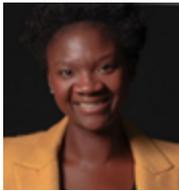


GATHER. GROW. EVOLVE.

The truth is this – once you're doing something that you are passionate about, you will always have the ability to lead.



Leanne Antoine, Clinical Lead and Director of Distinct Physiotherapy and Council Member of the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

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I am Leanne Antoine, the Clinical Lead and Director of [Distinct Physiotherapy](#). I am one of 12 council members for the [Chartered Society of Physiotherapy](#) (CSP) – a member led organisation in my industry. I am also a media spokesperson for the same organisation and my contributions can be found in well-known publications, namely The Times, the [BBC](#) and [Sky](#). I am a public speaker and a black female entrepreneur.

When the [Institute of Association Leadership](#) (IAL) asked me to author an article about Leadership in their first ever magazine, Elevation, not only did I feel honoured to do so but it really made me think about my career progression and the role I have established as a leader within my profession. The questions at the forefront of my mind were 'How' and 'When' did I get here and how my journey could be of use to you, the reader.

You see, my career path was conventional in terms of securing an undergraduate part time physiotherapy degree, but I did work as a physiotherapy assistant at the same time. As I worked my way up to becoming a senior physiotherapist in the public healthcare sector, I felt that the work and role of the physiotherapist, in terms

of visibility to the public was very much in its infancy. I ignored the voices that spoke to me about this for a very long time – trying to settle into the concept that is '9 – 5' but constantly battling with the fact that I wanted and needed more for and from my profession. I thought that working privately would satisfy my career urges, but it didn't, and I eventually established Distinct Physiotherapy some 9 years after I initially graduated as a Chartered Physiotherapist and just 6 months after completing a Masters in Neuromusculoskeletal Advanced Physiotherapy.

On reflection I don't think that the decision and the transition I made was brave at the time, although looking back on it, there was a vulnerability in this career move. There is no courage without vulnerability. My decision came from the clarity to create my own innovative and creative way to exist in a profession that I felt needed revitalising and refreshing at the time.

My original goals were based on providing affordable, accessible physiotherapy and raising the visibility of Physiotherapy to the public. I still do not know why the latter was so important to me or why I felt that I had a responsibility to 'lead' on this but in my own way, I did.

**“There is no
courage without
vulnerability.”**

Image courtesy of Lynn Margolis, Cherish Studios Photography

“I spoke openly and honestly about my exposures as a black woman within my profession and for many my response opened wounds that people didn’t know they had.”

I started off reaching out to schools in my local area explaining what I was offering, and many schools were actually really keen on me speaking to Year 10’s and upwards as these students were in the process of making career-based decisions. This voluntary drive was born out being told by a college tutor that Physiotherapy was not an achievable goal for me. I wanted other students to recognise that their goals could be achieved with flexibility in career path and I also wanted them to know that Physiotherapy as a career choice was open to them. In 2020, data provided by the CSP stated that black people made up just 1.9% of the profession. With a career span that is now 15 years in my industry, I know that my goal to raise visibility was one that was essential and a goal that I am dedicated to for the rest of my career as a lifetime commitment. I no longer simply speak to students about my endeavours, I speak to corporates about emotional intelligence in the workplace and wellbeing. I use my social media platforms to engage my audience on such matters entwining it with physiotherapy education. My visible leadership journey started here. Whilst I was focusing on engaging the public, my physiotherapy colleagues were watching, and they were starting to reach out to me.

Now, the pandemic has uncovered so many matters for everyone and the impact of it has been so different on everyone. However, the death of George Floyd in 2020 and the eruption of ‘black lives matter’ started to raise questions about racism within workforces but more poignant and relevant to me was racism within physiotherapy, my industry. I have always known that I have been a minority and I am very aware of some of the barriers that I have faced because of this. I believe that this would need to be explored more deeply in another article – particularly as there is an ever-growing appetite for this type of content, with an exciting change in our narrative as people begin to educate themselves. As my physiotherapy colleagues struggled to address the systemic racism within

our profession, I responded to a post on [Facebook](#) that was placed in a group of physiotherapists and therapists. I videoed my response and spoke openly and honestly about my exposures as a black woman within my profession and for many my response opened wounds that people didn’t know they had. It opened some for me too. At the time, I had no idea how the video would impact me, the profession and the people who listened to it, but I know that the video is still shared amongst my colleagues for educational purposes and insight.

The pandemic has ignited a need for engagement on so many levels in the workplace and it has undoubtedly become an absolute priority (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020). It has created a window of opportunity for people to speak their truths (I hope that it remains), but it has also come at the cost of emotional and physical exhaustion. Many environments have seen increased numbers of burnout with severely exhausted members of staff (Queen & Harding, 2020). I wonder whether our workplaces can make the engagement culture a long-term sustainable change whilst it supports its employees. Can those of us in leadership positions recognise and accept that we are equal in many ways to those that we are leading and can we see how this humbled level of engagement would not only develop fruitful relationships in the workplace but also lead to more profitable outcomes? (Jones, 2017).

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Distinct Physiotherapy approaches its seventh year, this year but I have been working tirelessly for the last fifteen years trying to make an impact in my industry. I can see some light. As my career transcends with my council role, my paid public speaking opportunities, and my evolving wellbeing studio, I hope to have a greater impact on the public and those within my profession.

The truth is this – once you’re doing something that you are passionate about, you will always have the ability to lead. ■