

Leadership Development

Leadership development and mentoring is one of the most essential skilful means we have to cultivate in Shambhala, not only because leadership is very important, but because it is part of the transmission of the wisdom of the lineage to a new generation of people. The leadership principles of Shambhala are not just ordinary skills people can learn when thrown into a situation. They are derived from a profound understanding of the nature of mind, and have a transmission quality to them. If they are not transmitted properly, then this wisdom will not be passed on.

The essential points of leadership development can be boiled down to the following three aspects:

- Inspiring
- Training
- Empowering

Inspiring

Clearly inspiring people is the starting point. This happens both through the teaching, through individual practice, and through the view of Shambhala society, the view of the Great Eastern Sun. But we also need to inspire people to work in the administration because such work is a path in and of itself—a path of great dignity and potency that is very worthwhile cultivating. So when we identify people who could take on leadership roles, it is important to inspire them further, through for example:

- Presenting them with the view of Shambhala governance
- Asking them to take on responsibility for some tasks in the centre and groups
- Suggesting that they attend certain trainings and making sure that they are formally invited to such trainings
- Creating situations for them where they can be close to the Sakyong or to other senior people in the mandala—for example, by being coordinators of a Sakyong visit, or by being Kasung or Kusung

Typically, in the Shambhala mandala, we inspire people and then do not do much more. We typically do not really train people well, nor do we properly empower them. Instead, we plunk them into their jobs and wish them good sailing.

Training

We have to think very carefully about training people. Training people has a number of facets:

- Mentoring people and term limits

- Formal training situations
- On the job training

Mentoring and Term Limits

As of Shambhala Day 2004, all appointments have a term of at least two years, and a recommended term limit of three years. If circumstances warrant, and based on discussion, it can be extended in certain cases.

In any organization, term limits are an important aspect. In our Shambhala world, they are even more so—frequently people take on jobs, stopping only when they are burned out, to suddenly hand over to someone else. Alternately, we have situations where the same people have had jobs for as long as ten years. This does not create an atmosphere of empowerment or inclusion because there a lack of emphasis on cultivating and training successors to posts.

By emphasizing term limits, we can encourage everyone to start training their successors as soon as possible. It also causes the leadership to be as inclusive as possible.

Any new requirement like this can be an extra burden, as we all then have to put new procedures in place to make it happen. And while many of us have had no opportunity for training in our positions and are just at the stage of struggling to understand our tasks, now we are being asked to take on the additional burden of selecting and training our successors. But in the long run, the time and effort we devote to this will strengthen our system of government.

Such a recommendation also emphasizes the importance of working within groups. Thus rather than thinking of a job as a single task, there are really three roles to think of when thinking of for example a Practice and Study Coordinator. There is the person holding the job, there is the person being trained, and there is a senior person who acts somewhat as an advisor. Thus, for example, a path for the role of a Practice and Study Coordinator could consist of being an assistant for two years, holding the job for three years (of which two years is spent training the next assistant), and then being an advisor and reference point for the post for a further year. Thus there are always three people connected to a particular post or function. While it is not always possible to do things in such a systematic manner, thinking in this way creates an atmosphere of training and empowerment which is very important.

Formal Training Situations

It is also important to create formal training situations for people, both locally and regionally. Locally, these could include:

- Afternoon or one-day training in forms—chants, umdze, shrine hall procedures, etc.

- Afternoon or one-day training in basic leadership skills—meeting management, community well being, etc.
- Coordinators training
- Shambhala Guide training

Regional and international trainings offered include:

- Vajradhatu Gate administrators conference (September each year)
- Shambhala Training resident directors conference (late October each year)
- Finance Directors conference (September each year)
- Governance training (end April or May each year)
- MI Training
- Teacher training

We need to work towards a situation where people who hold positions in a centre, such as resident directors and Vajradhatu gate coordinators etc see attending these yearly conferences and trainings as part of their job, and as a basic necessity to attend—either to be trained in the skilful means for their tasks, or to help pass on their wisdom to others.

Empowering

Once someone is inspired and trained, then when the situation is ripe they could be empowered—placed into a situation and asked to take on the responsibility for this situation. This empowerment should come with:

- A formal ceremony
- A vow
- A clear description of the task
- Support to help them take their seat