

The Leaders' Corner - Michael Anhorn, Canadian Mental Health Association

Blog
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The Leaders Corner

Michael Anhorn is a warm person with a reputation for collaboration and sharing. He grew up in Penzance, Saskatchewan, a small farming community, and realized early on that a career as a farmer was not for him. After university, Michael began a Masters of Divinity at Queens Theological College, but did not complete it. Instead, he realized he could fight for the causes that he is passionate about – social justice, inclusion, and social housing – within the not-for-profit sector. Over the years, Michael has held a variety of roles in government and the not-for-profit sector, giving him a broad and deep perspective of the sector.

Michael is also passionate about the importance of leadership development and capacity building. He has experienced much on his own leadership journey. A particular new interest is in change leadership, explored when he recently led the successful amalgamation of 3 formerly independently incorporated Branches of the Canadian Mental Health Association. Through the project, he realized that positive change is only possible with the people front and centre. To accomplish this, Michael and the leadership team at CMHA aimed to have minimal to no impact on program participants, and provided staff with opportunities to celebrate the successes of their original branch, grieve its loss and develop hopes and dreams for the amalgamated branch. As with most transitions of this size, there were bumps and unexpected turns along the way; however, the staff team seems to be coalescing and have remained resilient and committed to their program participants.

Leader: [Michael Anhorn](#), Executive Director

Organization: [Canadian Mental Health Association, Vancouver-Fraser](#)

Tenure: Since November 2012

Leadership or life motto: “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing there is a field. Want to come play?” (Rumi as translated by Jamshed Storer)

Upcoming projects/challenges:

Integrating 3 cultures into 1 new organization. Expanding programming into areas previously not served by CMHA (Surrey and Langley).

If you could have dinner with anyone alive or dead, who would it be?

Nelson Mandela

Do you have a mentor? What is the biggest lesson they ever taught you?

I’ve been lucky to have many mentors throughout my life. It is too hard to name only one or two. The three most important lessons they taught me are: 1) Figure out the ‘right’ thing to do and then do it (even if doing so is personally risky); 2) Approach everything from the perspective of curiosity – curiosity reduces our tendency to jump to judgment and forces us to listen; and 3) When you are lost, return to your heart and listen for the quiet voice that resides there.

Who is your favourite leader from a movie?

Jean Luc Picard. Although I’m not a huge Star Trek fan, I do admire the collaborative and developmental leadership style of Jean Luc Picard.

What is your greatest fear?

Disappointing others. It’s a fear I need to stay very conscious of so that I don’t give into it in leadership roles.

What trait do you most admire in others?

Compassion combined with visionary thinking

What is your favorite book?

[Leadership on the Line](#): *Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* by Ronald Heifetz and Martin Linsky

What do you do for fun?

I travel to places that are quiet, remote, and where cell phones don't work. There I can listen to the wind in the trees and water rushing in the streams.

What would your super power be?

Invoking compassion and empathy in others.

What impact do you want to make on the world?

I want to increase the value attributed to the not-for-profit sector in our society and by doing so, increase the inclusion of people who are traditionally left out or left behind in our communities.

What is the best gift you have ever received?

A cooler. It was a present for my grade 12 graduation that I still have and use regularly.