



The Call to Everyday Leadership

By Denise Bissonnette

To those who would be leaders,
let us not wait a single moment to invoke the powers
that would lend light and love into the world.

Let us not wait for an event of great import,
or a golden moment of opportunity
to rise to a noble challenge, to inspire the crowd,
to deliver a final blow to the enemy, or
to ride in on a white horse to save the day.

What if, instead, we treated the time at hand as if it were of import?
What if we sought the gold in each moment,
and faced our daily challenges as if they were noble enough?
What if we were to inspire ourselves,
to fend off the enemy of indifference,
and work to save each day from losing its capacity for hope and for good?

Leadership is not the province of a fortunate few.
It is the birthright of every human being.
We know well the stories of great leaders
whose lives helped change the course of human history:

*Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa,
The Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Rosa Parks,
Franklin Roosevelt, Benazir Bhutto, Pope John Paul II,
Cesar Chavez, Nelson Mandela, Albert Schweitzer,
Golda Meir, Aung San Suu Kyi, Sojourner Truth –*

Even the sound of their names makes us sit up straighter
and lean forward into our deeper humanity.

But what if we were to add to this portrait of leadership
the people in our own lives who, without fame or fortune,
inspired us, modeled a way of being we can only aspire to,
or left an imprint that changed the shape of our own story?
These were grandmothers, uncles, sisters and sons.
They were teachers, nurses, coaches, and grocers down the street.
They were rich and poor, young and old, with or without a job or a degree.
They wore no shining armor, held no political office,
or ever won a Nobel Peace Prize.

Yet in our hearts we proclaim them leaders
because we know the truth about leadership:
It isn't about position or popularity,
but acting on matters of principle.
It's not about being able to make a great speech,
but speaking for truth where it needs a voice.
It's not about the accumulation of power,
but championing the rights of the powerless.
True leadership is putting the pursuit of
one's purposes before personal goals and interests.
It's about embracing one's gifts, accepting one's limitations,
and with an equal measure of confidence and humility,
taking up the mantle of each new day.

Most of us will never hold the designated role of "leader".
But how many times in a day, a week, or a month
are we called to make a choice, pose a question, or advance a cause
in which we must summon within ourselves
the one willing to take a leadership stance?
How often are we the ones to catch the star
that has fallen from the sky of one who's lost hope –
and with a word, a look, or a gesture of kindness,
helped return it to its rightful shining place?
To ignore or refuse the call of everyday leadership
is to carry an unlit lantern.
To respond to it is to add one's unique and
much needed light to the world.

Each of us has a unique perspective
of the work that needs to be done
in order to fight the good fight.
"Be the change you wish to see", advised Ghandi!
Wait for the cavalry to come? I don't think so.
Wait for the next sage to set the stage? I'm not so sure.
Wait for the newest management method? I guarantee disappointment.
But dare to unleash the leader within ourselves,
in our colleagues and co-workers,
in the students in our classroom,
in the sons and daughters at our kitchen table?
That is where our real hope lies.

This is a call to everyday leadership!
You bring your light, I'll bring mine ...
We'll encourage those around us to bring theirs...
and together we will illumine the shadowed paths
of this, our shared and humble journey.

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