



REDEFINING LEADERSHIP: A 10-POINT MANIFESTO

Ed O'Malley &
Julia Fabris McBride

You don't need a title to be a leader.

Even the boss of the company or the queen of the country can't make the toughest challenges go away. But we can all see, as we look out at the world, that...

1. TOUGH CHALLENGES ARE ALL AROUND US.

A non-profit isn't sustainable.

A small business barely stays profitable after the founder moves on.

A school struggles to help a city's most vulnerable children thrive academically.

A nation grows more divided.

Those challenges appear in our professional lives, in our communities, and in our families. They polarize and perplex us. They can seem unsolvable, unreachable, and beyond our ability to grasp what needs to be done.

Our toughest challenges baffle us. We can work on them for days, weeks, or even years and still not see progress.

Passion for progress isn't the same as progress. Often, we are stuck.

Progress requires leadership.

2. MOST THINK LEADERSHIP IS A POSITION. IT'S NOT.

Most think leading is meant for the few. (Wrong again.)

When people say, "Let's ask leadership about this," they mean let's ask the people in charge.

When they say, "The company has a new leader," they mean there is a new CEO.

If someone sends you to a leadership program, they are probably preparing you to be a manager, or a manager of managers.

If they give you a leadership coach, chances are, they think you are ready for even more direct reports, for an even more important spot in the hierarchy.

Passion for progress isn't the same as progress. Often, we are stuck.
Progress requires leadership.

3. LEADERSHIP *ISN'T* ...

- **AUTHORITY**
- **BEING THE BOSS**
- **VISION**
- **CHARISMA**
- **A SERVANT'S HEART**
- **AN INSPIRATIONAL SPEECH**

Leadership *could* involve these things, and many more, but it isn't literally these things.

4. IMAGINE IF PEOPLE THOUGHT ABOUT PRACTICING LEADERSHIP OR EXERCISING LEADERSHIP, RATHER THAN "BEING A LEADER."

We don't like the word *leader*. We know people use it all the time, but it doesn't seem helpful. A lot of times, so called *leaders* don't lead.

If leadership is a practice, anyone can do it. Some might do it more effectively than others, but everyone can do it. And everyone *can* get better at it.

A whole lot more becomes possible if we see leadership through this appreciative and inclusive lens.

5. PLENTY OF PEOPLE IN IMPORTANT POSITIONS NEVER EXERCISE LEADERSHIP.

The world is full of bad and mediocre bosses, coaches, presidents, and CEOs.

Leadership position and leadership team are outdated terms from a model that no longer works. The “leadership as a position” model is collapsing. The world is moving too fast. The pace of change is too unforgiving. Organizations that expect people at the top to do all the leading won’t thrive. At best they’ll survive.

The pace of change makes it too hard for the relatively few people who head up teams, committees, companies, agencies, cities, and countries to shoulder all the leadership necessary for success. They lack sufficient perspective and knowledge to solve multifaceted problems in an increasingly diverse society.

The traditional “leadership as authority” model lets the rest of us off the hook. We tell ourselves that since we aren’t in charge, we aren’t responsible for what’s wrong. We say it’s the CEO’s fault or the governor’s fault or the pastor’s fault. We leave the creativity, risk, and responsibility for change to someone else, someone higher on the organizational chart.

Organizations that expect people at the top to do all the leading won’t thrive.

6. SO, MOST OF US DON'T LEAD.

Everyone is calculating what their boss, board of directors, teacher, principal, manager, voters, and friend expect of them. Then they do those things and hope to meet those expectations.

Followership keeps other people happy and you out of trouble. A CEO keeps her board of directors feeling secure and in control. A manager reads his job description and follows it exactly.

A teacher follows the principal.

The principal follows the superintendent.

The superintendent follows the school board.

The school board follows the voters.

Followership plays out most clearly among politicians. Politicians are lagging indicators of what's going on in society. Change rarely starts with them. A politician anticipates what their voters want and then follows the crowd that put them in office.

Get good at following and people will call you a success! You'll get promoted. You'll be called a team player. Keep it up and you'll get promoted again and again. Eventually they will make you a "leader." Never mind that all you've done is follow expectations set out for you.

7. LEADERSHIP IS AN ACTIVITY, NOT A POSITION OR AUTHORITY.

It is an activity available to all of us.

Leadership emerged in 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on the bus.

Leadership emerges whenever a new employee asks a question no one wants to answer.

Kids are told, *"Anyone can be a leader!"* They see images of people of all genders, races, and abilities sitting behind a big desk, taking an oath of office, or managing an emergency. Yes, every kid needs to know they can work hard and achieve great things.

But kids (and adults) must also understand that leadership and position are two different things. Kids (and adults) need to know they can exercise leadership whether they have a formal position or not.

Leadership has nothing to do with role. It has everything to do with seeing and seizing moments to help a group move forward.

It is an activity available to all of us.

8. IF ANYONE CAN LEAD, THEN EVERYONE CAN LEAD.

When everyone leads, amazing things happen. Tough problems become simpler. Big aspirations become reachable.

When everyone leads, organizations are productive, not just busy. People are purposeful, not just going through the motions.

When everyone leads, emotion gets channeled into teamwork.

When everyone leads, it's not up to the boss to ask all the right questions. People inspire one another to stay focused on what's most important.

When everyone leads, frustration, gossip, and office politics give way to engagement, productivity, and a shared sense of accomplishment.

Solutions to big, important challenges emerge. People make progress together.

When authorities—the folks with the top jobs—empower others to lead, their own jobs get easier. When the folks not in authority start leading, their work becomes more rewarding.

Organizations, companies, and communities are more successful when everyone leads.

9. LEADERSHIP IS RISKY.

A moment that could benefit from our leadership comes right at us, but we let it go. We don't take the swing. We don't seize it because we are afraid of making a mistake. We would rather blame someone else for a problem than do something about it ourselves. Because once we try something, once we see and seize our moment, there is no turning back.

Leadership is risky because once you intervene, you have a stake in the outcome and you can't be sure what will happen next.

10. AND IT'S NOT LEADERSHIP IF IT'S NOT ABOUT OUR MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES.

Every organization, company, or community has concerns and unmet aspirations.

Leadership is about the biggest of these. Leadership is an activity designed to make progress on the things that concern us the most, those that we most aspire to achieve.

Leadership is mobilizing people to make progress on the most important challenges. And, it's rare.

More than fifteen years ago, a foundation committed tens of millions of dollars to build leadership capacity in our part of the world. The board of that foundation came to a profound conclusion:

The quality and quantity of leadership is a key determinant to prosperity, health, and success for organizations and communities.

We launched the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) in 2007. Ed's background was in government and politics. I was an actor turned leadership coach. We have guided this training, engagement, and research center, overseeing an experiment unlike any in the world. Nowhere else is a leadership development effort as well-financed and as focused on leadership for everyone in communities, organizations, and companies.

Leadership is an activity designed to make progress on the things that concern us the most, those that we most aspire to achieve.

After 15 years, over 15,000 participants, and partnerships throughout our state but also around the world, our research and experience support a powerful promise:

WHEN EVERYONE LEADS, WE MAKE PROGRESS ON OUR MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES

You can see exactly that in our programs. There's a firefighter, teacher, banker, pastor, and politician in one small group. Another has a construction worker, nurse, university president, social worker, and a business owner. Yet another has a school principal, nonprofit volunteer, corporate middle manager, an engineer, and a game warden.

Some are early in their careers. Others are seasoned with decades of experience. They come from organizations big and small, from urban and rural communities, and from all sectors. Some are liberal. Others are conservative.

Dozens come from each organization. Hundreds learn, practice, and engage together. Thousands every year.

Their experience disrupts how they think about leadership, what leadership is, and who it is for. They embrace our leadership model and use it to create profound change in their organizations, companies, and communities.

The KLC experience is countercultural. It runs against the grain. It upends norms. Still, people from all walks of life engage with us. They learn a very different way of exercising leadership.

They are on a journey. You are too. Welcome.

LET THESE PRINCIPLES GUIDE YOUR WAY

PRINCIPLE #1: LEADERSHIP IS AN ACTIVITY, NOT A POSITION.

Leadership and authority are two different things. Leadership is mobilizing others to solve their most important challenges. *Authority* is more like management. Having good people in authority positions is absolutely necessary to keep things functioning at a high level, but authority alone is not sufficient to make progress on the things that matter most.

PRINCIPLE #2: ANYONE CAN LEAD, ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

If we want to solve our most important challenges more people need to embrace the idea that everyone can lead. When it comes to our toughest challenges, we all have a part to play. Lots of people need to contribute time and energy. Saying “yes” to the idea that anyone can see and seize their moment to lead means risking your own comfort for the sake of progress on something that matters.

PRINCIPLE #3: LEADERSHIP STARTS WITH YOU AND MUST ENGAGE OTHERS.

Some things an expert can fix or the boss can order done. But as a culture, we've fallen into the bad habit of waiting for others to lead. When you embrace this principle, the waiting is over. Action is yours to take and the time is now. No matter your position, age, or level of experience, you can do something to mobilize others to make progress on an important leadership challenge. The goal of taking action is not to fix things yourself but to engage other people.

PRINCIPLE #4: LEADERSHIP IS RISKY.

If you've ever attempted to get people to work together on a difficult challenge, you know that leadership is risky. We want to drive home this principle as both a warning and encouragement. Even as you do everything you can to energize others to solve a big challenge, pay attention and build your skill at minimizing risks.

PRINCIPLE #5: LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT OUR TOUGHEST CHALLENGES.

You have to care about something really important—an aspiration or a big concern. Without a clear sense of purpose nothing is going to change. **It's not leadership if it's not about those tough challenges.** 📌



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ed O'Malley is president and CEO of the Kansas Health Foundation. He founded the Kansas Leadership Center in 2007, serving as president and CEO for 15 years. A former Kansas state legislator and gubernatorial aide, Ed has co-authored three previous books including Your Leadership Edge and For the Common Good.

Julia Fabris McBride is chief leadership development officer at the Kansas Leadership Center, where more than 15,000 people around the world have attended programs since 2007. A certified coach, former actor and co-author of Teaching Leadership, Julia splits her time between Wichita and Matfield Green, Kansas.

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