



EFFECTIVE  
LEADERSHIP  
PRACTICING THE  
**KISS**  
PRINCIPLE

By Bea MacGregor



Effective leadership applying the “Kiss Principle”, throughout the conceptual process of Alderney Landing, enabled us to secure the funding to build and then develop a fully utilized community cultural facility. Alderney Landing is comprised of a theatre, market, gallery and outdoor venue. We host 667 programs, events and performances, attracting 300,000 people annually to our beautiful waterfront. Simple, clear, shared, direct communication using the “Kiss Principle” is an effective leadership style that I have utilized throughout my career, including in the initial inception of the facility. It has been especially effective when the goal is to create a new event or make a significant change.

### “KISS” Achieves Long-Term Results

The “KISS Principle” is an acronym for “Keep it Simple”, coined by Kelly Johnston lead engineer at Lockheed shunk works, who created state of the art spy planes. The acronym has since been used as a design principle by; the US Navy, Canadian Disney animator, Richard Edmund Williams and currently by leading software designers. The “KISS Principle” states, that systems work best, if they are simple, rather than complicated. People want products and services that are easy to understand and simple to use. It may take longer to design or plan an event using the principle, however; the event will be less expense to produce and will achieve greater long-term results.

### Visualize and KISS

Throughout history iconic people that achieved tremendous success, endorsed elements of the “KISS Principle”. Leonardo da Vinci’s modo, “simplicity is the ultimate sophistication”. His ability to visualize every aspect of his creation in its simplest form, before completing his work, can be utilized in building and designing festival site-plans to the finest detail. Visualize your event, as you want to see it unfold. Spend

time in the venue or on the property well in advance of your event. Visualize each item in relation to the adjacent attraction. Spend time in the event zone.

### Make It Simple, Straightforward

Einstein believed in the beauty of striving to make something as simple as possible for the user. From the patron’s vantage point, entering your site, do you have a simple large-scale welcome entrance and then clear directional signage to every activity at your festival? Today, customers don’t need information overload. Attention spans are shorter than ever. Shakespeare’s belief, “Brevity is the soul of Wit”, should be applied to all aspects of event communication, including; logos, website, Facebook, apps, print media and points of sale at your festival. Some of the best logos are simple; i.e. Nike, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola and IFEA. The long-term success of the logos is that they are; simple in form, easy recognized, versatile and memorable. They are timeless, not requiring expensive rebrands. Utilizing the “KISS Principle”, keep it simple, straightforward Alderney Landing’s logo was developed twenty years ago. Today it is a household recognized logo in our province. Our simple brand is so strong that people identify it with the entire section of our Dartmouth Waterfront.

### Stick to the Basic’s

A trend today in several industries is to over complicate problems leading to rebranding. Mark Held, Thinksalot Marketing message is; stick to the basic’s, keep it simple and straightforward. His success has been to find something interesting and truthful about the product or service and to deliver the message in the right tone of voice. Using the “KISS principle”, the criteria to becoming a vendor at our bursting at the seams farmers market is: is it homemade, homegrown or a good thing for the

community? Once you’re in, we have three rules; don’t be late, don’t leave early, and be a good neighbour, “meaning”, have a positive attitude. The camaraderie between the 80 vendors and the patrons is phenomenal. Last year we support 140 charities, produced 47 market driven special events and over the years incubated over 23 businesses that are now thriving in our region. Vendors and the public love our market, it is simple, straightforward and truthful.

### Achieve Results

An effective leader motivates people to collectively achieve success, communicates clearly and gives positive feedback. As a leader you need to be able to clearly and succinctly explain your mission, vision, core principles, and the goal of specific tasks to successfully achieve results. Shared goals, inclusiveness, constant direct communication is key to effective leadership. Surround yourself with people that have different perspectives but share the community’s vision.

Incorporating the theory of the “KISS Principle” into leadership style, was successfully accomplished by Johnson who originally coined the phrase. “Our aim” he said, “is to get results, sooner, and better through the application of common sense to tough problems.” “If it works, don’t fix it”. “Reduce reports and other paperwork to a minimum.” “Keep it Simple.” Johnson knew how to get the most out of the fewest people and deliver results. He gave the authority, and responsibility to his managers, with no interference. Mistakes were allowed, if they were brought to his attention with recommendations to correct mistakes. Johnson communicated clearly and asked lots of questions. He treated everyone equally and infused comradery and fun in the work place. Johnson received international recognition for excellence in aviation design.

Alderney Landing has eight full time staff, that deliver the 667 programs, performances and events, with support from 70 casual staff, a Volunteer Board and hundreds of Volunteers. We extensively use the “KISS Principle”, in our daily routines. After a new initiative is completed, a single staffer has the responsibility to service and deliver an event for their area of expertise. Only difficult issues or mistakes are brought to my attention with potential solutions to the problems. Staff eat breakfast together daily, a time when we can discuss the issues of the day and have some connective time. Duplication is limited to an absolute minimum. Direct contact to the individual responsible is absolutely adhered to by all staff and clients.



### KISS the Team

Planning a new event starts, with your motivation, and connecting yourself with positive people, leaders in community. If you're planning a new event, know your strengths, most importantly, know your weaknesses. Find members of your team to take on your weak spots. Put people on your team that are kind to others. Few people accomplish great things, without a tremendous team. Your team could be your friends, your neighbours, your family, volunteers, political leaders, your co-workers, staff and bosses at all levels. Identify the strengths of the individuals on your team and put them in the right roles. Use the "KISS Principle", clear, consistent communication and positive reinforcement. It's essential today to succinctly, emotionally sell your event, while offering real benefits to your patrons, sponsors, partners, volunteers and staff. Make sure that every member of your team understands the purpose of the event and the benefits. After you have identified the best people for your team. Enlist, empower and have faith in your people that they will deliver.

### Leaders Avoid Unnecessary Complexity

Effective leaders don't use confusing phrases or jargon. Confusion leads to lost time, sucks energy from the team and wastes valuable resources. To avoid misunderstandings, keep it simple. Direct communication improves productivity especially in large groups and develops efficient problem solving. Complicating our events is detrimental to our effectiveness and diminishes attendance. Keeping things simple, reduces errors. Events work best when you avoid unnecessary complexity. Leadership and communication should be precise, brief, straight forward and simple.

Following in Johnson leadership style, lead by example, be accountable, own

your mistakes, analyze first, criticize last and delegate. Pete Seager said, "any darn fool can make something complicated, it takes a genius to make it simple". Software designers solve the problem, then design the solution simply. It takes patience sometimes to identify the route of a problem and even more time to design a straightforward solution that is user friendly or for the identified solution to really achieve the results that you are looking for.

### KISS Customer Service

Lead by example for your event team, with your awesome customer service. Greet everyone; sponsors, partners, patrons, vendors, staff and volunteers in an upbeat tone. Really listen, be genuinely empathetic, understand the problem, solve the problem, or figure out the next steps. Lastly show appreciation and follow-up. Keep the process simple and straightforward. Utilize the process of excellent customer service in context to your event. Break down every aspect of the event, into bite size manageable tasks and fully understand how each area functions and its relationship to adjacent pieces. Not overworking or complicating any one area. Richard Edmund Williams, a Canadian Animator, best known for his works "Who Framed Roger Rabbit", said, "inexperienced animators may over-animate their works". He urges animators to use the "KISS Principle", so that their work may not do too much and move too much, losing the authenticity of the character.

### KISS the Revenue

Review all your event revenue streams, tickets, vendors, food, beverage, parking, ATM's VIP experiences with the "KISS Principle" in mind as the customer. Put all the revenue streams in the best possible locations on the site, adjacent to attractions that make it simple for the

customer to engage in. Make sure that each revenue stream is simplified.

### Can't Fix It?

During the beginning, and anytime after the start of a project, or an event, check your gut? If it doesn't feel right, figure out the problem, fix it or cancel it. Don't be afraid to end or cancel a project, if it is too risky or just not right. I have created dozens of successful 2 to 25-year annual events, programs and festivals. I have also shelved many events, until, the right time. The right time could be when the right partners or team appears. I don't need to tell you that the entertainment industry is one of the riskiest businesses. A good question to ask yourself is, whether your superiors will support you if your project fails or if a mistake is made? If the answer is no, shelving the project until you have the right support may be the best move. Before you cancel a project work through the process of the "KISS Principle".

Be an effective leader and have fun creating new events.

Utilizing the methods of the "KISS Principle", be the effective leader that incorporates Kelly Johnston, Mark Held or Richard Williams style. Think of Shakespeare's brevity with your communication and application. In the concept development, employ Leonardo da Vinci's ability to visualize the completed project before the work commences. Keep it Simple, Straightforward and enjoy maximizing all the opportunities.

**Bea MacGregor** is responsible for the initial development and ongoing success of the Alderney Landing Craig Gallery, Theatre, Farmer's Market, and Events Plaza, providing over 600 diverse cultural performances and events annually. She believes in empowering the community to thrive socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically. As Alderney Landing's Executive Director, Bea assists the Volunteer Board of Director's by leading a dynamic staff team, partners, and volunteers, who share a passion for collaboratively and creatively making a cultural difference and enriching lives. Her holistic approach in providing a network of support strengthens artists, and entrepreneurs, at all levels, building a strong sense of community. Annually through Bea's leadership Alderney Landing supports over 140 not-for-profits and charities. Bea can be reached at: [bea@alderneylanding.com](mailto:bea@alderneylanding.com) or 902 233-2196. For more information on Alderney Landing, go to: [www.alderneylanding.com](http://www.alderneylanding.com).