

# TEACHING A SOCIAL JUSTICE APPROACH TO LEADERSHIP IN LAW SCHOOLS

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*Leadership is critical for social justice. Our law students have the potential to serve as future social justice leaders, building strong organizations and movements to carry out this work. Drawing on both leadership theory and practical examples from clinical legal education, this piece argues for a broad definition of leadership, embracing diversity and encompassing the counter-cultural values of listening and humility. It further proposes a three-dimensional model of social justice leadership, engaging the mind, heart, and spirit, and suggests teaching practices to strengthen each component. The first dimension focuses on cognitive competencies, including substantive mastery of an area of law and relevant interdisciplinary frameworks, as well as strategic thinking and project management skills. The second dimension focuses on emotional intelligence, including both personal and interpersonal competencies with an emphasis on fostering resilience, collaboration, and empathy. The final component focuses on ethics and the development of self-reflective and socially conscious practitioners, as well as energizing the spirit through the cultivation of hope.*

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership is a critical skill for social justice work. Our law students have the potential to serve as future social justice leaders, building strong organizations and movements to carry out this work. However, legal education is a relative newcomer to the study of leadership, and leadership remains an underdeveloped area in law schools, including at the intersection with social justice. As Susan Jones states, “While American leaders—from presidents to members of the U.S. Congress—have been lawyers, legal education has typically given no attention to

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teaching leadership principles and skills.”<sup>1</sup> Deborah Rhode famously lamented, “It is a shameful irony that the occupation that produces the nation’s greatest share of leaders does so little to prepare them for that role.”<sup>2</sup> Over the last decade, these pioneers and others have taken important strides in forging the field of law and leadership.<sup>3</sup> However, critical gaps remain. As Paul Radvany notes, “[T]he vast majority of law students still graduate without any exposure to leadership instruction.”<sup>4</sup> This is in sharp contrast to business schools, which prominently incorporate leadership courses and coaching in their curriculum in response to employer demand.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, while there is a rich literature on leadership in the business setting, research and scholarship on leadership in the legal and social justice context is still at an early stage to which this article hopes to contribute.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Susan R. Jones, *The Case for Leadership Coaching in Law Schools: A New Way to Support Professional Identity Formation*, 48 HOFSTRA L. REV. 659, 661 (2020). See also Deborah L. Rhode, *Preparing Leaders: The Evolution of a Field and the Stresses of Leadership*, 58 SANTA CLARA L. REV. 411, 412 (2018) (“The legal profession [although only .4 percent of the population] has supplied a majority of American presidents, and in recent decades, almost half of Congress. Lawyers occupy leadership roles as governors, state legislators, judges, prosecutors, general counsel, law firm managing partners, and heads of corporate, government, and nonprofit organizations.”).

<sup>2</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, 69 STAN. L. REV. 1603, 1605 (2017). See also ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, DANGEROUS LEADERS: HOW AND WHY LAWYERS MUST BE TAUGHT TO LEAD 4-5 (2018) (pointing to the “deep chasm between what law schools teach lawyers to do and what the world expects of these lawyers who so often become leaders”) and at 15 (“[T]he disturbing reality is that law schools more often than not fail even to offer courses on leadership or to surface leadership concepts and dilemmas in the standard curriculum.”).

<sup>3</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Preparing Leaders*, *supra*, n.1, at 412 (“Most lawyers still receive no formal education in leadership. . . . But what has changed is that legal educators are now starting to do something about it.”); Joan MacLeod Heminway, *Change Leadership and the Law School Curriculum*, 62 SANTA CLARA L. REV. 43, 52 (2022) (“Law schools have begun to address the need for leadership education through professional leadership courses and curricular programs”). Leah Teague, *Modernizing Legal Education through Leadership Development Programs: Equipping Lawyers for Success, Significance and Satisfaction through Service*, 58 WAKE FOREST L. REV. 943, 948 (2023) (“Only within the last decade have law schools addressed the need for intentionality to make students aware of the lawyer’s role in society or attended to developing professional competencies and skills that enable students to work more effectively and achieve more success.”).

<sup>4</sup> Paul Radvany, *Experiential Leadership: Teaching Collaboration through a Shared Leadership Model*, 27 CLINICAL L. REV. 309, 309 (2021). See also Martin H. Brinkley, *Teaching Leadership in American Law Schools: Why the Pushback?* 73 BAYLOR L. REV. 194, 196 (2021) (“[W]ith a few rare exceptions, law schools do little to help students become the leaders they want to be or that the world needs.”).

<sup>5</sup> Susan Hanley Duncan, *Reviewing Law School Leadership Programs: What Can Business Schools and Social Science Researchers Teach Us?* 76 BAYLOR L. REV. 63, 64 (2024); Susan R. Jones, *supra*, n.1, at 660; Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 311; ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 5.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1665 (“Leadership needs to be a much higher priority not only in law school curricula but also on research agendas. Relatively little academic attention centers on leadership for lawyers, and the field in general is underdeveloped.”); Leah Teague, *Making Progress in Legal Education: Leadership*

At the same time, law clinics focus on developing many capacities that are important for leadership. The collaborative nature of law clinics and their focus on reflection provides the potential for them to serve as “important leadership incubators.”<sup>7</sup> Our Human Rights Clinic, for instance, works with students on a number of skills essential to leadership, including “organization and management, collaboration and teamwork, leadership and creativity, research skills, legal analysis and writing, communication skills and oral advocacy, interviewing and relationship-building with partners, self-reflection and cultural competency, and professionalism.”<sup>8</sup> However, clinics often do not explicitly discuss leadership or engage with the relevant theories.<sup>9</sup>

This article posits that programs focused on social justice lawyering would benefit from the leadership literature, while lessons from clinical teaching can, in turn, contribute to this literature. Law clinics provide a wealth of practical experience for strengthening core leadership competencies. Through this article, I delve into scholarship and practical guides on leadership, identifying insights related to social justice work. While using a social justice frame, this article engages with a variety of perspectives and seeks wisdom from diverse sources, including both the non-profit and business worlds, as well as pioneers in law and leadership. The article then connects core leadership concepts with concrete examples of leadership development from the law clinic setting. Moreover, the article provides an opportunity for self-reflection on leadership techniques with which our Human Rights Clinic is currently experimenting.

This article aims to set out a vision for social justice leadership. Part I seeks to define social justice leadership, arguing for a broad definition that embraces diversity and the counter-cultural values of listening and humility. Part II then proposes a three-dimensional model for developing social justice leadership, engaging the mind, heart, and spirit. It further suggests teaching practices to strengthen each component. The first dimension focuses on cognitive competencies, including substantive mastery of an area of law and relevant interdisciplinary frameworks,

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*Development Training in Law Schools*, 73 BAYLOR L. REV. 1, 5-6 (2021) (“Articles and symposia focused on the subject of lawyer-leadership were few and sporadic until a small group met at a 2016 American Association of Law School breakfast hosted by Baylor Law School and Stanford Law School.”).

<sup>7</sup> Susan R. Jones, *supra*, n.1, at 673. Paul Radvany likewise highlights, “The clinic is an ideal setting to teach leadership because so much of the work is accomplished by teams in a collaborative manner” and “requires self-awareness and reflection.” Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 325.

<sup>8</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC <https://www.law.miami.edu/academics/clinics/human-rights-clinic> (last visited January 28, 2026).

<sup>9</sup> See ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 154 (noting that law clinics “miss the mark” in not connecting skills taught with leadership skills).

as well as strategic thinking and project management skills. The second dimension focuses on emotional intelligence, including both personal and social competencies with an emphasis on fostering resilience, collaboration, and empathy. The final component focuses on ethics and the development of self-reflective and socially conscious practitioners, as well as energizing the spirit through the cultivation of hope.

## I. DEFINING SOCIAL JUSTICE LEADERSHIP

While there is no consensus as to the definition of leadership,<sup>10</sup> the leadership literature highlights the ability to inspire and guide others in creating change and achieving a common objective.<sup>11</sup> Leadership at its core is collaborative, recognizing that one person alone can accomplish little<sup>12</sup> and directed towards a larger community or organizational goal.<sup>13</sup> In the popular imagination, leadership is all too often conflated with hierarchy,<sup>14</sup> and some social justice models express skepticism of leadership, reflecting an understandable backlash to authoritarian models. However, this article argues that social justice leadership is not primarily about hierarchy. Rather, it centers on collaboration and achieving joint goals, critical to social justice work. Formal position is neither necessary nor sufficient for leadership.<sup>15</sup> As April Mara Barton

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<sup>10</sup> Deborah Rhode relates that leadership has generated “a cottage industry of commentary” and over 1500 definitions. Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1607.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel Goleman, *What Makes a Leader?* 82 HARV. BUS. REV. 82, 85 (2004); JOHN KOTTER, WHAT LEADERS REALLY DO 38 (1999); Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 16; Kenneth Townsend, *Preconditions of Leadership in Law*, 56 WAKE FOREST L. REV. 859, 862 (2021); Susan R. Jones, *supra*, n.1, at 659; Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1607; ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, DANGEROUS LEADERS *supra*, n. 2, at 169-70 (“Effective leadership . . . depends on uniting, inspiring, and moving others toward a greater common goal.”); Donald J. Polden, *Leadership Roundtable Article: Leadership Matters: Lawyers’ Leadership Skills and Competencies*, 52 SANTA CLARA L. REV. 899, 903 (2012); Faith Rivers James, *Engaging Law Students in Leadership*, 30 ST. LOUIS U. PUB. L. REV. 409, 411 (2011).

<sup>12</sup> MICHAEL WATKINS, CRITICAL SUCCESS STRATEGIES FOR NEW LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS: THE FIRST NINETY DAYS 239 (Harvard Business Review Press 2003).

<sup>13</sup> Leah Teague calls for “lawyer-leaders,” who “not only recognize the professional obligation to serve clients and the justice system but also embrace the opportunity to impact individuals, organizations and communities in order to make a positive difference in society.” Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 11.

<sup>14</sup> Artika Tyner & Tisidra Jones, *Inspiring and Equipping the Next Generation of Lawyer-Leaders: Center on Race, Leadership, and Social Justice*, 17 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 1079, 1081 (2022) (“Leadership is often mischaracterized as a position or title.”).

<sup>15</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1607 (“Although popular usage sometimes equates leadership with power or position, most experts view leadership as an activity or relationship that involves influence.”); Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 320 (“Contrary to popular belief, leadership opportunities are not limited to those who serve in traditional positional leadership roles because leadership is increasingly thought of as an influence process.”).

explains, “[T]rue leadership is not authority, nor is it fear based. Instead, true leadership is a mindset that one possesses no matter where one’s place is in an organizational chart.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, there is no single style of effective leadership, and different situations may call for different leadership styles.<sup>17</sup>

Given common myths and misconceptions around leadership, this section of the article seeks to define a social justice vision of leadership rooted in collaboration. It argues that social justice work, focused on advancing human dignity, equality, and rights,<sup>18</sup> requires a broad conception of leadership that encompasses varying personalities, as well as racial and gender diversity. Moreover, it problematizes the conventional image of a dominating, outspoken, and charismatic leader. Rather, social justice works calls for leading from behind, embracing the counter-cultural values of listening and humility, and uplifting others. Part II of the article then builds on this discussion, addressing core competencies needed for leadership and highlighting opportunities to develop them through clinical teaching.

### A. *Leadership by Diverse Personalities*

Too often, American society upholds a narrow view of a specific type of leader, who is extroverted, brash, and loud. As Susan Cain notes, “The extrovert ideal has been documented. Talkative people are rated as smarter, better-looking, more interesting, and more desirable as friends<sup>19</sup>. . . We also see talkers as leaders.”<sup>20</sup> This is amplified in law school with its “gunner” culture<sup>21</sup> and in the legal profession, which likens successful lawyers to legal “sharks” marked by powerful

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<sup>16</sup> April Mara Barton, *Teaching Lawyers to Think Like Leaders: The Next Big Shift in Legal Education*, 73 BAYLOR L. REV. 115, 124 (2021). See also ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 9 (“[L]eadership is not role-specific. Today’s leaders must learn to lead with—and without—formal authority.”).

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Goleman, *supra*, n. 11, at 82 (“[T]he personal styles of superb leaders vary: Some leaders are subdued and analytical; others shout their manifestos from the mountaintops. And just as important, different situations call for different types of leadership.”). See also David E. Snowden & Mary E. Boone, *A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making*, 85 HARV. BUS. REV. 68, 73 (2017) (“Effective leaders learn to shift their decision-making styles to match changing business environments. Simple, complicated, complex, and chaotic contexts each call for different managerial responses.”); Neil W. Hamilton, *Ethical Leadership in Professional Life*, 6 U. ST. THOMAS L.J. 358, 375 (2009) (“[E]ffective leadership is contingent on matching the leader’s style to specific situational variables.”).

<sup>18</sup> See United Nations, *What is Social Justice and How is the UN Helping Make It a Reality?* (Feb. 19, 2025), <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/02/1160301> (last visited January 28, 2026).

<sup>19</sup> SUSAN CAIN, QUIET: THE POWER OF INTROVERTS IN A WORLD THAT CAN’T STOP TALKING 4 (2013).

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 51.

<sup>21</sup> See LawProfBlawg, “What’s a Gunner”? (Dec. 2018), <https://abovethelaw.com/2018/12/whats-a-gunner/>.

aggression.<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Kelly Janus and Dee Smythe describe expanding students' conception of lawyering beyond "the paradigm of the 'Perry Mason' image that many students may imagine as the quintessential lawyer" taking eloquent command of the courtroom.<sup>23</sup> At one organization where I worked, there was even some discussion whether staff who are quiet, hard-working, and conscientious had the right personality to lead!

Law students would benefit from exposure to a broad conception of leadership. One third to one half of our population are introverts who work best in environments with less stimulation, and they can make important contributions when given the freedom to be themselves.<sup>24</sup> Solitude and internal reflection are further fundamental to creativity and deep analysis.<sup>25</sup> Susan Cain refers to "the transcendent power of solitude" as a "crucial ingredient" for deep thought and creativity.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, introverts bring particular strengths as leaders. According to Susan Cain, "Because of their inclination to listen to others and lack of interest in dominating social situations, introverts are more likely to hear and implement suggestions. They are then likely to motivate their followers to be even more proactive, creating a virtuous circle of proactivity."<sup>27</sup> Moreover, they "tend to think and feel deeply about what they've noticed and to bring an extra degree of nuance to everyday experiences."<sup>28</sup> In fact, despite prevailing leadership stereotypes in the United States (U.S.), high performing companies often have CEOs with quiet personalities.<sup>29</sup>

While our current culture celebrates extroverts, we need both types of leaders, who bring complementary strengths. Extroverts also bring important leadership capacities, including performing well under time and social pressure and handling information overload.<sup>30</sup> Susan Cain thus concludes that good leadership teams consist of "a healthy mix of

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<sup>22</sup> See Casey C. Sullivan, "Shark Week: A Brief History of the Lawyer as Shark" (Mar. 2019), <https://www.findlaw.com/legalblogs/strategist/shark-week-a-brief-history-of-the-lawyer-as-shark/#:~:text=The%20idea%20of%20the%20shark%20lawyer%20stems%20from%20the%20idea,definitely%20prefer%20the%20later%20interpretation.>

<sup>23</sup> Kathleen Kelly Janus & Dee Smythe, *Navigating Culture in the Field: Cultural Competency Training Lessons from the International Human Rights Clinic*, 56 NYS L. REV. 445, 478 (2012).

<sup>24</sup> Susan Cain, *The Power of Introverts* (Ted Talk 2012), [https://www.ted.com/talks/susan\\_cain\\_the\\_power\\_of\\_introverts](https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts).

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* Cain explains that "[i]t's only when you're alone that you can engage in 'deliberate practice,' a key to exceptional achievement." SUSAN CAIN, QUIET *supra*, n. 19, at 57.

<sup>27</sup> SUSAN CAIN, QUIET, *id.*, at 57.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.*, at 103.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*, at 55.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*, at 168.

introverts and extroverts.”<sup>31</sup> Balance calls for both “bold and easy FDRs and sensitive and conscientious Eleanor Roosevelts.”<sup>32</sup>

### B. Diversity in Leadership

Moreover, there is a gender and race dimension to social narratives about leadership. Prevailing notions of leaders are “overwhelmingly white and male.”<sup>33</sup> White men enjoy a presumption of competence not conferred on women or on people of other racial groups,<sup>34</sup> and both men and women more readily recognize leadership ability in men.<sup>35</sup> Bias further plagues assessments of women and lawyers of color.<sup>36</sup> Women are criticized as either “too soft” or “too strident,” and a study of performance reviews found that three-quarters of criticisms for being “too aggressive” related to evaluations of women.<sup>37</sup>

These biased conceptions cause us to miss out on talent and on the contributions of diversity to leadership. In fact, a McKinsey study points to a correlation between greater diversity and efficacy, with companies with greater racial/ethnic and gender diversity more likely to have above average financial returns and companies with less racial/ethnic and gender diversity less likely to have above average financial returns.<sup>38</sup> The study further found an increase in earnings for every 10% increase in racial/ethnic diversity on executive teams for U.S. companies.<sup>39</sup> As Anthony Tjan notes, “The best teams are rarely made up of similar types. On the contrary, they are composed of a diversity of excellence.”<sup>40</sup> Diverse organizations are not only more effective, but employees experience greater job satisfaction and motivation, resulting in lower turnover.<sup>41</sup> Diverse teams bring a variety of perspectives and

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<sup>31</sup> *Id.*, at 93.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*, at 154. In a funny anecdote, she recalls going to a weekend gathering of introverts and finding it utterly lacking in energy and connection. *Id.* at 153-154.

<sup>33</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 152.

<sup>34</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law, supra*, n. 2, at 1649.

<sup>35</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law, id.*, at 1650.

<sup>36</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law, id.*, at 1643.

<sup>37</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law, id.*, at 1651. Women thus struggle with striking “the right balance between being too assertive and not being assertive enough. Experts suggest being ‘relentlessly pleasant’ without backing down. Strategies include expressing appreciation and concern, invoking common interests, emphasizing others’ goals as well as one’s own, and taking a problem-solving rather than a critical stance.” *Id.* at 1660.

<sup>38</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 24.; Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 329.

<sup>39</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 24-25.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony K. Tjan, *How Leaders Become Self-Aware*, HARV. BUS. REV. (Jul. 19, 2012), <https://hbr.org/2012/07/how-leaders-become-self-aware>. See also MICHELLE DESTEFANO, THE LEADER UPEHAVAL HANDBOOK 22 (2023) (“[I]t is essential to consider how you can multiply the diversity on the teams—which is one of the key ingredients to creative, collaborative problem solving”).

<sup>41</sup> Leah Teague, *Making Progress, supra*, n. 6, at 27.

experiences that enrich understanding and enable a robust exchange, challenging conventional thinking and leading to innovation and better outcomes.<sup>42</sup> Given our increasingly global work environment, it is particularly valuable for leadership to draw on different backgrounds and cultures.<sup>43</sup> Recognizing this, the American Bar Association (ABA) Presidential Initiative Commission on Diversity concluded, “It makes good business sense to hire lawyers who reflect the diversity of citizens, clients, and customers from around the globe.”<sup>44</sup>

However, the legal profession is unfortunately one of the least diverse.<sup>45</sup> African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans make up about a third of the population, but only a fifth of law school graduates. They further constitute only 7% of law firm partners and 9% of general counsels of large corporations.<sup>46</sup> While women make up over a third of the legal profession, they constitute only 18% of law firm partners and 24% of general counsels of Fortune 500 corporations. Studies further find that men are two to five times more likely to make partner than women, even after controlling for time spent out of the workforce or part-time schedules.<sup>47</sup> In the nonprofit sector, while women make up the overwhelming majority of employees at 75%, only 42% of boards are led by women, and only 22% of nonprofits are run by female executive directors or CEOs. For nonprofit organizations with incomes of \$25 million or more, the percentage of female led boards further drops to 33%.<sup>48</sup> Bias in leadership is also self-perpetuating as individuals

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<sup>42</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 10-11, 31, 52-53, 135-137, 141-142. *See also id.* at 52-53 (“When the team must explain or defend choices—and ultimately convince naysayers or be convinced by them—the results tend to be more thoughtful and defensible.” Thus, “[t]he tension from healthy disagreement leads to better outcomes.”); Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 27 (characterizing diverse teams as “more innovative because people with different lifestyles and backgrounds challenge each other more leading to deep inquiry and breakthroughs” and noting that “the quality of decision making improves” “because working with many people who are different challenges the brain to overcome stale ways of thinking”).

<sup>43</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 25, 37 (Wide-ranging and sometimes competing experiences, viewpoints, and approaches enhance a leader’s ability to recognize and understand differences at work in the world better.)

<sup>44</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1658.

<sup>45</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *id.*, at 1645 (“According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the law is one of the nation’s least diverse professions; medicine, accounting, academia, and others do considerably better.”). *See also* Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 25 (“[I]t is . . . shameful that the profession whose members are hired to fight for the rights of the marginalized is itself woefully behind in creating an inclusive environment with sufficiently diverse members to represent clients.”).

<sup>46</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 25.

<sup>47</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1645. *See also id.* at 1645-46 (“Even women who never reduce their labor force participation and work long hours have a lower chance of partnership than similarly situated men.”).

<sup>48</sup> Nicole Froio, *Women Run Less Than 25% of Nonprofits: How Organizations Can Change That*, Triple Pundit (Aug. 2, 2024), <https://www.triplepundit.com/story/2024/Nonprofits-leadership-gender-gap/807641>.

generally favor members of their own groups and provide mentorship and opportunities to people like them.<sup>49</sup> In an ABA survey, 62% of women of color, compared with 4% of white men, reported isolation and exclusion from networking.<sup>50</sup> Anthony Thompson laments, “Law schools funnel high numbers of White men into the workplace and leadership roles in the profession without helping them develop an appreciation for and understanding of the value of difference.”<sup>51</sup> It is time for this to change.

Law clinics bring particular lessons and expertise in developing diversity in leadership. Cultural competency, enabling effective interaction with diversity, is a key area that many law clinics teach. Our Human Rights Clinic teaches both a class on cross-cultural and ethical competencies, as well as a class on oppressions and privileges. In the class on cultural-cultural and ethical competencies, students explore the considerations and challenges of advocating in socially, culturally, and economically unfamiliar environments, as well as classic colonial critiques of the human rights movement and recommendations for addressing them.<sup>52</sup> The class further emphasizes that “all lawyering is cross-cultural,”<sup>53</sup> whether it takes place globally, nationally, or locally. Fundamental to cultural competency is an understanding of one’s own biases and positionality.<sup>54</sup> This includes privileges and oppressions; and in the class on this topic, students are encouraged to take the Race, Skin Tone, and Sexuality Harvard Implicit Association Test (IAT);<sup>55</sup> they further participate in an exercise where they step forward or backward, depending on whether a statement applies to them, and learn about their background in relation to their classmates.<sup>56</sup> They are also introduced to

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<sup>49</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1652; Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 329; Saleem Reshamwala, *Check Our Bias to Wreck Our Bias*, N.Y. TIMES, (Dec. 16, 2016), <https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000004818668/check-our-bias-to-wreck-our-bias.html?playlistId=100000004821064> (“[W]e tend to help people who are similar to us.”).

<sup>50</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1653.

<sup>51</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 25.

<sup>52</sup> Readings include Makau Mutua, *Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights*, 42 HARV. INT’L L.J. 201 (2001); Caroline Bettinger-López, et. al., *Redefining Human Rights Lawyering through the Lens of Critical Theory: Lessons for Pedagogy and Practice*, 18 GEO. J. POVERTY L. & POL’Y 337 (2011); NEW WAVE FEMINISM, *Indian Feminists/Activists Respond to Harvard Kids Attempting to Help the Less Fortunate ‘Third World’ Feminists* (Feb. 25, 2013), <https://newwavefeminism.tumblr.com/post/44025968229/thepeoplesrecord-indian-feministsactivists>; Sunil Bhatia, *Op-Ed: Nicholas Kristof and the Politics of Writing about Women’s Oppression in Darker Nations*, THE FEMINIST WIRE (Mar. 3, 2013), <https://www.thefeministwire.com/2013/03/op-ed-nicholas-kristof-and-the-politics-of-writing-about-womens-oppression-in-darker-nations/>.

<sup>53</sup> Sue Bryant & Jean Koh Peters, *Five Habits of Cross-Cultural Lawyering*, at 3, in RACE, CULTURE, PSYCHOLOGY & LAW (Kimberly Barrett & William George eds., 2005).

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> This is available at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/selectatest.html>.

<sup>56</sup> This is an exercise adapted from the Privilege Walk Exercise by ARROW. ARROW, *InterSEXionality: A Facilitator’s Guide*, 16-17, <https://arrow.org.my/publication/intersexionality-a-facilitators-guide/>.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s powerful Ted Talk on “The Danger of a Single Story,” a story that stereotypes people and takes away their complexity and humanity.<sup>57</sup>

### C. Counter-Cultural Leadership

Additionally, crucial for social justice leadership are the virtues of listening, humility, and uplifting others, which counter the traditional law school “gunner” culture and its focus on one’s own eloquence,<sup>58</sup> as well as on more authoritarian models of leadership. Drawing on her experience as Chief Operating Officer of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg emphasizes, “The ability to listen is as important as the ability to speak.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, effective listening requires suspending judgment to understand, rather than to critique or convince.<sup>60</sup> It entails deep listening that goes beyond the words to the emotions beneath them.<sup>61</sup> Leah Teague discusses “the importance of listening with empathy to understand and not just hear.”<sup>62</sup> She considers listening’s primary goal “to see and feel as another.”<sup>63</sup> Michelle Destefano describes listening “with an Open Heart” to practice “the true meaning of empathy . . . understanding that helping isn’t fixing.”<sup>64</sup> This type of listening is a sign of respect and the key to relationship-building.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story* (Ted Talk 2009), [https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en#t-207290](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en#t-207290).

<sup>58</sup> See LawProfBlawg, *supra*, n. 21.

<sup>59</sup> SHERYL SANDBERG, LEAN IN: WOMEN, WORK AND THE WILL TO LEAD 81 (2013). See also Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 316 (Leaders “must also listen effectively—not only to the words that are spoken, but to the underlying emotion and motivation of what is said. This is important not only to make other group members feel heard and respected, but because it will lead to better decisions.”).

<sup>60</sup> Mark Weisberg & Jean Koh Peters, *Experiments in Listening*, N.Y.L. SCHOOL CLINICAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE, Research Paper Series No. 04/05 #5, 19 (2005). Mark Weisberg and Jean Koh Peters describe how “[m]ost of the time, when someone else is talking, we either tune out or are so busy formulating our own responses to what she’s saying that we don’t listen to her. Our heads are too full of noise to be able to hear.” *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> Garry Jenkins describes “listening at multiple levels,” including “surface listening (i.e., listening to the words), issues-based listening (i.e., paying attention to the underlying message and its implications), and emotions-based listening (i.e., paying attention to the agenda, emotion, motivation, and values at work).” Garry W. Jenkins, *Educating Lawyer-Leaders: The Mechanics and Artistry of Case Study Teaching and Discussion Leadership*, 83 TENN. L. REV. 729, 744 (2016).

<sup>62</sup> Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 30.

<sup>63</sup> Leah Teague, *Making*, *id.*, at 30.

<sup>64</sup> MICHELLE DESTEFANO, *supra*, n. 40, at 39 (2023).

<sup>65</sup> See David Brooks & Thomas Friedman, *Thomas L. Friedman Says We’re in a New Epoch. David Brooks Has Questions*, N.Y. TIMES (Dec. 12, 2025), <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/12/opinion/tom-friedman-david-brooks-polycene.html> (noting that “deep listening” conveys respect and “unlocks a conversation”).

In our Human Rights Clinic, we try to complement the emphasis in law school on public speaking with a focus on listening. For instance, in our class on interviewing skills, we stress that it is more important to be a good listener than to formulate eloquent questions; and we assign articles on good listening for this class, as well as for a class on mindfulness and the law.<sup>66</sup> In our clinic seminar, we have held a class on “courageous listening” in collaboration with a documentary filmmaker, Juliana Tafur. This class centers around Tafur’s film, LIST(e)N Courageously, which brings together individuals with opposing viewpoints on the hot button issues of gun reform, abortion, and immigration. The film explores the power of listening deeply and without judgment or agenda to opposing views.<sup>67</sup> Particularly in our increasingly polarized reality,<sup>68</sup> this is an important lesson for students.

Humility is likewise a key component of leadership. Clayton Christensen advises, “If you have a humble eagerness to learn something from everybody, your learning opportunities will be unlimited.”<sup>69</sup> In fact, a study of the highest performing countries revealed CEOs with “unassuming personalities. They were described as quiet, modest, reserved, shy, gracious, mild-mannered, self-effacing, and understated.”<sup>70</sup> Humility further links to conscientiousness and attention to detail.<sup>71</sup> Jim Collins identifies humility as a crucial trait of the “highest-performing executives who create extraordinary results over long periods.”<sup>72</sup> They are open to new ideas and feedback and provide credit and recognition to others, motivating them.<sup>73</sup> The Chinese philosopher, Lao Tse, went

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<sup>66</sup> Matthew McKay et al., *Messages: The Communication Process*, NEW HARBINGER PUBLICATIONS, 123–25 (1995); Scott Rogers & Arvey Rogers, *Mindfulness and Medicine: The Healing Capacity of Genuine Listening*, 3 ACG MAGAZINE 35-36 (Spring 2019), <https://issuu.com/amcollegegastro/docs/19acgmag-1-issuu>.

<sup>67</sup> For information on the film, see LIST(E)N COURAGEOUSLY, <https://listencourageously.com>. For information on the filmmaker, Juliana Tafur, see COLUMBIA WORLD PROJECTS, *Juliana Tafur*, <https://worldprojects.columbia.edu/node/714>.

<sup>68</sup> See Sabrina Acloque, *How to Build Community in Times of Increased Polarization*, PAINT A NEW WORLD WITH ME (Jan. 20, 2025), <https://www.paintanewworldwithme.com/essays/how-to-build-community-in-times-of-increased-polarization> (“When difficult conversations or conflicts arise – and they will – how will you engage? Will you be listening to understand or listening to make a point? Be intentional about whether you are listening with empathy or are just listening to respond.”).

<sup>69</sup> CLAYTON CHRISTENSEN, *HOW WILL YOU MEASURE YOUR LIFE?*, 12 (Harper Business 2012).

<sup>70</sup> SUSAN CAIN, *QUIET*, *supra*, n. 19, at 55 (2013).

<sup>71</sup> See Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 317 (identifying people worthy of following as having a “strong work ethic, and ensuring they are reliable, available, and responsive to colleagues,” as well as competent and well-prepared).

<sup>72</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1622.

<sup>73</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1622; Anthony C. Thompson, *supra*, n. 2, at 75 (“[T]he lawyer-leader should adopt the practice of sharing credit when things go well and shouldering the blame when things do not.”).

so far as to praise the invisibility of a good leader, stating that when the work of an effective leader is done, “[t]he people all remark, ‘we have done it ourselves.’”<sup>74</sup> While humility is critical to leadership success, it paradoxically does not appear to help in selection for leadership, which too often relies on self-promotion and stereotypes. As Deborah Rhode notes, “Narcissistic individuals are frequently selected for leadership positions because people are attracted to the confidence, charisma, and grandiosity they project.”<sup>75</sup> Education and a broader conception of leadership can hopefully help change this.

For human rights work, strong listening skills, humility, and conscientiousness are crucial, and we strive to make our clinic a counter-cultural space in the law school, where these virtues are celebrated. For instance, we have discussed the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who differs from the type of leader we typically lionize in the U.S. She is old in a country that idealizes youth, and brainy, principled, quiet, and hardworking. As one article remarked, “[T]he diminutive Justice Ginsburg is not the usual vision of authority. Friends and colleagues remark that she is quiet, reserved—not at all what is traditionally thought of as powerful.”<sup>76</sup>

Critically, social justice leadership is not about self-aggrandizement but rather strengthening others. In fact, the true hallmark of social justice leadership is the development of leadership capacities in others. Deborah Rhode points to the importance of “transcend[ing] individual desires in pursuit of common values” in order to make a lasting contribution.<sup>77</sup> This requires “enabling achievement by others”<sup>78</sup> and supporting their professional development.<sup>79</sup> She defines the “ultimate test of leadership” as “not simply what individuals themselves accomplish while holding such positions but rather what they enable others to achieve after they are no

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<sup>74</sup> Lao Tse, *Rulers*, in *THE WISDOM OF LAOTSE* 114 (Lin Yutang trans. & ed., 1948).

<sup>75</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1622. Moreover, Deborah Rhode refers to a “leadership paradox,” where “[i]ndividuals reach top positions because of their high needs for personal achievement. But to perform effectively in these positions, they need to focus on creating the conditions for achievement by others.” *Id.* at 1622.

<sup>76</sup> Melena Ryzik, *Ninja Supreme Court Justice: Ruth Bader Ginsburg Has Fun with Fame*, N.Y. TIMES (May 9, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/09/movies/ruth-bader-ginsburg-rbg-documentary.html?smid=em-share>.

<sup>77</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1665.

<sup>78</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Preparing Leaders*, *supra*, n. 1, at 413-415.

<sup>79</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1665 (2017). See also ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 29 (“The primary role of the servant leader is to delegate responsibilities and then to provide direct support to his or her subordinates to enable their individual growth.”).

longer around.”<sup>80</sup> April Barton similarly connects “true leadership” to “empowering others” and encouraging “their brilliance to shine.”<sup>81</sup> The Rockwood Leadership Institute calls on leaders to “co-power” and “intentionally lift[] up the power of those around us.”<sup>82</sup>

Leadership and facilitating learning and growth thus go hand in hand. Models of social justice leaders in our Human Rights Clinic are students who do not just work and perform well together. Rather, they are the ones who use their diverse strengths to lift each other up, expanding their capacities to be creative and prolific and producing high-quality work that best serves our community partners.<sup>83</sup>

## II. THREE-DIMENSIONAL LEADERSHIP

This section sets out a three-dimensional model for social justice leadership that includes cognitive, emotional, and spiritual competencies. Here, it is important to emphasize that leadership can be developed in each of these dimensions. As Anthony Thompson observes, “Research in the past few decades has debunked the notion that leadership cannot be learned.”<sup>84</sup> Leadership, like other capacities, can be taught, practiced, and improved.<sup>85</sup> In my clinical teaching, I strive to strengthen my students’ leadership in each of the three dimensions, and this section shares practical examples for developing different leadership skills.

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<sup>80</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1665.

<sup>81</sup> April Mara Barton, *supra*, n. 16, at 122.

<sup>82</sup> ROCKWOOD LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE, ART OF LEADERSHIP PARTICIPANT WORKBOOK 4 (2009).

<sup>83</sup> For example, our Housing and Homelessness Team was honored with the CLEA (Clinical Legal Education Association) Outstanding Clinic Team Award. Jeff Baker, *2025 CLEA Awards for Outstanding Clinical and Externship Students*, CLINICAL LAW PROF BLOG (May 16, 2025), [https://lawprofessors.typepad.com/clinic\\_prof/2025/05/2025-clea-awards-for-outstanding-clinical-and-externship-students-miamis-katirina-delviscio-wilmy-de.html](https://lawprofessors.typepad.com/clinic_prof/2025/05/2025-clea-awards-for-outstanding-clinical-and-externship-students-miamis-katirina-delviscio-wilmy-de.html); UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW, *Students Take Top Honors with the Clinical Legal Education Association Award*, (May 28, 2025), <https://news.miami.edu/law/stories/2025/05/students-take-top-honors-with-the-clinical-legal-education-association-award.html>.

<sup>84</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 6. *See also* Deborah L. Rhode, *Preparing Leaders*, *supra*, n.1, at 415 (“Researchers find that the vast majority of leadership skills are acquired, not genetically based.”).

<sup>85</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 136 (defining leadership as “a set of behaviors that can be taught, learned, and practiced”); Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 315 (“Although every leader will have varying levels of proficiency with the many leadership skills and characteristics, every leader has the capacity to improve through training, experience and reflection.”); Donald J. Polden, *supra*, n. 11, at 903 (“[L]eadership, which is really a competency or set of skills and traits, can be learned and practiced by anyone; it is not a status that one is born into. Anyone can be a leader, and leadership is everyone’s business.”).

### A. *The Cognitive Dimension*

The cognitive dimension encompasses mastery of an area of law and legal analysis and persuasion, as well as interdisciplinary frameworks critical for social justice. April Mara Barton captures the mastery of legal analysis well: “Thinking like a lawyer means to possess analytical reasoning skills and to be able to see the issue from all sides. It means being precise with your words, seeing ambiguity, and being able to apply the law to a set of facts.”<sup>86</sup> Interdisciplinary frameworks can also inform analysis and can include history, politics, and economics. In human rights work, an understanding of these frameworks is crucial to connect individual violations to larger social structures and systemic problems that need to be addressed.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to substantive competence, leadership requires strategic thinking and project management. Project management is a crucial leadership skill, which often does not get much fanfare and appreciation. April Mara Barton points out that while a “tendency” exists to view management skills as “mundane,” leaders without them are “frustrating and ineffective.”<sup>88</sup> Effective management is not just procedural but also involves elements of strategizing and conceptualization. Leaders must be able to not just develop but also implement strategies and translate them into concrete action plans. As Deborah Rhode recognizes, “Leaders ultimately will be judged less by their broad visions than by their actual accomplishments.”<sup>89</sup>

In law clinics, students learn these important project management skills. This includes learning how to formulate an action plan and break up large projects into smaller components with deadlines for each.<sup>90</sup> I have found that it works well to have students propose an initial timeline

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<sup>86</sup> April Mara Barton, *supra*, n. 16, at 127. See also Martin H. Brinkley, *supra*, n.4, at 200 (noting that “American law schools have evolved” to lay “primary value on inculcating analytical and rhetorical skills- the ability to reason and argue”).

<sup>87</sup> Sunil Bhatia calls for connecting “victims’ story to the larger structures in which the story is embedded.” Sunil Bhatia, *supra*, n. 52. This entails, for instance, “situating women’s oppression [in particular countries] within a series of intersecting problems that are created by structures of colonialism, corruption, patriarchy, casteism, imperialism, capitalism, lack of education and civil transparency, and absence of law and order.” *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> April Mara Barton, *supra*, n. 16, at 126.

<sup>89</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1634. See also Robert Post, *Leadership in Educational Institutions: Reflections of a Law School Dean*, 69 STAN. L. REV. 1817, 1817 (2017) (“Leaders are judged both by the content of that vision and by their capacity to achieve it.”).

<sup>90</sup> In the context of writing projects, Tonya Kowalski describes a “modular approach” that “lends itself well to a series of smaller, calendared assignments that build toward a whole document, and teaches students to schedule ample time for the planning, outlining, and recursive research and writing phases of the draft process.” Tonya Kowalski, *Toward a Pedagogy for Teaching Legal Writing in Law School Clinics*, 17 CLINICAL L. REV. 285, 341 (2010).

to guide the work, identifying the various project components. I then review the timeline and add any missing steps.<sup>91</sup> This enables students to visualize and plan for the full trajectory of a project. We then revisit the timeline periodically, making adjustments as needed.<sup>92</sup>

Running productive meetings is another important aspect of project management that students can practice in law clinics. Our students, for instance, take turns developing agendas and facilitating meetings or developing minutes with action items from meetings. Thus, each meeting has a clearly articulated purpose, as well as follow up, which can be as important as the meeting itself.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Peter Drucker recounts that General Motors CEO Alfred Sloan's "legendary mastery of meeting follow-up helped secure GM's industry dominance in the mid-twentieth century."<sup>94</sup>

### B. Emotional Intelligence

However, cognitive competencies can only take a leader so far. The second set of leadership competencies focuses on emotional intelligence, or "the ability to recognize and understand emotions in yourself and others, and the ability to use this awareness to manage your behavior and relationships."<sup>95</sup> Emotional intelligence enables leaders to effectively communicate and exert influence.<sup>96</sup> In fact, according to the leadership scholarship, emotional intelligence is twice as important as other skills in effective performance and even more important for higher ranking positions.<sup>97</sup> Daniel Goleman reports that the higher a person's rank, the more emotional intelligence accounted for effectiveness.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Angela Campbell recommends, "The clinician and student should consult and try to establish mutually agreeable deadlines. The clinician may ask the student to propose a schedule, and then review it for reasonableness and feasibility." Angela J. Campbell, *Teaching Advanced Legal Writing in a Law School Clinic*, 24 SETON HALL L. REV. 653, 671 (1993).

<sup>92</sup> Tamar Ezer, *Teaching Written Advocacy in a Law Clinic Setting*, 27 CLINICAL L. REV. 167, 179 (2021).

<sup>93</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *What Makes an Effective Executive?* 82 HARV. BUS. REV. 58, 62-63 (2004).

<sup>94</sup> *Id.*, at 63.

<sup>95</sup> TRAVIS BRADBERRY & JEAN GREAVES, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE 2.0, 17 (2009); ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 138 (Emotional intelligence "has been defined as the ability to recognize and understand emotional information about oneself and others. Emotional intelligence means having awareness of one's own emotions and the emotions of others, and then using that awareness to manage oneself and influence the behavior of others"); Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 346 ("Emotionally intelligent individuals are 'more sensitive about interpersonal differences' and are more effective at knowing and managing their emotions, motivating themselves, recognizing emotions in others and handling relationships.").

<sup>96</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 138.

<sup>97</sup> Daniel Goleman, *supra*, n. 11, at 84.

<sup>98</sup> Daniel Goleman, *id.*, at 84 (further noting that "when senior managers [at one company] had a critical mass of emotional intelligence capabilities, their divisions outperformed yearly earnings goals by 20%").

This points to a gap in conventional legal training, which focuses on developing analytical and cognitive skills, neglecting emotional and interpersonal skills.<sup>99</sup> As April Mara Barton explains, “Lawyers are taught to advocate, to persuade, to analyze, to parse, to spot issues, even to convince others that they are right. These skills, while admirable, do not always align with good leadership; in fact, if not balanced with emotional intelligence, . . . these skills can defy good leadership.”<sup>100</sup> The workplace further reinforces this gap with analytical acumen serving as the basis for recognition and promotion without regard for other leadership qualities.<sup>101</sup> Lawyers thus tend to devalue interpersonal skills as “touch-feely” and “soft” and, in fact, demonstrate lower competence in these areas than the general population.<sup>102</sup> However, these skills are critical and often challenging for lawyers. As Deborah Rhode remarks, “the soft stuff is the hard stuff,”<sup>103</sup> and “[a]ttempting to train leaders without focusing more effectively on interpersonal skills is . . . like trying to teach geology without the rocks.”<sup>104</sup>

As discussed below, emotional intelligence consists of a series of competencies that flow from the personal to the social and from inward-to outward-looking. Critical personal skills for social justice work are the development of self-awareness and resilience. Key components of building resilience include addressing setbacks and trauma and engaging in regular reflection and self-care. Moreover, resilience can be found in community connection, which overlaps with social competencies. Interpersonal skills that are fundamental for social justice work include facility with collaboration and diversity and cultivating empathy.

## 1. *Personal Competencies: A Focus on Resilience*

### a. *Developing Self-Awareness*

The starting point for emotional intelligence on the personal axis is self-awareness, or an “understanding of one’s emotions, strengths, weaknesses, needs, and drives . . . as well as their effect on others.”<sup>105</sup> Leaders need to know themselves before they can lead others, and

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<sup>99</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 11, 22.

<sup>100</sup> April Mara Barton, *supra*, n. 16, at 117.

<sup>101</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 11, 22.

<sup>102</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1637.

<sup>103</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Preparing Leaders*, *supra*, n.1, at 413-414.

<sup>104</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Lawyers as Leaders*, 2010 MICH. ST. L. REV. 413, 422 (2010).

<sup>105</sup> Daniel Goleman, *supra*, n. 11, at 84, 88. See also ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 138 (noting the importance of “knowing your motivations, drives, and idiosyncrasies”). See also Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 356-57; Donald J. Polden, *supra*, n. 11, at 908 (2012) (referring to self-awareness as “the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives as well as their effect on others”).

self-knowledge is the foundation for further development.<sup>106</sup> Leadership scholars even consider self-awareness the most important quality of a leader.<sup>107</sup> According to Anthony Tjan, “The best thing leaders can do to improve their effectiveness is to become more aware of what motivates them and their decision-making,” including their “superpowers” and “kryptonite.”<sup>108</sup> This self-awareness enables leaders to communicate and direct their energies most effectively.<sup>109</sup>

To aid in self-awareness are a plethora of self-assessments.<sup>110</sup> Some of the most popular ones are the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the Dominance, Influence, Steadiness and Conscientiousness (“DiSC”) Model, and the Leadership Circle.<sup>111</sup> As Anthony Tjan explains, “It’s not that such tests are perfect measures or predictors, but they facilitate self-reflection, which leads to better self-awareness.”<sup>112</sup> In our Human Rights Clinic, we have used the *Leadership Wheel and the Wisdom of the Five Directions*, based on a model from the North American Lakota Sioux and their Medicine Wheel. While lacking the depth of some of the other evaluations, this assessment is relatively quick and provides a starting point for discussion of work and communication styles. It focuses on collaboration and emphasizes that none of the “directions” are better than the others. Rather, all are needed to become a sage, and we all have strengths and areas for growth.<sup>113</sup>

#### b. Building Resilience

The second key element on the personal axis of emotional intelligence is self-regulation. This competency enables leaders not just to be aware of their own emotions, but also to manage them and

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<sup>106</sup> Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 356; Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law, supra*, n. 2, at 1611.

<sup>107</sup> Anthony K. Tjan, *supra*, n. 40; Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law, supra*, n. 2, at 1611; Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 356v (“Leaders who possess this type of self-awareness have the ability to recognize their strengths, and just as important, have the capability to identify their weaknesses.”).

<sup>108</sup> Anthony K. Tjan, *supra*, n. 40.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 357.

<sup>110</sup> Mary Walsh Fitzpatrick and Rosemary Queenan identify self-evaluation as the “cornerstone of self-awareness,” providing “the ability to assess one’s strengths and weaknesses realistically.” Mary Walsh Fitzpatrick and Rosemary Queenan, *Professional Identity Formation and its Pedagogy: Professional Identity Formation, Leadership, and Exploration of Self*, 89 UMKC L. REV. 539, 551 (2021).

<sup>111</sup> Susan R. Jones, *supra*, n.1, at 666, n.50.

<sup>112</sup> Anthony K. Tjan, *supra*, n. 40. See also ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 151 (remarking that the MBTI “gives law students a foundation for thinking about themselves as lawyers and as potential leaders in a diverse environment.”).

<sup>113</sup> Available at HIGHLAND CONSULTING GROUP INC., *The Leadership Wheel & The Wisdom of the Five Directions*, [https://d11n7da8rpqbjy.cloudfront.net/askroxi/16801128\\_1612443222140LEADERSHIP\\_WHEEL-ASK\\_ROXI.pdf?kuid=297994e8-80f0-4db0-a74c-ba48a634c332-1769812985&kref=4zJvYVcmd6a4](https://d11n7da8rpqbjy.cloudfront.net/askroxi/16801128_1612443222140LEADERSHIP_WHEEL-ASK_ROXI.pdf?kuid=297994e8-80f0-4db0-a74c-ba48a634c332-1769812985&kref=4zJvYVcmd6a4).

respond in a way that has a positive impact.<sup>114</sup> For social justice work, a critical aspect of self-management is the development of resilience, which enables renewal and continuing effort in the face of struggle.<sup>115</sup> Or, as Dine Coutu describes, resilience requires facing down a difficult reality and building “bridges” to “a fuller, better constructed future.”<sup>116</sup>

As an initial matter, students need to learn to deal with setbacks. Setbacks are inevitable in social justice work. Bill Quigley advises law students interested in social justice, “If you cannot handle chaos, criticism and failure, you are in the wrong business.”<sup>117</sup> The key is a focus on learning. This requires reframing setbacks as “opportunities for growth,” including imagining new possibilities and strengthening strategies or relationships.<sup>118</sup> As Leah Teague notes, “resilience comes from failing with grace and an openness to learning from failure.”<sup>119</sup> A fellow human rights clinician, Gulika Reddy, goes even further and notes that setbacks are only possible when there is progress.<sup>120</sup> Like other leadership qualities, it is possible to build resilience through a set of practices that can be learned and shared,<sup>121</sup> including engaging in reflection, practicing self-care, and connecting to community.

### 1) *Resilience through Reflection*

Engaging in regular reflection is critical in dealing with setbacks and challenges. Michael Watkins calls for going “to the balcony,” or stepping back to see the big picture, to avoid getting “getting too caught up in the emotional dimension of difficult situations.”<sup>122</sup> He advises setting aside a particular time each day, which can be as little as a half hour, for focused time free of disruptions.<sup>123</sup> Bill Quigley notes that the people able to

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<sup>114</sup> Daniel Goleman, *supra*, n. 11, at 88 (defining self-regulation as “the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods”); ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 139; *see also* TRAVIS BRADBERRY & JEAN GREAVES, *supra*, n. 95 at 23, 68-69.

<sup>115</sup> According to Carley Hauk, “Resilience is the ability to get back up after adversity.” Carley Hauk, *How People Learn to Increase their Resilience*, MINDFUL (Mar. 2016), <https://www.mindful.org/how-people-learn-to-increase-their-resilience/>.

<sup>116</sup> Dine Coutu, *How Resilience Works*, 80 HARV. BUS. REV. 46, 50 (2002).

<sup>117</sup> William P. Quigley, *Letter to a Law Student Interested in Social Justice*, 1 DEPAUL J. FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, 7, 25 (2007).

<sup>118</sup> Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 62.

<sup>119</sup> Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *id.*, at 41. Bill Quigley emphasizes, “Failure itself cannot derail advocacy, it is the response to failure that is the challenge.” William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 25.

<sup>120</sup> Gulika Reddy, *Hope as a Human Rights Practice: Cultivating and Sustaining Transformative Hope to Advance Social Change*, 32 CLINICAL L. REV. 199, 232 (2025) (calling for “normalizing setbacks as an integral part of progress”).

<sup>121</sup> Hope Metcalf & Leanne Gale, *Lawyers, Trauma and Resilience*, LOWENSTEIN INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC (Spring 2018) (workshop handout, copy on file with author.)

<sup>122</sup> MICHAEL WATKINS, *supra*, n. 12, at 214.

<sup>123</sup> MICHAEL WATKINS, *id.*

sustainably engage in social justice work are those who make time to reflect “on what they are doing, how they are doing it and what they should be doing differently.”<sup>124</sup> This is the case since “[r]eflection allows the body and mind and spirit to reintegrate. Often, it is in the quiet of reflection that insights have the chance to emerge.”<sup>125</sup>

Clinical pedagogy trains students to be self-reflective practitioners. In our clinic, we aim to create spaces for reflection in both our seminar and supervision meetings. During “Project Rounds,” student teams present on challenging issues with which they are grappling in their projects to the full class and can benefit from the class’s insights and strategizing. We also engage in reflection on the field of human rights. Each student submits a response paper for a particular class, reflecting on the seminar readings and engaging with them on both analytical and personal levels. The rest of the class posts “Quick Takes,” or quick and quirky comments on the readings in the form of a text to a friend or social media post. These responses then enrich class discussion of complex human rights issues. Additionally, throughout the seminar, students have the opportunity to present and engage the class on a current event and human rights issue of interest to them.

## 2) *Addressing Trauma*

In addition to dealing with challenges in social justice work, lawyers will encounter trauma and may experience it vicariously. As Hope Metcalf explains, “to stand and fight alongside people who have experienced violence—in its many forms—is to be forever changed.”<sup>126</sup> She points out that engaging in social justice work is “to align one’s life with people who are ignored, hated, disappeared” and “to have a constant reminder about society’s darkest impulses.”<sup>127</sup> Mental health is a particularly serious concern in the human rights field, where advocates often experience elevated levels of vicarious trauma and burnout.<sup>128</sup> It is important to recognize this openly and develop techniques for resilience.

However, it was not until I had the opportunity to teach in Yale Law School’s Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic that I encountered my first class on trauma and resilience, taught by my

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<sup>124</sup> William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 24.

<sup>125</sup> William P. Quigley, *id.*

<sup>126</sup> THE ARTHUR LIMAN CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEREST LAW, *Liman Center Report 21* (Fall 2017) (remarks of Hope Metcalf), [https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/liman/2017\\_liman\\_report-final-2.pdf](https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/center/liman/2017_liman_report-final-2.pdf) (last visited February 5, 2026).

<sup>127</sup> *Id.*

<sup>128</sup> Margaret Satterthwaite, *From a “Culture of Unwellness” to Sustainable Advocacy: Organizational Responses to Mental Health Risks in the Human Rights Field*, 28(3) *REVIEW OF LAW AND SOCIAL JUSTICE* 443, 447-448 (2019).

colleague, Hope Metcalf. At that point, I had already been a human rights advocate for a decade, but had never been introduced to these concepts. Even just identifying vicarious trauma and having a discussion about it in class was revolutionary in a field that has traditionally ignored it.<sup>129</sup> In a study, “[a]dvocates described interlinked cultures of *martyrdom*, in which the human rights field fosters a view among advocates that they should sacrifice themselves for others and the work; a *savior or hero mentality*, in which advocates view themselves as capable of and duty-bound to ‘save’ others; and a *cowboy attitude*, where ‘toughness’ and risk-taking are celebrated.”<sup>130</sup> Even Metcalf writes of her late arrival to addressing vicarious trauma: “It took me more than a decade to ask myself these questions. Before then, like so many public interest lawyers and students, I choked down my own sadness and doubts.”<sup>131</sup>

Law clinics can play a crucial role in helping students develop resilience and deal with vicarious trauma integral to social justice work. I found the material in Hope’s class so critical that I arranged for her to guest lecture on trauma and resilience to all the Miami Law clinics; and in our Human Rights Clinic, we regularly incorporate a class on this topic.<sup>132</sup> During the last few years, we have also invited a psychologist with expertise in this area to help lead the class discussion and share available resources at the university.

### 3) *Resilience through Self-Care*

Self-care is further critical to developing resilience. In fact, engaging in self-care should be considered part of advocacy. As Mental Health America recognizes, advocacy can be “emotionally exhausting,” and advocating for others requires taking care of yourself.<sup>133</sup> Self-care involves a physical dimension, including adequate rest, nutrition, and movement, as well as a psychological dimension, including opportunities for reflection, connection, and activities of interest unrelated to work.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> *Id.* at 448 (noting that “inadequate attention has been paid across the field generally to well-being” and “the human rights field generally has responded poorly to well-being risks”).

<sup>130</sup> Margaret Satterthwaite, *Id.* at 449.

<sup>131</sup> Hope Metcalf, *supra*, n. 126, at 21.

<sup>132</sup> Readings in this class include Hope Metcalf, *id.*, and Hope Metcalf & Leanne Gale, *supra*, n. 121.

<sup>133</sup> MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA, *Taking care of yourself while advocating for others*, <https://mhanational.org/resources/taking-care-of-yourself-while-advocating-for-others/>. See also Hope Metcalf & Leanne Gale, *supra*, n. 121 (urging advocates to “[r]ecommit to good habits (food, sleep, movement, friendship), especially during times of stress, as part of your professional obligations”).

<sup>134</sup> Self-Care Assessment Worksheet, available at [https://www.andrews.edu/services/ctcenter/prevention/self-care\\_ax\\_worksheet.pdf](https://www.andrews.edu/services/ctcenter/prevention/self-care_ax_worksheet.pdf), from KAREN W. SAAKVITNE AND LAURIE A. PEARLMAN, *TRANSFORMING THE PAIN: A WORKBOOK ON VICARIOUS TRAUMATIZATION* (Norton 1996) and Catherine Nugent, *Replenish the Well: An Experience in Self-Care*, a workshop

One potential self-care practice is mindfulness. According to a study, “Mindful people . . . can better cope with difficult thoughts and emotions without becoming overwhelmed or shutting down (emotionally).”<sup>135</sup> As Carley Hauk explains, mindfulness enables us to “see the bigger picture with calmness and clarity” and “offer compassion for the hardship we are experiencing.”<sup>136</sup>

Our class on trauma and resilience directly addresses the need for self-care. Students complete a Self-Care Assessment Worksheet,<sup>137</sup> where they identify helpful activities they are already doing and select three to five new activities that they think would be beneficial and manageable. We then discuss these self-care goals in class.

We further regularly include a class on mindfulness led by my colleague, Scott Rogers, who brings expertise in mindfulness and the law. We schedule this class towards the end of the fall semester when both clinical project and law school demands are at their height.<sup>138</sup> Students love this class, which provides them with an opportunity to recenter and catch their breath, as well as practical exercises they can use in managing emotions and stress. This class also provides an opportunity to identify and release negative emotions as a collective, which can strengthen future efforts.

#### 4) *Resilience through Community Connection*

Vital to building resilience is community connection<sup>139</sup> and the social competencies discussed below. The personal and interpersonal are fundamentally interlinked. When at the Open Society Public Health Program, we had a “Lawyering on the Margins” initiative, which brought together lawyers from around the world, working with, LGBTQ+ populations, sex workers, and people who use drugs, who often face tremendous abuse and trauma.<sup>140</sup> Lawyers working with these groups must contend with the overwhelming legal and social challenges facing their clients, while they themselves are often marginalized in their profession. Coming together and meeting other lawyers like them was powerful. Many credited these meetings with energizing them and

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at *Peer Services: A Life in the Community for Everyone*, FIFTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION, CENTER FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE TREATMENT’S RECOVERY COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAM, (Jul. 13, 2004).

<sup>135</sup> Carley Hauk, *supra*, n. 115.

<sup>136</sup> Carley Hauk, *supra*, n. 115.

<sup>137</sup> Self-Care Assessment Worksheet, *supra* n. 134.

<sup>138</sup> See Scott Rogers, *What Do We Want? Mindfulness in Law*, LA. BAR J. (2015).

<sup>139</sup> In her tips on resilience, Hope Metcalf advises, “Foster a caring community.” Hope Metcalf & Leanne Gale, *supra*, n. 121.

<sup>140</sup> OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS, *Q&A: Lawyers on the Margins Find Creative Ways to Help Their Clients—and Each Other* (2017), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/qa-lawyers-margins-find-creative-ways-help-their-clients-and-each-other>.

preventing burnout. I have likewise been inspired and strengthened by my connection with these lawyers, as well as by the community groups with whom I have the privilege of working. Seeing the courage and hope of these community advocates and then being able to support their work is deeply satisfying. As Bill Quigley observes, “It may seem paradoxical, but it is absolutely true that in the exact same places where injustices are found, joy, hope, inspiration and love are found.”<sup>141</sup> Hope Metcalf likewise points to clients and partners as a source of strength and resilience, noting that “just as our empathic responses mimic others’ pain, so, too, can we mirror others’ strength.”<sup>142</sup> The key is to view our clients and partners as “not just the sum of their problems,” but as “whole people” with stories of “strength, resourcefulness, and recovery.”<sup>143</sup> As Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie urges in the “The Danger of a Single Story,” we need to see people in their full complexity and humanity.<sup>144</sup>

Clinics provide important opportunities for community connection. In addition to work with partners, we aim to connect our students with broader social movements and encourage them to see their legal work as just one piece in multidimensional advocacy on an issue.<sup>145</sup> Furthermore, as with many law clinics, we strive for our Human Rights Clinic to be more than just a class, but also a supportive community. Students develop relationships through working together that continue past the clinic and remark on the importance of these connections and the community built through clinic work.<sup>146</sup>

## 2. *Social Competencies: A Focus on Collaboration and Empathy*

This takes us to the second axis of emotional intelligence focused on social competence. Just like self-awareness is the first element of personal competence, social awareness is the first component of social competence. It refers to “the ability to understand other people’s moods, behavior and motives.”<sup>147</sup> This closely links to the second element of social competence—relationship management,

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<sup>141</sup> William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 26.

<sup>142</sup> Hope Metcalf, *supra*, n. 126, at 21.

<sup>143</sup> Hope Metcalf & Leanne Gale, *supra*, n. 121.

<sup>144</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, *supra*, n. 57.

<sup>145</sup> Hope Metcalf urges connection with “non-lawyers and broader movements to place lawyers’ work in a larger context, resist the temptation of inflated self-importance, and find models of resilience.” Hope Metcalf & Leanne Gale, *supra*, n. 121.

<sup>146</sup> E.g., UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW, *Alexis Bay’s Experience with the Human Rights Clinic*, (YouTube, Jan. 10, 2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bkr00ILICIo> (“I’ve made connections through the Clinic that I am very happy to say I think will go way beyond graduation.”).

<sup>147</sup> TRAVIS BRADBERRY & JEAN GREAVES, *supra*, n. 95, at 24.

or the ability to manage interactions with others, including building connections and rapport, establishing good communication, and handling conflict.<sup>148</sup> For social justice work, as this section addresses, social competence is critical for developing effective collaborations and cultivating empathy.

*a. Facility with Collaboration*

Collaboration is a fundamental leadership skill and integral to social justice work. As Anthony Thompson explains, “to be effective, lawyer-leaders will need to move from being an individual contributor to one who connects people and networks for the good of the enterprise.”<sup>149</sup> Bill Quigley refers to social justice work as a “team sport,” noting the excitement of “being part of a group that is trying to make the world a better place.”<sup>150</sup> While the ABA recognizes collaboration as an important lawyering skill,<sup>151</sup> law school generally takes an individualized approach to learning and achievement.<sup>152</sup> Students are thus ill-prepared for the working world where much legal advocacy and the drafting of documents take place in teams. However, in sharp contrast to most law school courses, “collaboration is at the heart of the clinical experience.”<sup>153</sup> Law clinics can play an important role in teaching essential collaboration skills. Good collaboration requires relationship building, as well as the ability to work across diverse teams.

*1) Relationship Building*

Relationship building is the first step, which serves as a foundation for project work. The Rockwood Leadership Institute advises focusing on “relationship before task.”<sup>154</sup>

Clinical work involves cultivating relationships. As discussed above, in our Human Rights Clinic, we strive to create a community

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<sup>148</sup> *Id.* at 44; Daniel Goleman, *supra*, n. 11, at 88.

<sup>149</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 136. *See also* Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 320 (referring to collaboration as “one of the most important skills for both lawyers and leaders”).

<sup>150</sup> William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 21.

<sup>151</sup> Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 322.

<sup>152</sup> Paul Radvany, *id.*, at 323 (“Despite recent demand for young lawyers who can work collaboratively, law school graduates continue to enter the profession with little experience working in teams, other than their work in clinics.”); ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 12 (“This singular focus on an individualized rather than a collaborative approach to issue identification and problem solving sits at the core of what is distorting and dangerous about legal education.”); Geoge T. “Buck” Lewis & Douglas A. Blaze, *Training Leaders the Very Best We Can*, 83 TENN. L. REV. 771, 784-785 (2016) (referring to “group work and exercises” as “far from a common experience in law schools” and calling for an increased “emphasis on collaboration and influence skills”).

<sup>153</sup> Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 325.

<sup>154</sup> ROCKWOOD LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE, *supra*, n. 82, at 3.

that is more than just a class. This entails learning about each other, and students and faculty share at the outset a “human rights moment,” or an experience that brought human rights home to each of us and draws us to this work. We further share meals and participate jointly in events, including site visits, volunteer work, lectures, and conferences. Students thus form strong bonds through working together that continue past the clinic.<sup>155</sup> While I value efficiency and tend to be task oriented, I have learned that meetings run more smoothly and productively when first taking the time to connect with people on a personal level. This can take the form of a formal icebreaker or even just a few moments of casual conversation. This is a lesson I take to heart in meeting with students and in guiding them in preparing agendas for partner meetings or even preparing for interviews. Moreover, students learn about striking the right tone in correspondence that is professional but also includes some emotion and a personal touch.

## 2) *Embracing Diverse Collaborations*

Additionally, leaders must be able to work cooperatively with diverse teams to achieve goals. As discussed above, the most effective teams are diverse, drawing on various perspectives and experiences, and leadership requires cross-cultural competency.<sup>156</sup> Anthony Thompson, in fact, advises leaders to invite dissent to develop “sharpened thinking that can come as a result of conflict and having to defend a position.”<sup>157</sup>

Clinics provide the perfect setting for students to practice working in diverse teams. In our Human Rights Clinic, project or case work generally takes place in teams of three to four students. Different students lead on various components and alternate leadership in key tasks, such as developing an agenda, facilitating meetings, developing minutes, and managing follow up from meetings. In collaborating closely on projects, students benefit from diverse skills and viewpoints and learn to mediate conflicts and tensions. Students further gain experience in collaborative writing, which, while unusual in the academic setting, is the norm in the professional world. As I discuss in *Teaching Written Advocacy in a Law Clinic Setting*, collaboration enriches writing through a diversity of perspectives and built-in peer editors.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, collaboration is particularly helpful for certain aspects of writing, such as brainstorming, conceptualizing a project, and outlining. While researching and drafting best take place

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<sup>155</sup> See e.g., *Alexis Bay's Experience supra*, n. 146.

<sup>156</sup> Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 316; ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 26.

<sup>157</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *id.*, at 27. See also *id.* at 36, 38.

<sup>158</sup> Tamar Ezer, *Teaching Written Advocacy, supra*, n. 92, at 185-186.

individually, students benefit from reviewing and commenting on each other's pieces.<sup>159</sup>

*b. Fostering Empathy*

Another critical component of social competency for social justice work is empathy. Anthony Thompson defines empathy in leaders as “the ability to understand and feel what others experience by stepping into their shoes and seeing the situation from their perspective.”<sup>160</sup> He points out that by anticipating the range of emotions, empathetic leaders are more capable of guiding people through change.<sup>161</sup> Susan Cain notes that empathetic people tend to have “unusually strong consciousness” and are more moved by people's emotions and troubles.<sup>162</sup> This consciousness is also a mark of strong leadership, as discussed further below. People are more willing to provide authority to individuals who have empathy and a focus on the common good.<sup>163</sup> Empathy is particularly important for social justice work. As one of our partners emphasized, “A society without empathy cannot properly find the justice we're seeking.”<sup>164</sup> This empathy can come from our innate human curiosity to understand others' perspectives, seeing them as full persons with dignity and not just problems to address.<sup>165</sup>

Law clinics are well-placed to cultivate empathy through meaningful interactions with clients, partners, and affected communities. Contact with directly affected individuals in law clinic settings broadens students' understanding. For instance, through interviews and interactions with people who use drugs, one of my students described, “One of the amazing things about working on this project was that it completely changed my perspective . . . I began to understand the complexities of drug use and that drug use does not preclude human rights, nor does it alone warrant the deprivation of parental rights.”<sup>166</sup> In our work addressing homelessness, students have benefited from the generous mentorship of powerful advocates with lived experience with this

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<sup>159</sup> Tamar Ezer, *Teaching Written Advocacy*, *id.*, at 186-187.

<sup>160</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 140. *See also* Daniel Goleman, *supra*, n. 11, at 88 (defining empathy as “the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people”).

<sup>161</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 140.

<sup>162</sup> SUSAN CAIN, QUIET, *supra*, n. 19, at 137, 141 (2013).

<sup>163</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1621.

<sup>164</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW, *Petty Offenses Symposium Report: Challenging Criminalization of Poverty, Marginalization, and Gender Non-Conformity* at 21 (2019), <https://miami.app.box.com/s/q891w54b661c6bismf190x23835kamsq> (quoting Harsh Mander, Director, Center for Equity Studies).

<sup>165</sup> *Id.*

<sup>166</sup> Miami Law Staff Report, *Via U.N. Advocacy, Clinic Addresses Discriminatory Drug Laws against Women*, UNIV. MIAMI SCH. OF L. (Mar. 6, 2019), <https://www.law.miami.edu/news/2019/march/un-advocacy-clinic-addresses-discriminatory-drug-laws-against-women>.

issue.<sup>167</sup> In supporting the work of communities and advocates, students also benefit and grow as people.

### C. *The Spiritual Dimension*

Social justice leadership also has an important spiritual dimension. This entails developing ethical leadership and the cultivation of hope as a practice to energize the spirit.

#### 1. *Developing Ethical Leadership*

Although not always emphasized in the leadership literature largely focused on business, the ethical dimension to leadership is of fundamental importance. If mentioned at all, the literature generally provides ethics with only superficial treatment and rarely delves into tensions and concerns.<sup>168</sup> Nonetheless, even when it comes to economic success, studies find that ethics supports profitability.<sup>169</sup> Deborah Rhode explains that this is the case since people “care deeply about ‘organizational justice’” and perform better when treated with respect and when rewards are equitable.<sup>170</sup> Thus, integrity encourages loyalty and trust,<sup>171</sup> and inspiring leaders focus on the greater good, subordinating their self-interest.<sup>172</sup> They set the tone of an organization, ensuring high ethical standards.<sup>173</sup>

In the legal context, ethics is of paramount importance. Lawyers are supposed to be upholders of justice<sup>174</sup> and encouraged to taken on

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<sup>167</sup> Robert Robinson at Partners for Dignity & Rights is an example of a brilliant and inspiring advocate who has generously mentored countless students. For some of Rob’s experiences and insights see April De Simone, *Shelter for All: An Interview with Marcus Moore & Rob Robinson*, URBAN DESIGN FORUM (Jul. 24, 2020), <https://urbandedesignforum.org/review/shelter-for-all-an-interview-with-marcus-moore-rob-robinson/>.

<sup>168</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1612 (explaining that leadership publications treat leadership in “perfunctory or platitudinous terms” and further noting that some commentators “simply list ‘moral’ as a catchall description of the desirable characteristics that leaders should have”).

<sup>169</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *id.*, at 1613-14.

<sup>170</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *id.*, at 1613-14.

<sup>171</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *id.*, at 1614. See also Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 41 (noting that is for “lawyer-leaders to conduct themselves with integrity and honor . . . is essential for lasting leadership built on trust, competence, and good judgment”).

<sup>172</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1620; ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 91-92, 137, 170.

<sup>173</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *id.*, at 28 (“Intersectional leaders recognize that their words, actions, and attitudes help to build an organizational culture. Leaders who model integrity and hold themselves accountable for acting with integrity signal their expectations for others working with them.”).

<sup>174</sup> Artika Tyner & Tisidra Jones, *supra*, n. 14, at 1082; Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 62; ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 9; Neil W. Hamilton, *supra*, n. 17, at 359.

pro bono projects and contribute to the community.<sup>175</sup> As Neil Hamilton notes, a lawyer serves “not just as a representative of clients, but also as an officer of the legal system” and “a public citizen having special responsibility for justice.”<sup>176</sup>

However, ethics is not an important consideration in most law school courses, aside from the limited context of a professional responsibility class.<sup>177</sup> In fact, law school may even erode students’ ethical compass. Kenneth Townsend recounts how “[i]t only takes a few weeks of the standard 1L curriculum for a student to shift her mindset from one that reads a case and roots for the ‘good guy’ to a mindset that zeroes in on what the law requires, for ‘good’ or ‘bad.’”<sup>178</sup> He explains that students become so focused on what the law is and what can be done, that they forget to ask why and whether something should be done.<sup>179</sup> Thus, doctrinal analysis, or “thinking like a lawyer,” becomes disconnected from ethical judgment.<sup>180</sup> Law clinics, however, focus on developing self-reflective and ethical practitioners. Students learn to be both self-aware of biases and positionality and socially aware of structural forces.

Feedback and reflection processes, deeply embedded in law clinics, can help in developing students’ ethical competencies. Leaders must have the courage to engage in difficult conversations and experience discomfort.<sup>181</sup> Bill Quigley underscores that the “first step of any real educational or transformative experience” is “a willingness to . . . risk being uncomfortable.”<sup>182</sup> One of our partners goes even further, encouraging advocates to become comfortable with discomfort and uncomfortable with comfort.<sup>183</sup> An ethical approach to leadership further requires openness to criticism and learning from mistakes. Leaders need to set out processes that encourage feedback, questions, and accountability.<sup>184</sup> Confronting mistakes provides a critical opportunity for learning. As Anthony Thompson explains, “[H]iding from failure does little

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<sup>175</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1618.

<sup>176</sup> Neil W. Hamilton, *supra*, n. 17, at 367.

<sup>177</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 17-18, 77-78. *See also* Neil W. Hamilton, *supra*, n. 17, at 359 (pointing to “[l]egal education’s failure to engage students and the profession in developing leadership skills including character and moral courage”).

<sup>178</sup> Kenneth Townsend, *supra*, n. 11, at 868.

<sup>179</sup> Kenneth Townsend, *id.*, at 867-68.

<sup>180</sup> Kenneth Townsend, *id.*, at 877.

<sup>181</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 112.

<sup>182</sup> William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 15.

<sup>183</sup> *See also* Gulika Reddy, *supra*, n. 120, at 241 (“Courageous work is often antithetical to comfort, and learning to sit with discomfort is an integral lesson in developing an effective human rights advocacy practice.”).

<sup>184</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1618; ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 11, 28.

more than ensure that other failures will follow.”<sup>185</sup> In fact, leaders with exceptional performance are constantly seeking opportunities for feedback and improvement.<sup>186</sup> Moreover, taking responsibility for mistakes encourages others to surface errors and creates a broader culture of learning.<sup>187</sup> Healthy organizations are learning organizations that do not shy away from confronting missteps.

Law clinics strive to stimulate learning through feedback and reflection. In our clinic, students regularly receive feedback from both their supervisors and peers throughout the project. This takes place during the course of developing project documents,<sup>188</sup> as well as during “Learning Goals” meetings with supervisors and in “Project Rounds” and “Writing Workshops” in class. For Learning Goals meetings, students are asked to draft a memorandum reflecting on their clinic experience, including areas of growth and challenges, and setting priority goals and a plan of action for their professional development.<sup>189</sup> In Project Rounds, as discussed above, each project team has the opportunity to present difficult issues they are facing in their project. This serves two goals: the team benefits from the classes’ insights on strategic considerations; and the class benefits from grappling with key questions of concern to human rights advocacy.<sup>190</sup> In Writing Workshops, students share and peer review written drafts, seeking feedback from classmates on argument, structure, support, and tone.<sup>191</sup> We thus hope to help develop self-critical and reflective practitioners, who can grapple with ethical concerns and are open to feedback and new ideas.<sup>192</sup>

Additionally, case studies can serve as a powerful tool in sharpening ethical competencies. Case studies, frequently used in public policy and business schools, provide the opportunity to analyze both good and

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<sup>185</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 158. See also Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1642 (“Aspiring leaders should worry less about the number of mistakes they make and more about the number of times they make the same the mistake or avoid admitting it. Even failures can be instructive; the key is to ‘crash and learn,’ not ‘crash and burn.’”).

<sup>186</sup> Deborah L. Rhode, *Leadership in Law*, *supra*, n. 2, at 1634, 1641 (2017).

<sup>187</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 75.

<sup>188</sup> For a discussion of the role of feedback in written advocacy, please see Tamar Ezer, *Teaching Written Advocacy*, *supra*, n. 92, at 167.

<sup>189</sup> This builds on an exercise developed by Sarah Paoletti, the Director of the Transnational Legal Clinic at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School.

<sup>190</sup> This builds on an exercise developed by Yale Law School’s Lowenstein International Human Rights Clinic. See also Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 357 (describing Rounds as “a process by which students brainstorm challenging issues and decisions they face in their case/project work with the class and reflect on these as well in part, as an effort to ‘extract theory from their and their classmates’ experiences”).

<sup>191</sup> Tamar Ezer, *Teaching Written Advocacy*, *supra*, n. 92, at 184.

<sup>192</sup> See Paul Radvany, *supra*, n. 4, at 357 (noting that Rounds provide a valuable opportunity for students to “improve their ‘professional reasoning and ethical decision-making’”).

bad examples of leadership.<sup>193</sup> Leah Teague highlights how considering historical figures reinforces for students that “we can learn more from our failures than our successes.”<sup>194</sup> Students can further grapple with various leadership models at different career stages, reflecting different ages, genders, races, and ethnicities.<sup>195</sup> Case studies also provide rich material for analyzing complex issues from multiple perspectives. Anthony Thompson makes extensive use of case studies in his course on leadership as a basis for an intersectional analysis, addressing missed viewpoints, methods of communication, and potential strategies and actions to avoid pitfalls.<sup>196</sup> Case studies also facilitate students’ active participation in their learning, enabling both reflection and group interaction to help internalize key concepts.<sup>197</sup>

I have found case studies useful in addressing ethical considerations that are front and center in human rights work. An understanding of human rights requires going beyond abstract standards and applying them to messy reality. This entails confronting internal biases and grappling with difficult issues.<sup>198</sup> In a collaboration with faculty from Eastern Europe and Central Asia to develop health and human rights courses, they clamored for interactive materials and case studies they could integrate in their teaching. To meet this demand, we partnered with the Toronto University’s Health Equity and Law Clinic and the Hastings Center to develop a series of case studies on various health and human rights topics, including access to sex reassignment surgery in relationship to legal identity change, access to maternal care for women who use drugs, and coercive sterilization of women living with HIV.<sup>199</sup> Developing case studies can itself be a useful exercise for students in analyzing diverse perspectives and strengthening ethical competencies.

The seminar component of our Human Rights Clinic provides students with the opportunity to grapple with case studies on challenging human rights issues. For instance, in a class on Indigenous rights and conservation, students delved into the case of the Big Cypress National Preserve with the Deputy General Counsel of the Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida. In this class, students learned about the racist

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<sup>193</sup> Garry W. Jenkins, *supra*, n. 61, at 730-731.

<sup>194</sup> Leah Teague, *Making Progress*, *supra*, n. 6, at 40.

<sup>195</sup> Garry W. Jenkins, *supra*, n. 61, at 731, 741.

<sup>196</sup> ANTHONY C. THOMPSON, *supra*, n. 2, at 156-157.

<sup>197</sup> Garry W. Jenkins, *supra*, n. 61, at 730-731, 742.

<sup>198</sup> For instance, the case of a patient with extremely drug-resistant tuberculosis may require balancing rights to liberty, autonomy, and freedom of movement against the danger of infection to the community. Tamar Ezer, *Four Key Lessons from Teaching Human Rights for Health*, OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS VOICES (Nov. 3, 2014), <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/four-key-lessons-teaching-human-rights-health-0>.

<sup>199</sup> Tamar Ezer & Judy Overall, *Advancing Human Rights in Patient Care through Higher Education in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, 15 HEALTH & HUM. RTS. J. 54, 59 (2013).

undertones of historic conservation efforts and considered opportunities to integrate an Indigenous rights perspective.<sup>200</sup>

## 2. *Cultivating Hope*

Social justice leadership further draws on spiritual traditions and the practice of cultivating hope. Gulika Reddy, a fellow human rights clinician, writes about hope as “a learned mindset and practice that allows you to believe in and work towards the possibility that you can achieve your goals.”<sup>201</sup> In particular, she calls for “transformative hope” that is grounded in reality and linked to action with the addition of creativity and imagination, allowing us “to take a leap of faith.”<sup>202</sup> She situates transformative hope “between certainty and impossibility.”<sup>203</sup>

Social justice work is not easy, and progress is not linear. We need to be able to work in difficult contexts. This requires engaging the spirit and connecting our work to the legacy of past advocates. We are following in the footsteps of a strong lineage, and it is not on us to get to the finish line. Rather, as Mehret Mandefro explains, “In the finite years we have on this Earth, all we have to do is run our part of the race and pass the baton on. The rest is the rest.”<sup>204</sup> A Jewish proverb expresses a similar sentiment: “You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free to abandon it.” In fact, there is no finish line, and the very struggle for justice is what makes us human. As one of our partners states, “Every human society is not just characterized by injustice, but also by resistance to this injustice.”<sup>205</sup> Let us be part of this resistance.

This requires building on the work of others and learning from good practices and successes. In the human rights movement, we are all too focused on violations and problems. In fact, classic human rights methodology, often referred to as “naming and shaming,” entails documenting and publicizing violations.<sup>206</sup> Thus, as Reddy notes, conveying positive knowledge “does not come naturally,” but can serve as an important source of learning and inspiration.<sup>207</sup> Thomas Coombes similarly urges human rights advocates to

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<sup>200</sup> See José Francisco Calí Tzay, *Reflections on Racism, Conservation and Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 14 ARIZ. J. OF ENV'T L. & POL'Y 1 (2024).

<sup>201</sup> Gulika Reddy, *supra*, n. 120, at 205. See also William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 27 (“Because the merchants of the status quo are constantly selling us hopelessness and diversions, we must actively seek out hope. . . . When hope is alive, change is possible.”).

<sup>202</sup> Gulika Reddy, *supra*, n. 120, at 216, 218.

<sup>203</sup> *Id.* at 229.

<sup>204</sup> Mehret Mandefro, *Singing What We Cannot Speak: Bernice Johnson Reagon's Songtalking and Popular Education*, THE FRAGILE REAL (2024), <https://thefragilereal.substack.com/p/singing-what-we-cannot-speak>.

<sup>205</sup> HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC, PETTY OFFENSES SYMPOSIUM REPORT, *supra*, n. 164.

<sup>206</sup> See Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, *Sticks and Stones: Naming and Shaming the Human Rights Enforcement Problem*, 64 INT'L ORG. 689 (2008).

<sup>207</sup> Gulika Reddy, *supra*, n. 120, at 224-225.

not “only expose the things that are wrong with the world” but to “also offer a vision of how things could be” by focusing on alternatives and solutions.<sup>208</sup> The documentation of good practices is a focus for our Human Rights Clinic this year. In collaboration with the National Homelessness Law Center, following up on a series of reports documenting violations, we are now developing a Good Practice Guide, lifting up local initiatives that help to realize the seven dimensions of the international human right to housing. Even in a difficult federal context, we are seeing innovative and effective work at the local level.

Reddy identifies imagination and creativity as critical ingredients for cultivating hope. In our clinic, we are experimenting with incorporating art in our advocacy, as I hope to reflect on further in a subsequent piece. We have developed a partnership with Red Line Service, a community of artists in Chicago with lived experience of being unhoused to develop prints supporting right to housing advocacy. Clinic students facilitate a series of virtual workshops with the artists on the seven dimensions of the international human right to housing, in collaboration with activists at the forefront of advocacy throughout the U.S. The resulting artwork is available for download in a digital archive of graphic materials.<sup>209</sup> These prints illustrate the seven dimensions of the international right to housing in powerful and concrete ways connected to community experiences. We have also incorporated classes on the intersection of human rights with art and music in the clinic seminar. These classes have expanded the students’ imagination and vocabulary for addressing human rights issues. Additionally, in our final class, students share creations that capture their reflections on social justice and lessons learned from the clinic experience, with art often providing the opportunity for deeper expression and connection. Creations have included collages, poetry, paintings, drawings, and even performances.<sup>210</sup> Students have also collaborated on a human rights playlist, sharing songs that are meaningful to them and the stories behind them. This exercise has provided an opportunity for students to connect on a personal level, as well as uncover insights from various human rights struggles. And the students now have access to a playlist that can hopefully help inspire and energize them.

Thus, social justice requires spiritual work. Social justice ultimately relies on hope and the ability to dream, while still grounded in reality

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<sup>208</sup> THOMAS COOMBES, SEEING HOPE: A VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS 3, <https://seeinghope.fineacts.co/>.

<sup>209</sup> See UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW, *Art & the Right to Housing*, <https://www.law.miami.edu/academics/programs/human-rights/initiatives/arts-rights/housing/> (last visited on January 30, 2026).

<sup>210</sup> UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW, *Human Rights Clinic: Student Art Work and Creative Pieces*, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/miamilaw/albums/72157716585038838> (last visited February 5, 2026) (samples of student work).

and connected to our actions. As Bill Quigley advises students, “Every good law or case . . . was once a dream . . . dismissed as impossible or impractical for decades before it was enacted. Give your creative thoughts free reign, for it is only in the hearts and dreams of people seeking a better world that true justice has a chance.”<sup>211</sup>

### III. CONCLUSION

Social justice work must start at home with good individual practices and the building of healthy and just organizations. However, all too often, organizations engaged in social justice work are poorly managed and plagued by a crisis of leadership. In training the next generation of social justice advocates, a focus on developing leaders who can best serve our communities is critical. This article connects leadership concepts with practical examples for strengthening leadership from the law clinic setting. It proposes a social justice approach to leadership rooted in the principles outlined below.

Social justice leadership centers around collaboration, and you can lead from any position in a group. Leadership should be broadly defined to encompass varying personalities, racial and gender diversity, and the counter-cultural values of listening and humility. Good leaders develop leadership in others. And critically, leadership can be learned and developed.

Leadership is three-dimensional involving the mind, heart, and spirit. It entails three sets of competencies: cognitive, emotional, and spiritual. Cognitive competencies involve not just mastery of an area of law and relevant interdisciplinary frameworks, but also strategic thinking and effective project management skills.

Emotional intelligence entails both personal and interpersonal competencies. Social justice leaders need to acknowledge setbacks and vicarious trauma, and resilience is a key personal skill that can be developed through reflection, self-care, and community connection. Collaboration and empathy are vital interpersonal skills that can be developed through thoughtful teamwork and interactions with clients, partners, and affected communities.

Finally, spiritual competencies entail developing ethical leadership and cultivating hope. Ethical leadership can be developed through feedback and reflection, as well as through case study analysis. And hope can be cultivated through connection with the legacy of past advocates, learning from good practices, and the integration of art.

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<sup>211</sup> William P. Quigley, *supra*, n. 117, at 28.