

INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP: A journey to success

The following roadmap utilizes findings from CCAB's Skills for Inclusive Workplaces and the Advancement of Indigenous Peoples' report, which surveyed 25 Indigenous business leaders between February and March 2023. It is intended to serve as a useful tool that Indigenous entrepreneurs and corporate leaders can reference along their journey, and non-Indigenous leaders can use it to inform their workplace actions when seeking to create inclusive environments. This tool is not a checklist for success but a detailed description of Indigenous Peoples' experiences and valuable strategies for overcoming challenges in corporate workplace settings. The contents can be used by established or aspiring Indigenous leaders; however, certain aspects are meant to be internalized by non-Indigenous leaders seeking to create a more equitable workplace that supports Indigenous employees on their journey toward leadership roles.



1.The Foundation

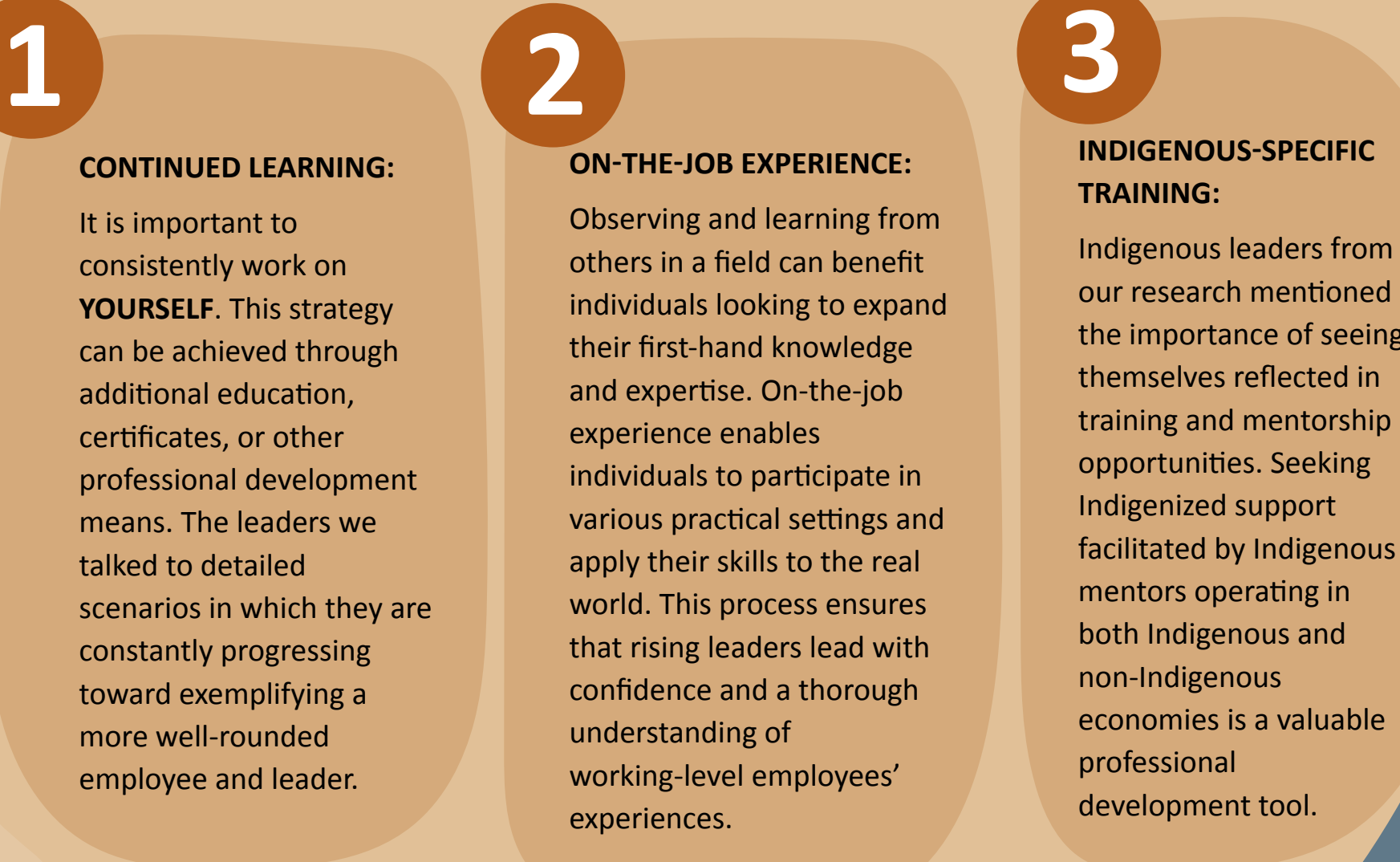
Before ascending to a leadership position, it is important to incubate your success by laying the necessary foundations. Many factors enable career advancement into senior-level positions. Indigenous leaders from our research detailed some of the prerequisites for carving a pathway to leadership roles:



2. Hatchling Stage

After laying the foundations and reaching a senior-level position, it is important to begin honing your skills to become the most effective leader you can be. Indigenous leaders cite continuous learning, on-the-job experience, and Indigenous-specific training programs as key developmental tools to become well-rounded leaders. The following are some examples of strategies that Indigenous leaders use to sharpen their skills and strengthen professional development:

3 Professional Development Tools Employed by Successful Indigenous Leaders



SOFT SKILLS INDIGENOUS LEADERS EMPLOY IN THEIR ROLES

- **Effective communication and interpersonal skills**
- **Analytical skill**
- **Collaboration and teamwork**
- **Resiliency and determination**
- **Incorporation of Indigenous culture and traditions**

INDIGENOUS LEADERS' DEFINITION OF A "GOOD LEADER"

- **Humility**
- **Strong vision and innovation**
- **Compassion and empathy**
- **Respect and kindness**
- **Flexibility**

3. Surviving in The Unknown

As you maneuver the corporate world, you will face internal (within yourself) and external barriers in the workplace. When you can recognize the most likely sources of obstacles, you will have the courage to confront them. Indigenous leaders highlighted a variety of barriers that exist, including the following:

LACK OF REPRESENTATION: Noteworthy concern exists regarding the lack of representation of Indigenous Peoples in senior or executive-level leadership roles. Within organizations and corporate boards, a **lack of diversity can affect the advancement of aspiring Indigenous leaders or perpetuate a continuous cycle of non-diverse leaders.**

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND UNCONSCIOUS BIAS: While combatting overt racial discrimination, it is also important to recognize unconscious biases, which are ingrained attitudes or stereotypes about specific racial or ethnic groups. From the insights gathered, unconscious biases seem to exist across many of Canada's corporate leadership networks, **contributing to the lack of diversity in leadership and disadvantaging Indigenous Peoples looking to advance their careers.**

TOKENIZATION: Indigenous leaders from our research found that, within certain organizations, Indigenous Peoples can sometimes be tokenized or "pigeonholed" into specific roles or Indigenous-related sectors. Indigenous Peoples' abilities and qualifications are frequently underappreciated, **resulting in their being overlooked for leadership positions outside these areas.**

GENDER BIASES: Besides racial discrimination and unconscious biases, Indigenous women face additional barriers due to prejudiced behaviours perpetuated against women. These biases negatively influence the possibility of promotion for Indigenous women seeking to undertake leadership positions, causing feelings of being unequal or treated unfairly.

STRUCTURAL/SYSTEMIC BARRIERS: Educational gaps and other socio-economic disparities contribute to the limited opportunities for Indigenous individuals wanting to progress in their careers. Factors ranging from lack of access to job training and internet connectivity further hinder Indigenous leaders' advancement. The impact of these issues is especially heightened for those who live on reserve or in rural areas, where there is often inadequate infrastructure.

4 Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

PRACTICING HARD WORK AND DETERMINATION

"Having to work three times as hard [as a non-Indigenous person] to get the credential — that carries through into every career path or every step. If I was going to get a promotion, I feel like I had to work harder [than others] to earn that promotion."

PURSuing EDUCATION/TRAINING

"I had a very positive introduction to education and to academics. By the time I got to school, I knew that I needed to find resources to help me succeed. I collect information that is helpful for my career advancement."

LEARNING SELF-ADVOCACY (THAT IS, "KNOWING YOUR WORTH")

"I picked myself up and said there's better things out there for me, being optimistic. I'm looking for that other opportunity that might be around the corner, always preparing myself and expanding my knowledge."

"It is hard to advocate for yourself, so I met with women in leadership or Indigenous people in leadership to get advice. I had to understand those barriers and how to come across them. I had to ask for opportunities and demonstrate how I would be a benefit. It goes against [for Indigenous people] the values of humility to put yourself out there."

STAYING OPEN-MINDED

"I'm finding different opportunities, or some opportunities will present themselves to me."

"Ultimately, what I had to do was to find new opportunities and explore options for places I could work that would value me."