

A Collective Work By:
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PRAISE FOR THE BOOK

We are honored to share these reflections from community leaders who have been involved in our work throughout the years. May these words of acknowledgment enhance your anticipation and appreciation for what is to come.

“This book perfectly captures the amazing support Charmm’d has engaged community leaders over the past 20 years. It is amazing how this book captures how we have all learned to love what we do while focusing on a growth mindset. Additionally, knowing the importance of starting somewhere, but doing so while consuming different perspectives. Finally, it is critical to understand the need to step out of our comfort zones, and finally know that leadership truly begins with YOU!” ~ Ray Lechner, School Superintendent

“The Charmm’d book is full of incredible wisdom, advice, joy, and hope. For two decades, Charmm’d has encouraged people to stretch, learn, and lead. The impact the organization has had is profound and will be felt for decades to come. This powerful book is a must-read for all who want to lead with heart.” ~ Pete Moore, Head of School

“This thoughtful compilation of wisdom is truly a gift to all those who have been touched by Charmm’d, serving as a reminder and reinforcement of the many lessons. I will personally utilize this masterpiece as a discussion guide to continue to grow myself and my team for years to come. What a perfect parting gift. Thank you, Charmm’d Foundation!” ~ Cheri Neal, Township Supervisor

“Over its 20 years, The Charmm'd Foundation cultivated a culture of trust, respect, growth, and knowledge - all in the name of helping leaders thrive. They continue that legacy with this book. You can feel the experience and warmth of Sheri, Ashley, Susan, and Susan (Wiley) as they leave us with lessons to propel us onward toward future endeavors, future challenges, and future successes.” ~ Hollis Sienkiewicz, Senior Marketing Manager

“Being a leader of a non-profit or government organization can be both incredibly fulfilling and incredibly lonely. Often, we find ourselves in leadership roles without having had the opportunity to first learn how to be our best selves as leaders. Working with Charmm’d has provided me with the opportunity to recognize my authentic self, to see the good in each employee, and to lead with empathy and patience. Each chapter in this book captures words of wisdom from coaches who have supported leaders and have also been on leadership journeys themselves. This book reminds us to lean on the Charmm’d community (including those in this book!) when we feel alone or overwhelmed. As Charmm’d teaches, leadership may be lonely, but you are not alone.” ~ Emily Smith, Director of Libraries



PROLOGUE

At the start of our professional journeys at Charmm'd, we were invited to contemplate the legacy we hoped to leave behind. We were asked to imagine ourselves driving away on our final day of work, passing four billboards along the road—each one representing a piece of us. The question posed to us was simple yet profound: ***What do we want the community leaders to remember when we are no longer here?*** In the pages ahead, we share these billboards with you, each a reflection of our aspirations, values, and the mark we hope to leave on the world.

You will also see ***the rope*** throughout the book. The rope is a metaphor for this work. Each strand alone has strength. Weave these strands together and form something more powerful. It symbolizes each one of us building our own strengths. It also illustrates the community as a whole weaving together the talent and resources of its many leaders.

As a team, this was our manifesto, our guiding light, and what we strived for every day...

Let's face it, we aren't here for a long time so let's create the best life we can!

Search for your ideas in the clouds. Go slow to go fast. Find love in helping others succeed. Challenge yourself. **Value those around you...even those you don't like.** Set big hairy audacious goals. Act with intention. Feel free to be you...every time. Be wildly curious. **Welcome and honor the diversity of others.** Push the boundaries. Show passion in all you do. **Be a leader.** Focus relentlessly on your vision and make your ideas realities. Laugh, a lot. Know you are not alone. You belong. **Stay humble.** Embrace the unexpected. Be uniquely you! Act ethically. Make your best even better. Dream big. Receive others with a heart of peace. **Reflect on how you affect others.** Collaborate. Go all-in. Welcome white space and relish in the pause. Be honest from your heart and your gut. Seek to learn from your failures and move on. Grow those around you. **Hold safety in the highest regard.** Aim to exceed expectations. Be accountable. Welcome feedback. Say what you're going to do and do what you say. **If you're not learning, you're not growing.** Ignore what's normal and play in the unknown. Act with compassion. Celebrate. Ask the hard questions. **Imagine the possible not the impossible.**

Together we can make a difference.

Let's make it happen!

Chapter 1

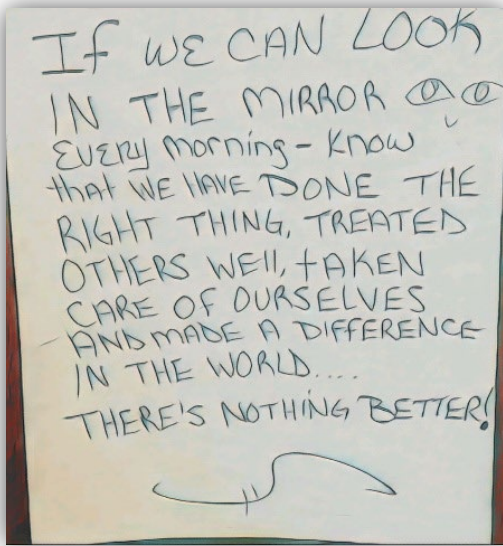
LEADING AN ORGANIZATION

BY: SHERI MILLER

Founder & Executive Director

*"Take responsibility for the life you want."
- Rick Tamlyn -*

LESSONS LEARNED ...BUILDING THE ORGANIZATION



When I began Charmm'd, I questioned whether I could successfully lead a group of people as my "soft skills" were not the greatest. I was a Type A leader who charged forward to get as much done as possible and with the hopes everyone else would follow. I micromanaged, had a short fuse, had a big ego, which meant I had to be right, and I held grudges. Heck! With all of that, I would have hated to work for this person myself! I began reading the cliff notes versions of leadership books, (podcasts hadn't yet been conceived and YouTube was not well known) and dove deep into the learnings offered at Charmm'd. What I learned made sense and changed my life. That was the start of me beginning to open my mind and learn so that I could create the culture I wanted to form. ...Below are practices put in place so Charmm'd, my team and I could succeed, and we did...

LEADING MYSELF

- **The poster at the top of this page** hangs in my office in its handwritten form. I use this to guide me as THIS is what makes me happy. When I am not happy, I go back to this and see what is not in alignment so I can make the change.
- **I work to be my best** so that I, my team, and our mission can succeed. To make that happen, I provide time for:
 - Self-reflection so I am aware of who I am
 - Breathing room so I have time to "just be"
 - Professional development in both hard and soft skills
 - Connections with others as connection is one of my highest values. These people are my teachers, friends, role models, confidantes, support, and what this high extrovert needs!
- **I often reflect on where I have a fixed mindset versus a growth mindset;** then I think of what I want to do about that, as I may be the one standing in the way of success.

- **Celebrate each win – no matter how big or small it is.** Knowing that our way of thinking – either positively or negatively - is an inside job, I focus on truly celebrating each win of myself, the team, and the community. This continually fills me with hits of dopamine that keep me in a positive mindset where I can think my best.

LEADING THE TEAM

- **Our job as a leader is to grow other leaders.** As leaders this “IS” a part of our job description; in fact, a very important part, and I regularly left time to grow my staff. This was for their own sake and to build them up so they can be the best they can be to best serve the community itself.
- **Create small goals.** Often, life can be challenging. By creating and then achieving small goals, we can help to build confidence and keep the energy and motivation moving forward.
- **Treat employees as your most valued customers** because they are. My reason for this is kind of selfish. It’s no secret that the work can’t be done without these folks, so if you don’t care about them as human beings, about their families, and about what is going on in their lives, if you don’t know what their goals and aspirations are, then why should they care about you and what you want to achieve? My selfishness has rewarded me with so much more than great employees. Not only do they challenge, support, and help me grow; when we closed the doors each team member was – and will continue to be - a true friend. That’s because we built mutual respect and trust with one another.
- **Treat each employee differently** based on what they want and need. Remember, one size fits one when it comes to how someone takes in information, what is important to them, what’s already on their plate, and what their goals are, etc. Together, come up with what will work for both of you.
- Diving a little deeper into communication, **communicate with each employee based on how they hear/take in the information.**
 - You may find your method is different for each one.
 - Your goal is to have them hear your message.
 - Ask them how they would like you to communicate with them so they can best hear your message.
 - Think about ‘What is in it for them?’ and speak to that.
 - Also, let them know what is in it for you and the larger mission (Think you/me/it.)
 - When talking with them, let them know what you are looking for from them, (ideas, answers, to be a sounding board, etc.)
- **Be clear with your expectations** so those that are following understand exactly what you are striving for. Truth be told, this is an area in which I never completely succeeded. ...I am still growing that muscle.
- **Have systems and structures in place** that allow all to be accountable for the expectations. Structures such as weekly 1 – 1 meetings, quarterly team meetings, and set agenda’s where day to day topics are discussed, as well as regular reflections about our mission, core values, manifesto, etc.

- As Jim Collins, author of *Good to Great* stated, **“Get the right people on the bus, then find the best job for them”**. You can probably see things in them that they may not see in themselves. Let them know you believe in them by giving them the opportunity.
- **Realize what most people want/need** is for their voices to be heard, to be seen, to know they have made a difference, and that they are cared for. Be the safe place they can count on to make that happen.
- **Do all you can to keep a good employee.** Sometimes this is money; usually, it is not.
- **Leaders don’t have to know it all.** What a gift it can be to hear a leader say, “I don’t know.” Ask questions, learn from others, and continually be curious.
- **Depend on the team to help make things happen.** You and your team both know your strengths and the strengths they bring to the table. Utilize that knowledge to accomplish the tasks and do it better than anyone could have done alone.
- **“Nose in, fingers out”** is a wonderful visual to abide by when wanting your team to have ownership and grow. Be interested and then stay out of the way and allow them to focus on the work itself.
- **When looking for buy-in,** address each team member one at a time.
 - Share your ideas and ask them to shoot holes through them.
 - Learn what’s important to them.
 - Learn about their concerns.
 - Learn what they would like to change, add, delete, tweak, etc.
 - After getting their input, take your idea along with the changes you agreed on to the next person. Keep the other thoughts filed away, still at your disposal.
 - Repeat with the next employee.
 - When having heard from everyone:
 1. Share the “new plan” with all.
 2. Point out what is added to the plan based on their input.
 3. Assign a champion to make it happen.
 4. Step back and let that person run, being there to support them along the way.
 - **Note:** This was possible at Charmm’d as we had a small team. If you have a larger team, I suggest doing this with your leadership team only. They then can do their own version of this with their team members.
- **Start/Stop/Change/Continue** is a reflection each team member would do quarterly. I would use as many suggestions as possible that made sense.
 - What would you like us to start doing to make the work more efficient?
 - What makes sense to stop doing because it is no longer serving us?
 - What change/tweak can we make to improve our success?
 - What is working great, and you want us to continue doing?

BUILDING THE ORGANIZATION

(Note: Much of what is noted above is true here too.)

- **Always keep the organization's focus in mind:**
 - The vision
 - The mission
 - The values
 - The specific purpose of the project
 - Your internal and external customers
- **Create time for white space.** That means allowing your mind space just to be. Not having an agenda allows for your creative thoughts to emerge, for better processing, big picture thinking, and for us to be our best for all that lies ahead.
- **Build your culture** by role-modeling the values that are the north star of your organization. Discuss those values regularly. Acknowledge others on your team when you see them living those values and celebrate when the external community calls you out on it as well.
- **"Leaders are experience makers. Every touch point is designable."** I 100% buy into this quote. No matter what is going on in our lives, it's best to remember we are creating an experience for others. It can be as magical as we'd like it to be.
- **"Go slow to go fast"** is also a mantra we often use. It allows time for processing thoughts, getting buy-in from others, and getting something right before it is presented in all its glory.
 - A perfect example of this was when we created our Leadership Academy. We knew the events we were offering our partners weren't getting the results we were hoping for. Our time vs impact wasn't there. So, we stopped the events and took a year to interview our community partners and find out what they needed. After a number of phone calls, we heard that 'professional development for emerging leaders' was wanted. As we continued to have conversations, many leaders would give us ideas around this concept. The ones that made sense for us and our mission were then shared with the next group of leaders to test out the idea and get more feedback. Conversation after conversation occurred in the community and with our team. Finally, The Leadership Academy was presented to our community and quickly took off to rave reviews and a full house each year.
- **Walk the talk** - do what you say you will do. It's that simple.
- Listen to the community and work hard to truly understand what they are saying and what's in it for them (WIIFT); then **go with the choice that is the best for the mission and the team.**
- **Stick to the mission** – even when everyone else says you're crazy.
- At the same time, **don't stick with something because of ego.** Admit your mistake; in fact, celebrate it, as you obviously learned from the experience and can now move in a new direction.

- Think about **time versus impact**. Is the impact worth the time you will have to spend on something? If not, make the time spent more effective or say no to the work itself.
- **Be open to flexing** because what works today may not work tomorrow.

Finally, love what you do, as so much of your time is spent here. Why not enjoy the journey? Note: When having this chapter proofread, the question was asked, “How do you love what you do, especially when work starts to just feel like work?” Here’s my answer to that. This doesn’t mean everything you do has to be something you love.

- It means to believe in the culture of the organization and be sure its values line up with your own.
- It means knowing that your voice is being heard and you know that you are making a difference.
- It means knowing “why” you are doing something and “how” this fits into the bigger picture.
- It means remembering why you took the position, what goals you want to achieve, and then, step by step, working toward those goals.

P.S. I can’t finish my chapter without talking about our community partners themselves. Knowing that my job was to build the team and the organization, a lot of time was spent focusing on the big picture and strategically creating opportunities for the best results. This meant going into the community itself to learn and work with our community partners. I loved this, as not only did I learn what was needed, I had the joy of working alongside so many community partners, watching them flourish, and building strong, caring relationships with them. All of this has been a gift to me and something I will cherish for years to come.

P.P.S. If you’re interested in diving deeper into any of these thoughts, I’d be happy to talk with you. Contact me. 847.710.9590.

Here’s to you and all you want to achieve,



Sheri Miller, Founder and Executive Director





Chapter 2

BUILDING ONESELF BUILDS COMMUNITY

BY: ASHLEY WARD

Director of Community Development

"Be the change you wish to see in the world."

- Mahatma Ghandi -

This section offers key lessons I learned during my 17 years serving as the Director of Community Development for The Charmm'd Foundation. I had various responsibilities over the years, and as our work evolved, so did I. One facet of my position was constant, the focus remained on building leaders and building community and I did that by connecting with our partners and building relationships one by one. We built an amazing network of community leaders who were involved in our services, and it was magical to see them come together, support one another through the challenges, and celebrate the big and small wins. We are meant to do life in community, and our partners have done that over the years. Lucky me for having the opportunity to witness these bonds form and learn from some of the most dedicated and inspiring individuals I have ever known. Hopefully, you will be inspired and empowered by the lessons shared here.

LEADING YOURSELF

- **You are the leader of your life, act as such.**
 - Put your oxygen mask on first. Many leaders resist this notion, maybe because it seems selfish, especially for those with a strong servant leader mindset. Self-professed "people-pleasers" have formed their identity around putting the needs of others before their own. To be humble, to serve others are noble endeavors, and to do those things well as a leader, you have to put yourself in the center of your circle and be the leader of your own life. Why? Because no one else will. This is how you prevent burnout.
 - When you walk your talk and lead yourself well, others will notice and will want to model after you. Remember, when you are a leader, others are always watching and looking to you to be an example.
- **Be accountable to yourself.** Invest resources (time, energy, money) in your growth and development consistently.
 - To lead yourself well, you need to **invest in your own development.** If you are not learning, you are not growing.



- **Consume different perspectives**...read, watch, listen. Most thought leaders and leadership experts offer free newsletters, host podcasts and webinars for free or minimal costs. The same goes for industry-specific experts. You have access to a local library that offers free access to thousands of books and articles. You can subscribe to Audible to keep up to date on your reading, you can join a subscription service that distills the latest books and articles into summary format for accessible, ongoing learning.
- **Join or form a Leadership Group.** If you are not connected to some type of group, find one or form one. Find like-minded colleagues who care about their growth and are willing to invest time and energy into learning with others and make it happen. The power of a group lies in the conversations that occur and the connections that form. Make sure the space is safe for people to be vulnerable. It's all about the 'give and get'. You show up to share your experiences, advice, and perspectives freely and you are open to learning from others.
- **Have a robust network of people inside and outside your industry** and don't hesitate to reach out and ask for advice, or ask a question. Return the favor when people make requests of you.
- **Consider a coach.** A coach acts as your second brain, helps you see what you cannot see, plays back what you say out loud, and will help you explore different perspectives. A coach will hold you accountable for things you say you want/need to do for success (personally and professionally). They want to help you make all your dreams come true so they will encourage, challenge, and push you to greater limits.
- **Make self-reflection a habit.** Ongoing reflection is key to growth. Do you think about your interactions with others regularly? Do you think about how you showed up at work, in meetings, in conversations, in that project? If you are not thinking about these things routinely, start now.
 - **If you journal, great - keep it up!** This is a powerful self-reflection habit.
 - If you don't journal, that's ok. **A periodic brain dump is a helpful exercise** to clear the mind of clutter, officially known as "cognitive offloading."
 - Some people love having an **end of day/end of week ritual** around self-reflection. Find what works for you and make it a habit.
- **Ask for feedback and be open to receiving it well.** Practice this.
 - **Creating a culture of feedback** is the hallmark of a healthy workplace culture. To have a culture where feedback is given frequently and received well, it needs to be practiced by all. It starts with you being the one to ask for feedback and being genuine in wanting to hear the good and the bad. With the hard-to-hear feedback, know how you respond when you hear critical feedback. Be aware of your body language and facial expressions. You can't control them, and you can be aware and speak to them. You can acknowledge your human responses (e.g. "Wow, that was hard to hear, and I know my face just got red and I might even cry, and thank you, I will reflect on what you shared because I want to learn from this.") You may need to ask for time and space to

process the information. You can ask for this and you can give it. With the good, learn how to humbly accept it, and don't forget to acknowledge the others involved in the success. Use positive feedback to reinforce what you know to be true about your strengths and let it remind you where you can continue to leverage the skills that come naturally to you or that you've worked hard to develop.

- **Express appreciation** to a person who takes the time to share their feedback. Then find a way to pay that forward. Kindness begets kindness!
- The more you **practice giving and receiving feedback**, the easier it will be over time to do both. It also models the importance of doing this for others. It can become ingrained in the culture of the organization with intentionality and ongoing action.

- **Do hard things. Move through discomfort, not around it.**

- **Life is filled with discomfort and hard things** - accept this instead of resisting it.
- You will succeed if you **deal with difficulties as they arise** instead of avoiding them. The longer you wait, the worse it gets and only makes matters more complicated. If you have an inkling that you need to have "that" conversation, it means you do. If something triggered you, you witnessed or learned that someone acted in a way counter to your organization's values or was disrespectful to another human, address it.
- **People make mistakes all the time, we are human and fallible.** Learn to address mistakes with grace, kindness, respect, understanding, and a growth mindset. Help the person learn from the mistake and support them in the process.
- **Know when discomfort is moving toward toxicity** and address it directly and swiftly. If it continues to grow in the wrong direction, remove the toxicity.
- **Don't delegate discomfort that is yours to address.** Yes, you may need to get others involved and you may need external support. Don't pass the problem to someone else if it's yours to handle.
- **Use discomfort to learn and grow.**

- **Start with why and go back to your why when you are feeling wayward.**

- This adage (thanks Simon Sinek) applies broadly and specifically to your life, projects, initiatives, pursuits, etc. The idea is simple... before **beginning a new endeavor, ask yourself, "What is my why?"**
- **Your life's why is simply put...your life purpose.** *What is your purpose? Why do you think you are alive at this place and time in human history and what are you meant to do with your life?*
- **Write your whys down** so you can remember them and go back to them when you are feeling lost, uncertain, unsure, or overwhelmed.

- **Get clear on your highest values and stay grounded in them.**
 - **This is a popular coaching exercise.** I ask my clients to list their highest values when we begin the coaching engagement. This helps me get to know them and understand where they are coming from so I can reference when I hear a value being expressed based on what they are sharing or when a value is being stepped on or violated when they are struggling or facing a challenge. Calling this out can be a lightbulb moment, an eye-opener. You can do this for yourself by taking time to reflect and identify what your highest values are and then define them, in your own words, not Webster's definition.
 - **When you are clear on your highest values, use them when making key decisions.** This is how to stay grounded in your authentic self.
- **When taking action, start somewhere.**
 - **Starting small** helps you reach your goal because it generates momentum and creates forward progress.
 - One more rep...**you build habits and routines through reps.** The more reps you do the stronger you become.
- **Celebrate your wins!** The small, the big, and everywhere in between. I recently heard a longtime Charmm'd partner tell me this is a key lesson they got from my facilitation of their group over the years. I'm celebrating that!

LEADING OTHERS

- **Your #1 job as a leader is to grow other leaders.** This is the biggest and best gift you can give to the world.
- **Hold people accountable and don't avoid the challenging stuff.** Don't allow bad behavior. What you permit persists. Negativity and poor behavior is toxic. It can lead to poor performance and disengagement and affects the entire organization more than you realize. Don't allow it!
- One size fits one - you will have to lead the people who report to you differently. **Practice leadership differentiation.**
- **Don't make assumptions** that people like what you like, that people will behave like you behave, that they value what you value, that they work in the same way you work, that they prioritize what you do, etc. This will only lead to frustration, disappointment, misunderstandings, ineffectiveness, relational discord and can lead to dysfunction. Don't assume. Stay curious and get to know your team. Ask about their preferences, work style, behaviors, and communication style. **Use assessments.**

- We provided many teams this opportunity over the years at Charmm'd and each engagement was successful in its own way. When people take assessments, they learn about themselves. When teams do this together, they learn about one another which helps them be more effective overall.
- **Create a leader manual and share it with your team.** Ask them to do the same. Keep updating it and use it as an onboarding tool. Don't leave your team making assumptions about you and your leadership style – tell them what it is and invite them to do the same.
- **Help open doors for others.** Give them opportunities to learn and grow in a variety of ways. Serve as a mentor, connect people intentionally, provide encouragement. A little effort goes a long way.
- **Give your people space and time to learn, experiment and grow.** Reward their failures as learning moments and help them celebrate their successes in ways that are meaningful to them.
- **Practice small acts of kindness towards those you lead.** Find authentic ways to show them you see them and you value them and their contributions. Ask your people how they want to be celebrated and shown appreciation for going above and beyond.
- If you are the top leader – do whatever it takes to **stay out of the weeds and avoid micromanaging.** Your job is to stay on the balcony most of the time and maintain a big-picture view of the organization. You also need to know how people are doing and be prepared to intervene when necessary. So go down onto the dance floor now and then and ask someone to show you their dance moves.

LEADING A TEAM

- **Go slow to go fast** – not everything can be urgent. Know your pace as a leader and be aware of the impact that has on the system. Have a long view when assessing progress on goals or when building a team or adding new programs. Taking time to build the plans and execute the details with excellence will speed up the process in the end and will speed up the success experienced.
- **Establish and revisit your organization's values.** Reflect on these regularly with your team. Use them to set goals and make decisions to ensure alignment.
- **Establish and adhere to team norms** (also known as operating principles). These norms serve as guidelines, and they are meant to define how team members have agreed to behave and interact with one another and how the work will get done. Each member of the team is responsible for holding themselves and their colleagues accountable to the agreed-

upon standards. This process is a collective effort and is not meant to be steered by the team leader.

- **Start your projects and initiatives with why.** Stay grounded in your purpose.
- Get good at **expressing genuine appreciation** for the team's uniqueness and diversity.
- **Empower others by delegating** and making it safe to take risks and fail.
- Show them **you are willing to do what you are asking them to do.**
- **Be consistent and dependable** – your team is looking to the leader to set the tone. If the team doesn't know what version of the leader will show up from day to day this can create confusion, discord, and disengagement.
- **If you are the top leader, the power dynamic will always exist.** The sooner you accept this and normalize it, the better it will be for everyone. Find your safe spaces to get the support you need.
- **Celebrate the team's wins.** Play and have fun together. Everyone needs this!

FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS

- **Be prepared, have a plan, and be ready to go off course.** Let the discussion evolve organically and meet the group where they are.
- Learn to **get comfortable with silence**, especially after you pose a question. Resist the urge to overexplain the question or provide context in detail. Avoid jumping in to share your thoughts if no one steps up to speak. They will, eventually.
- **Open with a check-in question** and keep changing them up if you meet with the same group regularly. It's important to keep building relationships with group members, even if they know each other well. A check-in question opens the door to better understand what people value, how they think, and what's important to them. It also primes the group for the discussion. It helps people get present and ready to focus on the topic at hand.
- **Ask people to share time constraints and distractions** when they check-in. This allows people to say if they need to leave the meeting early or to name any distractions that are keeping them from being fully present. You want to make it safe for people to share distractions without making them feel the need to provide specifics.

- **Creating a safe space is key.** You do this by requiring confidentiality first. When the group is first forming it's important to discuss what this means and to continue to reinforce this norm, and others established by the group.
- **Establish norms** that clearly define how people agree to show up and interact with one another when the group gathers.
- **Be present and pay attention to what is in the room.**
 - **Respect introverts** and be careful about when and how you draw them in. You can touch base with people offline and ask how they want to participate in the group. Ask them how else you can make them feel comfortable, if they want to be called on to share their thoughts.
 - **Manage people who talk a lot** and make sure the floor is shared among the group.

CULTURE IS KEY

- **Lead with vision.**
- **Trust** is the foundation of having a healthy culture. If trust is low or absent, the culture will suffer. To have trust, people need to feel psychologically safe. To feel psychologically safe, people need to feel a genuine sense of belonging at work. The playbook for making that happen is listed above.
- **Never underestimate the power of vulnerability.** The top leader has to model this for it to trickle down.
- You can **never take your foot off the culture gas pedal** or else it will stall out.
- **The top leader is the ultimate keeper of the culture**, and they need to involve many others in keeping the culture strong and healthy too.
- The **culture is only as healthy as the individual relationships people have with one another.** This doesn't mean everyone has to be friends outside of work. It does mean there is genuine respect and kindness in all interactions.
- **Culture is made up of big and little things** - everyday interactions that happen between staff, with clients, and those being served. It's also reflected in how people and events are celebrated.

- **Acknowledge milestones, work anniversaries, birthdays, life events** (graduations, marriages, births, the passing of loved ones). Be there for people during significant life events in ways that respect their wishes and preferences.
- **Your culture reflects your values.** Your values shape your culture. Know your values. Live out your values.

I hope this chapter encouraged you to think about your leadership lessons and what you've experienced and learned over the years, in addition to what advice you have to pass on. I invite you to consider how you can pay it forward and share your wisdom with others.



May you find peace and purpose in the season ahead,

Ashley Ward

Ashley Ward, Director of Community Development

Chapter 3

**COMPASS POINTS: NAVIGATING
PROGRAMMING AND EVENTS**

BY: SUSAN GIBSON

Program Director

“Let your truth be your compass and your compass be your guide, navigating you through life’s winding journey with clarity and purpose.”

- Anonymous -



Throughout my career, there have been many people who have influenced who I am today. They have shared their knowledge and gifts of wisdom that have helped me grow, take chances, and achieve things I didn't know were possible. Each lesson, a precious gift, has shaped the chapters of my life and the stages of my career, holding significant meaning and guiding me through challenges and triumphs. These lessons, rich with experience and insight, have become a part of me, a compass I embrace daily. As I reflect on this journey, my heart swells with gratitude, and it is with this heartfelt appreciation that I share these invaluable lessons in hopes they can help you as they have helped me.

1. **A large project can seem daunting**, and the notorious question comes up of where to begin. If you don't know where to start, start somewhere. It may sound cliché, and the smallest of things can spur ideas. Think baby steps. For example, start by creating a To-Do List, selecting a date and time, or researching a topic that will help you with the project...or...the list goes on. It's the activity of taking action, any action, which can help to spur more ideas needed for the project.
2. **When you get stuck in a task or project and cannot figure something out**, step away and remove your thoughts from what you are currently working on. Get some air, do another task, etc. Come back to the task at hand once you have had time to clear your mind. With a clear mind, oftentimes the answer will come. If not, who can you ask for help? I am a firm believer in asking for help when needed. It can save time, give you the answer, and allow you to move forward in planning.
3. **Have questions? Ask.** When you are unsure or don't know how to do something or have the right approach for a program, ask. It helps to make sure you are going in the right direction, saves time, and if stakeholders are involved, assures them that things are progressing.
4. **Be prepared so you have time to flex!** When hosting an event, make sure your I's are dotted and your T's are crossed so that when things go array you have a baseline for problem-solving. A speaker once got lost on their way to the venue and was late. Having to start the event

on time and by having a plan in place, we were able to flex and extend the welcome by throwing questions out to the audience to answer on the topic at hand to get a conversation going.

5. **Do your best and leave the rest.** There are things we can control and other things out of our control. At an event and in the moment, what can you do to control the situation? Who else do you need to ask for help? Prioritize your key tasks and focus on what truly matters. Surround yourself with supportive people who can help share the load and keep the atmosphere positive.
6. **Step out of your comfort zone.** It's easier said than done. It can be so rewarding and lead to better programming. Prior to COVID, we were an in-person-only training organization. COVID pushed us to learn online training and gave us a brand-new skill. From that skill, we were able to include a broader audience in our services.
7. **In moments of failure, look for the lessons.** What is the lesson to be learned from this unexpected experience? What would I do the same? What would I do differently the next time? How can this help us next time with better programming? Reflecting on these questions provides clarity and helps us to accept setbacks and use them as steppingstones to move forward. An example that we use, is after each event, we debrief round-robin style with success, improvements, changes, and surprises. It helps us to incorporate lessons learned into future programs. And, in some cases, eliminate something we have been doing that no longer works.
8. **“Everyone puts on their pants one leg at a time.”** Whether it's one leg or two at a time, we still all put on our pants. This advice was given to me when I first started training and had to do public speaking during workshops/events. It reminds me that we are all the same in many ways and provides a level of comfort every time I speak publicly. Find something that gives you peace of mind or encouragement when you have to deliver a presentation. Know most of the audience is rooting for and supporting you in the endeavor.
9. **In public speaking, when you are asked a question and don't know the answer,** respond by acknowledging the question, stating that you don't know the answer, and letting them know you will get back to them. When I first started managing events and had to speak in public, I thought I had to have all the answers. Turns out, it is OK to not have all the answers in the moment. Write down the question and follow up with the answer afterward.
10. **Take the extra step to create a solution easiest for the customer.** When planning an event or program, the customer may request changes. While we might find a shortcut to make the solution easiest for us, change your thinking to ask if the solution is easiest for the customer. This approach ensures better service. When you go the extra mile to make things right, customers notice, appreciate it, and are more likely to return for future services.
11. **There may be times when others you work with have a hidden agenda.** In these cases, stay focused on what is best for the mission. This provides a focus for the conversation and can help get the individual involved and their actions back on track. For example, we once held an ethics event where the speaker was asked to present ethics in one way and turned the presentation into their own beliefs. During breaks, we had to have several conversations with the

speaker to redirect their presentation back to the event's original focus. In the end, if the other person's agenda impacts the purpose of your program, the best thing you can do is apologize. This acknowledges what happened and ensures a better experience the next time.

- 12. Don't close the door, leave it open.** Be open to opportunities that come your way. You never know where they might lead. Focusing solely on one approach or idea can limit the chances of discovering a better path or new opportunity that is better for the organization. Our Foundation focused on soft leadership skills, and while that is our mission, we recognized that AI, being a technical skill, was an important innovation for us and our partners to understand. It impacted us all. And, while a technical skill, we opened the door because it influenced soft skills. By embracing this knowledge, we stepped out and shared our knowledge with others to create a space for convening, collaboration, and understanding.
- 13. If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.** Step away, pause, collect your thoughts, and return to the conversation when you are in a better place emotionally. In programming, disagreements can arise. Maintain a positive and respectful atmosphere, even in challenging situations. Taking a moment to compose your thoughts helps ensure your interactions remain constructive and a resolution can be reached sooner. In rare cases, when common ground can't be found, acknowledge this and step away gracefully.
- 14. Read between the lines.** Sometimes, customers say they want something, and their actions tell a different story, such as not attending an event they expressed interest in. What isn't the customer saying that they want? Try looking beyond their words to understand their true needs and preferences. They might want more convenient timing, better communication about the event, or different content that better meets their interests. Pay attention to these unspoken cues so you can work on adjusting your approach to better align with their actual needs.
- 15. Strive for consensus and be prepared to move forward with the majority.** In programming, achieving consensus on an approach is ideal, as it ensures everyone feels heard and valued. Know there are times when consensus isn't always possible. In these cases, aim to understand the differing perspectives and incorporate as much feedback as possible. Ultimately, you may need to move forward with the majority decision. Communicate the reasons for the chosen approach and emphasize the shared goals. Transparency helps maintain trust and commitment among those involved, even if not everyone agrees with the final decision.
- 16. Encourage collaboration and give credit where it's due.** Don't expect to have all the ideas for a program yourself. Collaborating and listening to the ideas of others can lead to a better event. When team members and customers share ideas that are implemented, make sure to acknowledge their contributions. Giving credit where it's due fosters teamwork. It not only enhances the quality of the event but also builds buy-in and a collective desire for the event's success.
- 17. In leading a team in planning,** assign roles based on roles people believe strongly in, excel in, and are passionate about. This builds energy, gives purpose, and in some cases, allows

someone to gain a new skill. Giving people roles they feel they can thrive in allows for a better experience for all and the positivity in attitude carries over to the service provided to the customer.

- 18. Start with the end in mind.** When planning an event, begin by identifying the desired outcome. What is the ultimate goal you want to achieve? By clarifying the end result upfront, you can identify the non-negotiable elements that must be included to accomplish that goal. Knowing the outcome and non-negotiables serves as the foundation upon which you can incorporate the rest of the event details to ensure they align with the intended outcome for success.
- 19. Look beyond your industry for inspiration and ideas.** By stepping out of your own industry, you can gain fresh perspectives and solutions that others in your industry might not consider. Be curious, be open-minded, and seek knowledge from different sources. You might find a groundbreaking idea that is a game-changer by applying concepts and practices from completely different fields.
- 20. The teacher becomes the student.** In the process of teaching others, we often find ourselves learning just as much, if not more, from our students. Each student brings their unique perspectives, experiences, and ideas to the table. By listening and engaging with them, you can uncover new techniques, insights, and approaches that can enhance your own understanding and skills. It's a mutual relationship where both teacher and student grow. Embrace the opportunity to learn from those you teach, and you'll continuously expand your knowledge and toolbox.

These lessons are my compass. Each piece of wisdom, every shared experience, has been a beacon of light, guiding me through the twists and turns of my journey. Embracing these lessons has allowed me to navigate challenges with resilience and to celebrate successes with humility. My wish is that these insights inspire you, provide you with strength in moments of doubt, and remind you that growth is a continuous, beautiful journey. May these lessons serve as a steadfast companion on your own path, illuminating the way forward.

Wishing you joy and success in all your endeavors,



Susan Gibson, Program Director



Chapter 4

CHASE GROWTH UNWAVERINGLY

BY: WILEY SUSAN WILDER

Business Administrator

“My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor and some style.”

- Maya Angelou -

Do you know your true self, down to your most authentic core? Take a moment and be gentle with yourself.

IT BEGINS WITH YOU:

- Who are you – down to your most authentic core? Be honest as you think about this question.
- Know your gifts and know your flaws.
- Where can you grow and where do you thrive?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What triggers you and excites you?
- What are your values? What will you not compromise on?

All of these things matter because when you understand yourself at this level, it becomes your compass, helping you plant yourself where you want to grow and thrive, surrounded by those who lift you higher.

KNOWING THIS IS KEY TO KNOWING:

- Where to plant yourself.
- What your needs are.
- Who to surround yourself with.
- When you need to shift, as well as...
- Why you are placed on this earth and...
- How you can create a life worth living.



Start your projects and initiatives with a clear understanding of the purpose. In every task, big or small, remind yourself why you’re doing it. What drives you? This sense of purpose will guide your efforts and ensure that your actions align with your core values.

For me, it’s about being helpful and responsive. I’m passionate about the “why” behind the work, and that’s what motivates me, even when the tasks themselves aren’t always exciting. Having a customer-service mindset helps, too. The better I can support my team, the better they can show up for our community.

This inner work isn’t just about you—it impacts how you show up for others and for your organization. When you work with a variety of people, each with their unique styles, approaches, and

expectations, you have to hold on to a clear sense of who you are while staying curious about how you can grow. I've found that my passion lies in supporting, organizing, and taking the initiative. In my role, I strive to go above and beyond, not because it's required, rather because I find joy in being helpful. On our small team of four, everyone brings their own gifts, and we complement one another in ways that create something beautiful. That's why empowering each other is so important.

Have you ever considered that someone on your team might have a skill they haven't shared yet? Or maybe there's a way you could teach them something that makes their day easier. Be open to learning from one another, and never underestimate the power of continuous feedback. When we truly listen with our ears and with our hearts, we open ourselves up to growth. Feedback becomes an act of love—an invitation to become better together. And remember, it's not about the words being said. Sometimes the most important things are communicated through silence or body language. Be present with your colleagues. If you sense someone's not okay, ask if they want to talk. Let them know you see them.

As much as we care for others, it's also important to care for the organization. Be proactive in responding to the needs around you. Have a to-do list and be prepared so you have time to flex. Plan ahead so when those last-minute requests come in—and they always will—you're not caught off guard. For me, finding the right system to prioritize tasks didn't happen overnight. It took time, trial, and error. I've learned that being prepared means I have more flexibility to respond with grace when things don't go as planned.

Even when we plan, sometimes there's a learning curve. When I encounter something new, my first instinct isn't to say, "I can't do that." Instead, I pause. I research, I dig, and I teach myself what's possible. I lean into curiosity and find that often, I can figure out a way forward. There's always something more to learn, and that's what keeps us moving toward growth.

Growth isn't always comfortable. Sometimes it means stepping outside of our comfort zones and challenging ourselves to develop emotionally as well as professionally. In my role, emotional intelligence is just as important as technical skills. Knowing yourself, setting healthy boundaries, and being clear about your workload all contribute to a balanced, thriving environment. It's okay to say "no" when your plate is full. It's okay to ask for help. It's okay to prioritize your well-being. Your energy matters, and the people around you need the best version of you—not the burnt-out, overwhelmed one. So, as you grow, be mindful of how full your cup is. Are you in a great place or are you running low and need to replenish because you are overflowing to the point where everything feels too much? Take a moment to pause and recalibrate when necessary. If your cup is overflowing and you're overwhelmed, consider communicating with superiors or team members, delegating tasks, or making a list to prioritize what's truly important.

One of the things I've learned is that no matter how detail-oriented or task-focused I am, I always try to keep the bigger picture in mind. I ask myself, how does what I'm doing serve the organization and our community as a whole? How can I be a better support system for my colleagues so they can show up as their best selves, too? This isn't just about getting things done—it's about creating a workplace where everyone feels seen, supported, and empowered.

Being adaptable is a huge part of this journey. Change is inevitable, and flexibility allows us to navigate it with grace. When you feel challenged, take a moment to reflect. Why does this feel hard? Is

it stretching your values or beliefs in a way that doesn't feel right? Or is it simply pushing you to grow in a new direction? These moments of discomfort are opportunities for learning, and it's important to have open, honest conversations about them. That's where trust is built.

Perspective is key. Take the time to see things through the eyes of others, and you'll find that humility opens doors to deeper connections. At the same time, don't forget the power of consistency. Establish structures and systems that help you thrive, while remaining flexible enough to evolve. You want the culture to reflect your values, allowing you be a safe space to operate from your highest values at all times. Stay authentic and grounded. And always, always operate from your values. Stay grounded in what matters most to you, and the rest will follow.

As we look to the future, it's essential to keep developing ourselves. Whether it's learning new skills, setting goals, or staying curious. Growth is a lifelong pursuit. If you don't know how to do something, that's okay! Keep an open mind, find mentors, and lean on your resources. In a world that's constantly changing, staying adaptable and willing to learn is one of the most valuable things we can do.

Above all, remember that work culture matters. How you contribute to the environment around you impacts everyone. Are you fostering a positive, safe space? Are you helping others grow, or are you unintentionally creating barriers? Being proactive in addressing challenges and finding creative solutions helps your team and the organization as a whole. Also, confidentiality and respect are crucial. It's important to discuss what these mean and to practice small acts of kindness.

Technology plays a part in this as well. Use the tools available to you to streamline your work, and be prepared for when things don't go as planned. Technology can be our greatest asset or our biggest frustration, so staying curious and creative helps when navigating these challenges. Explore new ways to improve efficiency and stay connected to others in your field.

At this time, resources like LinkedIn offer a wealth of knowledge and networking opportunities.

Lastly, as you continue on this journey, keep the end in mind. Know your goals and what you want to achieve. What is the ultimate goal you want to reach? What are the non-negotiables? Be kind to yourself. You don't have to have it all figured out, and that's okay. What matters is that you're committed to growing, learning, and showing up as your most authentic self, for yourself, for your team, your organization and the people you serve.

This is an ongoing journey, one that requires patience, humility, and love. So, chase growth, unwaveringly. And remember, it's not just about surviving - it's about thriving in your purpose, with passion, compassion, humor, and style. You deserve it!

May you continue to grow with purpose and lead with heart,



Susan Wilder (Wiley), Business Administrator



EPILOGUE

For the past 20 years, we have been living a Charmm'd life, sharing this journey with all of you and thousands of others. Together, we navigated our development with successes, failures, setbacks, and triumphs. We supported one another and took our journeys seriously, all while having fun and never doing it alone.

Our vision is for every one of you to continue your journey, live a wonderful Charmm'd life, and pay your learnings forward.

This is what we hope you have learned along the way: the people side of leadership is tough, but it is worth it. It is what gives us the Charmm'd Life – better connections, a deeper understanding, collaborative and stronger solutions.

***May your path be filled with purpose, connection,
and endless possibilities!***

BIOGRAPHIES

SHERI MILLER, CPCC, CPQC, TTI Certified in DISC, DF & EQ

Founder & Executive Director

Charmm'd Leadership Academy Mentor



I have often been asked why I began Charmm'd. My answer was a selfish one. I loved life and wanted to enjoy it even more. I also knew that I sometimes stood in my own way of making that happen and I knew that others were standing in their own way as well. The vision became clear if together we could grow as leaders – strengthening ourselves, our teams, our communities, we'd all be better for it. So that's what we (our community) did. We grew, became better, and made a difference. ...Together.

In addition to strategically spearheading the vision and leading the team, I was in the community coaching, facilitating, and mentoring tax-exempt leaders.

I continue to coach, consult, mentor, and volunteer my time with a handful of non-profits, including Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. Through Charmm'd, we've established scholarships for [Leadership Education](#), which has been a rewarding experience.

Living in downtown Chicago, I absolutely love the energy and excitement the city offers. From biking along the lakefront to exploring its incredible dining scene, arts, and rooftop gatherings, there's never a shortage of adventure for me and those close to me. It's our own little piece of paradise. But when I crave a quieter moment, I turn to ceramics, cooking, reading, and yes, binge-watching TV—these things fill my bucket in ways nothing else can. Enjoying life is the goal, and I'd say I'm doing pretty well at it!

Reach Out! I can be contacted at 847.710.9590 and would love to hear from you.

ASHLEY WARD, MSW, CPCC, TTI Certified in DISC, DF & EQ

Director of Community Development



17 years ago, I landed my dream job and remain grateful to this day for all I've learned and experienced over the years as the Director of Community Development with Charmm'd. The people I've met, the relationships I've formed, and the life and leadership lessons I've learned along the way are captured in my chapter. I only learned these lessons because of the amazing people who've been a part of the Charmm'd community over all these years and their willingness to share stories of triumph and failure. I've had the good fortune to swim in the deep end of the leadership pool and because Charmm'd's mission was rooted in emotional intelligence, I've been on a journey to practice and enhance my EQ muscles. This work has enriched my life in more ways than I could have ever imagined. It's truly been a "charmed" journey.

I live in Boerne, TX with my husband who loves his work equally, my daughter who dreams of being on Broadway, my son who plays all sports and loves fishing, a sassy Calico cat, and a spoiled Beagle. When I'm not working, I enjoy watching my kids engage in the activities they love, exploring new places, doing all things outdoors, playing with plants, reading, and being with family and friends.

What's next for me:

I continue to coach and consult and have a passion for helping leaders and teams bridge the gaps that exist in their leadership and culture. I do this by providing the following services: behavioral assessments, culture audits and analysis, customized leadership programs, executive coaching, and team building. I hope to stay in touch with you! Contact me at [Beyond Coaching & Consulting](#).

SUSAN GIBSON, TTI Certified in DISC, DF & EQ

Program Director



I bring over 15 years of dedicated service as Program Director at The Charmm'd Foundation, where I've led initiatives in professional development, special projects, and event management for tax-exempt leaders. I'm proud to have co-established The Leadership Academy, a transformative program for emerging leaders, and to have overseen 17 community-led Peer Advisory Groups. My expertise spans administering behavioral assessments, orchestrating large-scale events in diverse settings, managing a long-term education wellness initiative, and directing the Foundation's grant program.

Before my time at The Charmm'd Foundation, I held pivotal roles at Quill Corporation in Human Resources, Organizational Development, Project Management, and Administrative Operations. This diverse experience has equipped me to foster professional growth and create valuable networking opportunities for leaders, consistently driving meaningful outcomes in every role I take on.

I am committed to continuing my work with causes I believe in, finding innovative ways to give back through both nonprofit and for-profit endeavors that challenge me and hold deep meaning. Outside of my professional life, I find fulfillment in travel, spending time with family, and exploring new culinary experiences. I live in Lake in the Hills, Illinois with my husband and our beloved dog, and enjoy making lasting memories with my three bonus children and grandchildren.

SUSAN WILDER (WILEY)

Business Administrator



I joined Charmm'd knowing my purpose in life is to help others. I truly enjoyed being able to serve this team in all their needs by working behind the scenes in assisting in their happiness and success in what they do best. Being able to fulfill my purpose at Charmm'd has allowed that to flow into a passion. Charmm'd has built a foundation that allows the community to connect with each other as well as provide the knowledge and tools for them to grow into incredible leaders and become a support system for each other. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have a small part in what Charmm'd provided. I am delighted to continue my passion working for a family office as an Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive Officer and the Client Service Officer while providing additional support to other staff members with their needs.

I enjoy spending time with family and friends, traveling to new places, hiking, baking, and reading. I live in Crystal Lake, Illinois with my husband, teenage daughter, and our two very spoiled dogs.



**HERE'S TO YOUR JOURNEY IN CREATING
A BEAUTIFUL CHARM'D LIFE.**