



Andy King

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📍 Rochdale

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Andy King is the Chief Executive of Your Trust (Formally Link for Life) in Rochdale, and Chair of Greater Manchester Active (a collaboration of twelve operators across Greater Manchester); and also, one of our early participants on the leadership programme.

Andy had heard good things about the reputation of the programme and wanted to move beyond being just a facility operator by understanding better the bigger picture specifically the health and wellbeing agenda and system thinking. He left the course feeling motivated to change things and fascinated by the concept of purpose, an idea he was already examining through the writing of Simon Sinek.

Faced with producing a new strategy he started to ask himself and his leadership team about their purpose, why were they there at all and what would happen if they weren't. The course had stimulated him to think about facilitating a shift from a pure business focus to a more balanced outlook where responding to community need and delivering wider outcomes and impact mattered more than it had before.

Then the pandemic hit and for a while they actually didn't exist and perhaps wouldn't exist unless they started to change. What the pandemic did was raise the profile of health and wellbeing and forced them to examine their purpose for real as they shifted into not just engaging with but physically supporting the community.

The experience however, showed that they were nowhere near close enough to their communities and they had to get much closer to those most in need now facing 'life and death' situations. It was an enlightening time and he felt you couldn't help but be affected by it personally and organisationally. They were now by accident in new relationships with people they had never worked with before who were now commenting on the great

work they had done in the pandemic for communities. He realised they could not come out of the pandemic doing the same old things and the leadership programme coupled with the Sport England strategy 'Uniting the Movement' clearly pointed to a different way forward based on 'proportionate universalism' and working with those who needed them most.

This felt like an important moment in time, and he realised they had fallen into a community world they thought they understood but really didn't. He realised that the learning was now staring him in the face so again he went back to the course and to some of the key concepts including purpose, system change and the need for collaborative leadership.

His analysis showed that whilst he, some of his senior staff and his community development staff may have a shared understanding of some of the ideas and their application the majority of his staff did not share the same understanding or ownership of the challenges and opportunities. Andy acknowledges that in his role on GM Active he had been party to lots of conversations about system thinking and system leadership but very often he



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had been turned him off because it felt too academic and not realistic. He knew his management team would not engage with it and what was needed was their own version of it. He needed the course recreated in an easy digestible format for as many people as possible reflecting what it said in Uniting the Movement about leaders at all levels.

Prior to the pandemic plans were already taking shape to develop a training programme for staff across Greater Manchester using The Future Fit digital platform and some funding offered from the Local Delivery Pilot to increase staff awareness and engagement in the health agenda. Given most of the staff were now on furlough but could undertake training the big idea that emerged was to see if they could replicate aspects of the leadership programme for his own and other operational staff.

What emerged was a collaboration between Andy, GM Moving, the LDP, Future Fit and John Oxley to develop and pilot an online course inspired by the leadership programme but repackaged for centre managers from across Manchester. It would help them understand better their place in the community, the required focus on health and wellbeing and the need to apply a bigger focus on inequalities.

At the time of writing the first cohort of twenty managers were completing the course. Feedback has been very positive, and it is already clear that as a result of a better understanding there is a tangible difference in management attitudes and behaviours. Operational managers are looking closer at who is using their centres and not just numbers and financial returns. They are now taking their eyes off the operational delivery of a leisure centre as they know it and are far more aware that the agenda is changing.

They are also being encouraged to challenge existing thinking and think differently in order to utilise the assets better for the benefit of the community often going against the grain of what they have been doing for years where the focus was only on improving efficiency at the expense of effectiveness and only making token efforts to respond to community

needs and inequalities. As a result, there is now a greater awareness and ownership of what it actually means to be a community hub.

However, Andy acknowledges that some of the managers on the course when taking back these ideas to their own organisations are getting some pushback, so more discussions are now required at the GM Active board before progressing further with the second cohort.

In addition, Andy is now discussing with his partners a possible graduate entry programme for GM Active that seeks to ensure the next generation of leaders from the word go enter their employment with a better understanding of some of the core principles of system work, collaborative leadership and equality. They will know no different he hopes.

He is also looking at changes to their recruitment practices so that more of the workforce come from the communities that are underrepresented. Instead of just offering a job they are seeking their engagement and help in the mission and intend to recruit on character and passion rather than qualifications. Whilst it will not solve his immediate recruitment issues it will mean further down the line; they will have more empathy in their workforce.

Andy in emphasising these ideas returns to the Sport England strategy and the big message about needing to do things differently and he hopes that the Sport England implementation plans pick this up and really help him to address these key workforce issues. Andy really valued his attendance on the programme and acknowledges how his own leadership behaviours have changed as a result.

He is he says more collaborative, more likely to be last to speak and take a back seat, more inclined to delegate and more likely to encourage people who think differently and have different passions and feels that now the job title matters less. He also feels he understands people better and although just as passionate he is more relaxed, almost laid back.