Preface

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.

— John Quincy Adams

❖ AN IMPORTANT NOTE TO SOCIAL SERVICE LEADERS

Thank you for taking on one of the most important, challenging, and complex roles in social services. Unless one has operated in the role(s) of team leader, supervisor, coordinator, or manager in any of the varied sectors of social services, one cannot truly understand the inherent, multifarious challenges that arise from the complex roles and responsibilities of a social services leader. Thank you for committing yourself to support, supervise, and/or manage exceptionally valuable human-caring work through other people. Thank you for wanting the best and doing your best for the incredible people that work with you and for the important people that they serve and support. You cannot be thanked enough for your commitment, dedication, and hard work. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

❖ BACKGROUND

Leadership within the social services industry is gratifying and also very challenging. However, it does not have to be as difficult as it is. The work presented in this book was constructed as an effort to make your role as a leader less complex, less stressful, and much more rewarding. It has been motivated, over 20 years, by my experiences as a frontline helper, university instructor, supervisor, manager of supervisors, trainer of supervisors, and consultant to and with supervisors.

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It has been inspired by my own field experience and thousands of collaborations and conversations with managers, supervisors, and frontline workers who have conveyed a need and/or desire for something BETTER—better leadership for themselves, for their work, and above all for the important people they serve.

Whether you are brand new to the role of leadership or you have been doing it for years, this book is intended to enhance the meaning, value, and quality of your leadership efforts so that you may enhance the capacities of your workers in a manner that translates into higher quality service for the people they are responsible to care for and support. It was developed to provide you and all leaders in social services with valuable insights and practical strategies for inspiring, motivating, and engaging employees and staff teams to feel BETTER, be BETTER, and do BETTER as they carry out their important work with children, youth, families, and communities.

❖ STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This work has been designed to build a strong case as to why a Responsive Leadership Approach is essential for approximating and achieving preferred outcomes for both employee and clients. While the discussions presented are intended to be relevant and insightful for all leaders in the various social service sectors, the real potency of this work stems from the highly practical and immediately operational leadership tools and strategies offered throughout. It is my hope that the applications offered will affirm and validate what you are already doing well as a leader and provide additional hints, tips, and strategies for developing and advancing your leadership capacities further.

The book is divided into two main parts. Part I comprises Chapters 1 and 2 and is geared toward setting the stage and building a solid case for a Responsive Leadership Approach in social services.

Chapter 1 presents an honest look at the challenging realities of the current social services system, highlighting serious impediments to preferred practice and employee outcomes. The first chapter notes the multifarious and negative implications of such impediments on the overall well-being of workers and links worker stress, intent to leave, and burnout to less-than-positive outcomes for clients. Quality supervision is presented as a major factor for mitigating many of the effects of identified organizational and work challenges; however, supervisors and quality supervision are not immune from the challenges and

impacts of very tough work environments. Chapter 1 concludes by suggesting that *leadership* is the answer we might be looking for.

Chapter 2 builds on Chapter 1 and continues to compose a strong case for the leadership tools and strategies offered in Part II. The second chapter begins with a definition of leadership and suggests an important shift from supervision to leadership as inspiration. The discussion reviews a wealth of practice wisdom, scholarship, and research to demonstrate the role effective and quality leadership plays in enhanced and sustained worker engagement, motivation, and overall performance, including the positive impact these have on preferred outcomes for clients. Chapter 2 concludes by tying together what we know about quality and effective leadership with an introduction, overview, and guiding priorities of a Responsive Leadership Approach.

Part II of the book comprises Chapter 3 through Chapter 8. These sections offer a springboard from the conceptual to the highly practical by bridging the discussion established in Part I to the tools and strategies that accommodate the guiding priorities of a Responsive Leadership Approach offered throughout Part II.

Chapter 3 presents the important idea that quality and effective leadership are determined by the perception and experiences of individual members. The discussion emphasizes the benefits for leaders in learning about and engaging the unique needs, values, goals, and strengths embedded within employees' experiences. The Key Performance Motivators Scale (KPMS) and the Preferred Leadership Profile (PLP) are presented and discussed as valuable tools for enhancing and sustaining worker, engagement, motivation, and overall performance.

Chapter 4 represents a very detailed account of the importance of discovery and meaning-making within the Responsive Leadership framework. This section of the book offers leaders a comprehensive rationale and detailed process outline of the most effective communication strategy for creating a pathway to the employee and the employee's story. Several case situations are presented to illustrate the structure and process for meaning-making and discovery.

Chapter 5 is devoted solely to a strengths-based approach in leadership. The discussion opens by establishing the rationale and need for a strengths-based approach as an important method to counter the negative implications of problem-oriented approaches to supervisory training and performance development common in social services. A thorough overview, including the key components of a strengths-based approach, is presented in the context of a Responsive Leadership

Approach. The chapter offers a variety of strengths-based tools and strategies, coupled with illustrative examples of the strengths-focused methods in operation. Finally, the discussion offers a substantial list of positive and profound implications for worker and client outcomes that are a direct result of a strengths-based approach to leadership practice.

Chapter 6 offers a concentrated focus on doing inspiration and represents the most practical portion of the book. Built around the Key Performance Motivators Scale presented in Chapter 3, this segment introduces seven domains (relationship, vision and values, mission and goals, appreciative, personal/professional, feedback, and strengths) that can be accessed by leaders to enhance the motivation of most workers. Each domain offers leaders a plethora of tried-and-tested strategies to positively influence the attitudes and behaviors of workers to perform optimally.

Chapter 7 covers one of the most popular topics of interest for social service leaders: understanding and effectively dealing with employee opposition and resistance. The discussion opens up by defining and identifying various types of employee resistance and oppositional behavior. The chapter sets out competing perspectives on employee resistance and demonstrates the differential impacts these perspectives have on a leader's ability to effectively handle concerning and/or challenging behaviors. A variety of proactive approaches for decreasing and even eliminating resistance and opposition are offered throughout this segment as important considerations for all leaders. The discussion emphasizes the four core Responsive Leadership guiding principles that are foundational for dealing with employee opposition in the most efficient and effective manner. Finally, as an attempt to provide the most illustrative guide to the step-by-step Responsive Leadership Process for eliminating challenging employee attitudes and behaviors, a case situation is presented in detail. This section may represent one of the most important segments of the work as it brings to bear almost all Responsive Leadership tools and strategies offered throughout the entire book.

Chapter 8 represents a brief epilogue as the conclusion to the work offered herein. This final segment revisits the intentions and anticipated outcomes that were established at the beginning of the book. In an effort to maintain the practical disposition of the work offered, the epilogue provides the reader with some final insights and important considerations to further enhance their own leadership quality.

A Preferred Leadership Profile (PLP) and Key Performance Motivators Scale (KPMS) are available to those using this book. To access these tools, visit study.sagepub.com/degroot.

In addition to providing information and practical strategies for enhancing worker engagement, motivation, and overall performance, Chapters 1 through 7 offer the reader summaries of important points and valuable leader reflections and important considerations based on the content. These final sections of each chapter were constructed so that you may connect with your experience of the material in a manner that may fortify your capacity and efficacy as a leader, on your own personal and professional journey to enhanced leadership development.