

Women Leaders Creating Strong Communities

The Moment of Lift

My personal journey to leadership began in a small, mostly rural, farming community in northwestern Illinois. I grew up in Girl Scouting beginning at age of 7, culminating in 10 years working for the GS professionally after I finished my undergraduate degree. Girl Scouting helped me learn who I was as a person, what potential I had, and gave me opportunities to learn leadership skills. I also had a family and a community who supported and nurtured me from a very young age. My role models taught me, coached me, and challenged me. My professional life was all in women centric and women led organizations, which no doubt informs my experience quite differently than many.

Our Mothers, grandmothers, and aunts are the first female role models that begin to shape the lives of girls. To me a good role model or a mentor is someone who is invested in your success, someone who takes a personal interest in your growing up with a positive sense of self-worth and a sense of belonging-2 key characteristics I wish for everyone, but in my view, essential for any person serving in a in a leadership role.

My first and most beloved mentor demonstrated her strong belief that no one is more important than anyone else in any type of organization or community, whether you are the CEO, the pre-school teacher, the adm assist., or the janitor.

Value every person and let them know their contribution is essential to the whole.

This was the single most important piece of advice I received as a young professional and one that I have tried to pass on to those young women I have had the privilege to mentor. Leaders in organizations have the privilege & the responsibility to create a work environment that supports and lifts up their employees and brings out the best in each employee, and by extension, their employee's families and the communities in which they live. Mentoring and being good role models for girls and all young people is the job of us all. For our UUSMV community and the girls and boys who are part of us, do we greet our children and teens by name when we see them before or after the service? Do we ask how school is going, or if they enjoy the team they are playing on at school? This gives them a sense that we see and care about each of them. Many of us adults in the congregation have taken on leadership roles in our faith community,

that we haven't had before. We are never too old to be supported and mentored. **Reaching out to one another is important to all of us, young and old alike, and lifts our sense of belonging to this, our faith community. All of us, each with our unique gifts, helps create and sustain our community, here at UUSMV .**

To keep in perspective how important I think it is to lift up and support the leadership growth of young women, I look at them and think perhaps they will run the assisted living community I could live in one day. I want to have nurtured them well!

I want to say a few words from Melinda Gates' book "The Moment of Lift". We live in a world where nearly 750 million people live in extreme poverty. Many women and girls have no access to contraceptives, which would allow them control over the spacing between children and to have only the number of children their family can house, feed, and educate. **Contraceptives are the greatest life-saving, poverty-ending, women-empowering innovation ever created.** As women gain rights, families flourish, and so do communities. As a girl gains self-confidence, she sees she can learn. As she learns, she sees her own gifts. As she develops her gifts, she sees her own power; she can defend her own rights. You lift her gaze. She gains her voice. Gender equality lifts everyone. **When we lift communities out of poverty & honor the universal values of human rights, we create stronger communities the world over.**

I'll close with these inspirational words from a hymn that I like: "You raise me up so I can stand on mountains. You raise me up to walk on stormy seas. I am strong when I am on your shoulder. You raise me up to more than I can be."