

Moving Up!

Practical Tips for Aspiring Leaders



Thinking of moving up inside your agency? Wondering how you can become a Program Director, an Executive Director, or a Community Leader? Here are some practical tips and advice from current nonprofit program and agency leaders for those who are interested in learning more about how they can move up to a leadership position.

Be ready to jump in!

Sometimes opportunities arise when we least expect them. **Even if you don't feel ready, be confident and jump in!**

Once you jump in, connect to those you trust within the agency and within your community for advice and guidance. They want you to succeed!

Trust your gut! You already have so many skills. Lean into what you know.

Every day is a new start! Every day you build your competence and confidence!

Learn from others.

In our professional careers, we've all had good managers and some that weren't so great. Consider what you admired and appreciated about the good managers and use these qualities and practices to **create your own Do's list- your own best practices.**

Additionally, think about the managers that *weren't* so great. What was problematic? What would you do differently? Incorporate this information into your practices.

Use a **trauma-informed approach** when supervising people and managing projects.

Stretch out of your comfort zone.

Stretch out of your comfort zone and trust in your abilities. **Believe in yourself!**

If you're shy or not comfortable with public speaking, try facilitating a meeting. Overwhelmed by budgets? Ask a colleague to show you the ropes! If you're not sure about joining a board, try it and ask for orientation. Take little steps to build strength to run! **Trust** when others see your ability, even if you do not see it yet!

Develop your skills.

Start with a self-evaluation: What are your current strengths? What skills do you need to develop to move up? Do you need more confidence with developing and managing budgets? Supervising people? Project management? Grant writing and reports? Public speaking?

Continue your education. Learn new skills and systems regularly. For example, to develop financial management skills (an important skill for agency management), look for (free) online courses on building and managing budgets; or ask the agency finance director to provide some mentoring. Volunteer to facilitate meetings or evaluate projects. Finding ways to expand your current job can give you more opportunities to develop your skills.

Developing your skills- especially in areas where you feel you need to improve- will also help build your confidence.

Network!

Find your people. Join committees and community groups, attend community meetings and professional networking opportunities. Doing so can expand both your personal and professional network. You can meet people whose interests and values align with your own.

Join a nonprofit board. Many agencies are looking for board members. Joining a board provides an opportunity to see how an agency operates, the relationship between the Executive Director & Board, and the functions of a board. If you hope to become an Executive Director, then understanding the role and function of a board is critically important, and the best way to learn is by getting in on the action!

Find a mentor or coach.

Leadership positions can be lonely. Good mentors/coaches will help you **navigate your growth areas and provide support** for talking through issues and concerns.

Mentors may be within the agency where you're currently working, or they may be someone from the community. Connect with someone you admire and is available to provide guidance and help with learning about agency management.

IF NOT,
NOW
WHEN?

Be playful while staying flexible.

Create a plan but **be prepared** for surprises.

Give yourself **grace** and be **patient** with yourself. Own both your failures and your successes.

Be goal-oriented with a big dose of patience with the process. **Set goals** on a timeline and move towards them.

Consider your **entire life energy** – family, work, play. These are all essential elements to make you a whole person.

Be inclusive to foster the next generation of leaders.

Once in the position of leadership, build a program or agency that is inclusive and provides **pathways** for the next generation of leadership.

Foster **opportunities** for diverse leadership within your program and agency.

Transition plans for new leaders take time and **thoughtful planning** to ensure inclusivity.

Build a supportive team.

Leaders do not need to know everything; we just need to know who **does** know. Having a strong, reliable team is critically important.

Leadership is about **empowering others** to be their very best, and to be engaged and creative. When we foster this, we strengthen ourselves as well.

Don't be afraid to say: "**I don't know...but I will find out.**" Humility and openness to learning, and showing that openness, is a source and reflection of strength.

THINK IT,
WANT IT,
GET IT