

## Real Leadership, Real Progress

**A presentation for the Homelessness NSW 2012 Conference  
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Counterfeit leadership might explain all those long meetings that seem to go around in circles, useless reports that gather dust on the bookshelves and the continual sense of panic and urgency running through your organisation. Being able to make progress requires us to distinguish between real leadership and counterfeit leadership:

*"Fundamentally, real leadership gets people to confront reality and change values, habits, practices, and priorities in order to deal with the real threat or the real opportunity the people face. It facilitates improvements in the human condition. Counterfeit leadership, on the other hand, provides false solutions and allows the group to bypass reality."*

— Dean Williams

Our communities and organisations are often keen on quick-fix solutions which mask the real issues and allow us to avoid the hard work associated with confronting difficult issues. Social issues in particular such as homelessness, child abuse, youth suicide, refugees and race relations especially suffer. Real leadership requires us to distinguish between different challenges in different circumstances for those wishing to exercise leadership – ranging from the turmoil of the crisis and activist challenge to the development challenge for more established organisations.

So this is where leadership comes in. We use leadership very specifically as a verb rather than being a leader we talk about someone “exercising leadership”. It is therefore an activity rather than a position, and anyone can exercise leadership. Being clear on the level of authority you have is critical. Are you in a formal authority role or do you have informal authority, earned by your experience, reputation and level of impact? Knowing the difference allows us to know how much room we have to make progress.

Exercising leadership can include:

- Mobilising people to face the harsh realities they generally prefer to avoid.
- Challenging the values and norms of the dominant group
- Understanding the constraints and opportunities of the role of Authority, how to use your informal authority to manage up.
- Engaging and collaborating with the different factions and groups.
- Leading with questions and clarity of purpose rather than solutions

In the complex and changing environments we work in, our capacity to adapt to new realities and make progress has never been more required. The adaptive leadership panel and workshop will provide an opportunity to explore the type of leadership required to make progress within the homelessness sector and reflect on the nature of your own leadership challenges.

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**Further Reading:**

- *Leadership On The Line: Staying Alive Through The Dangers of Leading*, Heifetz, Ronald A.; Linsky, Marty. Harvard Business School Press 2002
- *Leadership Beyond Good Intentions – What It Takes To Really Make A Difference*. Aigner, Geoff. Allen & Unwin 2011
- *Real Leadership – Helping People And Their Organizations Face Their Toughest Challenges*, Williams, Dean; Barrett Koehler, San Francisco 2005.
- *Power and Love. A Theory and Practice of Social Change*, Kahane, Adam; Barrett-Koehler Publishers Inc. 2010
- *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership. Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organisation and the World*, Heifetz, Ronald; Grashow, Alexander & Linsky, Marty. Harvard Business Press 2009

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