

1 Leadership Journey: Skill or Personal Mission?

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“Leadership is simply having something left over, after taking care of yourself, to care for someone or something else.”

—John Ertha, Founder of Homestead

John Ertha died at the age of eighty-two after a life dedicated to education, theater, and leadership development for children and teens. He taught them to “work hard with others to achieve a common goal and to expect great things from themselves. Most importantly, they learned to value and respect the differences between people and understand that everyone has a contribution to make if allowed to participate” (*Portland Press Herald*, Oct. 18, 2009).

What wonderful lessons on leadership for children and teens—and what wonderful lessons for leadership in the world of work!

Leaders can be found in all walks of life, of all ages, races, creeds, and nations. Leadership demands much from us, despite our motivations to lead, the challenges we face, or the various opportunities

presented to us. As Carolyn Warner points out in her book, *Words of Extraordinary Women*:

“The Japanese word for teacher is sensei, which means far more than just someone who instructs. The literal meaning of the word is honored leader. A sensei is a guide, a mentor, giver and sharer not just of information, but of knowledge. And when I think of the greatest leaders that I know, or have studied, they combine all of these qualities.”

In *Real Women, Real Leaders*, our authors share stories about their mentors and guides, the various “sensei” in their lives, and how they have been impacted. In exploring those who have impacted them, they also share how they, themselves, have now taken on this role for others in their lives. The essays in this book show how these diverse authors view leadership and their personal journeys to becoming leaders. Their stories point out that leadership is not just a skill to be mastered, but also a mission, a value, a way to live.

For many of our authors, their earliest mentors or guides were their mothers, fathers, or grandmothers. Lessons learned in childhood supported them throughout life. In an article by Sorcher and Brant from the *Harvard Business Review* on the hardwiring of leadership, they concluded, “Our experience has led us to believe that much of leadership talent is hardwired in people before they reach their early or mid 20s. That means, as far as leadership is concerned, people are reasonably complete packages by the time they arrive at the corporate doorstep. Their ability to lead has already been shaped by a multitude of factors and experiences that took root early in their lives” (Are You Picking the Right Leaders? Melvin Sorcher and James Brandt, *Harvard Business Review*, February 2002).

Sorcher and Brant’s conclusion holds true for the stories found in *Real Women* as the authors share how early experiences in their lives built their leadership qualities and propelled them to success.

My own personal journey to leadership also began as a young child. Presented with an opportunity, I was always willing to step up to the plate at school, Girl Scouts, or even planning a neighborhood talent show to raise money for charity. I loved the sense of control that leadership can bring. But the downside of that was that I often took it too far and alienated my friends. When three of my best friends in fourth grade formed an “I hate Priscilla” club, I was shocked, angry, and sad. I had not included them in the planning of our Girl Scout bicycle trip. But in fourth grade those issues usually flame out quickly and, thankfully, they did and within a week we were best friends again. Lessons learned? The art of humility coupled with the ability to include, inspire, and motivate others in tasks goes a long way toward persuading others to follow you. These are lessons I continue to teach myself every day!

In fact, in a 2012 Girl Scout study of eight- to seventeen-year-olds, one-third of the girls said they did not want to be leaders because they feared being disliked by their peers. The study goes on to state:

“Leadership qualities girls would very much like to have as adults include:

- Standing up for their beliefs and values (84 percent)
- Trying to change the world for the better (68 percent)
- Bringing people together to get things done (64 percent)”¹

These qualities correspond to the leadership competencies from the Zenger Folkman study:

- Displays high integrity and honesty
- Champions change
- Collaboration and teamwork

¹ToGetHer There: Girls’ Insights on Leadership, Girl Scouts of the USA; January 2012

So Why This Book? Why Now?

When Kathy asked me to work with her on this book, I jumped at the chance. Kathy has been a leading mentor in my life. As a sister-in-law (full disclosure here! I am married to her only brother), we have worked together at various companies since 1991. She has supported me, pushed me, and exposed me to many professional opportunities. She has always believed in me and talked positively about me in front of others. Don't we all want praise, recognition, and encouragement? Do we do that enough for our co-workers, our children, our spouses? Kathy has definitely been instrumental in reminding me that giving credit where it's due is a strong, essential leadership quality.

While women have made great strides in leadership, and many of those stories have been documented, the truth is that today women represent only 5 percent of chief executives in Fortune 1000 companies (*Catalyst*, November 7, 2014, "Women CEOs of the Fortune 1000").

Knowing the tremendous stories of women that we encounter every day, Kathy and I felt it was time to gather these stories together, stories of other women, like us, who have been, and still are, on the journeys to leadership. And, as importantly, we wanted to include women who represent fields inside and outside of the corporate world—women who are impacting government, industry associations, non-profits, sports, and yes, the business world. So many books have been written about the topic of leadership, but *Real Women, Real Leaders* aims to tell a different story; in fact, twenty-four different stories, all bound together by the leadership competencies as described in the 2012 research by Zenger and Folkman. (The entire Zenger/Folkman research study, along with their sixteen identified leadership competencies, can be found in the Appendix of this book.) More than 7,300 leaders were studied, and it was discovered that, of the sixteen leadership competencies, women out-scored men on twelve, including:

- Taking initiative
- Inspiring and motivating others

- Driving for results
- Building relationships
- Collaboration and team work

Not surprisingly, when asked to list their top five competencies, our authors chose these as well.

As a corporate trainer who specializes in participant-centered instruction, training design, presentation skills, meeting facilitation, and adult learning theory, I often find myself observing and identifying leaders as I conduct group sessions. While I am fascinated by different leadership styles, it is equally fascinating to check off the list of competencies in action and to see first-hand how women differ from men in their leadership styles—most notably in communication, collaboration, and motivation. In my role as a consultant over the past twenty-four years, I have not been in a traditional leadership role: one where I manage other people or report to one organization. But in my role working with a wide variety of clients with diverse needs, my leadership role has been to communicate prolifically, exhibit expertise, motivate and inspire others, and model collaboration and teamwork. To make a lasting impact on people's lives, whether it be in a professional development workshop, in a community volunteer opportunity, at church or at work, leadership is a value and a mission that real leaders live on a daily basis.

In *Discovering Your Authentic Leadership*, a research report for the *Harvard Business Review* by George, Sims, McLean, and Mayer (2007), the researchers found that leadership emerged from life stories. After interviewing 125 leaders, they resolved: "The journey of authentic leadership begins with understanding the story of your life. Authentic leaders reframe life events to discover their passion to lead. Learning from life experiences is central to knowing who you are and your development and effectiveness as a leader."

The stories in our book explain the authors' personal vision of leadership, the obstacles they overcame, and the mentors and teachers

they encountered along the way. Now is the time for their stories to be shared. As more and more women are taking on influential roles in our society, businesses, and the world, what are the lessons we can learn as we share our personal journeys? This book aims to encourage more mentors for young girls and young women as they enter and progress in the world of work. While it is especially important to have female role models, it is equally important that men support, mentor, and promote women at work.

With this book, we hope to help our readers to consider that leadership “is more than a science. It is an art—a condition of the heart rather than just a set of things to do. Leadership from the heart is what is required of the successful organization” (Max Dupree, *Leadership Is an Art*, 2004).

So please, open your hearts to these stories. Learn from the journeys of these women. Consider your leadership competencies. Reflect on how you can manifest them in your world of work, your family, your life. And consider making leadership your mission, rather than just a set of skills.

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