



Leadership-in-Action Reflection

Jake Barton

Laidlaw Scholar

University of Toronto Laidlaw Scholars Programme

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Reflecting on my overall experience in Kenya, I am struck by the profound impact it had on both my personal and professional development. This Leadership-in-Action opportunity was not just a chance to contribute to a community in need; it was a transformative journey that expanded my worldview and deepened my understanding of effective leadership in a global context.

From the moment I arrived in Kisumu, I was immersed in a vibrant and complex cultural landscape. The stark differences between Kenyan and Canadian societal norms were apparent, challenging my preconceived notions and encouraging me to adopt a mindset of cultural humility. Engaging with in-need youth – those in conflicts with the law, orphaned, or under socioeconomic pressure to drop out of school – presented unique challenges. Many of these young individuals faced pressures and realities that were foreign to me, such as the harsh socioeconomic conditions that often forced them to abandon their education in favour of labour or early marriage. I quickly realized that meaningful engagement required not just a sharing of knowledge, but also an authentic connection built on understanding their lived experiences. This realization motivated me to approach my lessons with sensitivity and empathy, ensuring that I communicated in ways that were both relevant and relatable.

The practical aspects of my role, particularly in teaching and facilitating the Mama Ngina partnership, were equally enlightening. Lessons required careful planning and adaptability. I had to consider what topics would resonate with the youth and how I could present these ideas in an engaging way. The fluidity of time in Kenya, which I initially found challenging, taught me the value of flexibility. As schedules shifted and unexpected changes arose, I learned to embrace a polychronic approach, focusing on the task at hand rather than getting bogged down by rigid timelines. This shift in perspective not only enhanced my ability to manage my responsibilities but also enriched my interactions with local partners and volunteers.

Working closely with the Better Me team and various stakeholders offered valuable insights into teamwork. I learned that effective collaboration involves not only clear communication but also a willingness to appreciate different perspectives. Engaging with local partners required me to listen actively and adapt my approach based on their insights. This collaboration was especially crucial when establishing the partnership with Mama Ngina Childrens Home. The experience underscored the importance of allowing local voices to guide initiatives, reinforcing my understanding of ethical leadership in a cross-cultural context.

Throughout my time in Kenya, I grappled with ethical dilemmas surrounding voluntourism and white saviorism. Initially, I felt a sense of responsibility to lead and implement changes; however, I recognized the importance of humility and collaboration. By working alongside local leaders and respecting their expertise, I was able to eliminate these concerns and contribute in a way that honoured the community's needs and aspirations. This introspection fostered a deeper sense of integrity in my leadership style, reminding me that the most effective leaders prioritize collaboration and respect for local knowledge.

Being abroad in a country like Kenya was both exhilarating and humbling. The richness of the culture, the warmth of the people, and the resilience of the youth I worked with left an indelible mark on my heart. I found joy in the small victories, whether it was seeing a student grasp a difficult concept or hearing their stories of hope and aspiration. These moments reinforced my belief in the power of education and the importance of providing support to those facing adversity.

As I reflect on this journey, I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to contribute to Better Me's initiatives and to form meaningful connections with the community. My experience in Kisumu has not only shaped my understanding of social development but has also ignited a passion for continued engagement with global issues. The lessons learned—about empathy, adaptability, teamwork, ethical considerations, and more —will guide me as I move forward in my leadership journey.

Ultimately, this experience has instilled in me a commitment to lead with integrity and purpose, ensuring that my future endeavors are grounded in respect, collaboration, and a genuine desire to make a difference. The skills and insights I gained in Kenya will serve as a foundation for my future work, inspiring me to approach challenges with empathy and a focus on sustainable, community-driven solutions.