Tiny Mad Ideas
Are You Leading with Your Head or Your Heart?
By Megan Harris-Pero, Esq., LEAD Class 16

The LEAD definition of leadership is “a social influence process for change.” As a society we like to focus on large external changes. However, as we learn in LEAD, managing change begins with self-awareness.

My classmate, Matthew McIntyre, gave a powerful graduation speech about the inevitability of change and challenged our class to welcome change. Welcoming and managing change is often a personal process. I would like to share with you how I bring self-awareness into my decision making process in the hopes that it may assist you in your own introspection around personal change.

This past year I have gone through many change experiences: starting my own law practice, participating in LEAD, and training to teach yoga. The self-reflection practice I am sharing here comes from my yoga practice and is intuition focused. As an attorney, I consider facts to be important; however, I still find my intuition to be invaluable, especially when deciding whether to take on a leadership challenge.

Listening to intuition is a practice recognized by many spiritual leaders, psychologists, and scientists like Sigmund Freud.

When facing a difficult decision, my process for listening to intuition is to consider whether a decision is being made from my ego (the voice that says “you should”) or from my heart (what feels right). If that’s too much spiritual-speak for you, you can think of it as questioning whether a decision is primarily for your resume or is it for the joy of the experience. Sometimes a decision fits in both columns - that is okay. Asking the question helps predict how the change resulting from the decision will make you feel. Heart-based decisions should generally feel right and good. Ego-based decisions can appear rational but feel bad or draining. By predicting how the outcome will make you feel, you can be more empowered to make decisions that feel good and thereby lead with your best self.

Before you consider whether a decision is ego-based, it is helpful to know what your ego sounds like. One way of identifying your ego is to reflect on how you talk or write about yourself. Your self-introduction can be very revealing. Though in most environments you don’t introduce yourself in such depth as you may have at LEAD, you can still pay attention to stories you tell and don’t tell about yourself, and give yourself time to think about why. You may recognize your preferences and motivations in these stories. You may even recognize your Myers-Briggs Type, and if you’re lucky, you will recognize your ego in the back of your mind in the form of a “tiny mad idea.”

A tiny mad idea is often a negative story the ego replays. Identifying the tiny mad idea is an essential step in weakening its power. When I check in on whether a decision is ego-based or heart-based, I often look for that tiny mad idea to see if it’s in the driver seat.

It seems we all have a negative voice running the show at times. The tiny mad idea comes in many forms but is usually the thought that you are “un-something” (un-lovable, unwanted, unworthy). I have heard it described by LEAD classmates as basically, “I’m outgunned, I don’t have what others have (be it knowledge, a degree, experience),” “I am not worth LEAD’s investment in me,” or “I’m not sure if my perspective is valued or valuable.” When the tiny mad idea resurfaces and you notice it, it can let you know when your ego is trying to take over. In discussing with classmates, tiny mad ideas were very prevalent at our first session together, perhaps it’s the nerves of beginning a change as a group. Can you imagine if we let those voices run the show? We would have all quit at that first session if that was the case.

For me this tiny mad idea has always been whether I am enough? It says, “Do I know enough?” At its most powerful, the tiny mad idea has lead me in pursuit of perfection. It’s not all bad. I have achieved a lot with pressure from my tiny mad idea. The problem is, if I take something on for...
Alumni Study Trip Survey Results Are In

LEAD will offer an alumni study trip to Ireland in July 2017

This past winter, we surveyed our alumni to gauge their interest in a potential study trip offering. We had a very good response rate, with nearly 100 alumni responding—enthusiastically, I might add. Suffice it to say that there was sufficient interest to warrant exploring the possibilities further, which the alumni committee of our board of directors did this past spring. We are pleased to announce that we will offer an alumni study trip to Ireland in July 2017. Before I get into the details, allow me to summarize what the survey results told us.

**Duration, Cost and Eligibility**

It was clear from the results that most of our respondents would be willing to take a 7 or 8 day trip, and that they would be willing to spend about $3,500 per person on the trip. Beyond that—in either duration or cost—our participation rates would suffer dramatically. So 7-8 days it is, and we will try to make our trip come in around this budget range. The trip will be open to LEADNY alumni, board members, and their spouses/partners.

**Timing**

The winter months (January – March) were the most favored months to travel for most alumni. Unfortunately, those are also the most favored months to travel for most Western European countries (harvest and holidays). So, we opted for July, which also had some interest in Cuba, but our travel advisors advised us to hold off for the time being on that country. Next most popular were Western European countries in general. And given some of the contacts we have there, our committee opted to go with Ireland for this trip. Several other alumni groups have been there, and had wonderful experiences.

**Itinerary and other details**

A detailed itinerary will be mailed to alumni separately in the near future. Suffice it to say that the trip will be educational in nature (offering a variety of agricultural, historic and cultural tours, speakers and networking opportunities), but will be a far less rigorous pace than our typical LEAD Fellows study trip. In other words, there will be a little more free time to shop, relax or grab a meal on your own than we typically offer to our class members. Rest assured that our itinerary will be informative, fun, and offer outstanding networking opportunities for all.

Keep your eyes open for further details in the coming weeks. We will first put out a draft itinerary and call for pre-registrations. This pre-registration will hold your place on the trip, and if over-subscribed, we will begin a wait-list. In the late fall, once airfares are finalized, we will require a deposit on the trip, and if over-subscribed, we will begin a wait-list. In the late fall, once airfares are finalized, we will require a deposit (typically around $500) to hold your space on the trip, and the itinerary will be finalized. Payment in full will be required this winter, prior to departure.

As I said in my last Perspectives article, study travel is a valuable continuing education opportunity available to our alumni. I would encourage you to give serious consideration to this offering. We look forward to rekindling your LEAD enthusiasm with this alumni study trip.

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By Larry Van De Valk, Executive Director, LEAD New York
When I went through LEAD NY ten years ago, I questioned my ability to lead. I never thought of myself as a leader, and quite honestly, had never aspired to be one. Either. My extroverted self lived life to the fullest, wearing my heart on my sleeve and my passion serving as my only road map. So it came as no surprise when we finished our personality traits in LEAD to realize I was an "otter". (For those unfamiliar with this exercise, it's a simple test that matches your temperament with four animal species: otters, retrievers, lions and beavers. Otters are creative, fun-loving people, who like to network and motivate others.) That was a real "a-ha" moment for me. All those quirky personality traits that make me -terrifying because as an otter (and thanks to LEAD NY), I knew all too well my weaknesses. However, almost four years later, I was given an opportunity to unleash my inner otter as the executive director for the New York Animal Agriculture Coalition (NYAAC), where I serve today. The thought of this position was exciting! I could be its leader! It was also terrifying because as an otter (and thanks to LEAD NY), I knew all too well my weaknesses. However, almost four years later, I feel like I'm doing what I imagine to be doing. All those quirky personality traits that make me -terrifying because as an otter (and thanks to LEAD NY), I knew all too well my weaknesses. However, almost four years later, I feel like I'm doing what I imagine to be doing.

Fast forward a couple years, and I was given an opportunity to unleash my inner otter as the executive director for the New York Animal Agriculture Coalition (NYAAC), where I serve today. The thought of this position was exciting! I could be its leader! It was also terrifying because as an otter (and thanks to LEAD NY), I knew all too well my weaknesses. However, almost four years later, I feel like I'm doing what I imagine to be doing. All those quirky personality traits that make me -terrifying because as an otter (and thanks to LEAD NY), I knew all too well my weaknesses. However, almost four years later, I feel like I'm doing what I imagine to be doing.

By Jessica Ziehm (class 10), Executive Director, NYAAC

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ego purposes only, for the sake of proving to myself that the tiny mad idea is wrong and that I am enough, it causes burnout. Or alternatively, if I avoid taking something on because of the fear behind the tiny mad idea, I can miss out. If I let my tiny mad idea of “not being enough” run the show, I never would have done a lot of things – including apply to LEAD.

The secret of the tiny mad idea seems to be in self-awareness. When you can identify your ego-based thoughts (especially those negative, tiny mad ideas), you can make decisions that are not ego-driven or at least be aware of ego-attachments.

When asked how I found LEAD or why I applied, this can trigger my tiny mad idea, the feeling is something like, “Oh no, you’re outed. You don’t have a family in agriculture and you didn’t go to Cornell.” My responses are: 1. I appreciate agriculture, 2. I want to serve agricultural clients in my law practice, and 3. I felt a calling to use my skills in this area. What is difficult to articulate is that intuitive feeling – the gut feeling that brought me to LEAD.

As I was forewarned, the LEAD experience has been as much about self-discovery through the lens of leadership as it is about agriculture. I’m learning about agriculture and learning that I am enough. Year two will include a lot of leadership decisions. There are expectations to join organizations and hold titles. I have begun answering the call, realizing the need to check-in and ask, “Does this serve the heart or the ego?” Though I acknowledge a bit of ego in wanting to see things through, the heart still seems to be connected to LEAD. I hope the practice of learning and leadership continues to be heart-led and rewarding. I wish for each of you to discover the gift of uncovering your own tiny mad idea. While it can stay in the car, try letting your heart drive your leadership decisions!