

LEADING IN A CULTURALLY DIVERSE ENVIRONMENT

by Judy B. Rosener Ph.D.

I was born and raised in California. I remember the blue sky and daily view of the mountains. I remember public schools that offered vocational and college prep classes as equally valuable options. Regardless of the choice, most students graduated. I remember California voters who taxed themselves to invest in roads, bridges, parks, libraries, and a higher education system second to none. I remember when the song, "California Here I Come" conjured up the image of an expanding economy and a land of opportunity for all who came.

It was a time when being a leader was fun. It was a time when the pie was so large that most felt with some effort they could have a slice. Leaders, whether in business, government, or education had time to plan. Followers and peers spoke their language, and while there may have been questions about how the pie was sliced, few questioned how leaders held the knife. Put differently, "leadership style" was not the issue it is today.

It is no accident that leadership style (as contrasted with a leader's record) continues to be the focus of books, articles, and TV programs. The well worn phrase "style over substance" describes the 1980s, a time when most people became accustomed to obtaining information from pictures, sound bites, and value-laden metaphors. Newspaper reading decreased and leaders in all institutions were forced to oversimplify problems and issues so as to attract and retain the attention of an "instant everything" populace. Thus, interest in leadership style (a shortcut to understanding leaders) was consistent with the times. The assumption was that by categorizing leaders we would know what they would do. Perhaps that is why my article "Ways Women Lead" (*Harvard Business Review*, Nov./Dec., 1990) continues to generate interest. In that article I concluded (based on findings of a study I conducted of male and female leaders),



Melvin Hall, Dean, UCI Extension, presents the 1992 Amelia Earhart Award to Dr. Judy Rosener at the May 7 Awards Luncheon. Dr. Rosener was recognized for her leadership and "her encouragement of women to soar to new heights."

that women and men lead differently. Men prefer the traditional "command and control" style (top down decisionmaking, rewards based on individual competition, use of position and organization authority as a source of power) and women prefer the "interactive" style (shared power and information, use of interpersonal skills rather than authority and position, emphasis on group effort and contribution).

While it was the statistically significant difference in male and female leadership preferences that captured the interest of readers, the main message I was trying to convey in the article may have been overlooked. That message is that in organizations that reward only one style of leadership, by definition, those who use a different style are not considered potential leaders. In the context of gender, this means that since most organizations value and reward the male associated command and control leadership style, women, because they are seen as not leader-like, tend not to become CEOs, Chancellors, or U.S. Senators. This leads me to the issue of leadership in a culturally diverse state such as California.

Contrary to conventional wisdom,

leadership style does not necessarily tell us what a leader will do, and our institutions cannot afford to devalue potential leaders merely because of their leadership style. The issue of leadership should not focus on style, but rather on how to lead in a culturally diverse environment. In other words, how to move from rewarding only one style—the traditional command and control style—to valuing a diversity of styles as a way to tap into a larger pool of potential leaders.

The challenge is to develop leaders who can discover a shared vision between groups of people with different attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. What California needs today are "pluralistic" leaders. In our book *Workforce America! Managing Employee Diversity as a Vital Resource* (Business One Irwin, 1991), my co-author, Marilyn Loden and I discuss this kind of leader in some detail. In essence, the pluralistic leader has the following characteristics:

- **Organization vision and values that recognize and support diversity**

They see diversity as a key factor in all strategic planning efforts and are able to articulate the long term benefits that diversity offers. They take affirmative steps to diversify their organizations believing it will increase innovation and new insights.

- **Ethical commitment to fairness and the elimination of all types of workplace discrimination**

They believe and practice an ethic of fairness. They place ethical considerations of fairness, honesty, and equality before economic ones believing that the best decisions for the organization are those that respect the rights of people as they improve productivity and increase profitability. They speak out on issues of discrimination, often at the risk of

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