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# Journeys in Leadership

by Nancy Rosenow

One thing I have learned over the years from wise mentors and colleagues is that leadership is an inside job. Our first and most important work is with ourselves. Until we work on our own misconceptions and heal our internal challenges, we won't be very effective at leading others. Recently I had the chance to talk to three dynamic early childhood professionals about their experiences and discoveries over the course of their leadership journeys.

This is what Alison Maher had to say:

*I have been a leader at Boulder Journey School in Boulder, Colorado, for over two decades. I have recently stepped into the position of executive director at the school, so it is valuable for me to reflect on my leadership style and how it has evolved.*

*As a young leader, I had many misunderstandings about my role. I feel fortunate that I have been given the time and freedom to experiment and collaborate with colleagues in order to develop an approach to leadership that is effective for myself and the school.*

*The most valuable lesson I have learned is to be a good listener. This is the only way I can adequately represent the many viewpoints of*

*my colleagues when making decisions about the future of our school.*

*I have learned to be comfortable with change. While the core values lived at our school remain constant, we constantly evaluate the effectiveness of our work and systems in order to determine when and how to re-invent aspects of our school and our teacher education program.*

*I have learned that I can be inspired, rather than feeling as though I must always be inspiring. I can embrace my own learning and model a passion for innovation. I can share in the excitement of the successes and discoveries of my team. I can also share in the excitement of our collective failures, as each failure offers us new opportunities and new clues or indicators for how we can improve.*

Eric and Elyssa Nelson work together as leaders of two collaborating programs.

Eric, who is part of the Exchange Leadership Initiative, is director of the Outdoor Classroom Project. This is what he had to say:

*Recently an article came across my newsfeed called Why You Should Stop Being So Hard on Yourself (by Charlotte Lieberman, New York Times, May 22, 2018). It reminded me of one of the most valuable lessons I've learned about leadership. In order to work effectively with others and not be judgmental of them, it's so important to become*

*aware of any negative judgments I'm holding about myself.*

*I've learned that whenever I'm feeling critical of someone else, it's usually a reflection of some self-criticism I'm holding. That helps me know it's time to stop being so hard on myself.*

Elyssa Nelson, executive director of Child Educational Center-Caltech JPL Community, added:

*I actively use Kevin Cashman's definition of leadership described in his book Leadership From the Inside Out as authentic self-expression that adds value.*

*In every situation, I ask myself how I can add value to whatever is happening through my authentic self, as an expression of loving.*

*I work with people where they are, valuing who they are, looking for ways to benefit from the contribution they can make.*

*I believe I invite a growth mindset with others through active acceptance and non-judgment, keeping in mind that in every situation people are doing the best they can at the moment with the resources they have.*

*When I'm feeling especially challenged I look for my opportunity for greater awareness, learning, and personal growth in the situation. There is always something to be learned no matter what I am facing.*



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