



CHAIR'S WORKSHOP LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT FOR CON-RUNNERS

Vincent Docherty

SMOFcon 36, Santa Rosa, 2018

WHO'S UP FOR SOME LEADERSHIP?



Dilbert.com DilbertCartoonist@gmail.com

WATCH ME DEFINE ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR, ALIGN YOUR GOALS WITH COMPANY OBJECTIVES, PRIORITIZE RESPECT, DEAL DIRECTLY WITH CONFLICT, MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND PRETEND TO CARE!



2-12-14 ©2014 Scott Adams, Inc., Dist. by Universal Uclick

THAT WOULD BE IMPRESSIVE.



SETTLE DOWN, BILBO.



Session overview


- Who am I?
 - Topics and issues raised by participants
 - Leadership and management
 - Leadership Characteristics
 - Specific guidance and recommendations, with some tools
-
- Lots of discussion and learning from each other!

Topics and Issues from participants

- **Leadership style and presence:**
 - Issues chairs face – the role of the chair (job description)
 - Coming across as less intimidating to people who work with me
 - Burnout – work-life balance, learn to deal with the stress of being a leader
 - Diplomacy
- **Leadership and organisational skills:**
 - Working out what the situation is. Knowing when to send an email and not to.
 - Apply the learnings of previous events to avoid making the same old mistakes.
 - Scaling-up (size) & scaling-long (time)
 - Public speaking
- **People management:**
 - Delegation and Recruitment (of reliable staff)
 - Dealing with others' insecurities is hard
 - Dealing with an experienced, strong minded committee
 - Learn how to motivate people/ Instilling confidence and empowering
 - Getting personalities that are clashing to work together / Conflict management, interpersonal relationships/ Recognize and address problems and conflicts between staff members
 - Addressing poor and non-performance
- **Task management**

Leadership & Management

- Most definitions separate the two, for instance
 - The manager's job is to plan, organize and coordinate. The leader's job is to inspire and motivate. (WSJ)
 - Management consists of controlling a group or a set of entities to accomplish a goal. Leadership refers to an individual's ability to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward organizational success. Influence and inspiration separate leaders from managers, not power and control (HBR)
- In practice both are needed to different degrees and we **all** have some of them, if only to be able to operate in the world!
- An understanding of what they are and the skills and characteristics have grown over time. Originally from military and feudal hierarchies, then scientific management and time & motion studies, then consultancy-led leadership theories, with some academic underpinning.
- It's important to realise that leadership **can** be developed - up to a point – through practice, training, feedback ...
- Reality check: however it's also important to manage expectations, since it's far from being a Science. Skepticism is needed and watch out for the overuse of tropes and easy slogans.
- SF Fandom has developed a con-running culture, body of knowledge and practices, based on volunteering, learning by doing, making mistakes, and lots of feedback. We tend to repeat and re-learn the same things.



**Some are born great,
some achieve greatness,
and some have greatness
thrust upon them.**

Leadership characteristics

I think these characteristics are important to cultivate by con-runners, particularly at senior levels. They are mostly about people/culture/leadership.

- Self-awareness of why you want to do the job or projects.
- Be aware of your presence ... cultivate it.
- Knowing your own strengths and weaknesses and being able to take feedback on them.
- A desire to do the right thing, keeping yourself and others safe and healthy.
- Having a clear idea of what success looks like and the drive to make it happen.
- The ability to understand, communicate with, motivate and lead people, supported by the right tools and skills.
- Being able to balance principle and pragmatism.
- Having a sense of proportion and humour.
- Humility.

To illustrate this, think of examples where you have seen these and the opposite cases in yourself and others, particularly those who have led you.

A GOOD LEADER HAS
TO BE WILLING TO
BE DISLIKED.



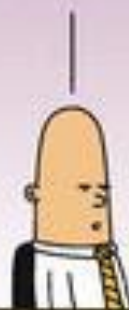
Dilbert.com DilbertCartoonist@gmail.com

YOU MUST BE
A **GREAT** LEADER.



9-17-14 ©2014 Scott Adams, Inc. Dist. by Universal Uclick

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN BY
THAT?



SORRY.
I DIDN'T
EXPECT
YOU TO BE
LISTENING
TO ME.



Notes on the chair's role

- Be aware of the type of leader you are and how you want to be perceived. Are you respected, loved, feared? Are you inspirational, visionary? What is it you bring to the table? How do you know?
- Also be honest with yourself and others WHY you are doing the role. It is usually obvious to others if your actions don't match your words.
- Realise that what you say has extra weight. You have positional authority. Be clear about the 'commanders intent'.
- It's about *being v doing*
- There are reasons to co-chair, but pitfalls as well.
- What is your Plan B?
- What would make you step away?
- Be careful with too many advisers or kitchen cabinets, which dilute messages or cause confusion. Formal deputy and span-breaking roles are okay.
- **Job descriptions** can be useful (though don't make an industry of it!). Distinguish the **What** from the **How**, and remember it's about managing [volunteers](#) who are motivated by love and status.

Notes on organisations

- Org design should be based on the work to be done and what works. Above about 8-12 people you will have teams and therefore interfaces. Form should follow function. Change the structure and the org boxes last.
- There is a lifecycle (drumbeat, cadence) to conventions, particularly if they grow in the one place, and repeating travelling events. These are useful and for many is part of the enjoyment.
- Organisations do scale with size and complexity, with transitions and choices to be made (ideally in advance!). For example when functional/support activities get large enough to need their own organisation. The skills needed in leadership roles also change with scale (see separate slide).
- Dealing with entrenched local 'leaders for life' is difficult.
- Change management – building skills and readiness is better than persuasion
- Speak the right language – detail, summarisation, exec-speak

I FIND IT RATHER
DEMOTIVATING THAT
YOU NEVER PRAISE ME
FOR A JOB WELL DONE.



www.dilbert.com scottadams@aol.com

YOU'VE
NEVER
DONE
A JOB
WELL.

THAT'S
BECAUSE
I'M DE-
MOTI-
VATED.



7-20-06 © 2006 Scott Adams, Inc./Dist. by UFS, Inc.

YOU
HAVE
TO GO
FIRST.

WOULDN'T
THAT MAKE
ME THE
LEADER?



CRITICIZE THE
BEHAVIOR, NOT
THE PERSON.



Dilbert.com DilbertCartoonist@gmail.com

THE EMAIL YOU SENT
TO EVERYONE LOOKS
AS IF IT HAD BEEN
WRITTEN BY A MONKEY
ON CRACK.



1-3-14 © 2014 Scott Adams, Inc./Dist. by Universal Uclick

JUST TO BE CLEAR,
YOU ARE TERRIFIC, BUT
EVERYTHING YOU **DO**
IS EXACTLY WHAT A
MORON WOULD DO.



Notes on staff management

(Additional materials in tools section.)

- Realise that not everyone wants to manage or lead, so don't force them to! ("To thine own self be true.") But do recognise ambition.
- We usually wait too long (friends, trying to be nice, norms) to fix issues, which results in pain for others. There are mitigations.
- Hiring and firing – guess which one is more fun! Guess which is easier to do! The failure modes are different but connected – wrong hiring (individual and 'corporate'/democratic) decisions result in firing ... eventually.
- Promoting people – Peter and Dilbert principles
- Delegating: Letting go of content (trust but verify)
- Dealing with toxic behaviour/standing up to bullies is always hard . How to detect it in yourself?
- Succession planning is important – build it into the timeline.
- Teaching, coaching supporting – individual and organisational capability
- Recognition and reward – volunteers get rewarded by success and feedback and can step away anytime.
- Intro/extraversion – not really a binary but still important, especially in fandom.
- Problems of success: too fast personal progression; manage expectations

Notes on Safety and Risk

- One of your main roles is to ensure the safety of everyone – organisers, participants, professionals, the wider community, city etc.
- Think about this and be clear and communicate who is responsible:
 - Where covered by the facility and external (emergency) services
 - Where supplemented by insurance
 - Where covered by well understood internal rules
 - Where particular focus and attention needs to be given, such as Codes of Conduct and Access.
- Model good behaviour (by yourself and the whole organisation) and be consistent in applying the rules.
- Risk management: Impact v likelihood:
 - Prevention >< Mitigation
- Cultivate ‘Chronic Unease’ and use the technique of ‘Anticipated Regret’

Notes on managing conflict

- As the leader, keep control of your own emotions. In most cases it is a simple difference of opinions. It can always be solved if tackled discreetly.
- Recognise the goals and achievements of all parties.
- Focus on reflecting back behaviours observed not assuming motives.
- Check the understanding of all sides as to the nature of the conflict.
- If not purely interpersonal, try to get focus on the content of the problems. Can you suggest solutions?
- Is something else going on, outside of the convention organisation?
- Recognise that the initial strong emotion or outburst is difficult to control, but it's about moving on from that.
- Communication is often a contributor and part of the solution.
- Help everyone understand that they already know how to self-manage conflicts – they have been doing it all their lives.
- Involve facilitators and neutral third parties as needed.
- Be prepared to offer step-out/time-out options, such as leave of absence, reducing workload, transferring responsibilities or even removing someone from a role.
- Practice conflict management in the team using real examples. Build resilience.

Useful tips

- Overcoming procrastination (analysis paralysis in self and others)
 - just get started (do 30% quickly)
 - contract with others to get yourself started and break the logjam
- Decision making – when not making one is making one.
 - Don't wait too long for clarity (sometimes you won't have the luxury of time).
 - In general, it is better to do *something* to get energy and momentum, then make corrections, or try in small scale, etc.
 - There's a good chance you know enough to be better than 50:50.
- Understand and clarify: Why > What > How
- Acknowledge mistakes quickly and honestly.
- Asking for help is a strength and a great way to build trust.
- Small regular successes are good. Turn tasks into projects (easier to resource!).
- Remember that you can run a really good convention by focussing on:
 - Having great content (Guests, Prog, etc),
 - Getting the basics right (reg, admin, web etc),
 - Taking care of your staff and participants.


Notes on (Self-)Care

- Look after yourself: look out for signs of burnout, contract others to do so, and be ready with mitigations and solutions.
- Real life comes first.
- Be kind to yourself, and others
- Recognise and deal with fear: of failure, of scale, of content/skill, of finance ...
- Self-esteem and impostor syndrome
- Apply 7:2:1 to yourself – especially sleep – plan that first
- There is no such thing as multi-tasking
- What do you do after you've succeeded ... letting go (a role, the event itself), finding new roles and opportunities.

- Always remember Rule Number 6

Notes on Worldcon

- No one knows what chairing a Worldcon is like till they do it. (It is easier the 2nd time!)
- It has a long history and many regulars feel strong ownership of all and/or parts. They will let you know – loudly – if they have a problem. (See social media response guide!) They will also love to tell you about the history and culture – listen.
- Each Worldcon is a separate organisation but we have learned a lot and many problems have been fixed (reg, etc). Learn what they are.
- It has a more that \$1m budget – it's a fixed problem, but causes fear in organisers. It's a vital management tool – use it, but also accept that you never get all the information you need.
- The fundamental principle is participation - everyone contributes, everyone pays, everyone volunteers. Watch out for exceptions (Guests, Hugo Reception...) and where sponsorship is appropriate and where not.
- The Hugos are often the tail-that-wags-the-dog, but remember they belong to the Worldcon and its members, not the other way round. They are also big enough now to have attracted unwanted external attention.
- Marketing is a necessary skill.
- Have experienced people run the WSFS stuff.
- It is a big deal for all involved and for most cities.



Tools & Links

Social Media Response Guide

By Colin Harris and updated by Elizabeth McCarty

- In the current world it's really important!
- The guide is available [here](#).
- **Key recommendations** (simple to understand but hard to do well):
 - Time really is of the essence; the faster you react, decide, and communicate, the easier it is to manage the conversation.
 - Recognize that you're dealing with an expanding bubble of righteous indignation - which after a few steps draws in people who may know nothing about the actual incident beyond what they have read in a couple of tweets or posts. This hive mind is not rational nor sympathetic to your pain.
 - Let go of the emotion; be humble; be willing to apologize sometimes even if you have not done anything wrong.

Scaling of Roles

Different skills are needed at different scales:

Individual Contributor – does a task - volunteer, gopher, specialist

Team Leader – line manager. Manages people who do tasks, and get the best from the team. Usually understands content and has ‘risen from the ranks’.

Leader of Leaders/Communities – Senior line manager. Manages Managers. – understands the content but main focus is on ensuring success of team **leads**

Integrative Leader – Division Head - focus on the horizontal as well as the vertical line. Has joint responsibility for the success of the whole organisation.

Strategic Leader – the CEO or Chair. Sets the direction, paints picture of future, inspirational , (but remember an orchestra can play without a conductor!)

Senior leaders can usually only set direction and make resources available.

Don't mix strategy & tactics!

If something isn't clear, it's possible that different levels of abstraction are (unconsciously) being used. Different people will often start with different assumptions and language.

Ask if the discussion or issue or question is fundamentally about:

WHY

∨

WHAT

∨

HOW

Delegation (ALEX CAVOULACOS)

1. **Be Patient** - The first time you delegate any task, **it is almost certainly going to take longer than doing it yourself**. That's normal. Over time, it will get easier.
2. **Don't Over-Delegate** - Delegation is not shifting work you should be doing to someone else's plate - **it's getting those tasks you shouldn't be doing off of yours**. It's important to know the difference.
3. **Pick the Right People** - Make sure the person you're delegating to is qualified to do the task. Better yet, **try to delegate tasks that will make use of your team members' best skills and strengths**. Then...
4. **Explain Why You're Delegating** - When you select people to delegate to, **tell them why you chose them specifically, and how you hope to see this help them grow**. Help them see each delegated task as an opportunity to take on more responsibilities or grow new skills.
5. **Be Specific** - Be specific with your asks, including why a task needs to be done, the deadlines, and the expected results. **Vague instructions beget vaguely terrible output**.
6. **Provide Training** - Delegation doesn't just mean handing off a **task—make sure your team members have the resources they need to do the job**. A good training rule of thumb is “I do, we do, you do” (i.e., watch me do this, then let's do it together, now you try). [“Know the way, show the way, go the way.”]
7. **Touch Base** - Throughout the course of the project or task, **always schedule time to touch base**. The more complex the task, the more often you may need to touch base.
8. **But Don't Micromanage** - Once you've delegated, trained, and set up a schedule for touching base, back away from the project. **To succeed (and to help your employee succeed), you have to let go**.
9. **Offer Feedback** - Any time you delegate something, **provide feedback on the end result (both positive and constructive)**. It's an extra step, but making sure you're getting exactly what you need—and helping others get better over time—will only help you in the long run.
10. **Say Thanks!**

Identifying Potential

- A tool used professionally: “How to assess the realistic estimate of the highest job an individual will be able to perform in their future career.” Evidence based, that should be recent, directly observable and consistent (i.e., observed by several individuals/multiple occasions)
 - Capacity: You'll need to bring the intellectual, analytical and creative ability to learn quickly, identify issues, make judgments and propose solutions
 - Achievement: We'll expect plenty of enthusiasm, resilience and confidence - you'll be someone who can always get things done
 - Relationship skills: You should have the character and ability to work effectively with others in a diverse team
 - Technical skills: Understanding and approaching technical issues coupled with an enthusiasm for technical challenge.
- A recent HBR article <https://hbr.org/2017/10/what-science-says-about-identifying-high-potential-employees> identified three general markers for high potential: Ability, Social Skills and Drive.
- Leaders should have some demonstrated content abilities, be able to communicate with their people such that they will work towards a common goal, and have sufficient drive and motivation to make things happen - **and** have clear scope and ability to develop these further *before* they get promoted.
- Learning on the job is fine but you also have to have the capacity to do the next role.

Getting Feedback

- Tool: 360' Feedback - An anonymised process for getting structured feedback from those who have actually seen you in action (line managers, peers, subordinates, others) based on a number of criteria relevant to performance as defined in your organisation.
- Put simply, you want to know:
 - What should I keep doing/do more of
 - What should I do less of/stop doing
- It is important to get *some* data to reveal any gaps in your self-awareness, as that seems to me to be a big failure mode in con-runners who step-up to a leadership role, often for the wrong reasons.
- (We could all list a few names I'm sure from recent Worldcons, where the 'Peter principle' applied - just because someone is a big name in local fandom, or has successfully led a bid, or simply wants the Past-Worldcon chair ribbon, doesn't mean they have the skills and aptitude to chair a Worldcon ... as several 'palace coups' have shown...)

Situational Leadership

- This means consciously matching your leadership style to the capacity or readiness of individuals and teams.
- It recognises the stages of development of a team (both temporary/project and permanent teams), often simplified as Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing.
- Typically at the start, direct support is needed, which over time changes to coaching & supporting, and ends up as delegating.
- Other leaders can also be useful as mentors.
- Research indicates this approach is probably true at the early stages of a career and team formation, but is less clear at the later stages.
- I find it useful as a general model, especially since convention organisations tend to have shorter duration and have lots of changes of people (managing voluntary organisations is hard!) and often bounce around the forming/storming/norming stages.

Servant Leadership

- Inverting the hierarchy - "Servant leadership turns the power pyramid upside down; instead of the people working to serve the leader, the leader exists to serve the people."
- In practice it means the leader(s) focus on ensuring the success of the people and teams who are actually delivering the work. This is a good match to situational leadership particularly at more mature stages.
- I like to use the "Survive – Succeed - Serve" model for consulting and leadership roles:
 - When you start it's about simple survival - it's a struggle and you make it over the finish line, just! You learn a lot at this stage and need a lot of support and coaching.
 - Once you master the basics and the content, you've made it, feel confident doing the role and are recognised as successful. However it's easy to become over-confident or arrogant, and there can be a tendency to 'wear the badge of success'.
 - Moving to a serving mindset means making it less about your own ego and success and more about the success of the individuals and teams you are leading. Their success is your success.

Think of the system

- Individuals and teams who have grown to be very good at their current role within their current convention setup, often struggle when the nature of the challenge changes. For instance a con that reaches a critical threshold of size, or when a local club has successfully run a local con for years decides to bid for a travelling event such as SMOFcon, WFC, Worldcon etc.
- It is important to recognise that context and structure (organisational capability) are as important as individual capabilities. 'It's about the system, stupid.'
- Look at the 'whole system' dimensions of your organisation:
 - Context and Strategy
 - Organisational structure
 - Processes and interfaces
 - People & Culture
 - Governance & Leadership
 - Outcomes
- How do those change at different scales of job and organisation?

Useful resources

- <http://fannishconventionmanagement.wikidot.com/>
- [<http://fannishconventionmanagement.wikidot.com/leadership-roundtable>](http://fannishconventionmanagement.wikidot.com/leadership-roundtable)



DISCUSSION