

The importance of being positive

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There's a quote in chapter 1 of Lead Like Mary that I love:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizen can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

For me, that quote, from American cultural Anthropologist Margaret Meade, sums up how we can all make a difference. As you begin the 12 weeks of Becoming a Conservation Leader it's important to remember that you are already a leader and that *you* already have the potential to change the world. We all do. You might not think it at the moment, but trust me, you can. There is a temptation when you're early in your conservation career to think that there's only so much influence you can have. You might not line manage any staff, you may simply be part of a volunteer team, but whatever the stage of your career, you can have an influence on the people around you. And that is how change starts to happen.

And that's the point, no one at any point in human history has ever created transformational change on their own. True, they might be a figurehead; but no one can do it singlehandedly. Look at Greta Thunberg. Her grassroots campaign which began as a lone protest outside the Swedish parliament in August 2018 how grown into a global movement. But she couldn't have done it alone. What she has done so remarkably is to show millions of young people around the globe that they have a voice. And those young people have responded spectacularly.

But how is Greta Thunberg's example relevant to your own career in conservation? Well, the point is that whatever stage of your career, you have the ability to influence those around you. Through the inside out leadership model Barry and Becky describe this week, you quickly realise that there is an opportunity to show leadership and to influence people every day. As Barry says, anyone can be a leader, it's a choice. The point is, how can we ever expect things to change, if we do not lead that change, or at least be a positive influence on those around us?

My own conservation career began when I was a 15 year-old volunteer at Rutland Water Nature Reserve when the Rutland Osprey Project was in its second year. I vividly remember sitting in a battered old caravan that doubled as a bird hide, watching eight juvenile Ospreys making their first flights. It was an incredibly inspiring day, but little could I have imagined how going and volunteering at Rutland Water that day could shape my future career. And I don't mean in the sense that I am still working with Ospreys and in species reintroduction. I mean in the positive outlook that my early experiences at Rutland Water gave me. It showed me that being positive, both in the type of conservation work we were doing, but also in the way I approached my day-to-day life and volunteering, was the way to get things done. In my opinion being positive is one of the key traits of any great leader. You can't expect to inspire or influence those around you if you are negative. Greta Thunberg has helped to highlight the severity of the climate crisis. But she has also shown that it is not too late to turn things around.

Eight years after first volunteering at Rutland Water I was asked to lead the Rutland Osprey Project – a job I did for the next 12 years. During that period we developed a team of 150 volunteers who were totally dedicated to the cause. I'd like to think that part of that was because everyone felt they were working together towards something really positive. Of course, there were difficult moments and times when I didn't lead as well as I should have done, but my feeling when I look back is that people wanted to be involved because they felt valued and part of a close-knit team who were helping to deliver something really exciting, and above all, positive.

My point is that during the course of the 12 weeks of Becoming a Conservation Leader, please have a positive outlook. Please think about how the topics we cover are relevant to your own leadership journey and how you might be able to incorporate them into your day to day life. If you do that then I guarantee that whatever stage of your career, you will start to influence the people around you. And it's when you start doing that, that exciting things can happen.