

# TLC SHOWCASE

## Alice Maynard


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TLC The Literary Consultancy

# Introduction to *Far to Go*

There are many different opinions about what makes a good leader. If you Google leadership traits, there are a great many possibilities to choose from. Even if you go to a relatively authoritative and selective source, such as Harvard Business Review, there are still enough options to fill a three-volume novel.

The book's main thesis is that leadership is formed before it is performed. Our life experiences are rich in leadership lessons, forming us as leaders long before we are called on to exercise leadership. I have selected traits for this book that I have found essential as a leader and illustrated them from my life experience.

My purpose in writing this book has been to encourage others to consider what leadership traits they have developed – whether like mine or different – because of their life experiences. Many of us do not feel we have what it takes to be a leader. If you are one of them, I think you might be surprised what you find if you look back – life shapes us in many relevant ways – so I encourage you to reflect and be confident you will uncover hidden treasure. For those who don't see themselves as leaders, I hope that the book encourages them to think again. For those who already have a leadership role, I hope it encourages them to reflect on and perhaps integrate more of their life experience.

Along my writing journey, I have been supported and nurtured by TLC and its community of writers. Without them, I would never have got this far. I have benefited from the many workshops TLC runs, including the brilliant Xanthi Barker's self-editing non-fiction course and from the continual encouragement of Aki Schilz and Joe Sedgwick. I am especially grateful to: Fran Bailey, the mentor who helped me shape my initial ideas into something others might actually be interested in, helping me craft a first full draft; Jade Fitton, my second reader, who not only helped me shape it further, but picked up on the many errors and inconsistencies that would cause a reader hiccups at best and to throw the book out for recycling at worst; and Ian Wong, an editor, who supported me to develop the book into its current form.

# Extract from *Far to Go*

## Chapter 9

**Knowing yourself**

*"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom"* **Aristotle**

"I don't think I ever really knew my daughter" my mother said to me sadly after my sister's funeral. Sue died in May 2008. She developed pneumonia at the end of March and had to be resuscitated, after which she stayed in a coma for a few weeks. She recovered from that but never emerged from hospital and her airways became blocked for a second time, after which she never came out of a coma and subsequently died. I had read out a collection of quotes that I had received from the many friends and colleagues that Sue had made throughout her life. They described her as funny, generous, warm and open. This was a side that my parents rarely saw. My father experienced her as angry, demanding, constantly complaining about discrimination. I think my mother shared my father's disappointment, although I don't know how she had perceived Sue. She had always had a much closer relationship with Sue than my father ever did, given his absence for the first year of her life, her hospital stays when she was a child and his work schedule. But I was surprised that my mother felt she never really knew Sue. Perhaps she had only seen that side of Sue that was fragile, but paradoxically strong and resilient, with a shell that was difficult to penetrate. The side of her that had escaped death more times than I can remember, and the side of her that made some foolish decisions, inexplicable to my parents, like marrying someone she met on a dating site and barely knew – it turned out very, very badly.

It was such a poignant moment I promised myself I would seek to be open and authentic with everyone I knew. Not that I had been hiding parts of myself deliberately, but it is a considered choice to be your authentic self with others. That does not mean putting all your quirks, foibles and unsightly habits on show wherever you go. Thank goodness!

It's almost a cliché now to say that leaders should be self-aware, and self-awareness presumes self-knowledge. What does it do for us as leaders, though? Self-knowledge shows us that we are human, with strengths and weaknesses, and so are those we work alongside. It's the piece of the jigsaw that stops us reacting out of instinct.

Instead we can pause – and respond with honesty and kindness to the person in front of us.

In learning about ourselves it can be helpful to understand where we have come from. I have spent a lot of time reflecting on my parents and their parents and what they went through in their lives. I believe that much of my capacity to recover from setbacks in my life is influenced by my mother and my grandmother.

Once, when I was working with one of the many coaches, counsellors and therapists I have engaged over the years to try to overcome some of my hangups, I had a glimpse of something that I can barely even put my finger on now. It had to do with the pain carried from generation to generation by women. I began to recognise that who I am is intimately bound up not only with my mother, and who she was, but also with the women who preceded her.

Not that we are untouched by the influence of the men in our lives. The hard work and profound sense of duty of my great grandfather on my father's side, passed down through the generations, has had a very significant influence on me. But as women we transfer something of the struggle of being a woman, often carrying unacknowledged responsibility in relationships, and we may carry damage and the consequent hurt of momentous negative experiences from generation to generation.

# About the Writer



By conventional measures, Alice Maynard was not obvious leadership material, having the muscle-wasting condition Spinal Muscular Atrophy from birth and attending 'special' school as a teenager. This might seem an inauspicious start, but following a successful career, she founded Future Inclusion to help leaders improve organisation performance, advising a wide range of organisations on good governance and inclusive culture.

She is Chair and Pro-Chancellor of the University of York, and Non-Executive Director (NED) at ITSO and its subsidiary Yotra (providing digital solutions in transport ticketing). She is also an external member of the House of Lords Commission, ensuring the operations of the House support Peers to fulfil their scrutiny role. She was NED at the Financial Conduct Authority and HMRC, chairing their People Committees, and a Board Member of Transport for London. She has chaired a number of charities including Scope and Swanswell.

Alice passionately believes that everyone is, or has the potential to be, a leader. She wrote the book to counter one of the prevailing views of leadership that it is a special quality that only a few people have. Our leadership qualities need to be nurtured and sometimes we are the only people who can do that – she hopes that this book will encourage many people to recognise and learn to nurture their own leadership traits.

In 2014, Alice's own leadership was recognised when she won the Sunday Times Non-Executive Director of the Year award, and she received a CBE in the 2015 New Year Honours.