

Is Lasting Leadership Possible?

by Margaret J. Marcuson

How tired are you? In the depths of winter, whether you are facing snow, rain, or merely cloudy skies, the demands of leadership sometimes feel overwhelming. Top it off with the burden of budgets, high anxiety in society, and any personal challenges you may be facing, and you may feel like you can hardly take the next step. Going forward can seem impossible.

We often begin the year resolving to take better care of ourselves. If we exercise more and eat better, we think, we'll be able to manage the burdens of leadership better. All true. But "stress management" and "self-care," as we usually think of them, are not enough. The best stress-management program around has to do with self-management in the way we relate to others: focusing on ourselves rather than trying to fix or change others. When we are growing emotionally and spiritually, we can better handle the challenges of leadership. And as I've often said before, we give others the room to do their own growing.

Every *Leadership Adventure* newsletter includes the tagline, "Moving from the impossible, changing others, to the merely difficult, managing myself." When I began to make that shift in my own leadership, my life took a significant turn. Before the shift, I truly believed I could change others by convincing, cajoling and willing them to be different (despite much evidence to the contrary!). And I was flirting with burnout as a result. I was exhausted, and felt like I couldn't carry on with my leadership.

As I slowly began to realize that I needed to focus on myself, my goals and my emotional maturity, my stress level went way down. I was able to sustain myself over time, without wearing out or burning out. And to my surprise, I found that others responded better to my leadership than they had before. Now, I must confess that this is a long learning process, and I still often get caught up in my own need to pressure others to be, act or think the way I believe they should. The shift to putting our primary attention on ourselves and our own functioning is the first step toward lasting leadership.

Make a list: in how many relationships are you trying to change someone else? Then ask yourself: if I focused on managing myself instead, what would I do differently?

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