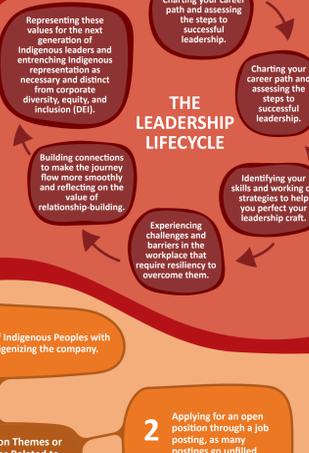


INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP: A journey to success

The following roadmap utilizes findings from CCAB's Skills for Inclusive Workplaces and the Advancement of Indigenous Peoples' report, which surveyed 25 Indigenous business leaders between February and March 2023. It is intended to serve as a useful tool that Indigenous entrepreneurs and corporate leaders can reference along their journey, and non-Indigenous leaders can use it to inform their workplace actions when seeking to create inclusive environments. This tool is not a checklist for success but a detailed description of Indigenous Peoples' experiences and valuable strategies for overcoming challenges in corporate workplace settings. The contents can be used by established or aspiring Indigenous leaders; however, certain aspects are meant to be internalized by non-Indigenous leaders seeking to create a more equitable workplace that supports Indigenous employees on their journey toward leadership roles.



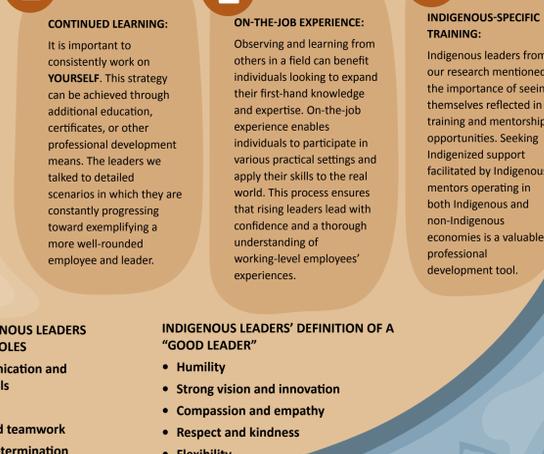
1. Foundation

Before ascending to a leadership position, it is important to incubate your success by laying the necessary foundations. Many factors enable career advancement into senior-level positions. Indigenous leaders from our research detailed some of the prerequisites for carving a pathway to leadership roles:



2. Hatching Stage

After laying the foundations and reaching a senior-level position, it is important to begin honing your skills to become the most effective leader you can be. Indigenous leaders cite continuous learning, on-the-job experience, and Indigenous-specific training programs as key developmental tools to become well-rounded leaders. The following are some examples of strategies that Indigenous leaders use to sharpen their skills and strengthen professional development:



SOFT SKILLS INDIGENOUS LEADERS EMPLOY IN THEIR ROLES

- Effective communication and interpersonal skills
- Analytical skill
- Collaboration and teamwork
- Resiliency and determination
- Incorporation of Indigenous culture and traditions

INDIGENOUS LEADERS' DEFINITION OF A "GOOD LEADER"

- Humility
- Strong vision and innovation
- Compassion and empathy
- Respect and kindness
- Flexibility

3. Surviving in The Unknown

As you maneuver the corporate world, you will face internal (within yourself) and external barriers in the workplace. When you can recognize the most likely sources of obstacles, you will have the courage to confront them. Indigenous leaders highlighted a variety of barriers that exist, including the following:

- LACK OF REPRESENTATION:** Noteworthy concern exists regarding the lack of representation of Indigenous Peoples in senior or executive-level leadership roles. Within organizations and corporate boards, a lack of diversity can affect the advancement of aspiring Indigenous leaders or perpetuate a continuous cycle of non-diverse leaders.
- RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS:** While combatting overt racial discrimination, it is also important to recognize unconscious biases, which are ingrained attitudes or stereotypes about specific racial or ethnic groups. From the insights gathered, unconscious biases seem to exist across many of Canada's corporate leadership networks, contributing to the lack of diversity in leadership and disadvantaging Indigenous Peoples looking to advance their careers.
- TOKENIZATION:** Indigenous leaders from our research found that, within certain organizations, Indigenous Peoples can sometimes be tokenized or "pigeonholed" into specific roles or Indigenous-related sectors. Indigenous Peoples' abilities and qualifications are frequently underappreciated, resulting in their being overlooked for leadership positions outside these areas.
- GENDER BIASES:** Besides racial discrimination and unconscious biases, Indigenous women face additional barriers due to prejudiced behaviours perpetuated against women. These biases negatively influence the possibility of promotion for Indigenous women seeking to undertake leadership positions, causing feelings of being unequal or treated unfairly.
- STRUCTURAL/SYSTEMIC BARRIERS:** Educational gaps and other socio-economic disparities contribute to the limited opportunities for Indigenous individuals wanting to progress in their careers. Factors ranging from lack of access to job training and internet connectivity further hinder Indigenous leaders' advancement. The impact of these issues is especially heightened for those who live on reserve or in rural areas, where there is often inadequate infrastructure.

4 Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

PRACTICING HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION
"Having to work three times as hard [as a non-Indigenous person] to get the credential — that carries through into every career path or every step. If I was going to get a promotion, I feel like I had to work harder [than others] to earn that promotion."

PURSuing EDUCATION/TRAINING
"I had a very positive introduction to education and to academics. By the time I got to school, I knew that I needed to find resources to help me succeed. I collect information that is helpful for my career advancement."

LEARNING SELF-ADVOCACY (THAT IS, "KNOWING YOUR WORTH")
*"I picked myself up and said there's better things out there for me, being optimistic. I'm looking for that other opportunity that might be around the corner, always preparing myself and expanding my knowledge."
 "It is hard to advocate for yourself, so I met with women in leadership or Indigenous people in leadership to get advice. I had to understand those barriers and how to come across them. I had to ask for opportunities and demonstrate how I would be a benefit. It goes against [for Indigenous people] the values of humility to put yourself out there."*

STAYING OPEN-MINDED
*"I'm finding different opportunities, or some opportunities will present themselves to me."
 "Ultimately, what I had to do was to find new opportunities and explore options for places that would value me."*

What Can Be Done to Lower Barriers?

- Address systemic barriers, challenge unconscious biases, and promote diversity and inclusivity to create equitable opportunities for Indigenous Peoples aspiring to undertake leadership roles.
- Organizational restructuring to create spaces for Indigenous leaders within traditionally non-Indigenous settings.
- Develop Indigenous-specific diversity, equity, and inclusion policies that respect Indigenous Peoples' inherent differences as a unique equity-deserving groups in Canada.
- Take a bottom-up approach to making changes. From the recruitment, hiring, retention, and training of Indigenous Peoples up to leadership structures, more emphasis must be placed on lowering the barriers Indigenous employees face in professional advancement.

4. Calm waters

Indigenous leaders often have mentors who help them progress and promote professional development. Mentorship is described as coming in many different forms. Whether formal or informal, mentorship is consistently cited as a valuable resource that can lay the foundation for long-term success and confidence in the workplace.

What Does Successful Mentorship Look Like to Indigenous Leaders?

- Mentors have a deep understanding of their mentees and their needs.
- An organic relationship cultivated out of a need to gain knowledge or advice.
- Communication of needs and wants between a mentor and mentee.
- A mentor who can provide meaningful, competent guidance that helps the mentee succeed, particularly in challenging environments and overcoming barriers.
- Patience and empathy to care about and consider the mentee's best interests when assisting.

Career Mentorship

"I had a mentor at [previous employer] who was very helpful, insightful, and wise. They gave me good advice on how to operate within a complex environment. I've always drawn on the expertise of individuals, whether Indigenous or not, in terms of where I should be going in my career."

"The people who were allies and mentors throughout my career were people who saw something in me that I did not necessarily see and supported me to learn and move throughout my career into higher leadership roles."

"Mentorship is very important, whether internal or external. [What has made this mentorship effective] Open and honest dialog with those mentors; being challenged by those mentors to look at different perspectives."

"The most successful mentoring relationships develop very organically and are relationship based. It needs not to be so rigid and formal. The person seeking mentorship needs to be intentional about developing that relationship and directing their mentor in what it is they need help with."

Indigenous leaders noted having a mentor from their working environment who offered the best strategies for advancing their careers. Mentors are usually people within the organization who maintain a senior role and can leverage their experience and insight to show mentees how to better contribute to or operate in the organization or their position. Career mentors are valuable because they can provide highly specific and relevant guidance for a given job, industry, market, or company. Creating space where employees feel comfortable enough to express concern or seek advice from more tenured staff members should be the goal of any company looking to provide a healthy work environment.

VS

Community Mentorship

"I have what I would refer to as my personal board of directors, so the people that I know will give me an honest answer and not the answer they think I want to hear. Those are the people who will always have my best interest at heart, the people I rely on to guide me."

"I have a wonderful role model who I rely on so much for support and wayfinding, a First Nations woman; she used to be a leader of mine, and I rely on her for support and advice."

Indigenous leaders described this type of mentor as knowing them and their experiences more personally, allowing them to provide a different, more nuanced style of guidance compared to what a colleague in the workplace might have the capacity to prescribe. In some cases, these community mentors are directly related to the mentee or have ties to the same or a nearby Indigenous community that affords them the ability to give apt advice on work, itself, or everyday life scenarios that might impact success at work. Elders, family members, and local Indigenous business and community leaders can all contribute valuable perspectives, insight, and information that might serve a slightly different purpose than a career mentor, grounded in cultural continuity, community well-being, and Indigenous knowledge.

The Next Generation

The experiences of established Indigenous leaders throughout the Canadian corporate landscape can help prepare the next generation of leaders while also mitigating past challenges. Indigenous leaders from our research had a plethora of advice for the Indigenous leaders of tomorrow:

- Identify and work toward achieving set goals
- Be authentic and align yourself with your values and principles
- Embrace curiosity and resiliency
- Seek mentorship

"Coming from a small Indigenous community, there was a lot of anxiety for me being in many of these roles and workplaces. And you often feel out of place because there's not too many other folks that look like you and have the same lived experience that you do."

5. A Return to Nature

As DEI has become increasingly important in recent years, organizations have begun to reconfigure their priorities and establish measures to combat the disadvantages that Indigenous Peoples face. Inclusivity, fair treatment, and welcoming environments are necessary for Indigenous Peoples to thrive in non-Indigenous spaces.



4 Strategies for Promoting Indigenous DEI on Boards

- Hiring and retention:** Companies should be intentional in recruiting and fostering an inclusive and supportive workplace in order to retain Indigenous talent.
- Outreach to Indigenous communities:** Companies should actively engage with and hire members of Indigenous communities and work to earn the community's trust in the process.
- Changing perceptions:** There is a need to change companies' perceptions of Indigenous Peoples in the workplace and actively challenge existing biases.
- Creation of purposeful mentorship:** Indigenous employees can be paired with senior executives who can provide direction, mentorship, and support to develop the required leadership skills.