

# Learning to Lead, An International Leadership Shadowing Opportunity

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## Summary report

During June 2004, I attend the Communities in Control conference at the Moonee Valley Race course. The key speaker for the conference was Sir David Henshaw, Chief Executive Officer for Liverpool City Council, UK and named European CEO of the year for 2004. David spoke passionately about leadership in a changing organisation of 19 000 employees covering services including Police, Education, housing as well as the usual local government role of infrastructure, rates, recreation, roads and community development. David demonstrated his notion of the role of government by 'borrowing' a member of the audience and asked them to dance asking "who was leading", notionally demonstrating the quandary of local government. Who takes the lead, the community or local government?

David's presentation got me thinking, who is in fact taking the lead? Was leadership within this organisation from the top down or through out the organisation? Was leadership valued and encouraged through all levels or was it just from the top down? With my head buzzing with curious thoughts I found my self bounding up to the key speaker and suddenly spitting out, "so how would you feel about an opportunity for mentoring/ shadowing for me with you?" The speaker, looking a bit bewildered, if not still jet lagged (obviously I found him in a weak moment) responded, "Can you pay for yourself?" I sputtered, "I hope so". So David, who was obviously still have shocked but beginning to recover said, "I can't see why not, contact me office and we will see". I think I bounced off, like tigger, full of excitement to a proposal that I was yet to really think through until later about its possible implications.

After the conference I came home to Traralgon, a little still bewildered by my brashness and upfront proposal. I sent off a quick email to David Henshaw's office and within days came back the reply confirming the mentoring/shadowing opportunity. When I told my friends and family, they didn't seem surprised by my self initiated opportunity as I think they are used to me pursuing my ambitions to take up any chance for leadership development.

Wow, it now started to sink in, how was I going to make all this actually happen, I was only newly employed by the Department of Human Services within Neighbourhood Renewal, Gippsland but it was contract work due to finish June 30, 2005. I also had to somehow fit in my participation in the World Masters Games with my Australian volleyball team at Edmonton, Canada in July 2005. My first thoughts came to fitting both of these travel opportunities together so logistically it was only one airfare, not an unmanageable two. After a few tenuous months of haggling dates, my shadowing at Liverpool would happen before the World Masters in Canada. OK that's a known factor, now for the money, employment, study (Masters

of Organisational Leadership thesis) and not to forget my family, with my eldest daughter doing Year 12 and the youngest who had already flown out for Canada on a 12 months student exchange. Could I fit her into my travel as well, why not, well somehow it would happen, hopefully!

So now, mild panic was starting to emerge, how was I going to self-fund this trip with potentially no wage. I calculated I had at least some holiday pay due to be following my contract completion with DHS, the other few weeks I would somehow have to earn the short fall so I wouldn't put a financial burden on my family. Luckily with working only 4 days per week I could pick up one day per week doing emergency teaching, which my employer, DHS agreed to. I had also accumulated too much holiday time at DHS so aligned my days off to pick up 2 weeks of emergency teaching. My budget was beginning to build but I wasn't sure I would get financially over the line. I saw the opportunity to apply for funding under the Victorian Office of Women's Community Leadership Grant. I put together an application called "Learning to Lead, an International Leadership Shadowing opportunity" highlighting the agreed mentor/ shadowing opportunity at Liverpool City Council with Sir David Henshaw. As all government grant decisions can take a while I was delighted when Fran Witty from the Office of Women contacted me to tell me my grant application was successful. Fantastic, everything was falling into place. I had the finances sorted, my shadowing opportunity was arranged, my family agreed and supported my trip, all I had to do now was find a job for my return following the end of DHS contract.

After numerous job applications where I came second, I finally had success with an ongoing, full time position with the Environmental Protection Authority as a Community Relations Officer within Gippsland. What could be better, nothing at this stage so where was the hic up going to come, everything was too perfect.

The mentoring/ shadowing at Liverpool City Council could also represent the perfect opportunity for research towards my masters thesis – "Learning to Lead" to explore how people in organisations and the community can be identified as potential leaders and how leadership can be developed. Through my University Supervisor, Associate Professor Len Cairns we mapped out how this research could be undertaken during the over seas tour. Len was always patient with me and has never been surprised at my endeavours or adventures, thankfully. We followed the university procedures and applied to the Ethics Committee for approval. The unfortunate thing with the timing was the Ethics Committee met to consider my study proposal only 4 days before my departure from Australia, not leaving any time for issues to crop up. Sure enough the Ethics committee did have a few concerns needing clarification. Between Len and I and the wonders of the internet, I finally received the approval of the Ethics Committee to proceed with my research while I was over seas.

So I survived the hic up and was finally on my flight. I didn't realise how exhausted I was until I was on that flight. Every spare moment I had over the last 12 months I was either doing emergency teaching, working my day job or completely renovating a rental property with my husband.

I landed exhausted at Manchester Airport (UK), caught a train to Liverpool Lime Street Station and was met by the delightful Alison Porter, an Executive Assistant in the Chief Executive Office of Liverpool City Council. What a god send Alison was

leading up to and during the time at Liverpool. Alison took responsibility and control of co-ordinating my visit and arranged all my appointments with staff and managers within Liverpool Council, Liverpool John Moores University and Liverpool University. Alison, in partnership with Liverpool University's Margaret Gascoigne (head of the Vice Chancellor's office) sorted out my accommodation arrangements at Liverpool University student residences. They even visited the residences to ensure its suitability and arranged staff rates for me, making accommodation affordable for me. Thank goodness for people like Alison and Margaret, but they were not the only people I came across to make the whole trip so successful and welcoming. Everyone went out of their way to be helpful and friendly, it's the people who make a place so memorable, and Liverpool is one of those memorable places.

During my three weeks at Liverpool I had open access to;

- Sir David Henshaw – Liverpool Chief Executive - Liverpool City Council (LCC)
- Chester Morrison – Principal Officer for Youth Services (LCC)
- Stuart Smith – Children's Services (LCC)
- Cllr Alan Dean – Lord Mayor of Liverpool (LCC)
- Carol Perry & staff - Neighbourhood Renewal (LCC)
- John Sayers – Assistant Executive Director for Community Safety (LCC)
- Natalie Cheers & staff – Neighbourhood Renewal & Splash Co-ordinator (LCC)
- Margaret Gascoigne – Vice Chancellors office at Liverpool University
- Professor Julian Crompton – Vice Chancellor Brighton University
- Susan Rutherford – Human Resources Director Liverpool University
- Vice Chancellor Drummond Bone – Liverpool University
- James Cooke – Consultant to Liverpool University
- Alison Wilde – Pro Vice Chancellor Admin at John Moores University
- Vice Chancellor John Moores University
- Joan McLaren – Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra Promotions (LCC)
- Tony Hunter – Executive Director Supported Living & Community Safety (LCC)
- Alison Wild, Catherine Nevin, John Gillin, Paul Evans & Alison Doherty – Community Safety Liverpool (LCC)

While at Liverpool I attended management team meetings, a LCC Executive Board meeting and events at the Liverpool Philharmonic, open air play at Speke Hall, Edgbaston Cricket ground one day match between England and Australia and invited to dinner events with Council representatives. In speaking to staff and community members of Liverpool I was able to speak in depth with them about their journeys, hopes, aspirations, frustrations, notions of leadership and insights into Liverpool. My research questions, the form of short answers and surveys were handed to the staff I had access to and for them to forward their responses to me. I was very grateful for the honesty, integrity and insights of each of people I spoke to and I appreciated the willingness for their participation and support from their organisations.

I am hoping my visit to Liverpool has opened up future opportunities for similar studies or exchanges of staff. I have gained so much from this and am determined that the opportunity will not be lost or wasted. I hear via email they were still asking, "Where's that Aussie?" so at least I made some impression!

Susan Lloyd (August 2005)

