

THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE **research**

THE MOST TRUSTED SOURCE ON BECOMING A BETTER LEADER

TITLE Once Upon a Time in Leadership: Inspiring a Vision through Storytelling

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OBJECTIVE The purpose of this study was to determine if storytelling is an effective method for inspiring a shared vision.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in three phases. The first was administering the LPI-Observer to the target population (employees of the Department of Public Social Services of Riverside County from rank-and-file to supervisor to manager level). Of 88 people contact, 49 agreed to participate (56% response rate). The second phase consisted of 10 interviews with a sub-sample of the respondents. The third phase was an interview with a key informant (the DPSS Director).

KEY FINDINGS

The most frequently used leadership practice according to the LPI-Observer was Inspiring, followed by Encouraging, Modeling, Enabling and Challenging (although Inspiring was the focus of this study). Responses on Inspiring did not vary across organizational level, nor by age or gender.

The most frequent answer, in interviews, to the question of "How have you been informed as to what the organization's mission is?" was given by seven of the ten respondents with some version of "the words and actions of the Director." Nine of the ten respondents were able to recall stories told by the director that spoke to the mission and values of DPSS.

Responses to the question, "what makes a story memorable?" were mostly related to the humor and emotion found in the story. Most respondents agreed that the stories were memorable because they were personal, and dealt with everyday life.

Respondents believed that they had changed their behaviors to be in line with the values expressed by the director in his stories. "Storytelling," according to the author, "has shown to be effective in inspiring a shared vision thereby changing the actions of the listener" (p. 51).