

What Is Leadership?

Exploring the meaning, purpose and practice
of leading others.

MARGARET COLLINS
Confidence | Clarity | Courage
visit MargaretCollins.com

Using the
What Is Leadership?
Workbook

In many professions, leadership seems to happen by default, as a consequence of “time in the job”.

In research and academia it is present from the earliest stages of our journey: we find ourselves “leading” a student (making sure they don’t break things, don’t hurt themselves, know how to do things well).

Yet few of us were ever taught how to lead.
Some of us never wanted to lead.

This lesson is an invitation to pause and explore what leadership means to you, how you currently lead (intentionally or not) and explore what kind of leader you might want to become.

These are my reflections

.....

on ___ /___ /_____

What is Leadership?

Leadership isn't one thing.
Leadership doesn't always mean being in charge.
It's often a relationship between people with a shared purpose.
It's how we create direction, alignment and commitment.

In academic and research settings, leadership often means shaping direction, inspiring trust, contributing to a shared vision.

Some people display qualities that we identify as "leadership", even if they never formally head a group of people – we get a real sense that they embody those qualities. Other people get the opportunity to act upon their leadership skills in their role within a group or organisation.

Different people might "do leadership" in different ways so think of some people that you know:

- Who do you admire as a leader (in your institution or beyond)?
- Recall a time when they showed/demonstrated leadership?
- What makes them "leaders"?

Dr Margaret Collins: info@MargaretCollins.com © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

Leadership or Management?

In many organisations the roles of leader and manager overlap.
Good leadership and good management are both necessary, they are different but related skill sets.
If I invite you to draw them apart, what skills, behaviours or roles would you put under each heading?

Leader/Leadership	Manager/Management

Reflections:

Which of these skill sets am I most competent at?

Which of these skill sets am I most comfortable with?

Do I believe I can - or want to - develop these skills?

Dr Margaret Collins: info@MargaretCollins.com © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

Leadership or Management?

In general, leadership is about having or holding a vision and supporting, motivating and aligning other people to work towards that vision or goal. Leadership involves influence and intentional action to support that vision.

Management is often about maintaining systems and processes, managing and monitoring resources, organizing, delegating, controlling.

Leader/Leadership	Manager/Management
• Inspiring • Setting direction, especially in times of change • Creating a vision or goal • Motivating people to work • Building and maintaining teamwork • Creating networks and opportunities • Providing an example • Producing a personal output	• Running the business in 'steady state' conditions • Day-to-day administration • Delegation • Monitoring • Managing conflict • Organising and establishing systems • Controlling finances

Leadership is rarely about one role. It's a portfolio of responsibilities and the roles will differ depending on your professional area.

For example, someone on the Academic track may prioritise a triad of research, teaching and professional contributions. you may be supervising students or writing grants.

In other roles you may find yourself on leading projects, managing teams, working through committees or influencing your institution's culture. You might be leading developments around best practice in the sector.

What will be most important for me to develop?

Dr Margaret Collins: info@MargaretCollins.com © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

Why do I want to lead?

Some people aspire to leadership and actively seek responsibility.

Other people seem to avoid leadership - perhaps because they are hoping to avoid being held responsible.

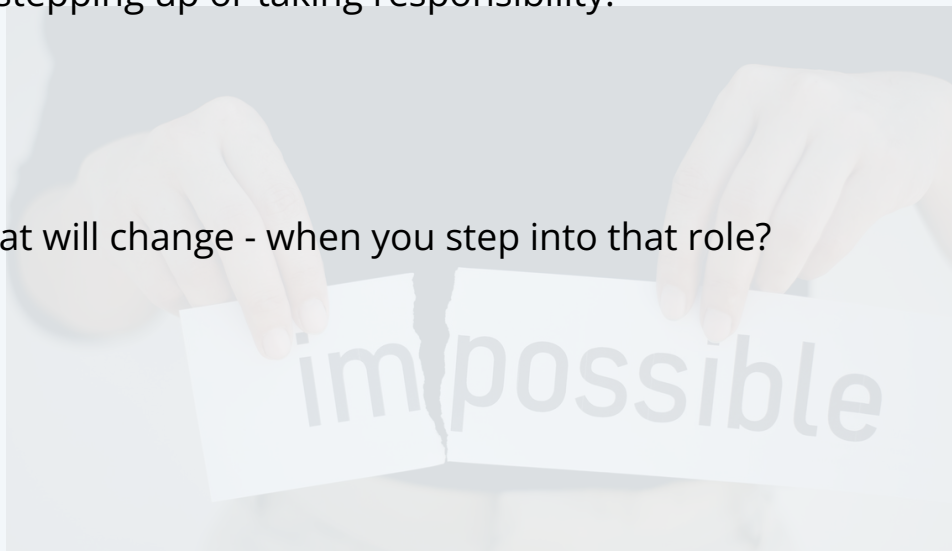
If leadership feels like a burden, it's often because we only see the responsibility, not the possibility. Maybe it helps to see leadership less as "power over" but as giving "power to":

- Shape a positive research culture.
- Develop and empower others.
- Align work with values that matter.
- Make meaningful change in your field.

Leadership is not necessarily about "me over you"; it can be about us achieving more together.

Reflections: My Experience of Leadership
Think of a time:

- When you were inspired by someone's leadership.
  What did they do or model?
- When you found yourself stepping up or taking responsibility.
  What did that feel like?
- Why do you want to lead?
- What will be possible - what will change - when you step into that role?



Dr Margaret Collins: info@MargaretCollins.com © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

My Leadership Map

Draw or note names of people you lead, influence or collaborate with.
They might be students, colleagues, project partners or professional peers.

Now ask yourself:

- Where am I already leading?
- Where do I avoid leadership?
- Where would I like to have more influence or impact?



MARGARET COLLINS
CONFIDENCE | CLARITY | COURAGE

Moving Forward

Leadership starts with self-awareness.
It's not about having all the answers, it's about creating the conditions where others can thrive.

Before moving into the practical "how to" of leadership, take a moment to reflect:

1. What kind of leader do I want to be?
2. What values or principles will guide how I lead?
3. How do I want people to feel when they work with me?

Many different aspects of leadership are important.
They will be influenced by or reflect your personal or professional values.
Do refer to your reflections from the Self-Discovery module if needed.

What blend is important for you?

- Being able to lead from the front
- From behind
- Telling
- Listening
- Sharing
- Resourcing
- Enabling
- Producing
- Discovering
- Changing
- Transforming

Dr Margaret Collins: info@MargaretCollins.com © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

Leadership is...

We began by acknowledging that leadership is many things.

Leadership is a collection of personal behaviours, attitudes and skills and the effects you have on others. It is shaped by your values and intentions.

We've explored how you might use it, flex it, embody it.

After all your reflecting, what are some of the ways you define it for yourself?

- Leadership is...

How can you live into your own definition of leadership, one step more each day?

> Leadership is about taking responsibility for enabling others to achieve a shared purpose in the face of uncertainty.
>
> Marshall Ganz

Dr Margaret Collins: info@MargaretCollins.com © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

WANT MORE?

This workbook uncovers the hidden beliefs behind our desire to lead, our drivers or even our secret fears.

Recognising that leadership is as much about others as about ourself can be freeing.

Note that quiet leaders can be every bit as effective as people who proclaim...

This reflection helps you step back from the daily demands of "doing the job" to reflect on what you can bring to this role.

Where will you start?

I hope this content has been useful.
If you know you need more, do reach out to me. I'd love to hear from you.



You can always explore the other resources on my website.

MargaretCollins.com/

Resources

Let me know how you get on!

Margaret

 © 2025 All rights reserved Do not redistribute

MARGARET COLLINS
CONFIDENCE | CLARITY | COURAGE