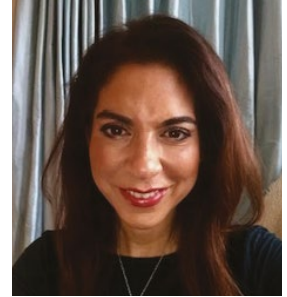


# MORE TRACY DASZKIEWICZS AND FEWER JAMES BONDS AS FUTURE LEADERS



By Nadine Smith

The new model of leadership set out in Nick Sinclair's essay requires new role models, as Nadine Smith explores here.

It is not often I get the chance to really indulge myself in TV but recently I was delighted to finally watch the most recent James Bond and the very gripping Netflix series, *The Salisbury Poisonings*. I have thought a great deal about what both said to me about the kind of leadership we need to maintain our resilience, strength and trust over a difficult and testing time ahead for all in public service.

While the public flock to see heroes like James Bond, busting through buildings and windows to save the world, leaving a trail of destruction behind them, I don't think that's what we need right now in public life. Rather, I think we need more people like Tracy Daszkiewicz, the then director of public health in Salisbury who was faced with an unprecedented public health crisis in her community but sought no fanfare in the way she protected the public. She had to rely on her relational skills to bring the community with her. At one point she simply said to an angry resident, 'Make me a cup of tea and I will tell you all I know.'

It is Tracy who shows being a public service leader in complex times means being a servant of the public in any circumstance. She makes top-down decisions quickly (because she needs to) but soon accepts what she does not know and admits that bravely and in public. It is central government in this scenario that sees indecision as weakness and swoops in, commanding and seeking to control, but Tracy continues to lean on her core purpose, drawing strength from her family and those impacted. She emerges an unlikely and reluctant hero after much self-doubt and personal sacrifice. There are many like Tracy who we do not notice across our services working like this every day and, more than ever, we need to enable them.

Tracy's leadership style however seems to still clash with today's performance management, measurement and commissioning methods, which in many ways seek false comfort in the unknown by trying to set down expectations on people, not with people, about what good should look like.

I hope that as we enter yet another difficult period where trust is shaken (and possibly stirred), we will see an emergence and celebration of more ‘servant leaders’ like Tracy. Servant leaders know their places, people and systems, they are curious, they seek out blind spots, not fame. They might need those they serve to create the psychological safety to enable their ideas to be heard and to be allowed to fail, as every ‘hero’ does. We will need to therefore help them to create spaces for listening and convening and bust not out of windows, but out of our echo chambers. We need to be asking who is *not* here and what assumptions am I making by excluding them?

Such self-awareness of one’s limitations has been a feature of the Appreciative Inquiry approaches that helped Plymouth to really get to know their community and serve their needs better with a whole system approach that is the Plymouth Alliance. Radical listening (as described in Karin Woodley’s essay) is also becoming a more familiar practice that serves leaders well, shows humility, builds relationships and empathy, as well as informs your strategy.

As leaders, we must try not to become obsessed with perfection but think about how we are learning and adapting to the ever-changing circumstances of people and places. You could even make learning your strategy, and central government your learning partner, as was done in Finland to reform education and as is being explored for health in Scotland.

An encouraging example I see of new ways of leading emerging in England is Changing Futures, a £64 million project (£46 million from the government’s Shared Outcomes Fund with almost £18 million in aligned funding from The National Lottery Community Fund) where areas are rethinking how they support those experiencing multiple disadvantage to live better lives. They are testing and learning new approaches and driving systems change. Those with lived experience are at the heart of decision-making that impacts on them. Approaches across local systems, governance and decision-making are trauma-informed throughout, understanding what happens when services are able to learn together and take a whole person, system-wide approach.

So, my suggestion is this. In your next performance interview, talk about what you have done to enable servant leaders like Tracy to emerge – let’s change the conversation about what successful leadership looks and feels like, let’s hear what communities think your leadership should look and feel like too. Perhaps then more Tracy’s, not James Bonds, will emerge – without the need for a crisis.

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