Discussion Questions for Leadership Development using *First Leaders*

Context

First Nations people have been refining leadership for millennia. By comparison, the discipline of workplace leadership emerged only about 100 years ago – just a few generations back. Over the long timeframe of their experience, First Nations have figured out what works and what doesn't. The timeless wisdom of First Nation societies can help workplace leaders solve their major leadership challenges.

Learning Objectives

In using the book *First Leaders* to explore workplace leadership, the objectives are to:
1. Help individual leaders at each level of the organisation enhance their own leadership.
2. Assist senior executives reflect on their personal leadership style and impact.
3. Assist HR teams review and improve the key leadership practices in their organisation.
4. Increase the respect we have for First Nation societies by appreciating the depth of their leadership wisdom.

This document supports Objective 1. Separate guides are available to support Objectives 2, 3 and 4.

Design

The questions that follow are designed for discussion in workshops of leaders or for self-reflection by individual leaders. The questions are designed to draw out key aspects of First Nations leadership and how that wisdom can help workplace leaders excel in their roles.

The questions aim to generate ideas and actions on the most critical aspects of leadership in First Nation societies. Beyond these questions, *First Leaders* has comprehensive recommendations and checklists for leaders and for leadership practices in organisations.

Overall

This section covers your overall impression of the leadership practices of First Nation societies outlined in the 11 Principles of First Leadership described in the book.
1. What impressed me most about the leadership approach of First Nation societies?
2. What are the core philosophies that underpin leadership across First Nation societies?
3. Are there particularly challenging aspects of the leadership approach of First Nations?
4. Why are those dimensions challenging – what is it about my own experience and perspective that makes the approach of First Nations challenging to me?
5. How many of the key leadership principles do I already apply in my own leadership?
6. What principles of First Nations leadership do I not currently apply? Which of those should I look to implement?

Treating People with Respect

Across First Nation societies, the common attribute that qualifies a person for leadership is that they treat other people with respect. In Chapter 3 of *First Leaders* the book discusses the behaviours that demonstrate respect and disrespect.
1. In thinking about leaders I have worked for over my career, what leaders demonstrated respect? What were their behaviours that showed they respected other people?
2. What about the leaders who demonstrate disrespect? What were their behaviours that showed they disrespected other people?
3. In looking at the list of behaviours that show respect and those that show disrespect, which of those behaviours do I also use (and hence show to my team members)?
4. What actions do I choose to take to increase the respect I show to others and to remove moments of disrespect from my leadership?

Time, Generosity and Favouritism

First Nation leaders make time for individuals and appreciate the individuals in their group.

1. How much time do I dedicate to the individuals who work for me? Do I schedule regular catch-ups (or reviews) with people? Am I 'there' for people when they need me?
2. To what extent do I know the individual identity of people in my group? What do I know about them, their career experiences and their life journey that makes them the individual they are?
3. Leading down to the individual level means in part that I have a generous attitude towards individuals and their potential. What is my view about the people on my team? Are there individuals who might benefit if I take a more generous view about their potential – what would happen for them if my view of them changed?
4. Why do First Nations people consistently say that a leader should not show favouritism to anyone in their group? What behaviours by a workplace leader would demonstrate that they have favourites in their group? In my own leadership, what behaviours might show that I have favourites, and conversely that show I have no favourites? What actions could I take to reduce any display of favouritism?

Group Cohesion

First Nation societies and their leaders invest time, effort and resources on building group unity.

1. What are the key practices of First Nation societies that contribute to social unity?
2. How harmonious is the group I lead?
3. What initiatives do I currently undertake to help unify my group?
4. Are there tensions within my group that need to be resolved?
5. What actions do I choose to take to increase the level of cohesion in my group?

Culture

First Nation societies find a balance between individual autonomy with group interests – this forms the culture of the group.

1. What are my five or so key values and standards that form the culture of my group?
2. Have I been specific about these standards to my team members – how do they know about these standards?
3. To what extent do I insist on standards of work and behaviour? Are any team members violating my cultural standards?
4. Fitting-in to a culture is a two-way street. For a person to contain their personal motivations there needs to be some emotional return for the person as a consequence of belonging to the group. What do I provide as the benefit for people being members of my group?

Individual Conformity

Consistently across First Nation societies, it falls to the leader to address any instances of individuals undermining the interests of the group.

1. What is the consistent approach of First Nation societies in addressing instances of an individual undermining the interests of the group?
2. Why is this a fair approach?
3. What is the end result if a leader of a group does not address instances of an individual working against the group?
4. In my own leadership experience, what tips have I learned that helps me address individual performance or behavioural issues – tips I would pass on to other leaders?
5. In my group right now do I have any instances of an individual working against the group? What have I done about this or plan to do?

Coaching and Mentoring

In First Nation societies, leaders are educators and mentors – they grow the next generation.

1. To what extent would my team members consider me as a leader who has their development as one of my priorities?
2. In the last three months, how much time have I spent coaching/developing individuals on my team (or in my organisational unit)?
3. To what extent would my young team members say that in the time they have worked for me, their development has accelerated and they have taken on more responsibility than if they hadn't been working for me?
4. What actions do I choose to take to increase my role as developer and mentor?