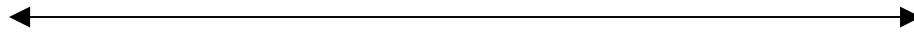


UNPACKING LEADERSHIP:



WHO GETS TO LEAD AND WHY?

WHERE DOES LEADERSHIP LEAD?

NEW WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT A FAMILIAR TOPIC

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PRESENTERS: Mona Harrington, Program Director, Workplace Center,
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Alison Bowens, Executive Director, Women's Institute for Leadership
Development (WILD)

This seminar featured two speakers. Mona Harrington, a political scientist, discussed leadership in the political arena, particularly presidential leadership. Alison Bowens, a labor leader, discussed women's leadership in the trade union movement. After each speaker, small groups convened for about five minutes. The second set of small groups was followed by a full group discussion.

MONA HARRINGTON

Harrington began by describing the heroic tradition or warrior leadership, noting that it is the dominant mode in our politics.

In the classical form, heroes protect people from literal or metaphoric enemies. They must be strong, brave, resolute; they must prevail over the opposition. These are masculine traits. The hero must slay the dragon, restore basic order.

In our day, the private market runs by itself. The family is also a self-regulating mechanism. Together, they organize economic and social structures to maximize freedom, fairness, and order. The corollary of this is that serious trouble is an abnormality, a wrong, a dragon. We need a hero to fight the wrongdoers who are disrupting the market or the family. Political processes can be good about wrongdoers; we like clear-cut enemies like Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Now, we have a clear illustration of heroic foreign policy in Afghanistan. It looks like heroic measures will succeed in eradicating terrorists and their protectors in Afghanistan.

In domestic politics, heroic leadership works well with clear-cut wrongs: the New Deal, fraud and abuse in the securities markets, labor/management relations, protecting the most vulnerable groups. The hero is effective against overt discrimination like in voting, hiring, public accommodations, and protecting against anthrax and bioterrorism. These are clear dragons.

But heroism does have its limits. It doesn't do well at understanding complex social needs, coming to consensus, or getting social cooperation here or abroad.

Why is the hero popular? He can accomplish things that groups with strong political power care about. The image is about solving puzzles, expressing anger, fixing quickly, living in optimism—the basic order is naturally right. And that image gives wide room to individual freedom.

We can't rely on the hero and the market for everything. A market makes riches, but can't distribute them. We tried heroic measures like the War on Poverty, but the income gap is growing. The wars on drugs and tobacco also haven't worked.

A hero can't deal with the change of women going from home to paid work, the social supports needed by working parents, or elder care. Who is responsible for the caring function? The heroic leader is at a loss. Who is the wrongdoer? Women who hire undocumented workers? Women who can't support their family? Or the employer who pays less than the minimum wage? But beyond this, the hero doesn't have the perceptual apparatus to understand or describe the issue. When heroes see dragons, rather than complexity, they fail—as in Vietnam, Nicaragua, and the Congo.

Today, there is much resentment of American foreign and economic policy. This is a breeding ground for terror, which is the weapon of the militarily weak. Do we participate in the construction of an evil-free government in Afghanistan? It's confusing. All the underlying tensions are still there, and are beyond the capacity of the hero to control. This requires a perpetual effort.

What kind of leadership does perpetual policy-making require? Harrington said she wished she could find a name for it. The new form is still inchoate, so she used the term "post-heroic."

The traits of such leadership lie in a country's social values and goals. If the goal is establishing the conditions for the provisions of care, then a post-heroic leader asks: What are these conditions? What are the ways to understand needs? How do we understand the range of possibilities? What are effective and fair ways of dealing with difference and conflict? We need to be clear about the basic values we are putting into practice.

Post-heroic leadership is about participatory democratic practice, the flow between leaders and citizens. We need voices expressing passion and confusion. If we don't hear difference, we can't reach consensus. Post-heroic leadership wouldn't have followers. It would have participants, citizen-participants. Not that we are always engaged in politics; sometimes we only yell at the TV. But we regard affairs of society as our business. We fill in the picture that decision-makers need to understand. There is no such thing as post-heroic leadership without post-heroic citizen-participants.

In a post-heroic future, leaders are still important for setting direction, urging action, and controlling wrongdoing. What could that look like?

Bill Clinton was our first post-heroic leader, though he wasn't a fully developed model. But some of his characteristics were departures from the heroic. First, he wasn't decisive. He let arguments go on and on. He was wildly inefficient—or was it an open form of decision-making? He didn't include broad participation, but many views were contributed. Second, he had an ability to listen, take in what was being said. Third, he was empathic and cared about others. Fourth, he was optimistic and

energetic, in full knowledge of deep flaws, and in the face of corruption and mess. Post-heroic politics would be messy.

How do we get there? We need an attitudinal change that values the feminine: attentiveness, listening, and acceptance of flaws and mess. We need to break down dichotomies between public and private so that private cares are public worries.

What we need to do is talk, contest, invent new vocabulary, write, elect women to office, challenge, and not follow.

ALICE BOWENS

Bowens started by reciting two quotes on her wall:

- If we always do what we've always done, we will always get where we always have.
- In all of us, there is the aptitude for courage.

She continued, "The story of WILD is my story. It's all about empowering women to grow. We say, you come to WILD to learn, you leave to lead."

In the 1980's, young women came to the union movement—driving buses, building cars, and working in offices—but the union leadership was white men. Even as women and nonwhite workers joined unions, the leadership remained white men. Women and women of color were not considered leaders. There was no mentoring for women.

In 1986, WILD was founded by union members and other activists. They thought unions were the best way for women and people of color to work for economic justice, but felt the labor movement wasn't open to women and people of color. They wanted to diversify the labor movement, address the participation of women and people of color, build awareness around racism, sexism, and homophobia, and connect people with community organizations.

WILD's mission is to empower women to become leaders, both rank-and-file unionists and community organizers. They used to be outside the labor movement; now they're a part of it. WILD has provided skills development, leadership development opportunities, and networks of support. So far, they've trained 1300 women, diverse in race, age, and sexual orientation. Their commitment to diversity means the commitment to end oppression of all women. Multiculturalism is both a moral imperative and strategically necessary.

They don't organize a discrete membership; they impact other organizations by working directly with women in these other organizations. They organize a community, creating an army of WILD women. They reach into the membership of these organizations to create a ripple effect from 1) their democratic style, and 2) creating more women leaders.

WILD has two institutes:

1. Summer Institute, a three-day weekend workshop on leadership development skills
2. WILD in the winter

In the institutes, they cover:

- Being democratic;
- Actively encouraging participation;
- Being inclusive: recognizing diversity; creating opportunities for involvement;
- Mobilizing organizational memberships; and
- Eliminating all forms of oppression.

WILD thinks it's important to give workers power. They empower women to redress economic imbalances. Unionized women workers earn \$145 more per week than nonunion women.

WILD uses a popular education model, a problem-solving method that imparts skills and treats learners as subjects of the process, not objects. Everyone is a teacher; everyone is a student. Workshops have vibrant dialogues about experiences and struggle. The effect on participants is stunning. People are ready to make a change.

WILD also trains activists to train others, also using a popular education model. There are four major components of this training:

1. Curriculum development.
2. Evaluation of workshops.
3. Group dynamics with an anti-oppression component. They create diverse groups to work to bring things to the surface and foster an emotional mix, which helps teach trainers to deal with dynamics.
4. How to co-teach. They push co-facilitation because they can create cross-race training teams.

WILD offers opportunities for leadership. You can participate in committees, co-facilitate workshops, chair a committee, or be a board member. All board members started as WILD participants. They also create opportunities for leadership through work with coalitions. They foster cooperation between women's groups, labor groups, and community groups. For example, during welfare reform, they initiated a dialogue between labor and women's activists. This created stronger communication between the two groups.

Bowens ended by giving her own personal history. She said, "I am a product of that leadership development process. I went to a labor conference and saw women with WILD t-shirts. I went to the summer institute: 150 women with the same passion and desire for change. I moved to Boston to work for a union, participated in WILD committees, chaired a committee on the training program, then became a board member. WILD has been more successful at changing the gender of union leadership than its color. I was hired to bring women of color into WILD. Then I became the director."

DISCUSSION

After each speaker, small groups convened for about five minutes. They were asked to address the following questions:

1. How can citizen-participants create better leaders?

2. How can leaders create better citizen-participants?

Some groups answered these questions fairly closely, while others used them simply as a starting point for discussion. The full group discussion was wide-ranging.

FLUID NOTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

Alison's talk provided some very clear proposals about how to do leadership differently:

- Having workshops on co-facilitation.
- Pulling out conflict in the group, then saving that narrative and showing how you worked things out.
- Using these stories to show that if you work through conflict, you can come out on the other side.
- Having leaders come up through the organization, rather than picking a leader to go to Harvard to learn.
- Saying we need to learn as a whole group, so people take turns; many people have skills.

The question is, how can we apply this model to post-heroic leadership? It's a very fluid notion of leadership, which makes it harder to separate citizen-participants from leaders.

There was a similarity between Mona's purpose and WILD's purpose. Whoever is working toward that purpose is either a citizen-participant or a leader—it doesn't matter.

Small people look at big people as leaders. WILD extracts bigness from those who participate. It cuts through the polarity of leader/follower.

Citizen-participants can create better leaders by getting involved, giving feedback, not expressing things in black and white, careful use of language, and inclusivity.

THE ROLE OF CONTEXT

How do leaders and citizen-participants become carriers as we move across different contexts? We have either heroic or post-heroic settings. Could Clinton's style work in this particular (post-September 11) time?

How can WILD leaders go into the established labor movement and keep hold of what they've learned?

Is the heroic model infantilizing? Perhaps post-heroic leadership emerges from the institutions' readiness for a new model. We won't have another post-heroic leader soon in the presidency because s/he would run into the same assaults as Clinton. But other institutions may be more ripe.

Post-heroic leaders who go to like organizations will successfully create citizen-participants. Institutions vary in their capacity for encouraging agency. Post-heroic leaders will do better in those that encourage agency and will use that to their advantage.

THE ROLE OF COALITIONS

Perhaps coalitions act as intermediary institutions; they are transitory.

The welfare reform coalition that included women in unions and women on welfare captured the complexity of problem; such ventures move beyond good guys/bad guys. It was a move toward a vision of the post-heroic.

Through workshops WILD brought these women together to create this coalition. At these workshops, union women come to learn about bargaining, grievances, etc., while community women come to learn about organizing. They meet at trainings, then pull together on issues.

RAISING THE THRESHOLD OF DISCUSSION

WILD's work promotes a chain reaction. Their tight focus lifts everyone's boats; it changes the labor movement. Focus makes us more effective because people have to respond with equal quality. There is a quality of provocation. Men have to respond to all these smart women. If the women are talking, the men have to talk back. It raises the quality threshold of the discussion. It changes the equation. If you put a different conversation out there, something new emerges.

Is WILD changing how non-WILD leaders lead? Yes and no. There has been a backlash from traditional male leaders—always a struggle. Some unions with many women members have women who have worked their way up and see a change. The building trades are a particular struggle.

HEROIC AND POST-HEROIC LEADERS

There are two viewpoints about WILD: "WILD warriors" is a heroic image. But WILD is also seen as inchoate. Perhaps WILD encompasses both heroic and post-heroic.

One way to find leaders is to elect the right person. But Mona's talk suggests promoting through the ranks is very effective. So there are two options: 1) an organization that grows leaders by grappling with real issues, and 2) electing someone before you know what they'll have to deal with.

Subcomandante Marcos, of the Chiapas uprising in Mexico, is a post-heroic leader. We don't know his identity. He is Subcomandante because the people will lead. He could be a number of different people, each taking the role. The temporary nature of that kind of leader is key—once you're identified, it's all over.

Perhaps what we do to leaders, once they're named, creates them as heroic leaders. Nelson Mandela survived that naming process with a lot of integrity, but perhaps that's because he was a transition figure, had been in prison, and was from an oppressed group.

Post-heroic leadership takes a lot of time before you can move to action. People were disappointed in Clinton very quickly. He tried to do it all.

A president needs a really mobilized political party behind him to accomplish his program. Post-heroic leaders, especially, need citizen-participants.

BRINGING TOGETHER PEOPLE ACROSS DIFFERENCE

We need a cross-class organization of women. But are there any such organizations? Perhaps there are more multi-racial organizations than multi-class organizations. In South Africa, the Women's Committee is supposed to include all differences. If you focus only on similarity, then people get left out. But the group has to figure out what the basis of similarity is, e.e., that we're all caregivers.

The group would need leadership that allows them to talk about what's real, rather than just being nice. WILD uses caucuses—of lesbians, Latinas, etc.—so they can talk about shared issues and intra-group conflict and then come back together.

DO WOMEN LEADERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Even within the liberal/left spectrum of U.S. politics, there's still a male leadership. Issues raised are just pieces of right-wing programs. A new conversation is not happening.

We need to move women into the void. Women feel the complexity and pressures more directly. It's not a matter of essentialism. The complexity is clearer from women's lived experience.

But perhaps it's not about electing women; it's what their political position is. Women are more likely to be liberal, but perhaps it's more important to build the left than to elect women. The question is, how can the left use its more chaotic/anarchic style to its advantage?

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