What leadership is and how one defines it, is often difficult to identify, and yet you know when you see it, and you definitely know when it's absent. Leadership is one of those subjects that much has been said, discussed and written about and it still, to a degree, remains an inanimate topic – the feeling of unanswered questions always seems to linger.

Leadership can be defined as a set of skills and attributes by which a person influences, motivates and elicits others cooperation in order to accomplish a goal.

A common misconception often exists that leaders and leadership skills are born and the qualities possessed by only some individuals. As the well known American Football coach Vince Lombardi said "Leaders are made, they are not born. They are made by hard effort, which is the price which all of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile." Napoleon Bonaparte insisted that every soldier in his army carry a

marshal's baton in their knapsack because he believed that every soldier had the potential to be a general and lead his army in his absence.

Leadership is a quality that everyone is capable of, whether we realise it or not we all do take a leadership role at some point in our lives. Think about it...when you choose or suggest to go see a particular movie, or to having coffee or where to have coffee, or manage your care attendants etc. Doing something, however small, perhaps even completing a task differently, that was you being a leader, without even knowing.

David Taylor, in his book 'Naked Leadership' said "...everyone is a leader, that's every single person, including you; whether you choose to accept this leadership is your choice..."

Attitudes for Leadership

Leaders are very unique people, they don't think like followers they think like leaders. They develop a certain mentality, something happened or evolved which made them think differently – an attitude that influences people. If you want to develop an impactful and influential personality, you have to develop certain types of thinking and perceptions that change the way you see yourself and how you see the world. This is called the spirit of leadership. You don't necessarily need to be intelligent, big, strong, able to walk, use your hands or to talk, but you need a leadership attitude.

Dr. Myles Munroe uses the analogy of a Lion, they are not the biggest animal in Africa, but they are bold, courageous and command respect throughout the animal kingdom – they have a leadership attitude. He says "an army of sheep lead by a lion will always defeat an army of lions lead by a sheep. Leadership can transform cowards into violent warriors. A good leader can transform people that are timid into bold people who are followers".

Attitude plays a key role in leadership. Leaders have a different attitude, one of respect for others. Nobel Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu said "The leader is the servant. So leadership is not having your own way. It's not for self-aggrandizement. But oddly, it is for service. It is for the sake of the led."

Leaders don't see problem, they see opportunities.

Attitude is the product of your belief system and nobody can live beyond the limits of their believe system. Leaders are thus "born" when they discover a new belief system. The perception of who you are also needs to evolve, you need increase your sense of significance, you need to believe in yourself. in other words you need to start developing a leadership attitude.

Of course attitude is a good foundation from which to begin, however all leaders need to learn and develop leadership skills.

Developing Leadership skills

The leader within

As a leader you will be required to elicit cooperation, arouse, excite, and/or motivate people, it's unlikely that you will be able to accomplish this unless you know what you stand for. Thus in order to develop your leadership skills you first need to know who

you are, what your values, strengths, weaknesses, talents and principles are. What drives and motivates you and what your vision is.

Therefore the first step to becoming a leader is to be the leader of yourself; Philip Patston said “Leadership is about you – it’s far more effective to change things for yourself than to set out to change things for others.”

You need to develop your self-discipline, self-motivation and in time become emotionally mature. You need to know and understand what your wants, needs and desires are as a good leader will often need to put others needs above there own. Not knowing yourself could thus impair your judgement.

You need to start thinking and acting like a leader. Lech Walesa one of the founders of the Polish Solidarity movement once said that “you become free by acting free” so too for you to become a leader you need to start thinking and acting like one.

Humility – one aspect of being a good leader is the conscious awareness that you never really quite “arrive”. This is important as remaining humble and open-minded facilitates good interpersonal skills.

Responsibility – to be a good leader you need to be willing to embrace responsibility; responsibility for your tasks, your successes and failures.

Listening – one of the most fundamental skills of any leader is the ability to listen and to take others’ points of views, comments and criticism into consideration when determining the vision, making choices and taking decisions. Leaders who fail to listen run the risk of changing from a leader into a dictator/commander. Thus it is imperative to develop effective listening skills.

Reflection – Self-reflection can not only help you to learn more about yourself but can also make you a better leader. Taking time to think about things that were said, decisions and choices made and results achieved can often provide you with insight as well as providing you with valuable lessons which can help you to become a better leader.

Leadership and leadership skills development is an ongoing process. As someone once said “The biggest room in the world is the room for improvement” therefore it is important to actively and continuously learn and develop your leadership skills.

Leading by example

It is often said that good leaders “lead by example”. Nelson Mandela said “It is better to lead from behind and to put others in front, ... Then people will appreciate your leadership”.

They say “actions speak louder than words” and this is most definitely the case when it comes to setting an example for the people you lead. As the leader you need to be the most diligent, hard-working, focused person on the team. There’s something about when a leader is willing to go the extra mile and set a premium example – it will inspire others to raise their level and quality of effort as well.

[5] The following steps facilitate doing this effectively:

- Feedback: Asking for feedback about your leadership style in a relaxed, open and unthreatening manner can be extremely valuable, especially when a 360

degree approach is used. A 360 degree approach is where you receive feedback from your colleagues, team members and peers, essentially from everyone that is affected by your leadership. Knowing how other perceive and experience your leadership can really help you to adapt, change and grow as a leader.

- Listen: When your colleagues, team members and peers speak to you about their worries, concerns, ideas and suggestions, hear them out. Listening with an open mind and being empathetic when appropriate helps to develop good morale and harmony amongst the followers. As they say “Great leaders are great listeners”.
- Connect and communicate: Effective communication is pivotal to being a good leader, as Lee Iacocca said “You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can’t get them across, your ideas won’t get you anywhere”. This aspect needs to be given particular attention when you rely on augmentative and alternative means to communicate. It is vital that as a leader that you are able to effectively connect, and communicate with your followers. A good leader needs to be able to convey the vision, the individual tasks and objectives and what is expected from the individual and their role. A leader needs to ensure that the message/s were effectively communicated, and if not take steps, such as rephrasing the message, to make sure everyone knows what to do. Should someone have a question/s these should be answered with the same attention to effective communication. As Nelson Mandela said “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart”.
- Be a people’s person: A fundamental part of being a good leader is to respect and trust your team/followers capabilities. Allowing them freedom to make certain decisions and choices – trust them to complete their task.
- Integrity: One of the primary reasons why it’s important to lead by example is it allows you to as they say “put your money where your mouth is”. It helps to build up your integrity with your team/followers and consequently gain their support.
- Share leadership: Delegating and distributing tasks amongst the team members allowing them to take a leadership role and responsibility for it allows you to become a better leader by involving more people in the leadership process. It also allows you to harness the strengths and skills of the individuals within your team.
- Evaluate success: Focusing on building and developing the skills of your team/followers will enhance their motivation and the team’s performance. Remember your team’s success ensures your success.

Steps to help you develop your leadership skills

The following steps can help you to develop your skills as a leader:

- Challenge and question: Leaders challenge and question commonly accepted methods. Embrace innovative processes and procedures early on. Learn from and flourish in difficult situations.
- Enthusiasm and passion: Some of the key aspects of being a leader are; the ability to **motivate**, **inspire** and **elicit cooperation** from others. Being enthusiastic and passionate about the vision or objective you can inspire others to “catch the vision”. When others feel your excitement and enthusiasm for the task or goal, it becomes contagious resulting in a motivated team/followers working together towards a shared vision. Likewise a lifeless, dull, expressionless leader will produce lifeless and unmotivated followers.

- **Commit:** A leader needs to be wholeheartedly committed to the project or goal. A leader who approaches a project or goal half-heartedly radiates a lack of commitment and passion for the project or goal which is easily sensed by the followers. This can often result in them being unmotivated and not committing to the tasks at hand. The importance and commitment that you give to the task/s at hand will often determine how important others perceive it to be. Commit and dedicate yourself completely to the project or goal; you'll be amazed at how this can inspire others to do the same.
- **Clear and concise goals:** One of the fundamental aspects of good leadership is the ability to set and define clear and concise goals. It is very difficult to hit a target that has not been defined. Your followers need to know that you know where you're going, and that you know how to lead them to get there.
- **Delegation:** Effective leadership rests largely on the fact that everyone has a full understanding of their role in accomplishing the goal. Get others involved as often as you can. It has been said that "involvement creates commitment". It also creates a sense of joint responsibility amongst the team/followers. A good leader knows when and what tasks to delegate to others and then trust them to take those tasks and run with them. People desire to be trusted and believed in, and most of the time they will live up to your expectations of them, given the opportunity to do so. A Leader who micro-manages and insists on completing all the tasks for themselves, will cause the team/followers to languish and feel unimportant and de-motivated.

Conclusion

John F. Kennedy said "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other". Leadership is an ongoing learning and exploratory process – something we have to define on our own terms. As David Taylor says "Success is whatever you want it to be, it is yours to define."

One important aspect to remain cognisant of is that all leaders are human and all human beings have insecurities, fears, weaknesses and strengths. All humans make mistakes and fail – none of us is perfect. If one looks at some of the greatest leaders in history, such as Mohandas Gandhi and Nelson Mandela one striking, yet often overlooked characteristic is compassion and mercy. It's important that in your quest to develop your leadership that you don't forget your humanity. You need to be kind, compassionate and merciful in your decisions, choices, and with your interactions with your team/followers and others; but equally important, possibly even more important with yourself. Learning, coping with and how you handle yourself both with success and even more so when you fail is vital. Being kind, gentle compassionate and merciful with yourself can provide you with one of the greatest opportunities for growth and development both as a leader and as a human being.

A simple way to approach your development is to ask yourself:

- Is this taking me where I want to go?
- Am I clear about where I am now – what I have and do not have?
- What do I need to do, to get to where I want to go?

Then just get on with it! As the saying goes "practice makes perfect" so look for opportunities to exercise your leadership skills, remember you don't need a title or to be in a position to be a leader. If the leadership opportunities are not there, don't wait for leadership to come to you, how about seeking out opportunities?

As George Bernard Shaw said “The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can’t find them, make them.”

Finally, embarking on a leadership development program may seem to be a daunting, scary and impossible task but remember everyone can be a leader and in the words of Nelson Mandela “It always seems impossible until it’s done”.

Further reading

Adair, John. 2009. **How to Grow Leaders: The Seven Key Principles of Effective Leadership Development**. Kogan Page Ltd.

Goleman, Daniel; Boyatzis, Richard & Mckee, Annie. 2003. **The New Leaders: Transforming the Art of Leadership**. Sphere.

Taylor, David. 2002. **The Naked Leader**. Capstone.

Wilkinson, Mary. **Defying Disability: The Lives and Legacies of Nine Disabled Leaders**. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Goleman, Daniel. 2007. **Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships**. Arrow Books Ltd.

Munroe, Myles. 2009. **Becoming a Leader**. Whitaker House

Munroe, Myles. 2009 **Becoming a Leader Workbook**. Whitaker House

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: full text is available at: <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=12&pid=150>

Sync: is interested in the interplay between leadership and disability; it aims to energise, inform and ultimately change disabled and Deaf people’s relationship with leadership, by offering information and support, encouraging dialogue and designing leadership interventions. <http://www.syncleadership.com>

References

1. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=12&pid=150> (Retrieved: 06 July 2009)
2. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/countries.asp?id=166> (Retrieved: 06 July 2009)
3. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=14&pid=156> (Retrieved: 06 July 2009)
4. <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?navid=13&pid=162> (Retrieved: 06 July 2009)
5. <http://top7business.com/?id=2113> (Retrieved: 15 July 2009)