



Adaptive Leadership for Public Health Podcast Series

Episode #2: Leadership Principles and Practices

Hello everyone, and welcome to Adaptive Leadership for Public Health, a podcast created to help you address the complex challenges of public health leadership by growing and thriving as an adaptive leader. This podcast is sponsored by the Region IV Public Health Training Center at Emory University.

My name is Brandy Walker and I am faculty at the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, a unit of Public Service and Outreach at the University of Georgia. I'll be your host as we explore various aspects of adaptive leadership through our podcast. Today's episode is about leadership principles and practices.

If you think about it, we are all operating from some set of principles that ultimately guide the practices or behaviors that make us the people we are and the leaders that others see us as. Remember, leadership isn't something that exists in a vacuum—it is all about relationships with others. The adaptive leader recognizes relationships as critical to facing adaptive challenges that don't have clear-cut answers.

In today's episode, I'm going to share with you the principles that guide the leadership organization that I work for. As I do so, think about how these principles may be applicable in your public health leadership context, and what additional principles apply for you. Reflection is a key leadership practice, so thinking about what is truly important in the work you do helps you be more intentional and strategic as a leader, and as a member of collaborative teams.

After sharing those principles I'll move on to some tried and true research-based practices of effective leaders, coming from the work of James Kouzes and Barry Posner.

Again, as you listen, *your* work is to consider how these apply in your context, and reflect on what principles and practices define you as a leader.

Starting with principles, most organizations articulate their vision and mission, and sometimes you'll see the principles that guide the actions of an organization.

My organization, the J.W. Fanning Institute of Leadership Development, has a set of 7 simply stated principles that guide the work we do in helping to build the capacity of the leaders and organizations that we work with. As a unit of public service and outreach at the University of Georgia, our mission is to serve the entire state of Georgia and beyond, building the capacity of every client and participant to tap into their personal leadership development, which doesn't have to mean that they are a positional leader, or someone with the title of leader.

So our 1st principle (in no particular order) is that Leaders recognize that *everyone* has leadership potential.

Again, this does not mean that everyone should be a CEO or the president—that isn't possible, right? What it does mean is that everyone can *develop* their leadership potential. Well, what is leadership potential if it's not becoming a positional leader? It is closely related to what we covered in our first podcast about adaptive leadership, specifically, about how as leaders we must focus on managing our environments and managing ourselves. Developing your leadership potential is about developing the skills to be more intentional in how you contribute to and even create productive environments in interacting with others, which includes developing group decision making skills, collaboration skills, conflict management skills, and so on. And then managing ourselves is about being more aware of how we tick, what sets us off, and how we can be more intentional in how we take things in, and how we respond to others.

As an adaptive leader, if you don't recognize that everyone has that leadership potential within them to contribute to your organization, then you may be overlooking valuable human resources in those people, or, you may simply have the wrong people.

So, how do you figure that one out?

Well, our second leadership principle might help. It is that Leaders learn through reflection on their own experiences and the experiences of others.

As we discussed in our first podcast, adaptive leaders are able to step back and see the big picture, and to reflect on what is happening in order to learn, adjust, and respond. Many of you are leaders on the front lines of public health, and you

can find yourself running from one fire to the next, facing one challenge after the other. If you don't make that time to step back to relax, to refresh, to regroup, and to think about your ah-ha's for the day, you can miss critical learnings.

Here's an example: think about that meeting you led today... was there's someone on the edge of that meeting that didn't get heard or that that person disconnected, or was there somebody in the middle of the meeting that was just too out there? What were those dynamics, and how did your leadership and the structures in place to create the environment of that meeting play a role in the experience? Give yourself time to reflect on not only what you've experienced, but what others experienced around you. Take the time to reflect and make the time to listen to how others are experiencing those environments.

Our next leadership principle is that Leaders acknowledge that a wide variety of skills, knowledge, and talents are needed to address today's problems.

This is a cornerstone of adaptive leadership, which recognizes that complex problems call for a multiplicity of approaches and talents. If you look around and your teams don't have a wide array of skills and a diversity of talents, you may need to address those gaps. Public health challenges are certainly complex and require approaches that take into consideration this very principle.

Next, we have the principle that Leaders act and are accountable for action.

Leaders are, of course, required to act—to do things. You can't just be a thought person locked in a thought bubble and not actually do things. But leaders are also accountable for action, not only their action, but often the actions of those around them in the environments that they help to create. Thinking about this principle can be really interesting in terms of public health. That's your job.

Our next principle is that Leaders are inclusive and ensure representation from diverse segments of the community.

This principle reflects *my* organization's commitment to public service. Because our work is in communities, if we don't have representation from all segments of the community, then we're not doing community work. This principle probably has a strong connection to *your* work in public health as well. It's difficult for

communities to respond to public health campaigns or initiatives if they don't feel that those campaigns are speaking to them; if they don't feel represented.

This also relates to the adaptive leader's call to see those who may be on the margins. Think about community outreach and engagement efforts: who are the people who don't show up, even when they are invited? This principle about inclusion means that, if that happens, you don't throw up your hands and say, "Well, we invited them but they just never show up." Instead, look into their "why." Do they feel a lack of connection to the problem? Do they have barriers to accepting the invitation? Would they feel comfortable enough to contribute if they did accept the invitation? Inclusion is more than just inviting, it is about making those who were invited feel included.

Our next principle is that Leaders have a responsibility to develop future leaders.

This principle is directly tied to my organization's mission, but it is really one that *every* organization should consider. Every organization should think about their leadership pipeline and make sure there is a strategic plan for growing new leaders within the organization. Now, that's talking about positional leadership. Additionally, leaders should be mindful of how they are purposefully helping everyone in their organization to develop their own leadership capacity so they can be more productive members of teams.

And my organization's final principle is that Leaders sustain their work through a deep connection to service.

Serving the community, again, is a cornerstone of the work that my organization does as part of the public service and outreach division of our university. And I believe it's a cornerstone of the work that you do as well in public health.

So these are our founding principles of leadership that we have at our organization. Now, think about what leadership principles guide the work you do in your organization.

Now our 2nd topic for this podcast is the practices of effective leaders, from the research of James Kouzes and Barry Posner. They began their research in the early

1980s focusing on leaders who perform at their personal best. They focused on leadership as a measurable, learnable, and teachable set of behaviors, not just something you're born with. At the heart of their work is that leadership is about relationship building. This is also a cornerstone of adaptive leadership—the dynamics of relationships in leadership encounters, and the emphasis on leadership development as self-development.

When we talk about the *practices* of effective leaders, we're talking about the things that people can see you doing—actual behaviors that are observable. Kouses and Posner have a Leadership Practices Inventory instrument that is a great tool to use for self-assessment, and as a 360 assessment. You may have done a 360 assessment, before which is when you get people on all sides of you within your organization to provide you with that 360 degree view of insight. You would have direct reports, supervisors, peers, and even community partners participate in the assessment of what they OBSERVE in your leadership behaviors. If they didn't see it, they don't know it happened. This can be very insightful, because you may think you are doing something, but if no one recognizes that you are doing it, the impact of that behavior may be lost on that audience.

I've facilitated many groups who have taken this Leadership Practices Inventory assessment, and it is a great reflection tool for leaders. Of course you may not have taken this assessment, but I want to talk broadly to you about what these 5 practices of effective leaders are for your reflection, and I encourage you to look into this assessment for you and your organization.

The five practices of effective leaders are:

1. Modeling the Way
2. Inspiring a Shared Vision
3. Challenging the Process
4. Encouraging the Heart, and
5. Enabling Others to Act.

I'll just give you a brief peek into each of these practices and ask that you reflect on how these behaviors show up in your leadership practices and how you see these in others within your organization.

First, with **modeling the way**, leaders should keep projects on course by modeling how they expect others to operate. This is done by setting examples, and also planning small wins. When you are on a long marathon of a project, people need to have points where they can refresh, get breaks, celebrate small wins to keep energized so they can keep moving.

Another critical aspect of modeling the way is to, get this: do what you say you are going to do! That seems simple, but it is very powerful. People are listening, and watching, and so that means first, be careful what you say! And then be sure to follow-through with the action that you promised. Also, be aware of your audience—if the people expecting to see something are not the ones seeing it, did it even happen?

Here are some practical tips on modeling the way:

- Walk the halls and let your teams see you as available, present, and active.
- Publicize what you think is important—the rules of the road, the principles to guide actions of your teams. If people don't know what the expectations are, you can't hold it against them if they don't live up to them.
- Spend time on your important priorities. If your team hears you saying something is a priority for you, but they don't see you modeling that, it may be hard for them to believe it. This also translates to your community partners.
- Build commitment by offering people choices. If there is a goal at the end of the road and there are multiple ways people can be involved, there is a greater chance that they will be involved.
- And then make people's choices public and visible to others. This transparency helps with certainty and accountability.

So those are some ways of thinking about how leaders effectively model the way.

The next practice of effective leaders is **inspiring a shared vision**.

You have to have a vision as a leader to know where you're going, and if that vision isn't something that inspires others, or is shared by others, you may have

followers who just go along with you, maybe begrudgingly, but without the enthusiasm that you want and need. So it's through YOUR enthusiasm and skillful communication that you enlist the emotions of others and inspire *them* to share the vision. You can do this by knowing who your followers or people on your team, and appealing to a common purpose that has meaning for them. In order to inspire others, it's so important that you yourself believe in what you are saying. Developing a clear pitch or "elevator speech" is key so that people can in a nutshell, hear what that vision is and clearly see it. But, be careful that you don't say it so many times that you lose the passion for it yourself and it becomes stale. It's your belief in that vision and enthusiasm for it that encourages others to fully buy into it themselves.

The next practice of effective leaders is to **challenge the process**. This is the one I think is the most fun, because it is often the way that innovation and creativity comes to light. Leaders are not like managers whose primary goal is to maintain the status quo and follow existing procedures. Leaders, especially in adaptive situations, are on the front edge, the frontier, pioneers if you will. They seek out opportunities for new and different approaches, often stepping out into the unknown, taking risks in order to innovate through experimentation without predictable outcomes.

And leaders who challenge the process see mistakes as learning opportunities.

In this practice, you learn how to ask tough questions, like "is this actually working, or is there a better way?" This can be a tough question because people are generally opposed to change and may be comfortable with "the way it's always been done." Leaders who challenge the process are practicing that adaptive principle of seeing beyond what may be keeping people "stuck." People who are strong in this practice are always searching for opportunities, experimenting, and testing assumptions. They try to beat the system. And that doesn't mean that they are trying to get away with breaking rules, but that they push against the rules, processes, and protocols to see if they hold. If they are good rules, processes, and protocols, then they can stand a push. But if they collapse with a push or two, then maybe they need strengthening or changing.

Leaders who challenge the process don't just try to poke holes in things, but to come up with better ways and new solutions.

In your organization, are you able to create an environment that allows people to challenge the process? To test assumptions and offer up new ideas? Do you honor risk takers or do people feel apprehensive about expressing alternative viewpoints? It is a delicate balance –you need to be able to let people rock the boat every now and again to make sure it's sturdy, without sinking the ship!

Next we have the leadership practice of **encouraging the heart**.

As a leader, if you're not encouraging and recognizing people when things are hard and difficult, then they are going to fall off, they are going to go somewhere else where they feel appreciated. And being appreciated can manifest in many different ways. It's not always about the money they are making, or what title they have, though those are important. It can also be about how they are greeted, how they are invited to sit in the break room with others, and how their contributions are acknowledged and celebrated.

Simple actions like saying "thank you" in an authentic way can go far in encouraging the heart.

Another step for this practice is creating support networks in your organization and in the communities you serve.

Also, you can encourage the heart by linking performance with rewards. This is something you would think most organizations already do, but sometimes they don't provide feedback about the results of performance reviews. People need to know when they are doing things well. And when they are *not* doing things well, they need feedback on how to change, not just that it's wrong. So make sure that feedback is there.

Figure out what people need to feel that their work is valued. One strategy offered for this practice is to be a cheerleader. Now, that may not come naturally for everyone, so here's a tip: if you're not good at that, find someone who is to help you with these acts of encouragement. It needs to feel authentic. It's the

little things that sometimes mean the most, but if it feels inauthentic, it really misses the mark.

And our last practice of effective leaders is **enabling others to act**. This is also one of my favorites, because it means you don't have to do everything yourself!

Work on building the capacity of those on your teams and in the communities you serve to do the work—that is a key aspect of adaptive leadership, putting the work where it belongs. Remember, that was from our first episode.

You can do this by involving people in the planning and problem solving, allowing them to use their strengths and find support for their weaknesses.

One way to enable others is to keep them informed so they don't feel like they are in the dark. This can be difficult in uncertain times, but as you build relationships and build the trust of those you're working with, you can be more comfortable letting people in on the details that are in-progress, and they can be more comfortable when you let them know that they need to be patient until the details are worked out for you to share.

Overall, this practice of enabling others to act involves a leader giving people the opportunity to be autonomous and to use their discretion. This, again, is built on a principle of trust, that you trust them because they are part of a shared vision, to do the next best thing. AND, wrapping this all up, that they feel safe enough to learn from mistakes, and you allow that as a leader.

In summary:

Adaptive leaders need to ground themselves in clear principles and practices that define the work that they do. In this episode I've shared with you the principles that my organization operates from, and the 5 practices of effective leaders from the research of Kouses and Posner. Your job is to reflect on these and decide what insights you have that you can apply in your own leadership journey.

Think about how this applies to your organization and consider how others see you practice leadership. Adaptive leaders know when to look at their circumstances from a different vantage point—remember that getting on that balcony.

On behalf of the Region IV Public Health Training Center, I want to thank you for listening. We hope this podcast will help you build your confidence and capacity to address complex challenges in your public health organization by growing and thriving as an adaptive leader. Our next episode will address cultural competency from an adaptive leadership perspective. Until next time, reflect on what you've heard and how it fits into your leadership journey.