

## Three women principals describe their leadership style

Is there one successful style of leadership? To what extent can we remain ourselves when appointed to the top?

Chaired by **Sally Dicketts**, Chair, WLN.

**Heather Maxwell**, Principal, South Devon College.

**Maxine Room**, Principal, Park Lane Campus of Leeds City College and Principal Designate, Lewisham College.

**Cathy Walsh**, Principal and Chief Executive, Barking College.

### 1. **Heather Maxwell**, Principal, South Devon College.

Heather introduced herself by saying she had taken over an unsatisfactory college seven years ago and at their last inspection (November 2008) all areas were described as outstanding by Ofsted.

She detailed 9 key ways that had accounted for this under her leadership:

1. Being a leader of learning.
2. Be ambitious for learners, staff, the college and the community.  
[Celebrate success at every opportunity e.g.: most inspirational teacher or business support person; a successful innovative project]
3. Staffing – right staff in right place.  
[if not working, support and enable that person in a different role; if still not succeeding, assist them to move on...]
4. Monitor performance.  
[gather key evidence e.g.: performance indicators, regularly]
5. Establish a Culture of Discipline.  
[self discipline recognised – reliable people stand out]
6. Encourage innovation and transformational learning.  
[try new things, projects, style of working, and ways of thinking]
7. Solve problems as mistakes hurt.  
[avoid blame culture]
8. Be yourself.  
[self awareness to best practice]
9. Be proud.

2. **Maxine Room**, Principal, Park Lane Campus of Leeds City College and Principal Designate, Lewisham College.

Maxine added to Peter Daley's four key strategies for applicants for senior posts:

- VISION – “sharpen the saw”
- STRATEGY – “feel the fear and do it anyway”
- VALUES – maintain leadership strengths in times of mergers
- BUSINESS ACUMEN – be driven by success rates

Maxine maintained that taking the Principals' Qualification Programme had enabled her to become more reflective and reflect on her leadership style.

Her sound bites:

- Get every staff person on the golden thread (knowing how they fit into the organisation)
- Act as a mentor for all women
- Be tolerant with ambiguity
- Keep motivation going
- Value transformational/distributed leadership
- Keep focused on the business

**Cathy Walsh**, Principal and Chief Executive, Barking College.

Cathy has only been in post for 10 months and in that time has become very conscious of the impact of her leadership style. She is constantly informed by:

- Great women in the sector.
- Other people every day in every way.
- Herself and her own learning and development.
- Her upbringing and underpinning values (strong sense of social justice & fairness).

Cathy explained that she is comfortable in her own skin and this has made her more confident. And finally, she said that she:

- Has learned to be immodest and promote herself.
- Is proving to be fearless.
- Strives to be collaborative.
- Values networking, where connecting with people strikes a chord.
- Is optimistic about her future.