
Transformational leadership

“Leaders who can build community capacity... recognize and mobilize all of a community’s assets, they connect across cultures, they facilitate collaborative action, they continuously learn and improve, and they are accountable to those they work with and those they serve.”

- Paul Schmitz

From: *Everyone leads: Building leadership from the community up* (2012, p.87)

Generations of Hope Communities are designed to augment social services by shifting the primary initiative for care and support from professional service providers back to the neighborhood, creating a way of life where everyone, including vulnerable people, can contribute and succeed. To accomplish this, GHC leaders must find ways to build the capacity of the community to create relationships in which neighbors care about each other and work effectively together toward common goals and a shared vision.

Untapped resources

When the gifts and talents of ordinary people of all ages and vulnerabilities become available in new ways, creative solutions to a multitude of social challenges can emerge.

Building this kind of community capacity is different from familiar service delivery paradigms and can be difficult to master. GHC leaders have to walk a fine line between taking charge and standing back. They must recognize that certain decisions and actions can and only should be made by them, but to be most successful their work is most often



A child at Hope Meadows receives a quilt designed and hand-made especially for him by senior residents.

characterized by consent rather than control. Ultimately they primarily enable others to act by giving power away and by playing a supportive background role.

The leadership challenge

This does not mean, however, that the residents of the neighborhood are left completely to their own devices. As Kouzes and Posner in their inspiring book, *The Leadership Challenge* (1995, p.30) write: *Without leaders, constituents have no energizer to ignite their passions, no example to follow, no compass by which to be guided.*

In order to ignite passions and be a compass, a GHC leader has to have a **vision** of what the GHC is about and how it may need to change, grow, and improve in the future. He or she needs to be an incubator of new ideas and someone who can **communicate** these ideas to boards and to the community. The importance of these qualifications is underscored by the work of Daniel Burris, a leading authority on leadership and management, who found that companies that are the most successful over time are those who are the most **creative and innovative**.

In addition, leaders of GHCs must have the courage and conviction to question well-ingrained social service practices and policies, and to strongly and effectively advocate for the implementation of the GHC core principles and guidelines, each of which reflects a critical difference between conventional practices and what is needed for a GHC to be successful. They are **risk takers** who are not afraid of bringing temporary chaos to business-as-usual, and do not take personal offense when others disagree with them.

Key responsibilities

GHC leadership also involves key responsibilities. GHCs are based on the belief that for any of us to have a good life, to flourish or thrive, we need to have in our daily life friends and family who understand us and care about us. It is through these relationships that we meet our needs for supportive family and friends, community engagement, security, belonging, and purpose. Having skills in fostering these key components of well-being is the cornerstone of GHC leadership responsibilities.

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- Kouzes and Posner

As Paul Schmitz notes in his very insightful book, *Everyone leads: Building leadership from the community up* (2011), these responsibilities include:

- building and maintaining **trusting and caring relationships** with community residents of all ages,
- **bringing together diverse people** to solve problems,
- empowering community members to **take responsibility for one another**,
- encouraging people to become and remain **engaged in the life of the community**,
- encouraging the community **to look within itself** to largely determine the shape of relationships, commitments, and obligations,
- **assuming personal responsibility** to mobilize people and resources toward a common goal and **owning the consequences** of that choice,
- **providing purpose**, direction, and motivation to others (to help build a strong and vibrant neighborhood able to meet the ever changing needs of community members),
- **being competent** and inspiring.

Ultimately, for leaders of GHCs to succeed, they must genuinely enjoy being with, and respect people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities. In the words of one parent at Hope Meadows, “This is not just a job; it has to be about who you are.”

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- A Hope Meadows parent

Conclusion

Leadership of a GHC differs from leadership in familiar service delivery paradigms where service is done to community not *with* community. It encompasses the continual challenges of being a visionary, excellent communicator, innovator, and risk taker. And it involves building the capacity of a constantly changing community.

In working with community, GHC leaders see friends, neighbors, and partners where others see clients, and they see assets and resources where others see problems. In working with community residents (including those who often are stigmatized because of their challenges) as friends, partners, and assets, responsibilities and power become shared and the community becomes empowered.

With transformational leadership, residents develop a sense of security, belonging, and purpose. The community develops a real sense of pride, ownership of its mission, and a powerful sense of connectedness and neighborliness. Ultimately the community is transformed as a culture of kindness, and caring develops as a way of life—as a way to address a multitude of social problems.