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## Roundtable Wisdom Improves Leadership

By Roger A. Shapiro

“Leadership matters today more than ever, whether or not you have direct reports at work,” says Linda Mather, Ed.D, president of Forums Institute for Public Policy. The key to being an effective leader starts with proper training, which is why Mather and Forums Institute director Eleanor Newton will present a three-part *Leadership Roundtable* beginning Friday, September 19, at 9 a.m. at the Conference Center at the New Jersey Hospital Association on Alexander Road. The first installment, *Leading Sideways* will be followed by *Group Dynamics* on Friday, October 10, and by *Conflict Management* on Friday, October 31. Cost: \$300 for all three sessions or \$125 per session.

Each session focuses on skills people can use to improve how they lead themselves and their teams. *Leading Sideways* will address knowledge, communications, values, and people, Mather says. “We serve as a catalyst for change. People can learn techniques that help them promote excellence in their groups,” she says. “One way people can work differently is by creating a framework that can show you what steps are necessary for you to become a better leader.



Linda Mather

Each roundtable session will include small groups so Mather and Newton can encourage group interactions and maintain relevancy for the audience. “We don’t just talk at the group. We encourage them to discuss real-life experiences so they can learn from each other as well,” says Mather. What they learn are real leadership skills that can be applied right away and make people more efficient. *Group Dynamics* will help people look at how they get work done while keeping others productive and satisfied in their jobs while *Conflict Management* offers examples of how to deflate trouble. “It’s important to realize that we talk about managing conflicts, rather than resolving them,” Mather says.

### **The Whiny Professor**

Mather remembers a faculty member working under her many years ago. This professor regularly complained to her about certain issues, always in her office. “One day, I asked him to walk around the campus with me while he told me about his issues,” she says. “Once I changed the environment I asked him what he wanted me to do. We both realized that he didn’t want us to solve the problem. He wanted to wallow in it. After that the issues never came up again.”

### **Managing meetings more effectively**

Small changes—holding chairless meetings, clarifying agendas, and starting a meeting on time— can have profound effects. One company she knows started using chairless meetings for weekly updates and meeting times dropped from an hour to about 10 minutes. Proper planning also improves the efficiency of a meeting. “You should ask yourself ‘what is the purpose of this meeting? Why am I getting people together?’” Mather says. “And you should use a timed agenda. These approaches let you lead a meeting, rather than just host it.”

### **Is everybody happy?**

“To lead others and be happy with your job,” Mather says, “you must know what your value system is, and you must make sure it synchs up with your company’s values. We talk about building knowledge because in today’s economy, each of us must continually increase our knowledge level.” In addition, Newton and Mather encourage leaders to develop a personal action sheet. “We have people write down the steps they need to move forward,” Mather says. “Don’t just say you need to communicate better, say what steps you’ll take to do so.”

In her 30-plus years as an educator, Mather has worked at Rowan University and William Paterson College, consulted for the Kellogg Foundation, the Wharton School of Business at Penn, and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton, and has served as associate director at the New Jersey Department of Higher Education.

Newton, who received her Ph.D. in counseling psychology from the University of Texas at Austin, specializes in conflict management and mediation. She worked at AT&T, where she taught management and union leaders about Project Bridging as a means of dealing with issues. She is a certified mediator.

“We realized there are many ways we can help people increase their capacity to lead. In very practical terms, we help them increase their efficiency and ability to lead others,” says Mather.

