

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-loveable, 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

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By Larry Van De Valk,
Executive Director, LEAD New York



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 \$3,000 per person on the trip. Beyond that – in either duration or cost – our participation rates would likely suffer dramatically. So 7–8 days it is, and we will try to make our trip come in around this budget range. The trip would 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 worst months of the year for LEAD to run such a trip, given our seminar schedule, recruitment events, and class selection process. And our board was adamant that any alumni study trip offering should in no way compromise the quality of our current

class programming and recruitment efforts. So, we opted for July, which also had some strong alumni availability (likely because it is after planting season and before the fall harvest and holidays).

Location

China and India definitely got the most votes, but both are inconsistent with what alumni said they were willing to invest, from both a cost and duration standpoint. In other words, we won't be going to either of those locations in 7 or 8 days for \$3,000 per person – it's just not realistic. There was some interest in Cuba, but our travel operators 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 air-fares 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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SPOTLIGHT ON...

An Otter Kind of Leadership

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



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 roadmap.

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 the time leading up until then I thought of my traits as weaknesses. I was criticized at one job for my “youthful enthusiasm” and my creativity was buried in layers of bureaucracy at my then-current job. But no two ways about it, I was an otter, and that newfound information and realization was liberating!

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’m suppose to be doing. All those quirky personality traits that make me who I am are at last being put to good use.

Today, I serve as an advocate for dairy farmers throughout the state, working to enhance the public’s understanding and appreciation for animal agriculture. My role takes me to the farm level to help inspire and motivate farmers on how to best tell their story and converse with the public. It also provides me a stage where my passion and creativity can shine, where I can interact with consumers, and where all otters like to perform – in front of a crowd.

My skills and style are also fitting for NYAAC’s flagship event – the Dairy Cow Birthing Center at the New York State Fair, which I helped initiate. This educational exhibit showcases three live births daily and brings

together over 350 members of the dairy industry to serve as the spokespeople, many of whom I met through the LEAD NY network. The real success is not the fact that it attracts nearly a quarter of a million visitors over twelve days, but rather the amount of time visitors spend at the exhibit and the interactions that take place between farmer and fairgoer. Almost half of the fairgoers surveyed admitted to spending well over two hours at the exhibit, not only waiting to witness the miracle of life, but consumed with conversation with dairy farmers, asking them questions, and gaining a mutual respect and trust for each other. It’s a dream event for an otter, and while the relationships garnered at the Birthing Center are a victory, they are just the tip of the iceberg.

There is much more work to be done in the world of agricultural advocacy. Twenty years ago, you never heard those words used together in the same sentence. Today, it’s a common topic in the farm driveway, at conferences and on social media, and it’s a need that agriculture must address. To do so effectively, it requires a different skill-set than that of a traditional leader. Sure a problem-solving or goal-oriented leader could be a strong candidate, but this line of work requires out-of-the-box thinking, spontaneity, communication skills, an attention grabbing personality and the desire to work with a wide variety of people. Fortunately, there’s a leader for that.

LEAD NY helped me recognize and embrace the leader in me, which just so happens to be a furry, water-loving animal with a big personality, who thrives on the challenge of inspiring others and bringing a little bit of fun to their lives. And I wouldn’t want it any “otter” way. 🌱

Jessica Ziehm is an alumni of LEAD NY Class X, and served on the LEAD NY Board from 2006-2012. Currently, she serves as the executive director of the New York Animal Agriculture Coalition. She resides in Washington County on her husband’s 950-cow dairy farm where they are raising their two children. Jessica was recently recognized by Farm Credit as one of it’s Top 100 Fresh Perspectives, a nationwide search as part of the organization’s 100th anniversary to identify and honor 100 leaders who are changing rural communities and agriculture for the better.

LEAD Board Membership Updates

Brian Monckton (class 10), Karen Cartier (class 10) and Chris Nyberg will all complete 6 years of service on the LEAD Board of Directors this June. These three individuals also happen to be the past three presidents of our board. We will miss their leadership and thank them for their service! At their recent meeting, the board elected Harold Smith president, and Greg Comeau (class 14) as vice president for the coming year. Beth Ahner (senior associate dean at CALS), Patience Frysinger (DFA, class 15) and Steve Mooney (Morrisville State College) will all begin three-year terms on July 1.



Class 16 shadows legislators in Albany

As always, class 16 spent some time shadowing elected officials during our state government seminar in Albany this past February. Pictured here are Rella Getty and Rob Guay with Senator Betty Little in the senate chamber.

NEWS YOU CAN USE

ALUMNI NEWS, OPPORTUNITIES & EVENTS



Class 16 Year 1 Graduation in Watkins Glen

Twenty-five members of Class 16 were recognized at a graduation ceremony in Watkins Glen, NY on April 9 for their successful completion of the “Leadership Fundamentals” portion of their program. This seminar - which examined local government, local issues and local leadership – served as an excellent capstone event for the first year, as we strive to inspire and develop civically engaged leaders that will go on to serve their communities in a variety of local leadership roles. Congratulations, class 16!

Let the recruitment season begin!

Empire Farm Days (August 9 – 11, 2016) marks the unofficial start of our recruitment season for class 17. Even though we are just starting the second year of our current cohort, it is time to start building the awareness and excitement necessary to attract the next pool of qualified candidates for our program! To that end, watch out for some new recruitment materials from us later this summer. Please start thinking about qualified applicants for our program, and start talking to them about why they should apply. Feel free to direct them to our office if they have any questions or would like to be added to our mailing list for reminders about important recruitment deadlines.

LEAD Alumni recognized with “Fresh Perspectives” Awards

Dale-Ila M. Riggs (class 6) and Jessica Ziehm (class 10) were selected as Farm Credit Fresh Perspectives Top 100 Honorees during this, the Farm Credit System’s 100th anniversary year. Nancy Robbins, wife of Ron (class 5) and mother of Julia (class 14) was also a Top 100 Honoree. The Farm Credit 100 Fresh Perspectives Honorees include leaders and visionaries from across the country. Selected by a distinguished panel of industry representatives, our honorees are creating the future of agriculture and rural America through their dedication and innovation. Congratulations, ladies!

Sam Filler to become next Executive Director of NYWGF

It was recently announced that Sam Filler (class 16) will succeed Jim Trezise as the Executive Director of the New York Wine and Grape Foundation (NYWGF) as of January 2017. Sam currently serves as Director of Industry Development for the Empire State Development Corporation (ESD), where he manages a “one stop shop” for New York’s wine, beer, cider and spirits industries. Sam will have good company, as several LEAD alumni serve in a variety of leadership roles for these beverage sectors. Good luck Sam!



Tiny Mad Ideas... *continued from page 1*

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! 🌱



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