

A to Z of Leadership Exploring *Anxieties*

This resource has been designed by Lyn French, A Space Director, to be used with the Emotional Learning Cards from the set entitled '**A-Z of Leadership**' Purchase the cards online at www.inivacreativelearning.org

Naming, accepting and sharing our anxieties

We know from research into leadership and from our own experience that the contemporary work place is a complex environment. As leaders, we are faced with numerous tasks, both practical and relationship-based, all of which inevitably trigger degrees of anxiety. A key leadership skill is to learn about, and find ways of managing, anxieties. We all have insecurities, vulnerabilities and fears captured in questions such as *'What if I can't perform as well as I think I can? What if I'm exposed as being inadequate or lacking in some way? What if I'm much better than my peers - can I manage this without guilt or without triumph? How do I deal with my envy of my peer's opportunities and successes in life? What if I can't manage my anger and I show it? How can I deal with conflict when I'm afraid of it myself?'* and so on. Our anxieties are bound to be stronger when we are new to the role however there will always be instances when old anxieties surface regardless of our years of experience or seniority.

Managing the 'Uncertainty Cloud'

Ricky Emanuel, a consultant psychotherapist, talks about 'the uncertainty cloud' descending, especially when we are new, which plunges us into questioning our own abilities and capabilities. The Word Bank on the following pages captures some of the anxiety provoking questions we all ask ourselves. Knowing that everyone experiences these kinds of anxieties helps us to keep things in perspective. As our experience builds, we learn to accept that degrees of anxiety will inevitably be stirred up but we can keep our self-doubt 'right-sized' and hold in mind our successes as well as dealing with the challenges inherent in any leadership role. (Ricky Emanuel, '**Anxiety**' from the series '*Ideas in Psychoanalysis*' publisher Icon Books 2000)

Suggestions for using this resource

Cut out the circle shapes with questions which are included on the following pages. You can choose to add more circles with questions of your own and/or add blank circle shapes so that participants can record their own questions. (Blank shapes are provided on the last 3 pages.)

Place the cut out circle shapes with questions in the middle of the table. Pass around the box of the A to Z of Leadership cards asking each participant to take the top card. Then ask participants to match questions with cards. Ask them to add their own affirmations in blank circles to balance the more anxiety provoking questions (eg. *I can hold onto successes from my past; I have learned from past leaders; I am good with people* etc).

Variations on this exercise include laying out all the cards and asking participants to choose one which appeals to them then carry out the exercise above. Or use only the empty circles and ask participants to come up with questions of their own that captures some of the general anxieties all leaders have. Then compare participants' questions with those provided on the following pages.

**As a leader, to
what extent can
I be 'the real
me'?**

**What adjustments
will I need to make
to adapt to the role
of leader?**

**Will I feel I have to
hide parts of
myself?**

**What will I need to do,
or who will I need to
be, in order to be
accepted?**

**Is it appropriate to
bring all parts of who
I am into the role?**

**Will I be liked by
my staff?**

**Do I need to be
liked?**

**How much does
being liked
matter?**

**What will my
staff's reaction to
me tell me about
myself?**

**Will my image of who I
think I am (or who I
imagine I can become)
be challenged?**

**Will I discover I'm not
so capable or
personable as I
thought I was?**

**How will I
compare to past
leaders?**

**Have my past
professional experiences
& training been
sufficient enough to give
me a good foundation?**

**Do I have what it
takes to make a
success of a leader's
role? Do I even know
what's needed?**

**Have I
advanced too
far too quickly?**

**Will I be able to do
what is expected
of me?**

Will I earn the respect of those whom I am leading?

Do I have the inner authority necessary to hold individuals to account?

Am I able to give feedback that might be experienced as unwanted?

Will I be able to prioritise what I need to do?

Can I make difficult decisions & tolerate periods when I am not liked by those around me?

Are my expectations unrealistic or the opposite - too low?

Do I feel comfortable staying in a professional role or does it feel as if I am being cold or distant?

Do I feel guilty about achieving more than a sibling or a parent? If so, as a leader, might I be drawn towards self-sabotaging behaviour?

How can I be both warm *and* firm?

Can I accept that being a leader means forfeiting the opportunity to be friends with staff or will I be tempted to overstep this boundary?

What - or who - is my leadership style based on? Do I even have a 'style' yet?

I know there is no 'How to' manual for leaders so how will I manage when I feel like an imposter who is inevitably going to have to 'make it up as I go along'?

How can I avoid making the kinds of mistakes I've witnessed other leaders making?

How do I engage with those who have trained me now that we are both senior leaders?

How do I manage my relationship with those who have trained me if I can see that I will be doing things differently or if I have discovered that I have more to offer?

What is my own relationship with authority and how has it influenced my goal to

Did I have a rebellious stage or was I always hard-working and 'good'?

Am I trying to show authority figures from the past 'how it's really done'?

Am I competing with someone from my past or present life either consciously or unconsciously? Am I trying to prove something to myself by being a Head?

Can I trust that I will be able to think under pressure?

Am I 'programmed' to be 'the good girl'/'the good boy'? The older/ more responsible sibling? The surrogate parent? Is taking on this role simply an extension of this?

Am I able to make important decisions and take the final responsibility for them if things go wrong? Or will I want to blame someone else?

To what extent was I coerced into this role or into the education profession in general? Is it really 'me'? How do I know?

What if I really am a talented Head - can I bear the envy this might evoke in my peers and in those senior to me or those who have trained or mentored me?

Will I avoid particular difficulties by 'putting my head in the sand'?

Will I come across as cold and unapproachable?

Will I feel I have to be a 'hero leader' or a 'saviour'?

Can I manage differences amongst those I am working with?

Will I be intimidated by the 'institutions of the past' and traditional ways of doing things?

Will I act out family roles in the work place? What does this mean to me?

Will I be expected to 'dress the part'? Is this really me?

Will my gender help or hinder me?

Will I feel lost or disorientated in a new and unfamiliar 'landscape'?

Will I feel only 'half created' as if I don't quite fit the role yet?

Will I get into 'one to one' battles with particularly challenging staff?

Will I have moments when I can't think straight & my head feels too full?

Will I be tempted to focus solely on what's going well as if I can see only a beautiful landscape full of bright sun and flowers?

Will I feel frozen in my role as if I have become a statue, pretending to be a 'shining leader'?

Will I be able to read my environment or will the picture be skewed?

Will I feel totally out of place as if who I am doesn't match where I've found myself?

Will I feel under the spotlight, as if everyone is watching my every move?

Will I feel as if I have to join a kind of 'leadership cult', adopting the current 'belief systems' dominant in my profession?

Will I find myself doing jobs that feel out of step with contemporary ways of thinking and living?

Will I have targets to meet which are simply undoable? How will I cope with an overwhelming workload ?

Will I have times when I feel I am going under?

Will I have to cope with differences which I'll struggle to understand?

What will I have to sacrifice to belong?

Will I feel restricted by my role, bound up so tight by rules & targets that I can't be creative?





