



Traits of a Leader

What shapes culture and moves society? These are characteristics common to effective leadership, as identified by 16 leaders of all ages.

LEADERS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

"She's willing to do that for which she's calling." —Kathleen Saadat

LEADERS ARE LEARNERS

"It's a fun, exciting growth process. Everyone can increase their leadership capacity." —Cliff Jones

LEADERS SHARE POWER

"It's a more-the-merrier impulse." —Cathy Siemens

LEADERS DEAL WITH DIFFERENCES

"You have to be open-minded in dealing with lots of different kinds of people." —Tusaya Dunn

LEADERS ARE INSPIRATIONAL

"Inspire people to move beyond their comfort zone." —Deke Law

LEADERS ARE RESOURCEFUL

"You work with what you have, and take what you can get." —Cathy Siemens

LEADERS FIND COMMON GROUND

"Get people together, get them talking, and they'll change their minds about each other." —Kathleen Saadat

LEADERS HAVE PASSION

"We need to expect great things of ourselves and everyone around us." —Cliff Jones

LEADERS HAVE A PERSONAL STAKE

"You do it because you don't know what else to do to make sense of the world." —Deke Law

LEADERS SERVE

"It's about service, not attention, power, control." —Cliff Jones

LEADERS TAKE RISKS

"Leaders are seeking lives that are always dynamic, questioning their role, ethics, abilities." —Cathy Siemens

LEADERS ORGANIZE PEOPLE

"You work to build the constituency and give people meaningful roles that aren't destructive to them." —Suzanne Pharr

LEADERS ARE CRITICAL THINKERS

"Leaders frame issues in a way that touches people's lives." —Deke Law

LEADERS ARE COMMITTED

"It's hard for many leaders to have a life." —Don Powell

LEADERS REAP REWARDS

"It's a joyful thing to do work that matters and be in a position to influence things, connect people, turn them on to each other." —Cathy Siemens

LEADERS TAKE STANDS

"You need to rock the boat. I'm not afraid to speak up." —Tusaya Dunn

LEADERS HAVE FOLLOWERS

"It's an important skill, to know when to drop something if no one wants to work on it or pay for it." —Cathy Siemens

LEADERS ARE ALLIES

"You need to pay attention to what other groups are doing and support them, too." —Don Powell

LEADERS ARE LOVING

"You can't lead with a heart filled with hatred." —Kathleen Saadat

■ Reported by HOLLY PRUETT

Leading Edge

The gay rights movement has come a long way since Stonewall. Organizations and activists have both flourished and failed. There's still important work to be done.

It's 1999, do you know who your leaders are?

by Holly Pruett • photos by Linda Kliever

Ten years ago, several dozen lesbians gathered at the Bijou, a bistro in downtown Portland, to celebrate one of their own who was headed to the state Capitol to represent the Lesbian Community Project and more than 70 other feminist groups as the lobbyist for the Women's Rights Coalition.

At 26, I was that person. In the decade since my rites of passage in Salem, I have raised thousands of dollars, organized innumerable meetings, and taken the mike at rallies, marches and vigils. My photo appeared in *The Advocate* and my words in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. I devoted my life to the organizations I led—the Oregon Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence, Support Our Communities PAC, the No on 13 campaign—and met with both success and failure.

These days, I work mostly behind the scenes, contributing advice occasionally, money more often, and every now and then turning out for a demonstration or bulk-mailing party.

I don't have a formal role in an organization. I don't have a following. I don't lead anything in a traditional sense.

I often wonder if I'm still a leader.

What is a leader in today's diverse sexual minorities community? Do we have the leaders we need? Do we support the leaders we have? Perhaps we need fewer "leaders" as traditionally defined, and more people with leadership skills and responsibilities.

To investigate these questions, I spoke with 16 leaders whose experiences range from the gay liberation movement of 30 years ago to today's catch-all queer rights movement that lacks a language creative enough to describe all of its manifestations.

Most agree with Eric Rofes, author of *Dry Bones Breathe: Gay Men Creating Post-AIDS Identities and Culture*, who says, "Leadership looks different today."

But Rofes, who has been the director of the Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, San Francisco's Shanti Project, and Boston's Gay and Lesbian Political Alliance, has little patience with those who think we no longer have effective leaders.

Pointing to the proliferation of "queer-identified community-based organizations of every stripe and color" across the country that now number more than 20,000, he concludes: "They couldn't have come about or continue to exist without leadership."

Suzanne Pharr, a longtime social justice organizer who spent part of the last decade in Oregon, concurs.

"We have a world of leaders," she says. "Scads of low-profile, hard-working leaders."

Pharr's evidence includes the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's annual Creating Change conference.

"Go there and you'll see over 2,000 people who are leaders of some sort, though you wouldn't recognize the names of more than 50 of them," she says.

A leader, most agree, is not the same thing as a celebrity, a talking head or a personal crusader.

Some, like human rights leader Kathleen Saadat of Portland, assert that "leadership is not a personality—it's a function."

According to Pharr, "we need a definition of leadership that includes roles for people who are great visionaries, fundraisers, managers and organizers, instead of looking for one dynamo to do it all."

What emerges from these conversations is a constellation

of leadership traits that have built our movements and continue to redefine culture and community.

So, if in fact leadership is alive and well in Oregon's queer community, why is it so hard to identify?

For some, the answer lies in our broader culture, where the media and a growing cynicism marginalize organizational leadership and glamorize individual stars.

The typically short attention span in this culture only intensifies the idealistic desire among activists for immediate



Diana Courvant

results that Lesbian Community Project founder Cathy Siemens characterizes as "Paradise, Now!"

Those doing the nuts-and-bolts work of moving issues along or building organizations may not be recognized as leaders because they don't deliver instant gratification.

The other side of the urgency coin is that some members of the community are feeling very little pain and are therefore less motivated to either lead or follow.

"There's the perception that the wolf is not at the door," says Terry Bean.

Bean, Don Powell and John Baker, three of the community's longtime political activists, all agree that our battles are far from won.

But the increased material and emotional comfort level of some community members leads Baker to conclude, "We

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