

# EMPOWERING YOU

## Catalysts for Positive Change

### “Empowering Leaders” – The Story of a Participant and his Manager

This is an interview conducted by Steve Cliff of Empowering You with Gavin Haire, Digital and Shared Services Manager and his line manager Vince McNulty, Executive Officer – Customer and Digital Services, on 20th November 2018. It relates to the ‘Top Talent’ leadership development programme that Gavin joined in 2017, as part of a Socitm (Society of IT Managers) and Scottish Government initiative.

*(Please note that from 2019, the Socitm Top Talent programmes change significantly in format, structure and content and use a different training provider. This testimonial only applies to the programmes delivered by Empowering You)*

**Steve:** Gavin, what were the reasons you applied for Top Talent?

**Gavin:** I wanted to become a more effective leader. I wanted something to help me move on and progress in my organisation. I felt that I needed a wee bit more confidence and belief in myself. I was very new into a leadership role.

**Steve:** How did this programme differ from other management and leadership courses you had attended before?

**Gavin:** It was completely different. In the leadership courses I had done before, internally within the council, you’re sitting with peers, people that you know. If there were any scenarios you wanted to discuss it was kind of difficult to be completely honest and open. Come Top Talent we were talking about real life scenarios. On the first day we walked into the room and I knew no-one. It was good to listen to others who are going through the same journey. I realised we were not alone, we are all in this together. Nobody was holding back. The first day we were all relatively quiet. After that the trust and the confidence grew. No-one was there to judge you. You’re all there to learn. The sole focus on the two workshops is about yourself and learning and how you can improve. And then how to take that back into the workplace. After the first workshop we had the opportunity to collaborate on a national team project. We had never worked together professionally and we had a few challenges; but we overcame them. We worked on this project outwith our normal day jobs. It was good to have new experiences and try different ways of working.

**Steve:** What changed in you and what was the personal benefit?

**Gavin:** Before the course I never really believed myself fully. I do lack confidence and that is where the three coaching sessions really helped me. They helped me tremendously. Getting that confidence from the workshops and the coaching gave me the belief to stand up at the final conference and present our team project. At the beginning I said there was no chance I would be doing that. That is not the thing I like doing. It is completely out of my comfort zone. Now I don’t mind standing up presenting to people it doesn’t bother me any more. One of the challenges I was set in the coaching session was to go away and speak to my boss Vince McNulty and his boss Ann Davie, the Deputy Chief Executive. To find out about me from their perspective and that is what I did. I was taken aback by the comments from Ann. She knew me and



she knew me quite well. She was aware of all the work I've been doing for the last two years. She told me I demonstrated the leadership skills to move about the council in different leadership roles, not just ICT (Information and Communication Technology). And that's what is now happening. I now look after several new Service Areas. My staff responsibilities have moved from 24 a year ago to now around 170.

**Steve:** What do you think has been the value to your organisation?

**Gavin:** I've gained more self belief and it's now obvious that people also believe in me. My leadership skills are now being deployed across different service areas which is good for me and I believe good for the council. It's made me realise I don't just need to be managing in ICT. It's the difference between leading and managing. I can now lead different service areas where I have no specific expertise. I used to have two support teams reporting to me in ICT. I now also look after internal shared services, covering part social services, school payments, the revenue and benefits team, universal credit, Scottish welfare fund, rents and rates and much more. I also now have responsibility for the ombudsman handling complaints that come into the council.



**Steve:** How is your job satisfaction and motivation now?

**Gavin:** I've always wanted more but I've held myself back. My motivation now is to continually learn. Now I'm flying and fulfilling my potential. And providing even better customer service.

**Steve:** What would you say to somebody applying for this programme?

**Gavin:** I would tell them to go for it; definitely. It's about the workshops, the project the connections and the network that you built throughout the programme. I'm now collaborating with people in other councils and government organisations, sharing our challenges and experience, helping and supporting each other. Other leadership courses I have been on just haven't been as in-depth as the workshops and coaching on this program. Internal management courses can give you some of the foundations but not the in-depth progress that I've made on Top Talent. This programme is also for people in any leadership role. For example, in my cohort we had a procurement manager and a PMO project leader. Most people there were from ICT but that was because it was a Socitm programme. But the programme covers all aspects of leadership and is relevant for everybody.

**Right:** Roundtable discussion with guest speaker Colin Cook, Director Digital, Scottish Government.



## Interview with Gavin's Manager, Vince:

**Steve:** Vince, what was it that made you recommend this programme and support Gavin's application?



**Vince:** I was aware of the programme before from another employee who attended the year before who had had a very positive experience as well. Gavin has done the basic internal management training and I felt the time was right for him to develop his leadership skills even further. Gavin Haire showed for some time he has leadership potential. He has all the attributes. He just needed some mentoring and confidence building to help in progress and take the next step forward.

**Steve:** What changes did you notice in Gavin during and after the program?

**Vince:** The biggest change in Gavin is the confidence in his own ability. I've recognised his potential for years, but he needed that self belief. I've also noticed how much better he deals with people in difficult situations.

Gavin leads by example and is also more assertive when needed. He has a really good way of dealing with people in difficult management situations. He is now stepping up to the plate and has become a lot more comfortable and confident.

**Steve:** What is the value to the council of sending Gavin on this leadership program?

**Vince:** Council money is tight and we have limited resources. At many councils, technical courses often get a higher priority especially for ICT staff. This training program has been excellent value for money. To get this level of training, mentoring and coaching and support can be very expensive. The main thing in our council is a focus we have on developing all people. We focus a lot on succession planning and look for people like Gavin to take on those more senior leadership roles. The council recognises this through our workforce planning strategy. We want to develop those people and give them the opportunities to step up. In the review from audit Scotland we have now become an exemplar council in our workforce planning. It's recognised that in public sector we need to invest more in our people. People want to work for a leader they respect. You want people to want to go that extra yard. People at senior levels in the organisation need to look after their staff, invest in them and keep them motivated in what are very challenging times. The overall morale in the public sector because of the cuts and the challenges can easily go very low. We recognise that keeping people engaged and valued through difficult times requires leaders of the calibre of Gavin and his colleague Simon Rear, who went through the same programme last year.

**Steve:** What would you say to other managers considering this?

**Vince:** The programme is well proven. It's got a track record of helping develop leaders in the public sector in Scotland. It has highly experienced trainers and coaches, such as yourself, delivering the program. It was excellent value for money. So far all I've heard is very positive comments. All you can do if you haven't been yourself is to listen to the feedback of others. I've noticed the significant impact they bring back to the workplace for their colleagues and their teams.

**Right:** *The Top Talent Scotland cohort from 2017, Gavin is far left and Steve far right.*

