

Women Making a World of Difference

Putting Your Passion and Purpose on the Path to Leadership
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KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Being Heard In A Man's World

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Putting your Passion and Purpose on the Path to Leadership will require that you speak up, take risks, and be heard to move your goals from a dream to reality. You will not be alone!

Bold women around the world are stepping up and challenging traditional ways, with major consequences at the individual, family, community, and societal levels. They are insisting on being heard in a world where women's voices have long been marginalized or ignored.

Pursuing your path to fulfillment will bring you up against many barriers and pitfalls and will require you to deal with things you can barely imagine now. Today, I will outline a simple process to follow to make you most effective in your pursuits. I will then point out a series of qualities for you to bring to your work to be successful. Lastly, I will address what will be required of men to be most supportive of you passion and purpose. The work is hard and confronting, however, the satisfaction and rewards are enormous.

Women are clearing a path for you by moving into top leadership roles on a worldwide basis, more so in government than in large corporations. With the recent election of Laura Chinchilla as President of Costa Rica, the world has 26 women heads of state and government. India passed a law in 1993 that required that 33% of all positions in local government, called Panchayati Raj, be women. That law has allowed 1,000,000

women at the local level to take on leadership roles in their communities, which means more women in public office in India than in all of the rest of the world put together. In addition, the Indian Parliament is currently debating a new law that would extend the 33% requirement to the national level in its own lower house. China has 21% women in its National People's Congress. By contrast, the percentage of women in the US Congress and State Governors positions averages 17%. Representation of women among top corporate executives in the 1,000 largest US firms averages 15.7%. While these numbers still don't reflect the fact that women make up one-half of the world's population and "hold up half the sky," they do represent a significant number of women in influential roles.

As women achieve more powerful roles and higher incomes, however, a combination of old and new threats must be dealt with. Traditional cultural practices are still producing great discrimination against women and girls, from employment and educational opportunities right down to the aborting of female fetuses and abandonment of female babies in very large numbers. Estimates are that there would be over 100 million more women in the world if this were not taking place. In addition, fundamentalist religious sects are going to great lengths to suppress women across the world. At the personal level, pressures for conformity to old ways exist in every community.

So what is the appropriate action?

First and foremost, you must pay close attention to these existing conditions we're talking briefly about here today. The work you will do to successfully fulfill your vision will take place in these conditions. To be effective, you cannot wish them away, simply ignore them, or fight violently against them.

The process that will make you most effective is simple but it is not easy:

- 1) Develop a very clear expression of what your purpose and passion look like in the world when fully expressed. In our company we call that your vision or your "Yonder Star."
- 2) Make full, clear, and accurate account of the conditions that exist and in which you will be working.
- 3) Ask "what's missing from my picture of my fulfilled vision today?" "Which of those issues would produce the most results in the shortest time and with the least effort if I get to work on it?"

- 4) Design projects to address that issue and get to work.
- 5) Monitor progress and redesign as necessary to fulfill your projects.
- 6) Keep going until you are building capacities and moving successfully toward your vision.

Remember, the key to effectiveness is to have your vision, pay attention to current circumstances, and focus your work in the gap between the two

What will be required of you?

1) First and foremost, summon your courage. The courage that will be most valuable is what author and speaker David Whyte calls “developing a friendship with the unknown.” Once you start on your path, you will have left your traditional, familiar surroundings and ways of relating to others and will be in unknown territory. If you are unwilling to be in that state and learn to become comfortable with being uncomfortable, don’t bother to get started. You will be stepping out of historic roles and relationships and you will be insisting on what can and must be done to produce meaningful change.

2) Second, you must be willing to accept the consequences of your actions. This does not mean, “be a victim.” It simply says that all actions and even failure to act have consequences. To be free to act effectively, you must be aware of the potential consequences and feel that the results are worth it. You must give up avoiding being criticized or thought of as weird. You will have to deal with rejection and pushback without taking it personally. The questions to ask are “what stops me now?” “Am I willing to focus on my vision and go past that barrier?” “Am I willing to have all of the consequences and not just the ones that are safe or that I call good?”

3) Third, focus on collaboration. Develop strong alliances with other women who share your objectives. Work together and support each other, especially when your courage is faltering, you can’t find your passion, and your purpose is blurred. Find courageous men and teach them how to be your partners. It won’t work to make men wrong, as that will just create a wall of resistance. Success will involve teaching and enrolling them in how they will be better off by collaborating with you. It works – my wife and I are living examples of equal partners who make great contributions to each other and our clients and community.

- 4) Fourth, summon compassion. When you are causing change, some of the people around you, both men and women, will be threatened. They won't necessarily understand what you are doing or why. Your family members may fear for your safety or that you will leave them. Others may have their beliefs threatened or feel that they will be harmed in some way. Change of any kind, even good change, is an upset for people. Forgive them for their resistance and help them understand the benefits.
- 5) Be patient. Allow those around you to re-shape their relationship with you and with the changing roles of women in general. Balance the rate at which you are attempting to accomplish your work with their ability to absorb the changes you are bringing.
- 6) Develop and maintain your clarity - how do you intend your life to unfold? What is the best path for expressing your passion and purpose? Remember, it is your life, so any path you freely choose is fine. There are no right answers other than that!
- 7) Be authentic. The world has actually been waiting for you. Be fully yourself, fully self-expressed, and let the world choose how much of you it wants and for what roles. You are the only person who has been genetically encoded to deliver what you offer by being fully you.
- 8) Be persistent. You will be amazed at how many excuses and seemingly very good reasons you will come up with to change or give up. Stay on your path (strategy) or get back on it when you stray.
- 9) Surrender. If you have a really big passion and purpose, you will be immediately and often confronted by thoughts like "I'm insufficient," "I don't know how," "I'm scared to death," and "I'll never get good enough fast enough to reach my Yonder Star!" Success will require that you reach out to find team members and identify successful strategies. When you get stuck, ask, "Who are my missing team members?" and "What are the missing strategies?"

What does this require of men?

- 1) Enlightenment. To receive the benefits of having powerful, effective women in their lives, men will have to be willing to be open to the opportunity and to not know how it is going to turn out. They will

have to suspend their instant, automatic, and unexamined beliefs about women and the roles women should play. They will have to be present to the opportunities before them.

- 2) Recognition. To be able to partner effectively with women and benefit from their newfound power, men must realize and own that they discount or ignore women's voices. This will be extremely difficult for many men, as they do not realize that they do it currently. The adjustment may be threatening or painful and they may experience a sense of loss.
- 3) Courage. Men who step up to being real partners with women may still face times when they feel threatened by the situation or the strength of the woman or women around them. Further, they may have to stand the ridicule of other men who see them as weak or stupid. As with women, it will require developing a friendship with the unknown. They won't necessarily know what to expect from women or how to handle what is being said or done to them.
- 4) Action. In addition to all else, men will have to see and act on the opportunity offered by being in equal relationship with women whether as romantic partners, co-workers, or members of their community.

Ultimately, for both women and men, it will come down to listening to your heart and trusting yourself.

Identify your Yonder Star and the path to it and get to work. Be courageous, authentic, collaborative, compassionate, patient, and persistent. The joy is in the journey and the learning along the way. Go forth and prosper!