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# Leadership paths

**Have you ever thought, “If I could do it all over again, would my life be any different?” or “If my life had been like his or hers, things would have been much easier”? If you have, then wake up and smell the proverbial coffee! Regardless of who we are, each path in life comes with a variety of challenges. We often have periods of smooth sailing mixed in with adversity. The “typical career” of a woman in politics is a social construction: in fact, there is no such “typical” political career.**

As we know, the number of career paths and public spheres in which individuals can play a leadership role is infinite. Here, we have identified three adjectives to describe these roles. But these categories are not cast in stone, nor are they one-way streets: leadership roles can be participatory, influential or decision-making, or a combination thereof, and may play out in the public sphere or in our private lives.

## 1- Active participation

A common leadership path — and the most accessible — is based on participation in public or political life, or even private and family life. It all boils down to getting involved: gathering information, collaborating on projects, doing volunteer work or providing guidance are roles that are often taken on by people embarking on leadership paths or who may wish to take on a less active (but still important!) part. All of us have the capacity to exercise participatory leadership, regardless of our intersectionality, networks or day-to-day lives.

### GETTING STARTED

Start by networking or volunteering for causes you believe in. Get involved in councils and boards (student councils, school boards, boards of directors) or in the electoral process. Build up your network (see Tool 5 - Handy Networking Guide), get up off the couch, step out of your comfort zone and hone your participatory leadership skills.

## 2- Influential leadership

Influential leadership paths often begin with recognition (by peers, your network or your family). They may be characterized by the trust that others place in you, or they may involve mobilizing people and creating a sense of community. Our influence may be seen in the impact we have on other people’s opinions or actions. This influence may be intentional (or not) and may be public, private, political, social, community-oriented, etc.

### GETTING STARTED

If you would like to demonstrate your influence, you must be willing to play an active role and create an impact. Influence can be wielded in all areas of life. One typical way of acquiring credibility and exercising influential leadership in public or political life is to study, publish, write and operate in networks in which we can make our voices heard. Another way involves sharing our knowledge via mentorships (see Tool 6 - Mentoring).



### 3- Decision-making leadership

All of us have the capacity to exercise decision-making leadership. Nevertheless, our ability to make decisions in our private or social lives is not necessarily the same thing as the authority granted to those who hold decision-making positions.

This type of leadership is linked to influence and public recognition. It is often seen when individuals are appointed to a position or involved in a situation in which decisions are made that affect others. In some cases, influential leadership paths lead to decision-making roles; in other cases, decision-making roles lead to influential leadership paths.

### GETTING STARTED

When we have our sights set on a decision-making position, one strategy is to begin by saying, “Yes, I’m willing to get involved”. Surrounding yourself with a network, believing in your abilities, demonstrating your leadership skills and resolutely working towards your goals: that is the right attitude to have. Please refer to Tool 4 – 50-30 Challenge for information on professional tools designed to facilitate better gender equity in decision-making positions.

In the end, there is no “normal” path leading to leadership positions or public recognition. Have confidence in your abilities and surround yourself with people who inspire you. It’s never too late to get involved or to embark on an action-oriented journey.

**If you’re looking for some motivation, here is an example of an inspirational figure – someone who illustrates how a leadership path can be both participatory and influential, with extensive decision-making authority.**

#### Joanna Bernard, Interim National Chief, Assembly of First Nations (AFN)

Joanna Bernard is the AFN’s Regional Chief for New Brunswick, as well as the Interim National Chief. She is a high-profile leader dedicated to promoting prosperity and economic development among Canada’s First Nations.

In the private sphere, Ms. Bernard is a member of the Madawaska Maliseet First Nation. She was born in the U.S. and has both Maliseet and Italian heritage. She is a mother and a grand-mother. With a degree in business management, she has become a driving force behind the Grey Rock Entertainment Center in north-western New Brunswick.

Ms. Bernard’s career in the public and political arenas has been marked by her significant involvement with the Maliseet nation, serving as Councillor and then Chief from 2003 to 2013. She has gained recognition for her leadership and her contributions as a driver of development for her nation.

Ms. Bernard’s career is a prime example of her determination and her deep desire to make her voice heard in support of her community. She ranks among New Brunswick’s most influential figures.



### WHAT IS IMPOSTER SYNDROME?

**Imposter syndrome is a phenomenon marked by anxiety and persistent doubts about our personal and professional accomplishments. Individuals suffering from this syndrome fear being seen as a fraud, despite their competence. Those affected often tend to attribute their success to external factors such as luck, error or personal connections.<sup>1</sup>**

1. According to the Canadian Medical Association, July 28, 2020, consulted on November 20, 2023, <https://www.cma.ca/physician-wellness-hub/content/health-care-leadership-action-overcoming-impostor-syndrome>