

# Community Leadership

A partnership between community organizations and Libraries, Community and Voluntary Services Branch (LVCS), Municipal Affairs and Housing and the Wild Rose Foundation, Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture

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## Why don't we learn from history?

There is no denying that learning from our own experiences is valuable, but profiting from other people's experiences is a gift worth opening. History is the universal experience – infinitely longer, wider, and more varied than an individual's experience. We just don't live long enough to experience and learn everything we should and need to rely on those who have gone before us. This is what the world's history has to offer us.

What is the object of history? Usually it is to find out the truth about what happened while trying to find out why it happened. It allows us to seek the causal relations between events. We can learn why certain ways of thinking, understanding and acting led to certain consequences - destructive or positive. B.H. Liddell Hart suggests that history has limitations as a guiding signpost, however, it can show us what to avoid, even if it doesn't teach us what to do – by showing the most common mistakes that mankind is apt to make and to repeat. If you've ever seen the movie "Ground Hog Day", you soon realize how futile, frustrating and backwards it is to ignore one's experience and repeat the same mistakes over and over. How many times have we said to ourselves, "If I could just re-live that moment over again, I would know what best to do"? We can't re-live the past but we can study the "human story" of the past and get a better idea of "what best to do" (and what not to do!).

When studying history to enhance our capacity to design the future, we often get overwhelmed with details and specific facts. One of the benefits of history is that we have captured the stories through oral history and in thousands of books. By studying these many stories, we can begin to see common patterns of human and social development emerge. These patterns can tell us where humanity has acted in the best interest of all life on this world and where it has been shortsighted.

So...why don't we learn from history?

Source: "Why don't we learn from history?" by B.H. Liddell Hart (1895-1970)

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- click on the arrow to open "Services for Communities" link on the left
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"We can learn from history how past generations thought and acted, how they responded to the demands of their time and how they solved their problems. We can learn by analogy, not by example, for our circumstances will always be different than theirs were. The main thing history can teach us is that human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, cannot be undone. They foreclose the possibility of making other choices and thus they determine future events."

Gerda Lerner

# Leading Through the Spin

by Wendy Saunders

Spin is all around us. It proliferates in images, in impressions, in media of all kinds, in sensory contexts, in our every waking minute of every day. We are truly bombarded with media and perception management from cradle to grave. Drive down any street and pay attention to the bombardment of information that you see -- from road signs to billboards, to branding of products on businesses, to lifestyle choices, etc. etc. How do we interpret the information that we see? Do we believe the advertising, the propaganda, the perceptions.....the spin?

Is our society suffering from “truth decay”?

Never in recent history has the media in all its forms had more influence on the lives of the citizens of the world and on the planet. And, as sources of information grow at an astounding rate, it is even more important that society is able to apply skills of critical analysis to sort through and discern what is truth and what is spin.

In the early 1900's, with the birth of the first public relations firm, government and big business discovered the power of perception and of managing information. One of the first PR firms boasted that “they color what we see...what we believe...how we behave. And in our recent history, one of the media giants is credited with the quote “The news is what we say it is.” – Fox TV as quoted in the documentary “The Corporation”.

The use of spin has become part of the “modus operandi” for big business and political parties and it has had both catastrophic and far reaching effects in affecting the lives of all the citizens of the world. So how do leaders

lead with integrity, with insight and with hope for the global community with the pervasiveness of spin and manipulation? I think that we can answer this question through some of the role models who have challenged the spin machine....people like Nelson Mandela who fought against apartheid, Rachel Carson who fought against chemical pollution of our land and water, the Dalai Lama who stands for human rights, and many others who continue to fight for the health of the planet and the existence of the human species.

Leaders lead by looking beyond immediate boundaries, identifying needs, bringing critical analysis to problems, testing solutions and recognizing both the threats and opportunities that may impact decisions. Leaders continue to look for innovation, creativity and a deeper understanding of a situation. They bring, knowledge, understanding and disciplined action to problems and in the world of “spin”, awareness, knowledge and competence are our weapons of choice.

## Your spin toolbox:

Recognize propaganda:

- ☞ evaluate – what we believe, what we value;
- ☞ examine what role does control, competence, responsibility play;
- ☞ ask questions – look at both the pros and cons;
- ☞ follow the money and who is paying;
- ☞ demand accountability;
- ☞ take action.



## Leadership Program for Ethnocultural Youth



The Leadership Program for Ethnocultural Youth (sponsored by the Coalition for Equal Access to Education in Calgary) focuses on critical reflection, participation, empowerment and action. Through a series of reflective and participatory seminars, the program will help participants to tap into their leadership potential, to critically reflect upon issues facing ethnocultural youth and families, and to develop practical skills as community leaders. In addition, youth leaders who complete the program will be supported to develop, implement and evaluate youth-led projects.

If you would like further information please contact:

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# Leadership Wood Buffalo

by Sana Elache

Leadership Wood Buffalo was formed in 2006 in response to the great changes we have with development in the Wood Buffalo community paired with the demographics of growing population and retiring current community leaders.

The Leadership Wood Buffalo program, like many other leadership programs in Canada, is a community-focused program designed to identify and develop current and future leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. It is based on the highly successful Leadership Challenge model developed by Kouzes and Posner. It is a hands-on, experiential program designed to explore and develop leadership capacity and skills within the context of actual community issues. The community becomes the leadership development classroom.

In the first year of operation, we were very successful at recruiting a healthy mix of participating leaders from all three sectors: the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Participants were encouraged to become directly engaged in the community through the Future Forward initiative and through assigned case studies that were especially allocated to enhance participants' understanding of the history of the region and the leadership challenges it faced as well as the great leadership capacity exemplified in the past and recent years. Learning days were designed in such a way to mix some skills building with a lot of reflection and action oriented learning. Participants learned about leadership in a community team, practiced some of the skills they learned in the program and planned a special learning day of their own.

The program had many highlights like the day that was designed to enhance the participants' fundraising skills. Participants were given a hands-on exercise where they collected money as they learned about fundraising skills. They exceeded our expectations when they came up with their own fundraising ideas that were completely unplanned. They leveraged small donations through raffles and in less than an hour increased funds raised from \$325 to \$750 which was then matched by Suncor creating a final donation total of \$1500.

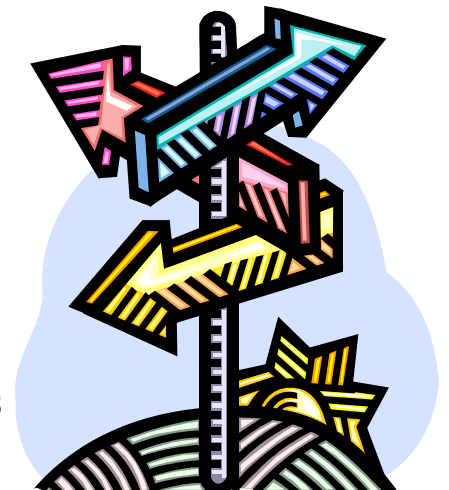
Two of the LWB Alumni just finished running a successful re-election campaign for the Mayor and one of the case study groups members were able to raise the profile of a leader mentioned in their case and she is now being considered for a Readers' Digest Hero's award.

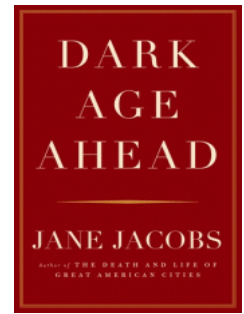
All in all, it was a great launch and we wish this smooth sailing for other programs in Canada.

*The program was exceptionally organized and provided a wide variety of unique training opportunities. I've learned the value of diversity in groups and have gained a greater understanding about community leadership. I am beginning to find my voice and have taken a deeper look at what I value. The program provided an exceptional experience that I felt privileged to be a part of and the learnings will not soon be forgotten. I look forward to working with the individuals in the 2007 graduating class beyond the classroom to affect positive change in our region now and into the future. Thank you! Monica Lance—Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo*

"To determine what is to be done, what is not to be done; in other words, to determine right and wrong, is an insistent problem for all organisms; it is not something that begins with man. With all organisms life is a continuous process of selecting one line of action and rejecting another; the determining whether certain actions are right or wrong."

H.S.Jennings: The Universe and Life, 1933





Jane Jacobs argues in “Dark Age Ahead”, that we stand on the brink of a new dark age, a period of cultural collapse caused by a failure to adapt and preserve the best of our culture and society.

A dark age occurs when a society loses a vital aspect of its culture and no longer remembers that it has been lost thereby making it irretrievable. It is as if we are suffering from “mass amnesia”. Sometimes a dark age comes from external forces such as a conquering nation and cultural knowledge and practice is forbidden and deliberately extinguished. Sometimes it occurs from long term neglect or from deliberate change driven from within a society. Jacobs describes our venture into a dark age by identifying some key aspects of culture that we are on the verge of losing.

Jane Jacobs, through her many examples, also seeks to also answer the question Jared Diamond posed in Collapse: “Why do cultures fail?” She notes that it is obvious why some cultures fail by saying, “Losers are confronted with such radical jolts in circumstances that their institutions cannot adapt adequately, become irrelevant, and are dropped”. In apparent successful cultures, it is assumed that adaptation and corrective action will be taken if things get bad enough. But sometimes, powerful persons and groups find it in their interest to prevent adaptive corrections and have ways of thwarting it. Sometimes, circumstances have allowed cultural destruction to drift to a point where the jolts of correction appear more menacing than the downward drift.

“(We) customarily think of a Dark Age as happening once, long ago, following the collapse of the Western Roman Empire. But in North America we live in a graveyard of lost aboriginal cultures, many of which were decisively finished off by mass amnesia in which even the memory of what was lost is also lost.”

Jane Jacobs

The book makes you question what we are hanging onto culturally and what we are letting go. Are we striving to keep the best of our human culture or preserving the trivial aspects? It is presumptuous of us to think that our culture can be transmitted solely through the media - internet, printed materials and television. These tend to give us a false sense of security about the permanence of culture. Many societies and cultures have fallen and disappeared in the past. What makes us think we in Canada are immune from this? Will our neglect and hubris cause us to lose what is important?

Jacobs focuses on five pillars that are in serious decay:

- families at risk and under great economic and social strain
- universities substituting credentialing for education
- science becoming irrelevant when done by people who do not understand the scientific method
- accountability for how government spends tax money and ensuring it stays close to the people it serves and the needs it addresses
- professions failing to police their members’ ethics — lapsing into endless corruption and scandal.



The corrosion of these pillars, Jacobs suggests, is linked to societal ills such as racism, environmental crisis and the growing gap between rich and poor. Jacobs offers many examples of why she has come to these conclusions. It is a dire warning, yet presents the hope that we can arrest the cycles of decay, self correct and renew our way.

The Leadership Edmonton class of 2007/08 brings together diverse individuals with a wealth of community involvement. The program is designed to engage people from various sectors to explore and utilize an action learning framework designed to:

- understand the disciplines that help us to broaden our understandings of the world and strongly align with what is best for humanity and life
- develop higher levels of judgment, learning and conduct
- find stable coordinates for navigating in a complex world
- build a network of support for pioneer leaders who are working on the leading edge.

The framework has been developed and tested for over 30 years and is based on research of the global life story, taking a holistic view of how we as individuals and communities learn “wisdom”. It incorporates a comprehensive study of sociology, history, anthropology, psychology, technology, life science, art, literature and cultural development and is incredibly pragmatic. At the end of the challenging nine month program, this class will join the 110 alumni from the program who continue to be fully engaged in their community through membership on community

## Truth

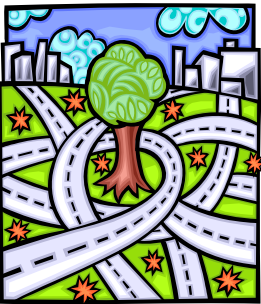
adapted from research of Action Studies Institute

B.H. Liddell Hart states that the role of an historian is to find truth. But what is truth and how do we find it? We highly value “the truth” but often are not skilled in understanding what it is, seeking it or testing and judging it.

We can use a map analogy to help us understand truth. The “truth” we find will be a representation of “reality” just like a “map” is a limited representation of a “territory”. (If you included all the detail of the territory in the map, you’d have the territory itself). Our thoughts and perceptions are like maps – they are limited representations of reality. As such, our thoughts can be constructed to accurately represent parts of the territory/real world or they can be wildly inaccurate.

For example, we may need a map that represents parts of the territory. If we only need to know the roads in our community, the map we seek may only show roads. Therefore, the map is limited in representing the territory but does serve a purpose. If, though, we required

a map that showed the complete topography of the community, this map would



be incomplete and inadequate. To relate this to truth, we may only seek part of the story if our need is not life threatening or somewhat trivial. We could use the example of a person who has just got a new job in research at a company and is asked to find out some information on the effects of a certain product. This person may have a great need for approval or acceptance, as well as a need to ensure that the company’s views (right or wrong) are adhered to and perpetuated. In this case, the “truth” sought may fall short of any information that disagrees with the company’s want or need. Selective information to support this need may only be used and other information conveniently left out. A good example of this is when the tobacco companies’ CEOs continued to state under oath that tobacco is not addictive or harmful to people’s health. The truths we hold or seek are always incomplete representations of aspects of reality, and are influenced greatly by our purposes for seeking truth, our habits and our interests. The accuracy or truth of our thoughts needs to **tested and judged on the basis of how closely it matches the territory it claims to represent.**

*“It is strange how people assume that no training is needed in the pursuit of truth.... We should recognize that for this pursuit anyone requires at least as much care and training as a boxer for a fight or a runner for a marathon.”*

—B.H. Liddell Hart

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## From the Editor...

Do you have a story from your community or organization you would like to share?

If so, please give me a call or email me—I would love to hear from you...

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## Learning from History...

Reflecting on war...

Take time to remember the people who have lost their lives due to war, to reflect on the other consequences of engaging in war and why we continue to travel this path.

“We learn from history that complete victory has never been completed by the result that the victors always anticipate—a good and lasting peace. For victory has always sown the seeds of a fresh war, because victory breeds among the vanquished a desire for vindication and vengeance and because victory raises fresh rivals.”

B.H. Liddell Hart

“The world has achieved brilliance without wisdom, power without conscience. Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical midgets. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living.”

Omar N. Bradley



## In the Next Issue:

- Books Worth Reading
- How we Learn...
- Leadership/Management

“History is the only laboratory we have in which to test the consequences of thought.”

Etienne Gilson