



Outstanding leadership: *five key elements*

from 6.00pm on Sunday, March 24th 2019
until 11.15am on Wednesday 27th

Background Note and Agenda for our 30th Leadership Conversation

Society of Leadership Fellows, St George's House, Windsor Castle

5

key elements of outstanding leadership

TRUST



COURAGE



INTEGRITY



CHAMPIONING OTHERS



STRIVING FOR EXCEPTIONALNESS



Modelling outstanding leadership

We are excited to be holding this Conversation. It is the first time we will be offering an intensive three-night residential of this sort, to explore the key insights that have come out of five different Leadership Conversations in previous months that, taken together, help to define outstanding leadership.

Each of the five elements that we will be exploring at this Conversation represents a vital characteristic of outstanding leadership in its own right:

- An ability to attract exceptionally high levels of trust
- A keen sense of integrity
- A capacity for real courage, especially in those moments when you are required to act with no notice whatsoever
- An ongoing commitment to building and championing others
- A constant striving for exceptionalness that makes the process of self-improvement evermore addictive and fulfilling.

We hope that this Conversation will help to **re-energise you** in your own quest to become an outstanding leader. We use this term on the basis that those leaders who are already outstanding are always most reluctant to describe themselves in this way!

Re-evaluating how you project yourself

We also hope that it will support you not only in re-evaluating how you project yourself as a leader, but also in how you help to **empower** those around you in their own development as leaders.

Our guiding principles

We will start off by running through the [guiding principles](#) that we have developed with Leadership Fellows since we launched the Society in 2016.

They are incredibly important if we are to achieve really high levels of trust among ourselves as a group from the very beginning, and achieve the sense of connection and mutual support that has been such an important feature of all of our Leadership Conversations so far.

More interactive and dynamic

As always, we are keen to develop the process that we use so that it becomes yet more interactive and dynamic, and holds the engagement of us all not least because we keep the momentum going in such a way that we never let ourselves get “stuck” at any stage.

During the Conversations running up to this one we will be supported by one of our Leadership Fellows, Joshua Smith, in testing out some brief exercises and techniques that help to vary the format and keep us all on our toes - perhaps literally!

"Living" the principles that we will be exploring

With Joshua's support we will test out some techniques for energy release and for visualising ourselves in team settings back at work where we are “living” some of the principles – and managing some of the challenges – that we will be exploring at different stages in this Conversation.

Joshua himself has coached Executives globally in mindfulness and resilience. We are very fortunate to be able to draw on his expertise in developing the process that we use to try and make this Conversation as impactful – and enjoyable! – as it can possibly be.

FIRST KEY ELEMENT OF OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

TRUST

Insights from previous Leadership Conversation:

[Chapter 5 of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume 2](#) on Becoming more Trustworthy as a Leader

Three core challenges that we want to engage with:

- 1** Do we sometimes **give trust away too freely**, to such an extent that others find it difficult to come to us when something goes wrong because we have told them how much we “trust” them?
- 2** How do we ensure that our desire to be trusted by risk-averse colleagues doesn’t make us too risk-averse ourselves?
- 3** Do we trust **ourselves** enough – and what needs to change for us to trust ourselves more as leaders?

Our opening questions for small groups

We want to start with this theme of self-trust. At this stage our thinking is that we should ask ourselves the following questions when we break for the first round of small groups:

- i** Do you think you **trust yourself enough** as a leader?
- ii** If you say yes, can you think of a time when your self-trust enabled you to be a better leader than you would otherwise have been?
- iii** If you say no, what is it that **holds you back** from trusting yourself more?

Your answers to these questions will determine the flow of our discussions through to mid-morning on the Monday.

SECOND KEY ELEMENT OF OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

INTEGRITY

Insights from previous Leadership Conversation:

[Chapter 1 of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume 3](#) on leading with integrity

Three core challenges that we want to engage with:

- 1 What do we make of the proposition in the report that integrity can only be owned by individuals and can't be sub-contracted to our organisations?
- 2 How do we as leaders handle a situation where there is some clash between what our sense of personal integrity tells us to be "the right thing to do" and what others in our organisation are asking us to do? When should we say "no", rather than swallowing hard and doing what is asked of us?
- 3 For us to feel that we are standing fully in our integrity as leaders, are there some things that we would need to differently – and if so, what are they?

Our opening question for small groups

We plan to take the first two questions into our first round of small groups on this theme. They're tough ones, and once we have answered them we should find number 3 relatively easy!

We expect this theme to continue through to 3.00pm on the Monday.

THIRD KEY ELEMENT OF OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

COURAGE

Insights from previous Leadership Conversation:

[Chapter 3 of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume I](#) on Courage in Leadership

Our discussions will have required a fair bit of courage on our parts by now, so it should seem natural to engage with this theme head-on!

Three core challenges that we want to engage with:

- 1 When we think of our daily lives as leaders, in which aspects of our leadership do we think our courage deserts us most often?
- 2 Keeping focused on these situations, are there any particular forms of courage that we might draw on to help us handle these situations better (such as being more courageous in asking close colleagues for their advice)?
- 3 If one or two close colleagues were to ask us to support them in being more courageous, what advice would we want to give them? (Sometimes we can learn so much about our own needs as leaders by reflecting on the needs of those we are closest to.)

Our opening question for small groups

In our first round of small groups we plan to start with the first question, and take it from there.

We expect this theme to continue through to dinner on the Monday.

FOURTH KEY ELEMENT OF OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

CHAMPIONING OTHERS

Insights from previous Leadership Conversation:

[Chapter 9 of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume I](#) on Leading a Winning Team

Three core challenges that we want to engage with:

- 1** Many leaders are quite good at championing those who report to them. What they are not good at is building and championing those who are peers, either as members of the same Board or as Executive Directors. How good are YOU at building up your peers and how might you affirm and support them more?
- 2** Focusing on those who report to you: how might you stretch them more as leaders, for example by taking them out of their “comfort zone” more often? And how often do you invite them to tell you how they would like to be stretched more, perhaps by changing some of their key responsibilities?
- 3** Are you in any way **threatened** by the possible impact of building up others – and the idea of them becoming better than you in some ways? And how do you respond to others when they champion YOU? Do you embrace this, or do you try to push them away?

Our opening question for small groups

This whole issue of building and developing and championing others is so crucial for Chief Executives who want to develop outstanding teams. We have potentially so much ground to cover, and know that we will run out of time!

In small groups, we plan to start with question 1. Whilst we can give this theme most of Tuesday morning, we will need to finish shortly before lunch so that we can move on to our fifth key element of outstanding leadership that in many ways draws on everything so far.

FIFTH KEY ELEMENT OF OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

STRIVING FOR EXCEPTIONALNESS

Insights from previous Leadership Conversation:

[Chapter 3 of Nurturing Wisdom, Volume 3](#) on From good to exceptional

Two core challenges that we want to engage with:

- 1 On the next page we reproduce the 11 qualities that we describe in the report as attributes of exceptional leaders. Which one or two of these qualities do you regard as personal strengths, and which one or two are qualities where you are not so strong and would like to develop yourself further?
- 2 In so many ways, the exceptionalness of a leader is determined by the extent to which they inspire those around them to create a culture that enables their organisation to become truly exceptional.

An exceptional culture is one in which we constantly seek to build higher levels of trust within and across teams. We are always striving to act with integrity, which requires us be open with ourselves and others at those times when we might be in danger of compromising our integrity - or have already done so.

We are mindful that moments requiring our courage often arrive unannounced and require an almost immediate response. And we know that the process of affirming and building and stretching others isn't just for special occasions. It is an ongoing process, day in and day out.

Developing our leadership style

How do we each need to develop our leadership style to create a culture that promotes exceptionalness at every level?

In small groups we will start with question one and your answers will then determine the flow of conversation. We expect this theme to take us through the afternoon and into our early evening discussions.

Capturing the eleven exceptional qualities:

- 1** Seeking out “the diamond in the rough”
- 2** Seeking to capture the essence of every challenge
- 3** Drawing out others’ truth and in the process fostering their courage
- 4** Promoting a team ethos in which we support each other in becoming exceptional
- 5** Trusting our intuition in moments when it tells us to declare ourselves
- 6** Accepting that at times leadership requires us to hold back, without compromising our sense of authority
- 7** Being prepared to be ruthless in how we prioritise the use of our time
- 8** Regarding directive leadership as a last resort, because we expect those around us to respect our authority and influence
- 9** Seeking to solve problems through our influence over others
- 10** Challenging ourselves on whether we are compromising our offer as a leader, whenever we “tone ourselves down”
- 11** Letting our insights into our own strengths and shortcomings heighten our awareness of others.

Aiming for breakthroughs in our thinking

As we go through this Conversation, we will be aiming for breakthroughs in our thinking. Our experience so far is that most of them come in the final session, when we press ourselves to engage with any really tough issues that we have perhaps “danced around” up to now and where some of us have managed to remain “sitting on the fence”, for one reason or another!

Three stretching resolves

In our final round of small groups we will break you into groups of two or three to support each other in coming up with three stretching resolves to bring back to the final session and share with the rest of us.

It is remarkable how much we can all gain when we each feed back our resolves after this final round of small groups, not least because our “no recycling” ground rule means that it’s not an option for anyone to repeat anything that they have already shared with the group!

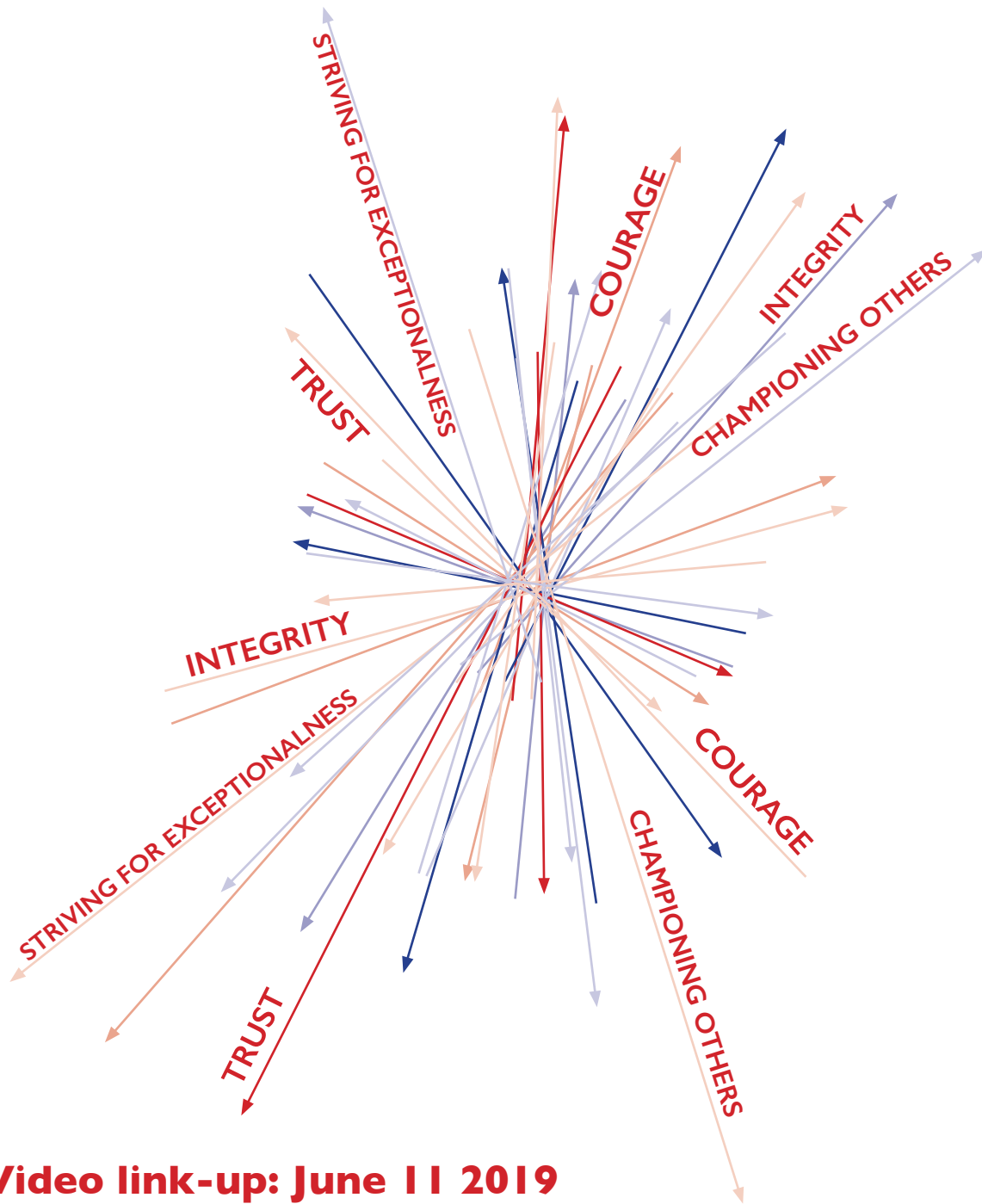
We usually find that it is in the final hour and a half of a Conversation when we have our most powerful breakthroughs. This is why we want to press ourselves hardest on the Wednesday morning in asking what are the key moments during this Conversation when we had a glimpse of some aspect of our leadership where we have tended to sell ourselves short in the past and now feel that we can step forward with a new level of confidence.

Giving each other a “nudge”

These moments of self-challenge can yield incredible insights. This is why we want to ensure that in this final lap we really are pushing ourselves to confront any of those choices and dilemmas where we know that some of us need to ease ourselves off the “fence” in one way or another!

The level of trust that we will have achieved among ourselves as a group should enable us to give each other a nudge in those moments when it is called for.

At previous Conversations the impact on individual Fellows has been profoundly positive, as they have made clear in their feedback afterwards.



Video link-up: June 11 2019

In the final minutes of the Conversation we will also arrange a time for a follow-up video link-up in June to swap notes. This will give us all a chance to hear how much progress we have all made in taking forward our resolves.

For previous video link-ups we have found that we can cover a tremendous amount of ground in one hour. Usually Fellows share a very brief email beforehand updating the rest of us on how you have acted on your resolves, and especially which ones you found the most challenging – and we take it from there!

Suggested time for Video Link-up: 10.00 to 11.00am on Tuesday June 11th, 2019

Agenda

Sunday, March 24th 2019

2.30pm+	You are welcome to check into your room in St George's House
4.30pm	Tea in the House for those joining Evensong in the Chapel
5.05pm	Evensong (optional)
6.00pm <i>Vicars' Hall</i>	Refreshments, then start of the Conversation. After agreeing our guiding principles for the Conversation, we break into small (standing) groups to consider the question (on page 5) that opens up discussion about our first key element of outstanding leadership: TRUST
7.30pm	After feedback and debate, we agree on one or two key issues to explore over dinner
7.40pm	Free time/drinks until dinner is served promptly at 8.15pm
9.45pm	Private floodlit tour of St George's Chapel (optional)

Monday, March 25th

7.45am	Breakfast is served in St George's House
8.45am <i>Vicars' Hall</i>	We hear any reflections arising from your discussions at dinner and ask ourselves what are the key lessons that we take from them. We have time for one more round of small groups on this theme of trust, and aim to draw out some tentative conclusions shortly before 11.00am when we have a 15-minute break.
11.00am	Mid-morning refreshments
11.15am	Our second element of outstanding leadership: INTEGRITY (page 6). We open up the discussion and then break for a round of small groups. After groups, we come together again to hear initial conclusions and then agree on themes for new groups over lunch in St George's House. We break at 12.45
1.00pm	Lunch in St George's House
2.15pm <i>Prompt, please</i>	We ask how your thinking has been moving on during this discussion about integrity. We draw together the key strands and messages and conclude this session at 3.00
3.00pm	Refreshments

Agenda

Monday, March 25th *continued*

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- 3.15pm** With Joshua's help, we gear into our third key element of outstanding leadership: COURAGE. In so many ways, it's one of the most compelling and most difficult themes of the Conversation. We know that we need to be able to draw on all of our selves to become truly courageous as leaders. We open up the discussion as one group and then agree our question for small groups (page 7) and break for groups by 4.00 pm
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- 4.30pm** Back again as one group we hear how your thinking has moved forward in your small group discussions. We press ourselves hard in this session to understand better those situations where our courage is most prone to desert us, and why, and what our best leadership response should be. We then continue this through to 5.30 at the latest
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- 5.30pm** TIME OUT. Refreshments available
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- 6.00pm** Group exercise to re-energise ourselves for the next session (this will be more fun than it might sound!) Then please grab a drink (alcoholic variety will be available) and bring it back into the circle. We now try to draw together the 3 strands of our discussions so far. What **linkages** do we each see between trust, integrity and courage in our own development as leaders? We might - or might not - have a brief round of small groups; we will play it by ear! By 7.30 we will agree on two killer questions that we want to ask ourselves over dinner and then conclude the session by 7.40 at the latest
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- 8.15pm** Dinner in St George's House, followed by drinks in the Sitting Room

Tuesday, March 26th

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- 7.45am** Breakfast is served in St George's House
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- 8.45am**
Vicars' Hall We reflect on our time together yesterday, culminating in our discussions over dinner. Do you have a sense of any significant movements forward – or breakthroughs – in your thinking that you want to make a point of bringing into our discussions? And do you recall any particular moments when you had insights into the leadership journeys of others in the group that you want to share now? We then turn to our fourth key element of outstanding leadership: CHAMPIONING OTHERS. We open up discussion through a brief visualisation and then draw on the text on page 8 to agree the question that we will take into small groups. We agree a new format for sharing ideas after groups and move into groups circa 9.45, when refreshments will be available
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Agenda

Tuesday, March 26th *continued*

10.15am	We look at the ideas on whiteboards and discuss which ones are likely to have the greatest impact in empowering and motivating colleagues who have not stepped forward as enthusiastically as you hoped they would do. We then ask what our conclusions tell us about the extent of unused capacity that you have as leaders for championing and building – and stretching – others. Through another exercise we ask each of you to picture yourselves as leaders having as much impact as is realistically possible in championing those around you. How different does this aspirational image of yours feel in comparison with how you have felt in the past?
11.30am	Break and refreshments
12 noon	We spend a few minutes asking what are our key take-aways from the discussions so far this morning. We then gear into our fifth key element of outstanding leadership: STRIVING FOR EXCEPTIONALNESS. We have some discussion about the 11 attributes of exceptional leaders (page 10) and agree our question for our lunchtime groups (page 9)
12.45pm	LUNCH IS SERVED in the Vicars' Hall and groups discuss the question together over lunch
2.00pm	We hear the outcomes of your group discussions and ask whether we can identify two or three aspects of exceptionalness in leadership that we regard as the most difficult – and challenging
2.45pm (ish)	With Joshua's help, we follow through a group exercise to help us focus our energies for the remainder of the afternoon. After the exercise we agree on our core challenges for small groups and break for groups (and refreshments) at 3.15pm
3.45pm	Back from groups, we explore our outcomes, with the main focus being on cross-group advice and coaching at this stage. We will have moved so far forward in engaging with the challenges of exceptional leadership that we want to have the space to support each other in relation to those specific areas where you are seeking some sort of breakthrough in thinking and feel rather "stuck at the moment"
4.45pm	Tea. Option to go across to Evensong at 5.05 or treat this as Time Out

Agenda

Tuesday, March 26th *continued*

6.00pm

Drinks and then we convene for our final session before our Social Evening. We allocate ourselves to small groups, in which we encourage each of you to raise with the group one aspect of your own leadership where you would value some peer advice to support you in speeding up the process of developing those strengths of yours that are pretty close to exceptional, and you want to draw on to enable you to step up more decisively as an outstanding leader.

After groups, we ask those who feel they took away something really positive from the group to share their key insight. Then we focus our energies on the (hopefully!) small number of you who remain stuck in some way in relation to your development as an outstanding leader. We pour our collective energies into trying to support you to leave behind this state of “stuckness”, on the basis that we won’t be able to help everyone achieve what you want BUT we hope that we will have opened up a process for others to offer you some sort of input to help you move forward in your thinking during the remainder of our time together

7.30pm

We bring down the guillotine on our discussions. Time out

8.15pm

Dinner, followed by our Social Evening in No 25 the Cloisters from 9.45pm (with LIVE entertainment!)

Wednesday, March 27th

7.30am

Breakfast is served in St George’s House. After breakfast, please vacate your room so that it can be prepared for the next group, and either bring your luggage down to the Vicars’ Hall or leave it in the Sitting Room in St George’s House, where it will be completely safe

8.30am

We start by asking whether any of those who had a key challenge unresolved at the end of our small groups yesterday evening, and raised it with us in the final minutes before we broke for the Social Evening, had some sort of inspiration or insight at some stage during the evening – or even in the shower or over breakfast! We rather hope that some of you will have had some sort of feedback from another Fellow that meant something could just go “click” for you!

Agenda

Wednesday, March 27th *continued*

8.30am

Continued

If you did, we are keen to hear how your thinking has moved forward. We're hoping that most if not all of those who were stuck in some way or another yesterday evening have now been able to move off that plateau, in your head, and can see yourselves "climbing the mountain".

9.10am

Shortly after 9.00 we will prepare for our final round of small groups, in which we ask each of you to develop three stretching resolves to take forward your most important learning points from these past three days. We will agree the specific questions that we want each of us to answer at the time

9.40am

In this final session, we ask you to adopt a ground rule of 'no recycling', under which we all agree not to repeat views that we have already shared in the Vicars' Hall. As we share our resolves there is time for positive challenge across the group before we draw together our key outcomes and conclude this Leadership Conversation **on the dot of 11.15 am**

