

## Leadership in Action: Adaptability over perfectionism



TIMOTHY SMITH NETWORK

For six weeks this summer, I had the incredible opportunity to work with the Timothy Smith Network (TSN) in Boston, Massachusetts. I'd like to thank the TSN staff, Laidlaw Foundation, and Tufts University for the incredible opportunity to visit Boston and conduct my LiA project. TSN is a non-profit organisation that provides underserved young people from Greater Roxbury with technology experiences, including a unique 6-week summer school and paid employment programme. The summer school, also known as the Boston Design Academy (BDA), delivers three main classes to students: Digital Design Intensive (DDI), Elevating Agriculture Technology (EAT), and Tech Your Health (TYH). I got to contribute to this vision by working as one of two summer admin and support staff members; I will share with you some of my key highlights and learning lessons from the experience, reflecting on leadership insights I learned or developed. Finally, I will end with how I intend to apply or have been applying those insights to my life.



Firstly, I am grateful for all the thought that Alessandra Brown and her team, alongside their partners, such as the City of Boston and Microsoft, put into making the BDA possible. Leadership requires diligent planning to start and finish a goal successfully. I also learned the importance of adaptability; for example, assigning student laptops and sorting their payment documents on launch day could have gone better. However, the other scholars and I ensured that we registered and

distributed the welcome packs to students and informed them about the issue and our intention to fix it by the next day. This experience taught me that clear communication with co-leaders and followers is vital, especially when things go wrong, because it can avoid disorder and misunderstandings. Also, TSN helped me to realise that being a leader is all about sticking to one's value sets and selecting roles and tasks that exemplify that.

The team was a great example of integrity to their mission aims, including prioritising providing technology tools to Black and Brown students to offset the digital divide in America. The team told us how the TYH programme, formerly Tech Your Fitness, came about with the help of previous scholars. TSN listened to a previous cohort during the pandemic who revealed food insecurity challenges in their communities and empowered them to modify the programme to focus on tackling the issue through growing their own food and innovating agricultural technologies. This experience reminded me that actively listening to ideas from other people as a leader and implementing changes, where viable, is a skill I should endeavour to develop. I implemented being adaptable and an active listener by helping to expand TSN's provision in my role as a support member of staff. I designed a videogame curriculum to celebrate young people's perspectives on their neighbourhood, and as I encountered difficulties [and breakthroughs] along the way, learning to take advice, know my limits and be okay with not having all the answers was vital for success. I do not have a background in game or curriculum design, and at first, I wanted to complete the curriculum independently, but it did not work that way. For example, I first struggled with making a slogan, marking rubrics, and creating a clear layout for how students would design a game in 6 weeks. However, I am grateful for the mentoring that I received from Nona, especially the advice that I do not need to be an expert at everything but consult those with more experience or expertise than me. I did, and it was highly fruitful and fun; I got advice from an industry expert in videogame design and educational research. In addition, I received invaluable instruction from a team member who is designing his own game. Taking on board their advice led to me coming up with learning objectives, rubrics, and other helpful elements and ways of thinking about my curriculum. My provisional draft of a new summer school curriculum is now complete, and when I presented it to students and staff, I was pleased to know that the young people had been wanting such a curriculum. Furthermore, I am excited for TSN to launch it next year in Summer '24.



In summary, I am grateful that I have an incredible experience of the beginnings of a curriculum design, a skill I probably would not have learned without being Laidlaw and TSN's incredible BDA. Moreover, I aim to continue to take these valuable lessons, especially on not needing to be an expert or perfect, into my academic and professional careers and everyday life as I go about hobbies and other activities.



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