



## Community Leadership Essentials for Nevada Communities: Series One: What is Community Leadership?

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When you hear the word “leader” or “leadership,” what often comes to mind? Most people respond by naming a single person who achieved some great feat in history, such as Gandhi, Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King Jr., Jane Addams or Clara Barton. Indeed, all of these people were great leaders. They possessed an ability to change public perception, deal with adversity, and inspire others to work toward seemingly insurmountable goals.

Although these people were all great leaders, the notion of one individual having all the skills and resources needed to achieve some desired change is not realistic when discussing community leadership. Community leadership employs empowerment, collaboration and shared responsibility, rather than power or influence. Community leadership evolves from the practice and use of certain skills with the intent of improving one’s community. This leadership series is designed to help you, as a current or emerging community leader, better understand how the characteristics of community leadership impact your capacity to lead.

Whether you recognize it or not, you have the capacity to be a leader in your community. Most scholars today agree, almost everyone has the capacity to lead and

that exercising your leadership potential is paramount in our democratic society. Rather than bemoaning the ineffectiveness of participation efforts, or the lack of leaders in a community, get active and involved in your community. Together, let’s review what it takes to be an effective community leader.

Community leadership is essentially the art and practice of working with others for the common good. Common good refers to something that benefits everyone. As a member of a community or a citizen in a democracy, you have certain self-interests that cause you to want or believe in something. For example, you may want to preserve open space in your community for both the aesthetic value and to provide habitat for wildlife. As a community leader, you will want to know how to work with local officials and other diverse interests to help reach the goal of preserving open space in your community.

First, let’s review what community leadership is not. Community leadership is not about command and control where the leader decides a goal and then informs members of his or her group on the plan of action. Using command and control to lead is usually referred to as a tactical leadership style.

A **tactical leader** tends to explain the goal or objective and then coordinate activities to accomplish the goal. The most common examples of tactical leadership are the military and law enforcement. Members of a group who follow a tactical leader typically have an uncritical obedience to authority. They do not ask questions, nor do they provide much input in the overall plan. While tactical leaders play an important role in the military, the tactical leadership style is not very effective when building community leadership.

Another widely recognized leadership style is that of a positional leader. A **positional leader** is in charge of accomplishing a certain task or goal. A positional leader may present the goal to the group and work to convince the members of the group how the goal or task is also important to them. A positional leader is commonly associated with being at the top or head of an organization, such as a CEO, supervisor or manager. Members of a group who follow a positional leader typically are fulfilling their roles as team members or meeting the obligations and duties of their jobs. Although collaboration may occur in a positional style of leadership, collaboration is focused on achieving the organization's goal, which may or may not be a shared goal of the individual group members.

The most effective leadership style for working with members of a community is a community leader. A **community leader** is a strong process leader—meaning they facilitate and energize others to create visions and goals to solve problems. Community leadership has also been referred to as collaborative, civic or servant leadership. The goal is not to tell people what to do, but to convince them that something can be done. Community leadership uses various skills and actions that encourage broad-based participation, facilitate consensus building, distribute shared responsibility, work to develop new leaders and enable groups to work effectively to achieve their shared goals.

A community leader is a peer problem solver—meaning they serve their followers as a peer. Collectively, they develop shared goals and the necessary actions to achieve the group's goals. A community leader acts on behalf of the common good—meaning they work toward integrative solutions that address an array of interests to resolve conflicts.

The following nine attributes outline characteristics of community leadership:

1. **Recognize leadership is a process**—Leadership creates change through the process of establishing a vision, bringing people together and motivating them to take part in this change.
2. **Inspire commitment and action through a shared vision**—Leaders are action oriented but get results by working with people to inspire a shared vision, commitment and action.
3. **Work as a peer problem solver**—Leaders do not DO the work for the group, but rather help peers solve problems. Their energy is invested in people and they are active and engaged.
4. **Build broad-based involvement**—Leaders recognize the importance of including relevant interests in the community, including a wide diversity of interests.
5. **Gain and hold trust by modeling the way**—Leaders are able to win and maintain the trust of the group and build trust among the group through their behavior, actions and words. Leaders “model the way” and hence are viewed as credible.
6. **Empower people and enable others to act**—Leaders encourage collaboration and teamwork and work collaboratively themselves.

Leaders make it possible for others to achieve greatness.

disenchanted. Leaders work to encourage the hearts of their group members to make success possible.

7. **Challenge the way things are done**—Leaders take risks and challenge the system and the way things are normally done. They are willing to experiment, try innovation and learn from the results. Leaders are stable, but their tactics are flexible.
8. **Sustain participation and hope**—Leaders help set incremental and achievable objectives to help lessen group frustration. They help keep people involved in the process even when a more traditional, but more destructive leadership style, would be easier.
9. **Encourage the heart**—Leaders recognize people can become frustrated, exhausted and

Exercising your leadership potential can nourish your community and yourself in ways you never imagined. The hardest part is getting started and involved. The characteristics of community leadership presented are a path to work toward. It is a rare circumstance for one individual to possess all these characteristics. Many of these characteristics are based on perception and skills. You can work on shaping your perception of community leadership. However, skills are developed through practice. Skills necessary for effective Community Leadership are discussed and outlined in, *Community Leadership Essentials for Nevada Communities; Series Two: Skills Necessary for Effective Community Leadership*.

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