PATRICK TOMLINSON ASSOCIATES

**THE LEADERSHIP OF ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING SERVICES FOR TRAUMATIZED
YOUNG PEOPLE
PATRICK TOMLINSON (2015)**

Patrick Tomlinson Brief Bio: The primary goal of Patrick's work is the development of people and organizations. Throughout his career, he has identified development to be the driving force related to positive outcomes - for everyone, service users, professionals, and organizations.

His experience spans from 1985 in the field of trauma and attachment informed services. He began as a residential care worker and has since been a team leader, senior manager, Director, CEO, consultant, and mentor. He is the author/co-author/editor of numerous papers and books. He is a qualified clinician, strategic leader, and manager. Working in many countries, he has helped develop therapeutic models that have gained national and international recognition.

In 2008 he created Patrick Tomlinson Associates to provide services focused on development for people and organizations. The following services are provided,

- ✓ Therapeutic Model Development
- ✓ Developmental Mentoring, Consultancy and Clinical Supervision
- ✓ Personal and Professional Development Assessment for Staff Selection and Development

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THE LEADERSHIP OF ORGANIZATIONS PROVIDING SERVICES FOR TRAUMATIZED YOUNG PEOPLE – PATRICK TOMLINSON (2015)

If a leader needs people who can think about difficult problems, it is no use simply telling them what to do.

> The leader of the organization is often between a rock and a hard place. Like Janus, the Roman God of gateways, sitting on the boundary of the organization with one eye looking out and one looking in – both views can seem equally challenging and hopeless. (Barton, Gonzalez and Tomlinson, 2012, p.185)

Rudy Gonzalez, Executive Director at the Lighthouse Institute asked me if I would write this blog on leadership. For over 20 years, Lighthouse who are based in Melbourne has provided a service for young people who have experienced homelessness. This is an achievement of leadership. I feel privileged to be asked to write on the subject and it didn't take me long to realize I could only scratch the service. I will mention some important aspects but leave out much more. Even so, this blog will be longer than usual!

Services for traumatized young people, as well as adults, are fraught with difficulty. Partly because of this, their history is one of controversy, sometimes including cases of abuse and scandal. We know that preventing the re-enactment of trauma is a challenge. It is a sad fact that just as in a family, where those who are supposed to protect and nurture children can end up abusing and traumatizing them, the same can also apply to organizations that are supposed to help the traumatized child.

Therefore, there has been a strong need over recent decades to try and discover what works and what doesn't (see Clough et al., 2006). Can we identify the factors that are most likely to correlate with positive compared with negative outcomes? The UK has had numerous Government initiated investigations into the 'Care System' for children and young people. Often these have been reactive, following the exposure of child abuse. The Warner Report in the 1990s identified two factors that correlated with positive outcomes for children in residential care. These are having a coherent philosophy of care and strong leadership.

Given the challenge of leadership in such organizations and the identification of its importance, it is surprising how scarce the writing on it is. Although, I may have missed a few publications I can think of very few. There are many publications about work with traumatized young people. Some of these have excellent sections on leadership, but there are few specifics about leadership. Adrian Ward's recent book, which I refer to later is an exception. In the wider world, leadership must be one of the most written about subjects. I believe that leaders of organizations who serve traumatized young people would be very well placed to contribute. There could be little else that is so complex and challenging, and such rich ground for learning about leadership.

From the start of my career in 1985 in an English Therapeutic Community (The Cotswold Community) for emotionally disturbed boys, I soon learnt the importance of leadership. At a basic level, effective leadership could mean the difference between chaos and an appropriate level of stability. The difference between the two could mean: getting children to bed and asleep by 10 pm, compared with 3 am; having a satisfying day with young people compared with being physically assaulted and injured; feeling supported and understood, compared with feeling isolated and misunderstood or not even valued.

We had homes with 10 boys in each, a staff group of 5 and worked 60-70 hours (or more) per week. Each home manager reported to a senior management team of 4 people. I guess that on average 50% of home managers didn't last more than 1-2 years. Leaders had to be resilient and create a sense of safety for the staff team and young people. From its beginning, in the late 1960s, this community had consultancy from the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. The 'Open Systems' theory developed at the Institute had an emphasis on issues related to role, responsibility and authority, and how these related to the primary task. This helped me to realize that the way a leader worked was as important as achieving successful short-term results. Short-term results can be achieved in ways that are not always helpful in the long-term.

For example, in any organization that works with traumatized young people, there will be an inevitable desire for a day without too much drama.   The kind of difficulties experienced in these organizations can be extremely anxiety-provoking with high levels of risk. However, preventing the drama can be achieved in ways that are not congruent with the primary task. Some leaders create an order that feels safe. However, they might do it in a way that is based on the power of their personality and which creates dependency. Everything seems fine as long as they are present. The dependency on the 'powerful' leader might stifle the development of the staff team and more importantly the recovery of the young people.

Short-term gains can be sacrificed for long-term ones. How should a leader be evaluated in terms of effectiveness? I think it is important to consider success while the leader is in the post, but also what happened after the leader had gone. Had the leader established a way of working that could be sustained after his/her departure? Had the leader created a culture in which new leaders emerge? For the personality-driven leader, a collapse after his/her departure can even be gratifying. It may feel like confirmation of how good and indispensable he/she was. Some organizational cultures encourage a focus on the short-term and only reward leaders on that basis. Therefore, there may be little to encourage a leader to take the risk of devolving responsibility in others.
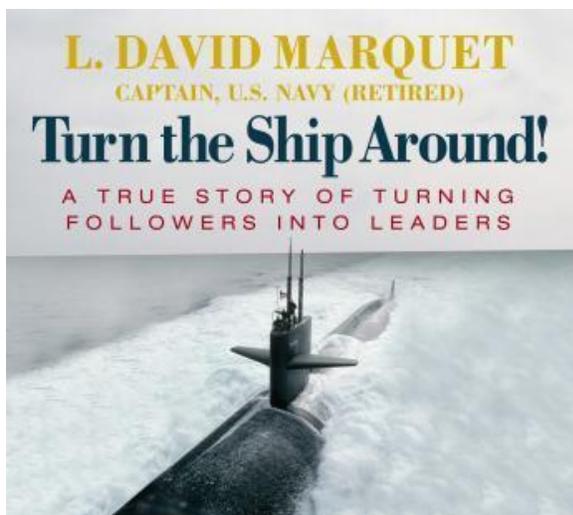
Recently a colleague recommended a book on leadership - Turn the Ship Around! A True Story of Turning Followers into Leaders, by L. David Marquet (2012). While Marquet talks of running a nuclear submarine the essence of his story is remarkably relevant to leadership in the organizations I am talking about.

In some ways, his challenging messages are even more powerful, because no-one can doubt the risk of operating a nuclear submarine, during a war, with over 100 people on board. Yet Marquet says things, such as,

> Our greatest struggle is within ourselves. Whatever sense we have of thinking we know something is a barrier to continued learning. (p.1)

> Resist the urge to provide solutions…. despite the time it would have taken, I should have let my officers figure things out. (p.91)

And,

> When I, as the captain, would 'think out loud,' I was in essence imparting important context and experience to my subordinates. I was also modelling that lack of certainty is strength and certainty is arrogance. (p.106)

This reminds me of the concept of Negative Capability coined by the poet John Keats back in 1817. Keats described negative capability as the art of remaining in doubt *"without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" and "the willingness to embrace uncertainty, live with mystery, and make peace with ambiguity"*.

The British psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion elaborated on this, describing negative capability as the ability to put aside preconceptions and certainties, and tolerate the pain and confusion of not knowing. Bion also knew about leadership in challenging circumstances. By the age of 21, he had been promoted to Captain of a tank section fighting in World War 1.

More recently the child psychotherapist and psychoanalyst Adam Phillips (2013) in discussing parenting has said,

> …. that the parents, the authorities, are at their most dangerous when they believe too militantly that they know what they are doing.

So, the thoughts of a poet in the early 1800s, which have been embraced by the world of psychoanalysis also provide an effective principle in the leadership of a nuclear submarine. In all these cases, 'not knowing' doesn't mean doing nothing. It means acting when we have given time and thought to the problem. 'Being with' the problem is doing something. Where

possible it also means involving others. It also means being clear about people's competence, so we have a realistic sense of what can be asked of them and when we need to 'take charge'. As Marquet (p.128) states, 'control without competence is chaos'. However, when we jump quickly into action with a sense of certainty it may well be that we have defended ourselves against the real difficulties involved. Not only is there a significant risk of mistakes, but we have also deprived others of an opportunity to contribute. Marquet (p.92) explains,

> How many times do issues that require decisions come up on short notice? If this is happening a lot, you have a reactive organization locked in a downward spiral. When issues aren't foreseen, the team doesn't get time to think about them; a quick decision by the boss is required, which doesn't train the team and so on. No one has to actually think through the issue.

Steve Covey (p.xxi) who writes the forward for Marquet's excellent book, states,

> We are in the middle of one of the most profound shifts in human history, where the primary work of mankind is moving from the Industrial Age of 'control' to the Knowledge Worker Age of "release." As Albert Einstein said, 'The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.' They certainly won't be solved by one person; even, and especially, the one 'at the top.'

This approach to leadership means a shift from a top-down leadership-follower to a less hierarchical leader-leader model. This is also reminiscent of what has been described in the world of therapeutic communities as a 'flattened hierarchy'. This approach can greatly encourage the development of authority and responsibility throughout the organization and most importantly in the young people. Menzies Lyth explained (1985, p.239),

> It is in general good management practice to delegate tasks and responsibilities to the lowest level at which they can be competently carried out and to the point at which decision-making is most effective. This is of particular importance in children's institutions, since such delegation downwards increases the opportunity for staff to behave in an effective and authoritative way, to demonstrate capacity for carrying responsibility for themselves and their tasks and to make realistic decisions, all of which are aspects of a good model.

About 15 years into my career I studied for an MA in Therapeutic Child Care. Adrian Ward was the course leader and along with his team provided a model of leadership through the way they ran the course. The training was experiential, and we learnt from this as much as from anything we were 'taught'. All our days at the University began and ended with a reflective group meeting. Ward (1999) has referred to this as the 'matching principle'. The mode of training must match or reflect the mode of practice. The way the course was provided matched key elements of what we needed to provide traumatized children. The same can be argued to

apply to leadership. If a leader needs people who can think about difficult problems, it is no use simply telling them what to do.

The leader of services for traumatized children is not just someone who will help the organization achieve results. Unlike many other businesses, industries and professions the way that he/she does this is of direct relevance to the service user. Traumatized young people have suffered a kind of authority that has been central to their difficulties. Those in positions of authority and power, instead of looking after them, in many cases abused, neglected and exploited them.

The leader represents an authority figure with a specific meaning to traumatized young people as a parental figure. The way the leader does things will set the tone for the culture of the organization. Even if young people don't experience much of the leader directly, they will experience him/her indirectly through the culture. Traumatized young people, like all traumatized people, have experienced a loss of control and a sense of helplessness. Therefore, leadership needs to be sensitive to these issues and encourage a culture that promotes self-control and choice. Trauma also often involves a violation of personal boundaries. Therefore, attention to and respect of boundaries is especially important. Trauma causes mistrust, so establishing trust is important. Denial and 'turning a blind eye' are often the defensive responses to trauma, so it is important to pay attention, listen and hear. All of this can only happen within the context of meaningful relationships. It could be argued that the way leadership is exercised provides young people with a template for healthy relationships.
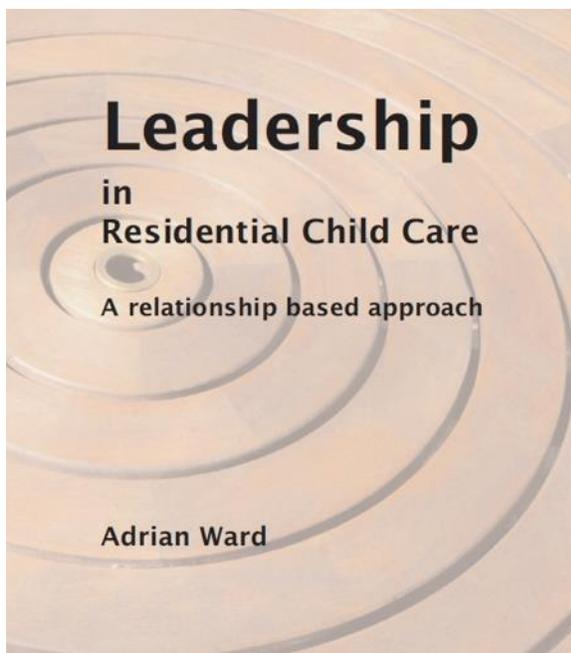
To conclude by tying a few threads together. Adrian Ward (2014) who I mentioned earlier, published a book on leadership last year. The well-respected researcher and author on residential care, James Anglin, in his recommendation of the book, called it an 'Instant Classic'. As the title suggests, Ward's book has an emphasis on relationships. Childhood trauma takes place within a relational context and one of the central elements is attachment difficulties. There is a vicious circle. The lack of attachment makes a child more vulnerable to trauma and trauma causes attachment difficulty. Therefore, the culture of an organization for traumatized young people must be one where relationships are central. Therefore, the culture needs to be both Attachment and Trauma-Informed. The leader in this context becomes a role model for the culture of relationships within the organization. This will influence the way everyone relates to each other, including the relationships with and between young people.

As with Marquet in 'Turn the Ship Around!', Ward also urges that rather than being a problem fixer and someone with the answers, the effective leader works alongside others to find solutions. It is not that a leader shouldn't have solutions, but he/she should resist the urge to jump quickly into that role. While the leader is ultimately 'The Leader' this approach will also bring out the leadership qualities in others including the young people.

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