

THE VISIONARY LEADERSHIP OF
JANE GOODALL



ERIN CREEGAN-DOUGHERTY

FEB 18TH 2024

The Visionary Leadership of Jane Goodall

Lasting Inspiration

This article aims to share the significant impact Jane Goodall has had as a leader, informing the readers about her heart-led leadership style, which inspires and transforms those around her to take action. It's a style and message of leadership that I hope everyone can learn from and find valuable takeaways. Her story and values have deeply impacted my own life, motivating me to share with others a little bit about her teachings, journey, and the positive legacy she will leave on the world. Her multifaceted leadership style—rooted in compassion and the power of storytelling—demonstrates that change is most profound when it comes from within, moving hearts rather than imposing values. Goodall has inspired countless individuals, including myself, to take meaningful action. Her focus on mission-centred leadership has not only revolutionized the field of conservation but also set a benchmark for leaders worldwide.

My deep personal admiration of Jane Goodall dates back to my youth when I was part of the Roots & Shoots club in junior high; those opportunities empowered me to follow up my passions. That moment, looking back, and the experiences I had in that program would leave a lasting impact. I vividly remember watching her documentary, where I thought, “She’s the type of adult I want to grow up to be.” Goodall’s empathetic leadership, characterized by her deep connection with both people and wildlife, resonates with my own aspirations to one day be at the forefront, of inspiring positive change. Goodall’s values of emphasizing perseverance and opportunity echo the sentiment that I have long believed. Life will always be filled with peaks and valleys, but it is our resolve to continue on and not give up that will shape our journey in life.



Figure 2 Source (Voorhies, S)



Figure 1 Source (Jane Goodall National Geographic)

Early Career

Born in London in 1934, Jane Goodall's journey to becoming a revered leader in conservation began in 1957 when she travelled to Africa.¹ In Nairobi, she embarked on the path that would launch her professional career, meeting the paleoanthropologist and anthropologist Louis Leakey. Despite her lack of formal university training, Leakey entrusted her with the task of observing a group of chimpanzees—an opportunity that Goodall leveraged to develop her unique research style.

Over time, her work brought new insights into the social lives of chimpanzees, leading to increasing recognition. As her reputation for leadership, commitment to conservation and activism grew, her strategy evolved from immersive research in the Gombe forest, observing and documenting primate behaviour, to incorporating community engagement as she recognized the necessity of involving local people to address conservation challenges effectively.

As she grew international recognition, Goodall's strategy continued to evolve, incorporating servant leadership and transformational qualities. She began using her platform to raise awareness about conservation issues, speaking at international conferences and engaging with policymakers. Key decisions that marked changes in her path included the establishment of the Jane Goodall Institute in 1977 to support her research in Gombe and beyond.² This significant move marked a shift from pure research to a broader focus on conservation and welfare, paired with an expansion beyond primatology to include public education and advocacy. The founding of the Roots & Shoots program in 1991 empowered young people to take an active role in conservation, signifying a commitment to empowering the next generation to create a sustainable and long-term impact.³

Footnote 1: Jane Goodall on a life as a woman defending the Wild | chatham house ... (n.d.-a). <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/11/jane-goodall-life-woman-defending-wild>

Footnote 2: Roots & Shoots. Jane Goodall. (2023, December 11). <https://janegoodall.ca/what-we-do/canada-programs/roots-and-shoots/>

Footnote 3: Mogenet, P. (2017, December 19). Interview with primatologist Jane Goodall. Egon Zehnder. <https://www.egonzehnder.com/insight/interview-with-primatologist-jane-goodall>



Figure 3 Source (Guardian News and Media)

Evolution Of Leadership

Goodall's path wasn't without obstacles; she navigated through scientific skepticism and gender bias, breaking new ground in primatology and redefining leadership. Her approach to avoiding confrontation and instead using narrative to reach people's hearts has been central to her philosophy. She also encountered gender bias in a male-dominated field, which played a significant role in shaping her leadership approach to creating change. Goodall believed in avoiding direct confrontation, often saying, "I don't see that there's much value in actually confronting people. If I were to start, you would come up against a wall, and they would be thinking, 'I've got to refute this woman.'"⁵ This philosophy helped shape her leadership style, which emphasizes telling stories to reach the heart rather than the head. Another major hurdle was balancing her research with her growing role as an activist, all the while ensuring that her messaging remained grounded in her research findings.

Funding was a constant challenge, as long-term research and activism require significant resources. However, Goodall became adept at securing funding through her transformational programs and messaging, although she often expressed concern about leaving a lasting legacy and a strong enough foundation behind. I deeply admire Jane Goodall's leadership for its multifaceted style. She leads not only with compassion but also through transformative leadership, harnessing her ability to inspire and motivate those around her.



Figure 4 Source (FRSA, C. H.)

Unlike many conservationists and movements that impose their values on others, I value her leading-from-the-heart leadership approach. She advocates for change through storytelling, often quoted as saying, "I have to reach the heart, not the head. You have to find the stories that will reach their heart, that will touch them—because I truly believe that people must change from within."⁶ I firmly believe that our world suffers from a lack of empathy and a lost sense of connection with others. Society is often viewed as a disconnected array of parts, without recognizing that everything is, in fact, interconnected. A single bad decision can have far-reaching consequences, rippling through the fabric of our collective existence. As a leader, Goodall has the ability to see the larger picture; she recognizes underlying issues in her broad mission of conservation. She understands that it's not just about traditional conservation methods; we must address the larger issues at play. An example is that she frequently discusses how increasing education for women worldwide leads to smaller family sizes, addressing the critical issue of overpopulation on a planet with finite natural resources. Her educational goals and empowerment programs try to address the root causes of the issues, not just the symptoms of the problem, a fact overlooked by many leaders and changemakers.



Figure 5 Source (Barbeau, C.)

Approach to Criticism

It is inevitable that we will all make mistakes at one point in our lives, but I believe it is how we handle those mistakes that define us. Goodall's handling of owning up to her mistakes, such as the unconventional methods of her early research or the "Seeds of Hope" controversy, showcases her remarkable ability to lead by example and maintain integrity. Her participative leadership style is defined by admitting mistakes, advocating for staying true to one's core values, and engaging in dialogue to understand alternative perspectives. This approach has not only solidified her reputation as a leader but has also supported her ability to turn setbacks into learning opportunities.

Footnote 5: Sheth, B. (2017, April 11). Leadership lessons from Jane Goodall: Investors can learn a lot from the iconic conservationist. HuffPost. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/leadership-lessons-from-jane-goodall-investors-can_b_58ecd610e4boeao28d568cd7

Footnote 6: Tim.faiella. (2021, May 20). Conversations for change: A call for courageous action through change leadership: National center for women & information technology. ncwit.org. <https://ncwit.org/video/change-leadership-a-call-for-courageous-action-with-dr-jane-goodall-video-playback/>



Figure 6 (Guardian News and Media)

Leadership Through Connection

Her leadership style has been shaped by many factors over the years, yet her ability to be self-aware and the support garnered from several key relationships have guided her as a north star. Goodall frequently discusses the value of self-awareness, emphasizing that by knowing ourselves, we can maximize and refine our strengths. She recalls that as a child, she identified her three greatest skills: patience, the capacity for love, and physical stamina. These attributes and being self-aware of her strengths, she has said, were crucial to her success in life, allowing her to persevere when others might have given up.

Beyond her self-awareness, her leadership ability over the years has been significantly influenced by key relationships throughout her life. The mentorship of Louis Leakey, the emotional connections with the Gombe chimpanzees, and the support from her mother and her husband, Hugo van Lawick, have all contributed to her leadership style and her relentless drive to effect lasting change. Goodall's skill in fostering collaboration and synergy among team members, alongside her pioneering community-centred conservation work, underscores her conviction that sustainable change must benefit and involve local communities.⁷

She strongly advocates that change needs to be initiated from the ground up in society; this belief supports her Roots and Shoots program, empowering change from below, as she expresses that long-term change is only possible when individuals are empowered to take action from within. Her steadfast dedication to leadership and her commitment to making a positive impact on the world are qualities I seek to exemplify. Goodall's extraordinary ability to reach and inspire people around the world surpasses societal limitations of background, generation, and nationality. Stressing the need for continuous improvement. She acknowledges that yesterday's achievements do not guarantee tomorrow's success and insists that leaders in every field, from business to conservation, must commit to lifelong learning. There is a clear link between her leadership style and the practical tools that can be derived for advancement in both professional arenas and personal development—it's about empowering others to take charge of their actions, to learn, and to make their own informed decisions.

Leadership of Jane Goodall By Erin Creegan-Dougherty

What We Can All Learn From Compassionate Leadership

As I reflect on Goodall's journey, I am inspired to follow in her footsteps, armed with the knowledge that empowering others and leading with compassion can indeed change the world. Jane Goodall's empathetic leadership, characterized by her deep connection with both people and wildlife, profoundly resonates with my aspirations to one day be at the forefront of enacting positive change. Her ability to understand and articulate the interconnectedness of our ecosystem serves as a powerful reminder of the impact our actions have on the greater whole. This holistic approach can remind us all to consider the well-being of all stakeholders, ensuring that progress for some does not come at the expense of others. Goodall's unwavering dedication and resilience, even when faced with daunting challenges, inspire me to approach my future leadership journey with the same tenacity and grace. Few leaders are able to emulate her balance of steadfast determination and adaptability, understanding that true leadership requires not just vision but the flexibility to navigate the ever-changing landscape with integrity and purpose.

To add a personal closing note to this article, I hope that the reader takes away the message: no matter what field you are in, or what path in life you are walking. Everyone can learn from the leadership that Jane Goodall exemplifies—one of compassion, leading by example, empowering all those around her and living not as a leader who talks down to others around her but as one who moves people by capturing their hearts. Her approach has deeply impacted my own life and path, motivating me to share insights into her life, her journey, and the evolution of her leadership with others, to give them the chance to learn the same lessons I did. From my childhood memory to my research today, her example instills in me the belief and the desire to make a positive, lasting impact in my life, as she has in hers.



Figure 7 Source (Jane Goodall National Geographic)

Footnote 7: How Jane Goodall pioneered heart-centered leadership. Innate Motion. (2022, September 21). <https://innatemotion.com/stories/how-jane-goodall-pioneered-heart-centered-leadership/#:~:text=She%20embodied%20heart%2Dcentered%20leadership,through%20her%20love%20and%20empathy.>