

Leaderful Communities | Paul Born

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Forward

This research has provided me the opportunity to address a question that has perplexed me for many years: “how do leaders lead other leaders?” This question led me to study community leadership.

This research has increased my understanding of the ways in which leadership is dynamic and constant. It cannot be controlled. Rather, it should be engaged. I have become fond of the statement, “we need to find ways to create lots of leadership in communities and create systems in which multiple leaderships co-exist with a common purpose.” This research has resulted in a deeper understanding of the systems that lead people to work together and allow people to lead.

This research was intended to help a major initiative in Waterloo Region called Opportunities 2000 which I co founded. The study aimed to help the steering team to better understand its leadership model moving forward. Opportunities 2000 was recognized with a United Nations 1998 Habitat best practices award as one of the forty top urban development initiatives world wide. It was also recognized by Imagine Canada with the 1999 Spirit of Community award for its exemplary partnership with RBC Financial in Canada. Learn more about Opportunities 2000 by reading the book, [Opportunities 2000 Creating Pathways Out of Poverty in Waterloo Region](#) (Waterloo, 2002). The book is available for purchase by emailing tamarack@tamarackcommunity.ca.

This research is also significant because it resulted in a deeper understanding of collective leadership at the community level. This understanding led me to co-found an institute called Tamarack – An Institute for Community Engagement and to launch a national poverty-reduction initiative called Vibrant Communities Canada. Tamarack has produced a large body of collaborative leadership knowledge since it was established in 2001, and Vibrant Communities is now active in more than a dozen cities. Learn more about Tamarack and Vibrant Communities at www.tamarackcommunity.ca.

This research led me to the following conclusions about community leadership.

Community leadership cannot exist without community. When expressed in community, leadership has a distinct tone of collectivism. The leader is a servant in service to the community. The leader exemplifies the best in the community and can lead not by position but by example and facilitation.

Community leadership is based on values. There is no more profound way to express its fundamental nature. Values are evident when people express the way they want to live together. Values make it possible for community leadership to exist. Community leadership transforms values into action.

Community leadership is about collective purpose. It implies a strong desire for the collective good. This desire leads people to action whenever they see or experience that which is contrary to the collective good. Community leaders are given the legitimacy to act when the community believes they will do so for the collective good.

Community leadership is evident when people engage together through shared values in a collective purpose for the good of their community.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

Opening

In 1993, I gathered together 12 people living on social assistance and 12 executive directors of community organizations to plan a project titled Opportunities Planning which would be funded by the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Seven years later, Opportunities Planning and a new project, Opportunities 2000, which grew out of Opportunities Planning, was awarded, by the United Nations, the distinction of being one of the top 40 urban development programs of the world in 1998.

Upon receiving this award and after thanking the many organizations and individuals who had helped to make the project a success, I made the following remarks:

For the last five years we ran a project called Opportunities Planning. This project was highly successful. It put back to work over 1100 people, most of whom had been out of work for more than three years. This project is today being honored by the United Nations as one of 40 best practices worldwide. We changed our approach from a client-service model to a community development model. We applied every best practice we knew, we were continually learning, changing and growing as an organization to accommodate these learnings and yet...during the life of this project poverty grew in the Waterloo Region by more than 5%. Did we do what we said we would do? Absolutely! Did we do what we intended to do, which was to better our community and increase the quality of life for those most marginalized from our economy?

This last question opened up a lively debate.

Introduction/Purpose

The purpose of this action research is to make recommendations relevant to a community leadership model for Opportunities 2000 in the Waterloo Region. The goal is to sustain Opportunities 2000 beyond December 31, 2000, the official ending date of the originally funded project. During this major project, the researcher will review the community leadership model designed in the first three years of Opportunities 2000 and recommend to the Leadership Roundtable of Opportunities 2000 a model for community leadership to extend the project into a fourth year.

The main questions to be addressed in this study include the following:

- What is the fundamental nature of community leadership?
- In what ways is community leadership so defined relevant for communities today?

Additional questions to be considered include the following:

- What community leadership model could Opportunities 2000 implement to ensure that its poverty reduction work would continue beyond December 31, 2000?

