

## Women in Leadership Highlights April 29, 2011



### **“Followership: the Other Side of Leadership: featuring Dr. Jean Walker, VP of Education, United Way of Metropolitan Atlanta**

Jean began by encouraging us all to be first “followers” of our dreams. To do that, she said that we need to put our cheerleaders in the front row and put the naysayers in the balcony so you can’t hear them.

Jean said that she has always wanted to be a teacher. When she was a small child, she learned from her older siblings who went to school, and taught the little ones in the neighborhood during the day. When she was 18 and was being interviewed for a college scholarship, she told the committee that she was ready to teach without going to college because she had been teaching all her life!

Jean did, of course, go to college and got her degree, and began teaching in DeKalb County. She then moved to Gwinnett as Assistant Principal of Norcross Elementary, and was later promoted to Principal. When there, she was visited by folks from United Way who asked her what she and her school needed. She said that she needed help so that kids came to school ready to learn and she needed a place for children to be after school was over. With community help, a Boys and Girls Club was built, and children had a place to go after school where they got help with homework, had access to activities, etc. Jean felt relieved because this meant she didn’t have to worry about them getting into trouble from 3:00 to 8:00 p.m. anymore.

Jean was again promoted to an Area Superintendent position in Gwinnett, but still had a dream of getting her Ph.D. Although many people told her that she didn’t need it (and wouldn’t make any more money if she got it!), she was determined, and finally achieved that dream.

Jean has been married for many years to another educator, Bill Walker, and their two adult children are also educators.

Jean told the audience that while they are all leaders, they are also all followers. What research tells us is that leaders value four things most in followers:

1. Loyalty
2. Trust
3. Dependability
4. Cooperation

She then asked the audience to consider:

- Are you loyal?
- Can your leader trust you?
- Can your leader depend on you?
- Are you cooperative?

Have you ever said to your boss, “I love my job – thank you.”?

According to Robert E. Kelly, there are five types of followers:

1. Passive – waits for you to tell them what to do, “Whatever you say;” requires an inordinate amount of your time, believes the organization doesn’t want their ideas. How do we as leaders engage our passive followers?
2. Conformist – “Yes” people, accepts assignments, seeks to minimize conflict, following the rules more important than outcome. How do you engage a conformist?
3. The Alienated follower – the maverick , plays the Devil’s advocate, cynical, tells you later, “I could have told you that wouldn’t work.”
4. Pragmatist – middle of the road – neither yes nor no – stays safe. How do we encourage them to commit? May fear failure. How do we create an environment where people know it’s okay to fail?
5. Exemplary follower:
  - a. Loyal
  - b. Courageous – will speak up
  - c. Ready to step up and carry on the vision when the leader is away.

Vision: the dream for the organization. When you joined an organization you signed up to make sure that the vision comes true – that the dream of the organization comes true.

Are you an Influential follower? Example of an influential follower: Martin Luther King – Follower of Ghandi & of Dream

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