

Gifts of Leadership

Excerpts from keynote speech delivered at the President's Award Luncheon held during the Executive Board Meeting of the Women's Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in January 2007 in Birmingham, Alabama.

Lee G. Bolman's and Terrence E. Deal's book, Leading With Soul is promoted as, "*An uncommon Journey of Spirit.*" *In this story of growth and personal revelation, they identify four gifts that leaders should give to those they lead.*

There is general agreement that with servant leadership, real leaders truly give to those they lead. But sometimes there is such stress associated with leading that there is nothing left to give. In Bolman and Deal's Leading With Soul, a corporate leader is facing burn out. He is struggling with an organization that is stalled. He is introduced to the gifts of leadership and this changes his life, outlook, and job.

Those that work closely with Steve, that is the character's name, are constantly looking to him for decisions, ideas, next steps, feedback...in other words they won't do a thing without his approval, okay and urging. This is creating overwhelming pressure and he is burning out. Someone who works with him recommends a coach, counselor, and mentor to help him discover how to lead from the *soul* and how to give the gifts of leadership thereby alleviating the pressure. His coach is an intuitive and insightful woman, a "*sheroe*" for the ages. She guides him to explore gifts that can be used to release himself, and revitalize the organization. He discovers these gifts slowly through the story of self discovery. It is not easy. As a matter of fact, it is very frustrating, because his guide, our heroine, does not want to just tell him as much as have him discover for himself.

What are those gifts that will release his team and allow them to move independently into making the organization healthy and viable?

The first gift he discovers is that of Authorship. Authorship is the sheer joy of creating something of lasting value; to place your name on something good. Leaders who give this gift empower people, within the parameters of the organization, to feel a sense of worth by creating something of which they can be proud. *At one of the schools I supervise, parent complaints were rampant. They all centered on the dogmatic and dictating (not dictatorial) way that the principal was running the school. I clearly explained to the parents that she was responsible for the health and safety of the school and couldn't they just get along? In private conversations with her, I strongly suggested she find a way to involve the parents in meaningful work at the school. The parents needed to find authorship in the community in which their children were being educated. And so was born the valet service for morning drop off. Without going into details the parents and teachers along with responsible students redesigned the unsafe drop off area in front of the school. This service led to a parent room, a wishing well for teachers, and the strongest volunteer program in our district. The interesting footnote is that she never changed her leadership style. Trusting people to solve problems brings about higher levels of motivation and better results.*

The second gift is Significance. It differs from authorship in that significance is the feeling of self worth that comes from working with others on something noteworthy. It is the powerful sense of accomplishment. Key to significance is the concept of us, ours and not me or mine. *The Chicago Bears followed their leader, Lovie Smith and feel a sense of significance; the New Orleans Saints do not. The Indiana Colts followed Tony Dungy and feel pretty significant; the New England Patriots do not. And even though you may not be a football fan, you probably feel a sense of significance that for the first time the winning coach of the Super Bowl will look like us!* The gift of significance lets people find meaning in the work, faith in themselves, confidence in the value of their lives and hope for the future. To open ones self to the ideas of significant community has to be couched in hope and wisdom.

The third gift of leadership is Power. Empowering people is risky but can have huge payoffs. The key is timing and sincerity. There are also mammoth downsides to giving power when it is win-lose situation; that is they win and you, as a leader, lose. In a win-win situation people feel included. You win and they win. That should be the goal. Hoarding power creates a powerless organization. *One of my major responsibilities is the training and professional development of principals. I always try to plan professional growth opportunities that I feel will meet their needs and move the organization forward toward higher student achievement. This past summer, a team of principals asked to go to UCLA (Go Bruins!) for a week long symposium. However, the symposium was designed for central office staff, not principals. In our district we have moved to principal led projects and oversight of major curriculum areas and so I thought, I'll approve, and let UCLA make the call as to the appropriateness of the training. I knew something was brewing when midday on the first day, I received an excited call from one of the principals. This is the best training. There were several more calls that day sharing the work that they wanted to replicate with their colleagues. Well to make a long story short, they came back ready to take over their professional development. I agreed and we set the parameters. Remember sharing leadership is not sitting back and giving cart-blanch. I left town for two weeks (vacation) and when I returned everything had been planned and organized. It was a fantastic launching of a year long focus on building teams. (Note: Five Dysfunctions of Team, Patrick Lencioni was used as the cornerstone. I would have hesitated to use such a strong message for those I coach and try to empower. They pushed themselves further than I would have.)* To pretend to give power and then ignore the decisions leads to mistrust and friction that can start a fire which will destroy the organization. Remember, in sharing power there must be collaboration with boundaries.

The fourth gift of leadership has a direction connection to II Corinthians 13. *"The greatest these is Love."* How do those you lead know you love them? When you show people you care they will reciprocate. When people love you they will warn you when you are on the edge and about to drop off. When they don't, they will pull up a chair to watch you careening down the slope. Caring begins with knowing about others. It means listening, understanding and accepting. Love is the willingness to reach out and open one's heart. Sometimes it is easy to identify those who have awarded us the gift of

love. (Note: During the presentation at the President's Award Luncheon at the Women's Missionary Society Executive Board Meeting in Birmingham, Alabama I shared those who have given me the gift of love. They included Dr. Dolly Adams, Bishop John Hurst Adams, Mrs. Vivienne Anderson, Jamesina Evans, Lola Cheltenham, Arvella Strong, and my missionary sisters in the 5th Episcopal District.) There is danger in calling names. As I contest, the minute I sat down, I remembered many, many, many others who had given me the gifts of leadership. I hope you know that I love and appreciate you and will acknowledge my gratefulness personally.)

Tribute to the presidents of the districts who work so closely with the Episcopal Supervisors: *You are amazing leaders who have given these gifts of leadership those you serve. You are a distinguished and honorable group of leaders, we thank you for giving us these gifts which help us grow, serve, and develop. Sometimes it has been a challenge but we recognize your courageous, brave and intelligent leadership. We thank you for the gifts of authorship, significance, power, and love.*