



WINGMAN

Wingman Report for

LEAP LEADERSHIP RETREAT

SHELLEY SMITH

11/17/2022

WINGMAN REPORT

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as a Wingman for your Leadership Retreat for LEAP on Monday, November 7. Every aspect of the retreat was well done. The facility was amazing, the group was great to work with, and Shelley Smith embodies the Wingman Mindset, which came through all of the planning and preparation for our day together. In the following paragraphs, I would like to share some observations that I hope you will find useful and helpful.

1. RETREAT DEBRIEF

The planning, preparation and execution of the retreat went very well from the first moment I spoke with Shelley about facilitating. In preparation, we (Shelley and I) spent 10+ hours on zoom calls talking about and creating the event, not to mention countless emails back and forth as the day was being developed.

From the first call, Shelley had a clear vision of what she wanted to accomplish with the retreat. As a facilitator, I found that refreshing. As I said at the retreat, my goal is to enhance a Wingman culture as opposed to create one. It was clear from the outset, Shelley, as a new leader, was very appreciative of the past at LEAP, aware of the current, and had clear vision for the future.

The facility was first class and comfortable. A lot of care had been given to room set up, organizing break-out discussions and a good pace for the day. Even the decision to go out to lunch vs bringing something into the room, was a good choice.

Shelley and I talked at each break about any changes we needed to make. As a facilitator, that speaks to the mindset of the leader I am working with. Many leaders I work with are rigid when it comes to a plan. All throughout the planning process, Shelley was concerned primarily with honoring the time and effort of the board members, who had given their day to be there. That same mindset applied to the actual day, as we tweaked and adjusted throughout the day.

My only concern for the day was that we bordered on information overload. We covered a lot of ground in the hours we were together. Overall, I believe the day went very well, and hopefully added to the momentum already in place at LEAP.

2. OBSERVATIONS

● GROUP INTERACTION

To be honest, as a facilitator, I never know how the day with a new group is going to go. I like a lot of interaction throughout a full day, and we had planned for that. I was amazed at how quickly the group was fully engaged in the day.

I found the group to be very attentive in the teaching portions, and very willing when asked to break into groups for discussion and interaction. I was also pleased with how free everyone was to interrupt with questions and comments.

While there was a wide variety of personalities in the room, there was a strong sense of unity. I was hard-pressed to tell who the board members were in comparison to who the staff was, and I see that as a very good thing.

When I work with non-profit organizations where there is both board and staff members, there is an us/them “vibe” in the room. I did not sense any of that with LEAP.

● LEADERS EDGE

One thing I was curious to observe going in was how Shelley would interact as a leader with the group. Many times leaders I work with, who have servant leadership in their DNA, can be too “soft” when actually leading a group. I was very pleased to see Shelley switch gears from leader to participant to servant leader several times throughout the day.

It was also clear to me that there are several natural influencers in the room, both on the board and on the staff. As you will see in the suggested next steps, I believe it would be wise to leverage that moving forward in order to accomplish the strategic plan.

When I lead retreats, many times there are “leadership bullies” who overpower the group from moment one. I absolutely did not see any of that in this group. There were strong leaders in the room, no doubt. But no one overpowered the sense of unity within the group, and that is vital in a Wingman culture.

● GROUP CHEMISTRY

I understand that most of the interaction of the board and executive directors has been via zoom conference calls. This is only an observation; the LEAP leadership has a unique sense of unity that many groups I have worked with do not. I believe it would do the board and staff well to try to meet more often face to face, even if that means fewer overall meetings.

Of all of the things I was concerned about going into the day, the break-out discussions was the biggest. In every break-out discussion, I had

to stop the talking (or laughing) in order to move on. There was no awkward silence, struggling for conversations or disinterest as I closely watched everyone in the room. My advice, take advantage of that chemistry moving forward.

3. NEXT STEPS

The following suggestions are simply that, suggestions. I realize I have very limited exposure to the group or LEAP as an organization. I am also not aware of all of the initiatives that may already be in place. From my observations, I would suggest the following in terms of possible next steps:

● LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

The strategic plan that was presented is a big plan. It will take a team to accomplish it. Right now, as I understand it, Shelley Smith is the Executive Director with 4 Directors reporting to her. **My first suggestion** would be for Shelley to select one of the 4 to intentionally serve as her Wingman. She needs a “go to” person; someone who knows what she knows and can compliment her in terms of skill set. If that person is selected, I would suggest coaching for them as the strengthen that relationship.

Secondly, I would suggest a leadership assessment of all 5 directors. The assessment would help in individual development and team chemistry.

● TEAM CULTURE EMPHASIS

Moving forward, it is important that all 100+ team members within LEAP are getting consistent messaging about the culture the board is trying to create. This can be done in a variety of ways, but I cannot overstate how important it is. Every staff member in LEAP needs to feel an “I’ve got your back” energy. This kind of emphasis is included in the Strategic Plan. In my opinion, that initiative needs to be given priority. If the team is strong, the families you serve will benefit.

● LEADERSHIP INTENTIONALITY

Again, my exposure to LEAP leadership is very limited. In the section above I mentioned how good it was to see such a sense of unity between the board members and staff members. The only downside of that is a clear set of boundaries and expectations established between the two

groups. I believe there is some work to be done leveraging all of the talent and wisdom that exists on the board. More intentionality includes a more clear definition on how to operate the committee structure in the most effective way. Levels of engagement within this kind of leadership community will vary, and that is okay. I have found acknowledging that and leveraging that energy is critical in a healthy Wingman culture.

Again, it was truly an honor and privilege to work with the LEAP Board, Executive Directors, and Director, Shelley Smith. If you have any questions about this report, please do not hesitate to reach out to me for clarification or additional thoughts.

Your Wingman,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Bennett", with a stylized, cursive script.

Brian Bennett