

Leadership in a Time of Great Challenge and Opportunity

BJ Walker, Acting Director IL DCFS

An Inconvenient Truth:

*“Everybody knows WHAT they do
and most know HOW –
But very few know WHY they do it . . . ”*

Adapted from Simon Sinek



Inspired leaders lead people and
organizations from the inside out

What's the Great Challenge facing us?

- That most problems facing our nation (*particularly those in social services*) are so intractable that they can only be managed, not solved
- That our government – where most of the funds invested in the poor and vulnerable come from – is so incompetent and corrupted that only heavy handed laws, rules, regulations, consent decrees and external advocacy can get us the changes we think are needed
- That we will never have enough money to support the kinds of changes that are needed to achieve great outcomes – *great schools, better child welfare systems, fewer homeless, less crime, more timely benefits for needy people*
- That given the above, we are all too willing to accept that our leadership really doesn't matter

What's the Great Opportunity before us?



- That we need to cultivate great leaders who work the Demand side – not just the supply side – of transformation
- That we understand that change is not simply about piling more money on top of our problems or about finding the next super star leader or about passing new legislation to dictate change
- That change is about tapping the energy and engagement of those who most need something different to happen – they may be our clients or they may be our workforce

For Example = The Civil Rights movement – leaders created space for sharecroppers to demand their right to vote

What That Means for Our Leadership

- We must have a Liberating Vision
- We must be willing to Supervise that Vision
- We must be Transparent - Willing to make the work “public”
- We must be Self Conscious (not ego driven but intentional about who we are and why that matters to the work)
- We must subject ourselves and our decisions to Powerful and Compelling Moral Imperatives
- We must be committed to Sustainability (it ain't about us!)

Have A Liberating Vision

- Help people see that they do not have to be enslaved to their current reality
- Offer them a new and enlightened view of what is possible
- Make it hard for them to say NO even when the work is hard—because the vision is so worthy
- Open up space in the organization and the work for the talents and thinking of all who want to contribute

Supervise your Vision

- Must show up in the work
- Use your presence to coax new potentialities from the willing as well as the unwilling
- Ask people to be more than “good soldiers” – ask them to believe in the vision and see it as worthy of their time and attention
- Beware of letting the day-to-day mission drown the vision
- Know the score....Coach to win because people in our line of work are too accustomed to losing

Be transparent and willing to make the work “public”



- Create a space where people can sign up for the work: where they can learn by trying and be safe when they stumble
- Use measures and scoreboards to do more than just track performance – make them part of how you work and why you work (In this business, winning is about people)
- Tell stories, inside and outside the organization – bring people along as the vision unfolds – let them know how hard this is and what and when they can expect to get results

Be Self-Conscious about Who you are and Why that matters to the work

- Give people a reason to walk away from their current (*and comfortable*) reality
- Put all your personal and professional capital on the table on behalf of the work
- Walk so persuasively that others cannot help but take you seriously
- Talk so persuasively that others cannot help but believe you know what you are talking about
- Act so persuasively that others believe you are courageous enough to pull it off

Subject yourself and your decisions to Powerful and Compelling Moral Imperatives

- Values so powerful they cannot help but drive new behaviors
- Values so powerful that they force a conversation about what the right work is and how to do it
- Values so powerful that they force individuals to make decisions that inextricably link their behaviors to what is right
- Values so powerful that they remove ambiguity and render the previously acceptable as unacceptable
- Values so powerful that they leave no honorable way out – not for you and not for them

Commit to Sustainability

(Because it ain't about you)



- Make your leadership indistinguishable from the work, so that when you go away (and you will), the work continues
- Let your active presence in the work show people authentically what it means to lead from “within” the work – from the inside out
- Create an environment that calls on the many to move the vision and act – from wherever they are standing
- Create and expand the leadership space such that it compels your people to choose to lead themselves

Nehemiah

*“You see the trouble we are in, how
Jerusalem lies in ruins with its gates
burned?”*

...Let us rebuild...”

Nehemiah 2:17