

Leadership: *an Alchemical Process*

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Excerpted from the speech, *Women's Leadership Building Vital Economies, Revitalizing Communities, Inspiring Hope*, delivered at the Athena International Leadership Conference, April 17, Chicago Illinois

During my tenure as the leader of the AWBC I've been tugged at, heard the call for, and wondered **what really is leadership and what does it mean, in particular, for women?**

Our AWBC vision is all about helping to create a world where economic justice, wealth and well-being is realized through the collective leadership and power of successful entrepreneurial women.

And, indeed, we're training over 145,000 women each year to be entrepreneurs, but are we asking them, engaging them to be leaders? Are we providing them with the tools for leadership?

I've realized that leadership is an invitation, and once accepted, we find that it is a relentless opportunity that challenges us in more ways than we can imagine. In the best of circumstances, it is an act of grace. Leadership requires courage to be fully who we are in the world. It is an ongoing cultivation and integration of one's own internal and external experiences. Leadership does not accept mediocrity—rather it demands an unequivocal answer that is heartfelt, untidy, and vibrant. Being a leader is a robust 'YES' to self and to the world.

With such a mandate, how do we get there? How do we navigate the often uncharted leadership waters? Where is our Global Positioning System that keeps us focused on the goal? I see the answer on two levels:

On the macro or system level, leadership requires that we. . .

- Understand and acknowledge our role as leaders.
- Access the portals that connect "and support that our leadership on the many landscapes in which we live and make our days.
- Imagine and believe in the possibilities that the role of leadership will have in our lives.

On the micro or professional/ personal level we must. . .

- Find role models, mentors- nearby and arms length.
- Discern the inputs of leadership – what makes us a leader?
- Embrace the outputs of leadership- what kind of the leader do I embody and model in my life and in the world? Am I pathfinder, strategist, rainmaker, collaborator, warrior, preacher or a believer?

As I contemplated the leaders I most admired and those who have quietly shaped my life, —I am most struck by the attributes that make these people leaders, such as: grace, balance, undeniable commitment, joyfulness, generosity, willingness to advocate and rugged determination.

These leaders lead from an inner strength and a willingness to dream big; these people could find those places where they could make a difference and

make an on-going commitment to self development. These leaders also had the ability to make room for others. And they were always willing to make it happen.

As I think about the leadership lessons and what helps me onward on a the many landscapes of my life, I offer what keeps me going and growing:

- Passion, generosity, humility and grace as defining characteristics of people who make a difference.
- GET grateful – Gratitude builds joy and provides the momentum to accomplish our work.
- Communicate and connect – There is no need for lone rangers.
- Say what you mean. Mean what you say. Do what you love. Love what you do.
- Always be willing to try and do something else. Show up.
- Drink from the wells you have yet to dig.

At no other time have the opportunities existed for each of us to accept this invitation to lead, to answer that tug, that call and make a difference. ●



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Strategic Summit Strengthens AWBC, SBA, OWBO Partnership

On February 12, 2006 The SBA Strategic Summit hosted members from the AWBC, SBA, OWBO, and NWBC for the purpose of incorporating the AWBC into the SBA as full partners, model replicating its counterparts such as ASBDC and SCORE. In addition the meeting acknowledged the need to maintaining and enhance ongoing communication among the agencies. The morning meeting was followed by a second session to work on certain WBC policy issues.

The agenda addressed the three major issue areas, Research, Resources and Relationships, that provide the focus for Office of Women's Business Ownership in support of the Women's Business Center program.

The summit produced a collective call to action for supporting and growing women's entrepreneurship while improving the stewardship for commitments and communications.

We've Come a Long Way:WBC History & Overview

Collective Commitment to:

- An assessment of the full range of the role of technical assistance in relation to all SBA programs with particular note of the compensating revenues for TA services roved to the Micro Loan program.

Quantifying the Return on Investment

Collective Commitment to:

- Ongoing analysis of the EDMIS data that is collected on a quarterly basis so that it can be useful to both parties
- Continue to fund Impact research

Relationship Building: Communications and Outreach Strategy between SBA/OWBO and AWBC

Collective Commitment to:

- Quarterly meetings with the Administrator and/or Deputy; the hope is that eventually there will be opportunities for joint meetings with SBA staff and all of the resource partners
- A relationship that is based on true partnership as opposed to communication based on the outcomes of oversight
- Help from the SBA in getting the WBC story out
- More education and training with SBA staff e.g. district offices who deal with the women's programs across the country
- Evaluation of the present pay request system to improve the reimbursement of the WBC's
- Consideration of AWBC role in certification of WBC's similar to the ASBDC process and support
- Commitment to improve collaboration, partnership and delivery of the 2007 AWBC/OWBO Training to participating WBC's

AWBC Board Retreat Focuses on 2007-08 Agenda

During a very wintry weekend in Cassopolis, Michigan, AWBC Board Members, the Public Policy Council Co-Chair and staff gathered together at the Edward Lowe Foundation to carefully, thoughtfully and generously consider the AWBC's history, refocus our vision, mission and priorities and plan for our future. While it was a non-stop working weekend, it was also a time to witness and appreciate the commitment each of us make to our collective dream of providing women with economic empowerment through a network of strong, sustainable and viable women's business centers. Our commitments include:

Core Values

- We collaborate with others to accomplish our goals
- We believe in women's entrepreneurship
- We believe in economic justice

AWBC's Purpose

We exist to create a world where economic justice, wealth and well-being are realized through the collective leadership and power of successful entrepreneurial women.

AWBC's Mission

To become the pre-eminent resource and voice for all Women's Business Centers by 2010.

We established the following themes as the focus for our work in 2007:

- Build member benefits
- Build organizational systems
- Become financially sound

The entire report can be found on line at www.awbc.biz, select News.

The highlights of our activities include commitments in the following areas:

Public Policy: will focus on leveraging WBC momentum in the areas of affective legislation, financial appropriations, public policy training, and stakeholder relationships. *Melinda Sanderson, Chair*

Membership Support and Cultivation: will use the new website infrastructure to ensure that members have the information they need when they need it. *Nancy Mitchell, Chair*

Fundraising and External Relations: will focus on sustainability leveraging new and existing initiatives, enhancing relationships with key and emerging funders, and increasing revenues from these relationships and the annual appeal. *Sani Fogel and Sharon O'Donoghue co-chairs*

Training and Capacity Building: will provide support and focus to offer educational and training programs that help women's business centers expand their capacity and leadership particularly through the 2007 leadership conference. *Eric Vines, Chair*

Organizational Systems and Sustainability will focus on organizational sustainability and transparency.

Let us hear from you!

We invite all AWBC members in good standing to submit their concerns, contributions, suggestions, best practices, wish list ideas, anything you think important with regards to AWBC's. Please submit your comments to Tené Wells, Communications Chair at: twells@womenventure.org

The Right People, The Right Bus.

After reflecting on the words and conversations and reviewing the strategic agenda, our burning questions for 2007 and beyond are *do we wish to be good or great? effective or right? impactful or perfect? abundant and visionary or conservative and on target?* Excerpted from the book, *Good to Great* by Jim Collins and the accompanying monograph that focuses on the social sectors, our responses to these questions are found in his *hedgehog concept and strategy for activity*. THE HEDGEHOG CONCEPT, is a long-term, disciplined intersecting vision and plan of action that has the potential to empower an organization to stay on vision and a fierce commitment to do what needs to be done to deliver the mission.

The first step is to focus on is: *First Who, Then What*. According to Collins, first "get the right people on the bus and the right people in the right seats and then figure out where to drive it." And we are committed to do just that!

To implement the strategic agenda, serve our members and our mission and with support from the Executive Committee and Board, the AWBC will shift responsibilities to a few individuals with focused skill sets and experience and a strong level of competency and commitment to deliver on the dream. By refocusing responsibilities, time commitments and with no change to the annual budget, Ann Marie Almeida will remain as President and CEO; Sharon O'Donoghue will focus on membership services, benefits and educational programs; and Pam Maus, our AmeriCorps Volunteer, will coordinate membership activities and online services. These decisions signal an exciting time for the AWBC as we navigate the waters of change, service, development and growth. ●

AWBC Website Sports New Look and New Member “Real-time” Resource

As of May, the AWBC has a new partner—**Insite Solutions** and their **RunMyClub** product (RMC). RMC provides a technology infrastructure that is already helping the AWBC better serve its members. You will want to keep the AWBC website at hand as we shift to the website as a real-time resource with up-to-date information to keep you abreast of the work that the AWBC is doing on behalf of its members.

New features include the following (with more to come):

- 1. Membership Directory.** Features include an at-a-glance profile of each member. Members can update their profile at any time with pictures, contact information, and unique information of your center including your most recent success stories.
- 2. On-line Financial Transactions.** The new system will allow easy financial transactions for paying membership dues and renewals as well as payment for other AWBC fee-based activities.
- 3. News Center.** Members may submit information for posting on the News center. Posting is a member benefit, however its contents will be available in two ways AWBC website:
 1. the public pages for visitors to the website,
 2. and in the Members Only private pages as appropriate.

4. Event Registration. The new system allows for easy registration for any AWBC event. Members will have access to view who has registered so that they can make advance networking plans.

5. Database Management. RMC will automatically manage our database—so that we always know who has joined the AWBC membership. We will also be able to create a non-member database to keep our critical stakeholders abreast of AWBC news.

6. Broadcast Messaging. AWBC communications will have a more professional look now that we can use our signature branding on Call to Action and other communiqué. Broadcast message will allow us audience selectivity and the inclusion of pictures, graphics, and hyperlinking.

What happens next?

Soon you will receive a letter to let you know that we are “turning on the new system.” This will be followed by a message from Run My Club including a password and instructions for personalizing your entry into the member database.

Pam Maus, our membership coordinator, will be on hand to answer your questions. Please feel free to contact her, pam@awbc.biz. ●

2007 Leadership Conference Planning Underway

The annual Leadership Conference dates have been set for September 10 -13, 2007 in Washington, DC. Be on hand to hear internationally recognized speakers, panel and roundtable discussions, personalized training and coaching opportunities. Be a part of the conversation, enter into problem solving discussions with corporate CEO's and special invited guests. You will not want to miss this event.

**September 10-13, 2007
Washington, DC**

Details to follow on the AWBC website.

AWBC on Capitol Hill

September 11, 2007

Under the dome of Capitol Hill, legislators, stakeholders, constituents, and colleagues join the AWBC to meet in an engaging atmosphere among friends and refreshments to support of women's entrepreneurship. High profile legislators take to the podium to share their views and policies on the state of business ownership. The event attracts hundred women directors and staff members of women's business centers from throughout the country, spanning the map from Alaska to Maine to Puerto Rico.