

Leadership Skills for the 21st Century

Part 1

By Mukara Meredith, Founder of MatrixWorks

Today I would like to discuss with you some of the most important skills for group leadership in the 21st century.

The first and most important principle, comes from a study of complexity and the role of complexity in working with groups as living systems. The basic premise here is that when working with a group, there are two interventions possible:

1. **Contain the group.** One way to do this would be to have a strong boundary around time for example, or to stick to a specific theme and not let the group wander from it. This intervention establishes safety and certainty and helps people relax.
2. **Perturbation, or stirring the group up.** This is the opposite of containment in that it involves introducing small experiments that move the group towards an experience of chaos. An example of this is encouraging members of the group to confront one of the leaders. This is more challenging, and shifts the power balance, introducing the positive value of perturbation. Not every leader is comfortable with this, and in

my experience, trying to perturb before establishing safety usually doesn't work, it dysregulates people. BUT if we fail to do this after there is adequate safety, group either goes flat and has no energy, or becomes explosive and acts out in a way that isn't helpful/productive and doesn't result in maturity.

I believe that going back and forth between these two poles is the most essential skill for leading in the 21st century.

Here are more leadership skills that I think are particularly relevant:

* **Courage!** To have the courage to trust one's own intuition, produce inner confidence and courage in order to ride the ups and downs of group work, and model an ability to be in authentic relationship. This sets the tone that even though groups can be scary and activating, that they can still be a positive experience and the results can bring the kind of maturation that really develops our human capacities.

* **Presence!** A way of understanding and being with each other without giving advice or being condescending. Presence allows us to really bring heart, minds, and spirit into interaction with the group.

* **The leader's own relationship to sense of good will towards each member**, and even a sense of love towards each member. This can be continuously cultivated and helps people feel safe to take risks, and empathize with each other. It helps take the ego out of the equation.

* **Openness!** While leaders should be careful what personal details they disclose, they should share enough to disclose that they are human and aren't perfect. As a leader, you definitely don't want group to feel like they unconsciously have to take care of you. You are like the parent. As the group continues, the movement towards more and more openness can progress. Start by leading with role and backing up with person, later switch to leading with person and backing up with role. This also creates a social field that is warm, welcoming, and healing.

* **Sense of personal power, energy, and stamina** – the intention is to have an attitude that anything/everything is possible. Personal power shows up as a kind of willingness to seek new experiences, to be open to including diversity, and to have the energy to stay with something – to support the ability of a group to really be nourishing to the members. Most people have a kind of wariness about groups – it seems unpredictable and not always safe. If we can demonstrate the stamina to stay through the confronting and chaotic moments, we show that things really are workable and possible.

* **Capacity for self awareness** (an ongoing process) – ability to know what I'm experiencing in my person and in my role and from there to be able to sense what is happening in the members of the group. This is a great component of high level leadership. There exists a continuity between awareness of self and receptivity to others' experience. It gives a sense for each person that they are being seen and known.

In conclusion, **our own personhood – the time that we spend facing our shadows, these things are crucial in being able to lead groups**

that can be transformative for people, and create a larger culture where we can see groups as healing and as a source of nourishment.