



## Seven Leadership Practices

The desire and drive to put your face into the wind, to have a hand in shaping the world around you, and to inspire others to join you in accomplishing something much bigger than your self-interests come from within. If you've heard the call, you know it, even if it has only been a whisper. Yet, just as musical, artistic or mathematical talent must be developed for a skilled musician, artist, or engineer to emerge, so it is with leadership. Becoming a highly evolved, effective leader requires the same thing it takes for musicians to get to Carnegie Hall: practice, practice, practice.

This final section of *Powering Up!* guides you through Seven Practices that I believe are essential for women *Achievers* to become *Leaders*.

How did I develop this list? I started with the classic qualities that come to mind right away: Vision, Courage, Judgment. I ended up with about 20 bullet points that I sent to several hundred female leaders to get their reactions. "What was missing?" I wanted to know. "What behaviors were more important than others?" I ended up with an even longer list—but clear winners. Certain qualities made nearly every woman's top ten. I then thought through the connections between specific qualities and leadership behaviors, asking myself, aren't "willingness to take risks" and "courage" related? That's how I arrived at the Seven Practices that are the subject of Part III.

So here's my list. Only one—*Womaninity*—is unique to women. The other six are equally important for men. What's different is how we integrate

these practices into our personal leadership style, which must be authentic to our gender and our times.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, aspiring women—regardless of our generation—must still struggle to emerge from the cultural quicksand that seeps under our skin, grips us to stay in place, and resists our efforts to emerge to new and higher ground. Becoming a leader is a process that begins with a decision, but is worth the effort. Are you ready to head for deeper waters?

## CHAPTER 7

### **Discover Your Purpose**

*As I thought about strong women of history, I realized that they stepped out in some way.*

— MELINDA GATES, Philanthropist, *Insider*

Sometime early in the morning on Sunday, August 12, 1973, Mary Doyle, my 22-year-old sister, took her own life. She got up before the rest of the family was awake, went out to the garage, turned on her car, and laid down near the exhaust pipe, pulling a sleeping bag over her head to keep the deadly fumes close. By the time we woke up and found her, Mary was gone.

I'm the big sister and second child (my older brother, Danny, came first) in a very close family of seven children. When my first sister arrived, I took her under my protective wing from a young age, braiding Mary's golden hair, holding her hand as we walked to school, and mentoring her as my closest ally in the inevitable "girls against the boys" pillow fights, water balloon battles, and neighborhood skirmishes. As a young adult, Mary was fun, capable, crazy about Detroit Tiger All-Star catcher Bill Freehan, and a bit of a risk taker. She bought a powerful 450cc motorcycle and insisted I learn how to drive it, laughing at my terror. She was much better in math than I ever was and started programming computers when they were the

size of small garages. The *Detroit News* put her in charge of running their employee payroll while she was only a college sophomore. I was 25 years old when Mary spun into a downward cycle of depression, lost all sense of her glorious value, and gave up on herself. Her death was the end of Camelot for my family; you go on, but you're never the same after such a loss.

What went so terribly wrong in the life of a young woman full of promise? It's a tragic story, triggered by a first romance with the wrong guy. So why include such painful memories in a book meant to inspire women to stretch their wings? Because, as my own path has unfolded over the decades since that terrible Sunday morning, I've come to realize that my sister's suicide has been one of the driving forces of my life.

When I was a young sports broadcaster standing alone outside the doors of team locker rooms, trying to muster the courage to walk in, Mary was with me. My willingness to face whatever was waiting for me inside every locker room I ever entered was all about the other Marys growing up, watching a woman sports broadcaster on TV. I wanted each one of them to believe in their unlimited potential—that they could be anything they wanted to be, no matter how many times culture, stereotypes, or negative people around them signaled, “No you can't.” As a mid-level executive at Ford Motor Company, every time I took the professional risk of pushing, in some way, against the auto industry's entrenched “steel ceiling,” my sister was with me. Whenever another woman asked me for help or mentoring, to me, it was Mary asking. My answer, whenever I could, was always “Yes.” And during my darkest hours and seasons of greatest discouragement (and there have been plenty), she was with me then, too. Mary Doyle is the fire in my belly, the eternal flame burning within that gives my work purpose. Have you found yours?

### **Making the Leap from Me to We**

Discovering your purpose is the first quantum leap an accomplished *Achiever* must make in order to become a *Leader* capable of inspiring others

to action. “If a woman is just about herself, then she’s not seeing clearly. We exist meaningfully in relation to others, in relation to the world,” is the way internationally known spiritual leader and author Marianne Williamson put it during a “Sister Giant” conference in early 2010.<sup>2</sup> Over 500 women (I was one of them) traveled to Los Angeles from all over the United States and parts of Europe in response to Williamson’s call to “Awaken the Sleeping Giant in American Womanhood.” “The reason that so many people in American society are so lost in their weakness is because they’ve only been given a narcissistic model of personal growth. Me, me, me,” Williamson told us. “Once you get it that we are here to serve this big WE, something rises up within you. Your power has purpose, which is much bigger than ME.”

My sister’s suicide, I’ve come to understand, has fueled nearly every step I have taken to help change attitudes, policies, and practices that limit possibilities for half of the human race. It’s one thing to strive for excellence and take professional risks in pursuit of your own career ambitions. That’s a great start. It’s another thing entirely, and a much more enduring source of energy, to be driven by a clear sense of purpose to make a difference about something bigger than yourself—something that you care passionately about. However, you don’t have to endure personal tragedy to find your purpose. Finding joy in your work can be equally inspiring and powerful.

Dr. Judy Rosener, a University of California at Irvine business professor and nationally recognized expert on women’s leadership, told me, “Women start companies for very different reasons than men. Men start them if they think they can make money. Women start companies for a passion. You find very few women-owned companies that aren’t started because the women really feel something.” Rosener gives the example of Dr. Taryn Rose, an orthopedic surgeon and founder of Taryn Rose Shoes. “Taryn was operating on women’s feet all the time and thought, ‘God, their feet are terrible!’ She came to the conclusion that most of women’s foot problems are because of the shoes we wear. So she decided to manufacture shoes that would be stylish but wouldn’t

hurt women's toes. Eventually, she sold her company for a lot of money. Now she's working to develop beautiful, sheer stockings that will still give women support," says Rosener. "So here's a physician who became a very successful entrepreneur because she was also interested in helping women have clothes that work for them but are still stylish. That's passion."

Dr. Rosener, who wrote "The Ways Women Lead,"<sup>3</sup> a ground-breaking 1990 article published by *Harvard Business Review* in 1990, is currently working on a book about sex-based brain, hormonal, and socialization differences and their implications for decision making in the workforce. She sees the need for a sense of purpose as an essential driver for *women's* ambition, in particular. "If you look at women-owned and women-led companies, the woman tends to be very identified with the product or service. That's not the case with men. They often don't care what the service or product is, as long as it makes money," says Rosener. That explains something I've always wondered about: why are the senior executives and board members for companies that make feminine-specific products like brassieres and tampons mostly men, even today? Rosener believes that for most men, money, success, and power are the catalysts for their ambition. Most women, her research has shown, need something more to fuel their drive to lead. We need a sense of purpose.

### **Lead with Your Passion, Leave When You've Lost It**

Years ago, when I was a newlywed, my husband Mike (now deceased) and I were talking about how unhappy he was at his job. I asked him, "What is it about your job that gives you joy?" I'll never forget the puzzled look on his face. He didn't seem to understand the reason for my question. "I like the money," he responded, with a shrug. I was astonished when I realized that Mike wasn't expecting to find personal satisfaction in his work. He sought that in other parts of his life. I can't imagine, however, staying very long in a professional position where I had lost the joy that comes from knowing you are making a difference.

People often ask me why I left successful careers in TV and the auto industry. My answer is always the same. In both cases, I left when I felt I was no longer making a difference. When I was fighting for equal access to sports locker rooms and helping to change TV viewers' attitudes about women's ability to cover sports, I had an endless supply of energy, tenacity, and passion for my job. But once my work as a change agent in Detroit was done, and I realized that it would be years before the TV networks would be ready to hire women reporters to really cover sports, not just provide sideline eye candy, I knew it was time for me to move on.

The same was true of my 13 years in corporate America. For the first 11 years working in communications and governmental affairs at Ford Motor Company, I thrived on the often grueling pace. During the 1990s, Ford was a stimulating environment. It was one of the most successful automotive companies in the world, and women were on the move. The long-entrenched auto industry "steel ceiling" was being pushed higher than it had ever been before. Highly skilled women were ascending to positions as plant managers, lawyers, engineers, designers, and even made a few inroads into the executive ranks. The higher you went, the fewer women there were. But our numbers were increasing, our opportunities were growing, and we knew we were bringing valuable, fresh perspective to critical discussions and decisions.

Even during times of intense crisis—and I went through plenty, including serving on the executive team for the deadly and devastating Ford Explorer/Firestone Tire business crisis<sup>4</sup>—the work was challenging and often exhilarating. The joy I felt in my work was fueled by my belief in the company's values and leadership, as well as my own ability to make a difference within the company. But my last two years at Ford, 2000 and 2001, were the most painful and discouraging of my professional career. It's often been said that we learn the most from our toughest times. I learned plenty in those two years. Following the Firestone/Explorer crisis and the firing of CEO Jac Nasser and several of his senior lieutenants, Ford was in a downward spiral, and the perfect storm was brewing in the auto industry. I'll leave it to others to write the books about how a once great company drifted dangerously close to the rocks and has now, once again, become one

of the most admired automotive corporations in the world. What led me to leave was the dramatic change (at the time) in Ford's internal culture. A work environment that was once fueled by teamwork and the pursuit of excellence around a clear vision had become Machiavellian. When watching your back and worrying about internal politics are essential for survival, in my book it's time to leave. Once I realized that it would be years before I could make a difference in what had become a very dysfunctional culture, my passion, commitment, and energy dried up very quickly. That's what happens when you lose your sense of purpose in your work.

Some would argue, correctly, that we need leaders who are willing to hang in there and be the change agents in dysfunctional or outdated work cultures. I agree. Women, in particular, have been deserting large corporations and starting their own businesses in record numbers. Women-owned firms now account for 16 percent of all jobs in the U.S. workforce and are expected to create more than half of the new jobs anticipated by 2018, according to the Center for Women's Business Research.<sup>5</sup> Most women who leave large and medium-sized employers to follow the entrepreneurial path tell researchers they are seeking greater professional opportunity, personal satisfaction, and work/life flexibility. They also mention "being sick of worrying about office politics" as another key factor in their decision to strike out on their own. Am I concerned that long overdue work culture changes will take even longer if too many women simply throw up their hands and leave large organizations? Absolutely.

But it's also essential for a woman with the ability and desire to lead to honestly address these critical questions: Are you fulfilling your sense of purpose through your present work? Do you believe you can truly make a difference in your present position? If your answer to those questions is "Yes," hang in there. Your leadership is needed. On the other hand, do you have a nagging sense that you are wasting precious time furiously treading water while getting no closer to the sense of purpose that gives your work meaning? If so, remember: leading is not about making money or achieving impressive titles. It's about making a difference.