

## David Chrislip

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

"He wrote the book on it." That's a saying we use to describe someone who is truly an expert on a topic. Today we'll learn about a gentleman from rural Kansas who is a national expert on making communities better and encouraging more civil discourse in our society. When it comes to collaborative leadership, he wrote the book on it, and I mean that literally. It's today's Kansas Profile.

David Chrislip is a nationally-known scholar, author, consultant, and speaker on the topic of collaborative leadership. For the last five years, he has served as Director of Faculty Development for the Kansas Leadership Center in Wichita. As of March 2012, he is planning to scale back his duties although he will continue to be engaged in this work.

David Chrislip graduated from Oklahoma State University in economics and history, received his master's from Wichita State University in economics, and earned a MPA degree from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

For 20 years, he was a senior Course Director with the Colorado Outward Bound School and the National Outdoor Leadership School.

"My role as an instructor was to teach the skills necessary for safe travel in the wilderness and help the group learn to work together and make sound decisions in potentially risky situations," David wrote. "Rather than guiding participants through these experiences, I helped the group develop the skills and capacities to meet the challenges they would face on their own." In other words, instead of directing them, he helped them build their own capacity collaboratively.

Then he began to work with groups of civic leaders from various regions. "I began to realize the power of community building as a way of transforming civic culture," David wrote.

David was a Senior Associate of the National Civic League, Vice President of Research and Development for American Leadership Forum, and taught graduate courses in leadership and ethics at the University of Denver and at the University of Colorado at Denver.

David co-founded a venture called Skillful Means. For more than 30 years, he has helped people to enhance their leadership capacities and create visions and strategies for their organizations and communities by working together. He describes the broader purpose of his work as being "to build civil society."

In 1989, when David and a colleague were asked to evaluate a leadership development program, they wanted to compare its work to the best practices of collaborative leadership. But there was one problem: There were no best practices of collaborative leadership in the literature.

Still, David knew that there were many people practicing collaborative leadership, although their work had not been documented, so he and his colleague launched a research initiative. They conducted six indepth case studies and 46 additional studies of successful community collaborations and wrote a book titled Collaborative Leadership. David later produced another text called the Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook.

The books provide many examples and strategies. They are based on what David calls the collaborative premise: “If you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community.” That foundational idea has helped collaborative efforts across the nation make dramatic progress on tough issues.

Five years ago, when the staff of the new Kansas Leadership Center was getting organized, they called on David to help shape this new initiative in Kansas. This was especially fitting, because David had grown up in the rural Kansas town of Abbyville, population 127 people. Now, that’s rural.

"David Chrislip is so many things to the Kansas Leadership Center - mentor, scholar, teacher and sage," said Ed O'Malley, President of the KLC. "His impact on KLC, Kansas and this nation is profound. Put simply, he is a rock star in civic leadership development and we have benefited significantly from his presence at KLC."

It’s time to leave David Chrislip, but we are thankful for the contributions he has made. As the subtitle of David’s book says, Collaborative Leadership is about how citizens and civic leaders can make a difference. David should know – he wrote the book on it.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.