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Advancing Women In Leadership

Preface

Several years ago while chairing a committee for the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME), the committee charge was to research and determine what constitutes a multicultural leader. We examined research on the issue, we queried members throughout the organization, and we debated data continuously in meetings. As one might imagine then, this exchange of information among committee members who represent various diversity, our interactions with others who represent their own uniqueness, enjoined and brought to the surface many other important questions.

Soon committee members (nine female and two male) became embroiled and intertwined within discussions that intensified around such issues as "what makes a sensitive multicultural female leader who might adjust policies established by White males and make them appealing to others?" And, "what about institutional policies established by White males and their direct implications for all women and women leaders of color?" Moreover, we explored ways that women may differ from men while carrying out policies, practices, and procedures within a fragile U.S. Military Industrial Complex such as ours? Questions such as "in what ways might women leaders make professional decisions that are different from their male counterparts?" Or, might a sensitive female multicultural leader reveal one who is sensitive to race, ethnicity; gender (especially women and girls) economics, various disability, and language groups.

Various committee members extended and intensified their research on women leaders and began to ask broader questions surrounding women leaders. They wanted to know "what experiences and insights might have occurred along the way that prepared women for sensitivity to diversity in their leadership?" It is with these questions in mind that we move toward a better understanding of what leadership means to women and how might their management styles differ from many of their

male counterparts.

Women managers who viewed themselves different from their male counterparts, but feared that there was no difference in their actions from men voiced concern. They offered similar responses to Belenkey and others in "Women's Ways of Knowing," who maintained that women are relational thinkers and men are more hierarchical in their understandings and dispositions. Therefore, to these women, perhaps one major difference between female and male leaders might be that women think and behave by relating to others and men do not. For example, female leaders might relate to and reveal sensitivity to employee's personal struggles with family and friends and might even allow time off from work to resolve issues. However, a typical male response might insist that employees work through their issues by focusing on their work. But, could there exist other differences in leadership among women and men? What makes a multicultural leader? And, what are the differences?

In order to respond to this critically important issue surrounding female leaders I posed several questions to a diverse group of women. I approached various race, ethnic, gender, economic, language, and disability groups of women. These women represent various agencies, organizations, and institutions. They range from women who volunteer in homeless shelters, physicians in hospitals and private settings, leaders in schools and academies, and social service representatives such as state and federal police/military and/or welfare to work programs. A resounding response to my query is "the major difference between women in leadership is that we must prove ourselves worthy to men," or "the politics of the workplace oftentimes overwhelm me and I am unable to lead as I choose," or "I worry that my leadership does not differ from men" to "I like the current system and see no reason for change." These responses from women tend to connect to national data collected on women in U.S. society.

The following data was collected from the perspective of women, by women, and asked of both women and men. That is, several women collected data from both females and males; men and women who represent various racial groups; persons who represent various ethnicities internationally; groups who represent different sexual orientations; and other groups who represent diversity. This group offered a resounding chorus of voices that revealed an intense belief in transforming the system to meet their various needs. There was also a less significant set of data within this category expressing a keen concern for maintenance of the system.

So, it is within the above framework that this special issue of Advancing Women in Leadership (AWL) is positioned. And, most importantly, I invite you to observe the writings of a diverse group of women directly affected by 9/11. The writers join in to examine the roles and behaviors of women in leadership. The manuscripts shared here would have been presented at the Research on Women and Education (RWE) conference, October, 2001 in Baltimore, MD. However, due to the tragedy of September 11, 2001, a month prior to the conference date and many cancellations from participants, the meeting was canceled.

In closing, to the women, men, families, children, and friends who directly faced tragedy on 9/11, we wish you confidence and peace, we love you and we carry forth our work in your honor! Pausing to the tragedy that changed our lives forever, AWL and RWE staffs and membership continue our work in honor of those most intimately affected by the tragedy. Together, we provide conference participants an avenue to share their work with you. Thus, AWL and RWE honor those most closely touched by the tragedy of 9/11 by dedicating this issue in your honor.

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