



**INLAND
WATERWAYS**
ASSOCIATION

GUIDANCE NOTE

Leadership Skills



CONTENTS

Introduction	3
What Is Your Role?	4
Task	6
Team	8
Individual Communication	9

First published as v.1 in 2022. This is a web-friendly document and will be reviewed and updated when the source legislation changes. Any printed version may not be the latest version and a check should be made on IWA website. IWA has interpreted the current legislation, as dated in the document, in good faith but the reader should check for themselves that it is the latest version and that they are acting within the legal framework.

INTRODUCTION

A lot has been written about leadership. There’s a wealth of research, views, theories and models out there. This isn’t the place to explore them in any detail but there are a few concepts that are particularly relevant to volunteer leadership and that help us understand how to keep our volunteers safe, motivated and enthusiastically contributing to the task in hand. The phrase “our people are our best asset” has become overused and a bit of a management truism these days. However, none of our projects would achieve much without our teams of volunteers, including regulars, experienced volunteers and assistants leaders who support you.

There’s a time and a place for being the boss or giving a firm directive – it’s rare, though, and really only appropriate in a crisis situation or where there is an immediate safety risk. Generally, ordering people about might get things done to a certain extent but it’s unlikely to keep your volunteers returning to volunteer with your group or returning to camps a second time.

As leader you should be setting a good example to your volunteers - getting stuck in with the mucky jobs and making the tea, working well alongside other working groups and make sure you practice what you preach about health and safety.

There’s been a lot of debate, too, about the differences between management and leadership. Here’s what a couple of commentators have said about the subject:



- A** Boss
- C** Supervisor
- B** Manager
- D** Leader

It says “**leader**” in your title but what are the differences that would evidence that?

Someone described as a boss might tend to rely on authority, issues instructions and demands and deploys their resources. A leader, on the other hand, relies on generating support and enthusiasm, coaches and develops his team members. It is worth sacrificing a bit of productivity to give your volunteers the enjoyable experiences which will make them want to return in future.

KOTTER

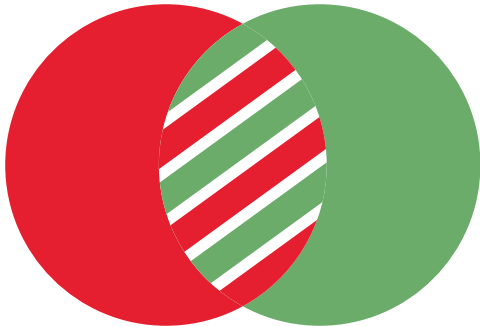
Leadership	Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set direction Align people to vision Motivate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan Organise Control Resolve problems

HOLLINGSWORTH

Leadership	Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovation Development Focus on people Inspiring trust Horizon scanning Doing the right things 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administration Maintenance Systems/ Structure Control Doing things right

There are important elements in both columns here and our view is that waterway restoration leadership needs a combination of the two. The prime position is where the two overlap.

LEADERSHIP



MANAGEMENT

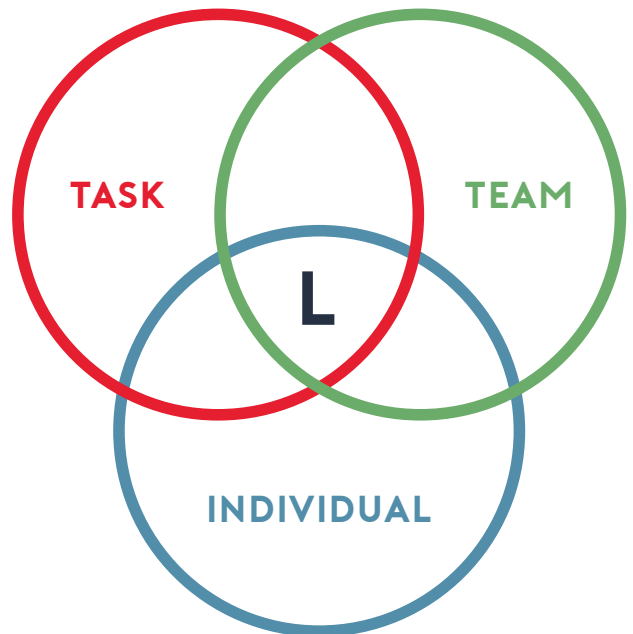
i

When we talk about leading people in this guide, what we are referring to is the overlap.

WHAT IS YOUR ROLE?

John Adair is a leading authority on leadership. Having had a varied career with early roles as a platoon commander in the Scots Guards and an adjutant of a Bedouin regiment, as well as working on an arctic trawler, he later became an adviser in leadership training at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and a professor of leadership studies.

Adair’s Action-Centred Leadership concept and his Three Circles model give a practical and relevant steer to volunteer leadership. The model suggests that there are three elements to all leadership situations – the task to be achieved, building and maintaining the team to do it and developing the individuals who make up that team. The leader’s role is to attend to and balance the needs of all three – if one is ignored, the others are unlikely to succeed. For example, if time pressure leads to intense focus on the task, this could be to the detriment of individuals. Or, while generating team spirit is important, even a really cohesive team will lose focus if it’s not achieving anything.



Adair also detailed responsibilities under each of the three headings but suggested, too, that there was potential for overlap. For example, you won't successfully plan a task without taking into consideration the capacity of your team to deliver it.

TASK

- 1 Define the task.
- 2 Devise a workable plan.
- 3 Brief team members on the task and their role.
- 4 Delegate work to team members.
- 5 Allocate resources.
- 6 Check the quality of the work.
- 7 Control the pace of work.
- 8 Keep the team focused on the plan.
- 9 Evaluate progress and modify the plan accordingly.

TEAM

- 1 Set standards and an example.
- 2 Maintain discipline.
- 3 Build team spirit and encourage teamwork.
- 4 Maintain morale.
- 5 Give encouragement.
- 6 Motivate members to achieve success.
- 7 Keep open communication.
- 8 Deal constructively to resolve conflicts.

INDIVIDUAL

- 1 Involve all team members in discussions and activity.
- 2 Seek out and use individuals' abilities.
- 3 Different styles – bring in quieter members and control overactive members.
- 4 Offer constructive feedback.
- 5 Praise, support, encourage and motivate.
- 6 Attend to personal problems.
- 7 Be fair to everyone.

TASK

This is possibly the more straightforward of the three circles for many team leaders and perhaps more aligned with the management element of the earlier table. The guidance note on Preparing the Project Plan is devoted to detail on planning the work of your restoration project. One or two elements merit further focus here.



Delegation

It is important that the leader is not overwhelmed. A valuable attribute of any leader is self-awareness – what are your strengths, and what do you find difficult? Being honest with yourself and making sure the gaps are covered or delegated, is less exhausting than pretending you're something you're not or that you can do it all. Use the experience of your volunteers and your knowledge of their capabilities to delegate individual tasks of the work party. For instance use an experienced banksman to control the final excavation to profile of a restored canal channel.

Remember that you delegate the work and the responsibility for doing it, but not accountability. Delegate with sufficient guidance, remain available for advice but resist the temptation to interfere. A bit of time spent delegating tasks carefully is an investment rather than a cost. Delegation can fall down if the task isn't completed to the standard the delegator expected and there can be a strong urge to give up and 'just do it yourself'. Communication is key; check in at the early stages of the task and discuss quality when it's needed.



Controlling the pace

It is also important for keeping levels of achievement up and for the wellbeing of the team. Having targets in mind is good and milestones are great for planning and for motivating. But use these as a framework not a straitjacket. You don't want to sacrifice safety or drive your team into the ground, especially where conditions are against you. This is where building some flexibility in to your planning and constantly evaluating progress will be of benefit. An afternoon off or an early finish for some or all of your volunteers can pay dividends.

Information about the task is important for the volunteers to understand what is to be done and the reason for doing it. The information may be given on site where volunteers can see the work area and ask questions.

Instruction in some aspect of the task may be required. There may be a material to be used that has to be mixed in a certain way or requires handling carefully. A piece of equipment, such as a water pump or generator, may have particular operating instructions in order to get it going, and don't forget instruction on how to use the Burco!

Training may be required for new volunteers or a new process. Some volunteers may already possess some skill, but need that to be supplemented with some additional training. There may be a new item of plant on site that volunteers need to be trained to operate. Don't forget that part of the purpose of volunteering is to learn new skills.

Supervision is the final element of the task to ensure quality and the methods are appropriate and to evaluate progress. Supervision will ensure that volunteers are working safely and will provide them with some feedback and encouragement.

e

“It is better not to finish off a task than to finish off your team.”

-
Mike Palmer, Leader's Training day 2018



TEAM

Along with Individual, this is perhaps a more complex circle – both involve people, who aren't the most straightforward of beings.

In most workplaces building a team takes time and effort. Teams go through different stages before becoming fully effective (“forming, storming, norming, performing”). A successful leader will be one who invests time and energy in the team and its members early on.

One of the great take-aways for volunteers will be meeting new people and making new friends. But there may well be people on your project where the work party is made up of different volunteers each day or camp who drive you or each other up the wall. Hopefully, much of this will be self-sorting but, as leader, you'll want to be alert to more serious issues.

Conflict within a team can be damaging and tends to affect the whole team, not just the parties concerned. It's difficult to deal with but less difficult if you can tackle it early. There is no place in waterway restoration for harassment of any kind. The leader should be aware of inappropriate attitudes and deal with any offensive banter.



Humour is a hugely important part of being on a restoration project– it's supposed to be fun – but if one person's “banter” is causing a problem for another team member or is clearly offensive, then it's time for a quiet word.



INDIVIDUAL

Your volunteers will all have different types and levels of abilities. A first principle is not to make assumptions about these, especially assumptions based on appearances or stereotypes! This is something we are all prone to do, so we need to challenge our own thinking.

It will be important to establish what your team members' strengths are and to make good use of them, but also to look out for opportunities for individuals to develop new skills. You'll want to establish early on what your volunteers want to get out of supporting a project – your introductory phone calls or the first site induction are an opportunity to get ahead on this and do some planning. Some people will be happy to do the same routine work all week. Spend time with volunteers early on to get a feel for their capabilities. Others might be itching to try something new but lacking the confidence to say so. As leader, it's down to you to establish which it is and act accordingly.

COMMUNICATION

Communication underpins all three elements. Think about how and when you'll communicate. Effective communication requires both parties to be in a position to listen, so read the situation i.e. are your volunteers itching to run off to the pub after work? A morning briefing can be a more effective time to communicate? When communicating to a large group consider spending a little time planning on what you're going to say, making short notes if that helps you. Explain what you want to talk about, stick to the point, speak clearly, loudly and smile.

When communicating on a one to one basis (especially if the volunteer is angry, upset or anxious) remember to listen properly without being distracted, use eye contact, give them space to talk (don't cut them off mid-flow) and check your understanding. Use reflective listening to repeat back what the volunteer has said to show that you understand what they are saying and take on board their comments.





Remember you can use written communication to support you i.e. your health and safety paperwork.

Thought provoking and helpful quotes:

- ① You are not born a leader, you become one. (A proverb of the Bamileke People in West Africa)
- ② A boss has the title, a leader has the people. (Simon Sinek)
- ③ A leader is at his best when people barely know he exists, and when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves. (Lao Tzu)
- ④ Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it. (General Dwight Eisenhower)
- ⑤ Earn your leadership every day. (Michael Jordan)
- ⑥ A leader leads by example, not by force. (Sun Tzu)

And finally, as a leader you must believe in yourself:

- ① Always be yourself and have faith in yourself. (Bruce Lee)
- ② You are braver than you believe, smarter than you seem and stronger than you think. (Christopher Robin in Winnie-the-Pooh by A A Milne)



USEFUL RESOURCES:

How To Lead Others – John Adair

Sign up to read the full Practical Restoration Handbook and supporting resources here:
waterways.org.uk/practicalrestorationhandbook



Historic England

*This project was partly funded by Historic England's
National Capacity Building Programme.*





The Inland Waterways Association is a non-profit distributing company limited by guarantee. Company registration number 612245. Charity registration number 212342. Registered office: Island House, Moor Road, Chesham HP5 1WA.