

Reflecting on my Laidlaw journey with a focus on ethical leadership and global citizenship.

The Laidlaw Programme has gone above and beyond any expectations I had when I first signed up to the programme. It has provided me with so many opportunities—to learn, grow, discover new interests, develop new skills, challenge my beliefs, consider new perspectives, meet incredible people who inspire and energise me (and who have become some of my closest friends), and create memories that I hold close to my heart.

Through my research and leadership-in-action projects, I was able to have two completely new and different experiences, each exposing me to different work environments and styles of leadership.

For my research project, I worked at the Institute of Sport Exercise and Health (ISEH). The positive culture at ISEH made me reflect on my ideas of what an effective leadership environment entails. Prior to working at ISEH, I had the perception that in academia, the culture and dynamics between coworkers were serious, formal and professional, with clear lines of who was above and below with regards to authority. However, at ISEH, this was not the case. While it could be inferred that some employees had a role with higher or more authorious responsibilities, there were no explicit cues in interactions to suggest that one was superior to another. Instead, respect was mutually provided, and it was clear that leadership was not utilized to assert power and meet one-sided outcomes, but a medium to promote everyone's growth and success.

My supervisor guided me by asking questions, encouraging me to explore different paths, and prompting me to seek expertise from colleagues. While there were times when frustration sank in and, in the moment, I would have preferred to be given the solutions, I realized it was far more empowering to discover the solutions myself. It strengthened my patience and resilience, as well as taught me that leadership is not about giving people the answers, but guiding them to discover them themselves. By observing my supervisor's interactions with other master's and PhD students, I also understood that leadership is not a one-way flow of knowledge and service. You lead another to support their own journey of growth, and through their journeys, questions and unique approaches, you have the opportunity to learn and expand your own understanding and approaches too—serving and growing your own bank of knowledge also. The openness to learn is fundamental to effective and ethical leadership on both ends of the interaction.

I also realized how easy it is for ethical lines in leadership to blur when accuracy and time pressures come into conflict. My research project required several statistical calculations, which left room for potential errors. While proofreading my final draft, I noticed a small error in one of the population numbers in my flowchart. I debated whether to rerun the models, knowing it would take time and that the change was unlikely to affect the conclusion. I spoke to a colleague that echoed this thought. However, ignoring this inaccuracy didn't feel right, so I discussed it with my supervisor and did reran the models. Although the changes were minimal and didn't affect the overall conclusion, my supervisor appreciated my honesty and conscientious

approach. I am glad that I upheld the integrity of my work, even when it felt inconvenient at the time. Had I 'let the inaccuracy slide', I would have felt uncomfortable and unfulfilled by the thought that I did not act in alignment with the principles that I believe and value. Even if the outcome does not change, the quality of the approach does matter as it cultivates the self-belief and congruency that is fundamental to the authentic execution of ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership begins with leading yourself. To offer stability and guidance to another, we must first build our own foundations of trust and reliability.

My LiA project in Nepal with SOS Children's Villages offered another enriching experience, particularly because I had the chance to observe the conduct of leadership in a culture very different from my own. I travelled across Nepal as a photographer and videographer, alongside two other students. One of our projects involved interviewing the national director of SOS Children's Villages in Nepal, Ganga Gurung. It was really inspiring to listen to him and sense his genuine passion for his work. I could sense that his heart was fully dedicated to his mission and that his head and heart led in alignment—a key driving force to ethical leadership.

I learned through observation that to lead with an ethical approach, simply, it is to lead in alignment with one's principles and intention to be and do good. This requires the knowledge of rational thinking as well as the intuitive guidance of our hearts—that deep inner knowing we have and can tap into when we are present and willing to listen. The effect of Ganga Gurung's ethical leadership was evident through the incredibly warm, supportive and passion-driven work culture radiated by each and every employee and their relationships with each other. It was clear that they poured their hearts into their work and genuinely had fun doing it—as a team. And I believe that it is their youthful, playful attitudes and head-heart aligned culture of leadership that enabled them to cultivate deep-rooted empathy for the people they seek to serve and thus their drive to understand and innovate ways to meet their needs—which they have and continue to do so successfully. Every child I met in the village truly looked to have their needs heard and addressed.

This brings me to another insight: ethical leadership achieves success because it is driven by fulfilment instead of validation. Validation-driven leadership fuels an egocentric approach and is based on scarcity, the desire to achieve success to prove oneself or one's mission as a result of a gap of internal certainty in that area, such that success comes from the validation that proceeds the outcome instead of the outcome itself. This is a common style of leadership that is seen in corporate/political environments and often follows with less-than-ethical decisions being made, dissonance between the leader and the stakeholders involved, and uncertain success. The latter arises because the sense of accomplishment is not brought by the achievement of the shared outcome but through the subjective sensation of earned validation—which is not certain and experienced differently from person to person. Fulfilment-driven leadership, on the other hand, is grounded in a desire to serve a larger purpose. Success is defined by the achievement of the shared outcome, which

inherently satisfies personal and collective needs. Here, success is certain because it directly results from the fulfilled outcome, rather than relying on external affirmation.

This is a valuable insight for me and one I will carry forward to shape my own leadership approaches. I found it to be really empowering to observe fulfillment-driven leadership in-action as it gave me proof that it is not just a beautiful thought in theory but a real and achievable practice. I am heart-warmed and inspired to bring this energy with me into my future projects, to help create success that is both sustainable and meaningful.

Both my research and leadership-in-action projects, alongside my participation in the Laidlaw and Oxford Character Ethical Leadership trainings, have helped me to cultivate a strong sense of global citizenship.

I believe that global citizenship is rooted in empathy and a genuine desire to give to others for the fulfilment it brings us—as we help bring a smile to another’s face and feel a sense of belonging and agency to uplift those we can help. By travelling to Nepal and getting to know people from different cultures and walks of life, as well as witnessing the very disheartening conditions some of them live in, I could better understand the gaps that exist in their side of the world, identify and connect with their needs, and reflect on what action is required to bridge these gaps and truly support them. By learning these insights through exposure rather than words on a paper, I felt a greater sense of urgency and personal responsibility to help; to look into my strengths and resources and see how I can utilize them to bring value to people that are not only human, like me, but have become my friends too.

I think this is one of the powers of meaningful travel—it connects us to people and communities that we do not typically have the opportunity to get to know in our home environments and connects their needs and goals with our own so that it is no longer “their problems” and “my problems” but all of them become “our problems” and therefore our interest to meet them. Not necessarily to be a hero for our ego, but to help a friend as we would in our physical home. When we travel to learn and experience, often those places become a home for us too, and the people our friends. This is how I feel about Nepal and the people I got to meet. The emotional connection I developed for the place and the cause I sought to serve came back to Europe with me and one I will look for ways to continue serving from here on out.

My LiA tapped me deeper into my desire and motivation to channel my interests and strengths to create value that positively impacts others, and the leadership training I received throughout the Laidlaw Programme has provided me with clarity and tools to turn this passion into action. By studying the different values and mechanics that underly ethical leadership, I feel more confident in my ability to lead, to reflect on my progress, and move in the direction that truly creates lasting and sustainable positive change—in my own life and in the life of others.

Each element of the Laidlaw Programme has helped me to grow, in so many more ways than pre-Laidlaw Scholar Cat could have imagined. My Laidlaw experience has not only shaped by personal and professional path but also my understanding of the impact I

can have on the world as a global citizen. I am excited and ready to embrace this responsibility and apply what I have learned to contribute to global solutions, uplift others, and inspire positive change—as Laidlaw has inspired in me.