

*Queen's University, December 2007*

## **Made in Canada Leadership: Wisdom from the Nation's Best and Brightest**

*This recently released book is co-authored by IRC Faculty Member and Fellow Françoise Morissette, who is a leadership development expert. In the following excerpt, we hear from various execs on attaining proficiency through practice - one of five elements identified for optimal leadership development programs.*

Developing leaders need practice to assimilate new learning and make it stick. It is also the crucible through which they find their voice, style and identity. Leadership, like sports, requires extensive practice to achieve proficiency. Therefore, programs have been gradually enhancing experiential components both within and outside the classroom. "Students have to function as a team. They are presented with activities and challenges and as a team, they decide how to master them. The ability to communicate and work together is important." (Theresa [Therri] Papp, Consultant, Rotary Youth Leadership Awards, Rotary International.)

Inside the classroom, this results in many interactive activities, such as simulations, case studies, role plays etc. "Our basic program comprises assessments, exercises, journaling, application, simulations during which participants are videotaped and can see themselves in a action. This is very revealing and complemented by facilitated group feedback and a one-to-one executive coaching session. We also ask them to select a goal to enhance their leadership practice after the program." (Donna Porter, Lead Facilitator, Niagara Institute.)

Outside the classroom, the practice component, often called practicum, must be strategically chosen, extensively supported and analyzed to derive maximum benefit. "The model for the integration and application of leadership learning is customized by each learner, based on the personal leadership challenge faced. For example, in pre-residency online orientation, students discuss a current challenge they are facing: they then work on creating an action plan." (Dr. Nancy Greer, Acting Director, Professor and Academic Lead, School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University.) We found a growing trend to this effect, particularly in organizational programs; however, market reality does not currently reflect this as a consistent best practice.

Practicum activities can include intra-organizational activities, such as assignments, affectations, job shadowing and problem solving. Because organizations want optimal ROI, practicum assignments are increasingly tied to real issues. They can also include external activities, such as community projects, field trips and exchanges. For instance, the range of practicum assignments is becoming more adventurous and global. "We have co-operative internships, one in Canada and one overseas." (Dr. Pierre Zundel, Dean, Renaissance College, New Brunswick University.)

While on assignment, learners always stretch outside of their comfort zone, venture into unfamiliar territory and meet challenges head on. In other words, they broaden their capacity. Therefore, it is important to strategically select assignments to fit each participant's current needs and goals. Richard Bégin, Director, Management Development Programs, said: "The Canada Revenue Agency ensures that candidates get a variety of assignment during their leadership and management development three-year program. For example, if a person has been working in a specialized area, a broad assignment is provided; if someone has had only head office experience, a regional posting will be arranged; if a person is not fluently bilingual, a move to a location where they can practise their second language will be offered."

Assignments need to be as carefully analyzed as they are planned. “We work closely within the workplace to see how clients are adapting their knowledge to specific situations and what they need to do to close the gap. The assignments last between one to two years.” (Mervin Hillier, president, The Corporate L.I.F.E. Centre Inc.)

A popular model features classroom education followed by a practical assignment, both supported by virtual methodologies.

Action Canada Fellows attend three eight-day working conferences in different Canadian cities, including Vancouver and Ottawa, to improve their understanding of the major policy issues facing our country. In the first three years, Fellows have travelled to Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon and Nunavut. They also work in task force groups to determine how these policy issues might best be addressed. In addition to the three working conferences, each task force convenes two face-to-face meetings during the fellowship year and connects weekly by conference calls and emails. The task forces are supported by Action Canada Advisors who work with the Fellows throughout the year.” (Cathy Beehan, CEO, Action Canada Foundation.)

Practice makes perfect and enables apprentices to integrate leadership behaviours. Through practice, skills become ingrained and judgement is refined. Through practice, leaders connect with the role’s essence and learn to express it through their unique gifts. “All the world’s a stage,” said Shakespeare, and leaders grow on the many stages created by practice opportunities.