

## **ADDRESS DELIVERED BY PROFESSOR EUDINE BARRITEAU**

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**"Women and Leadership: Some Strategies of Transformational Women Leaders in The Caribbean"**

*Violet Eudine Barriteau*, PhD. © 2004

Dr Jeanine Comma, staff of the Centre for Management and Development and new students of CMD's advanced degrees and diploma programmes, a very good evening. I wish I could say I am thrilled to be speaking to you after such a sumptuous dinner. While I am indeed honoured to meet you, the correct description of my feelings would be a sense of being challenged.

However, I allowed Dr Comma's formidable persuasive powers to work its magic for two good reasons. First, I knew this would be an excellent dinner and social occasion, and I love good company and fine dining. Second, as new Campus Coordinator for Graduate Studies and Research, at the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies, I wanted to both welcome and congratulate you, on this critical step in your continued professional development.

When you complete your various professional programs, as Chair of the Board of Examiners, I will sign all your documents, indicating and certifying, that you have successfully met all the requirements to be awarded your degrees and diplomas. In fact I am delighted to meet you, the women and men, who represent the continuing growth of Caribbean leadership, you, who will receive all these A's, and distinctions, and who will return to your various countries and organisations, extolling the exceptional quality and benefits of CMD's programmes.

As leaders in the public and private sectors, I want to share with you some ideas based on research, conducted by the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, Cave Hill on women and leadership in the Caribbean. I have titled my talk, *Women and Leadership: Some strategies of Women Transformational Leaders in the Caribbean*. I shall define transformational leadership, identify core characteristics shared by these women and include a discussion of the strategies they used as successful leaders. I promise you this will only take an hour and a half.

The defining essence of leadership is to be in charge - that is, it is to be responsible for the decisions taken. To lead, is to introduce the points of action in a social setting that produce, or are intended to produce, a set of anticipated, desired outcomes. The exercise of power and authority is the nucleus of leadership. In other words, the leader's capacity to make a decision, to initiate a course of action, arises from the exercise of power and authority.

Leadership can occur in any arena and a woman leader is a woman who exercises power and authority in a wide variety of arenas including homes, corporations, government bureaucracies, political parties, international organisations, and informal networks, in other words just like men exercise power and authority in a wide variety of arenas. Knowing that a woman is a leader does not guarantee or predict a particular outcome, even though many women, will perhaps lead in similar ways, within similar organisations or environments. In fact women's leadership is a biological classification, it assumes that the traditional traits, both positive and negative, associated with women, will manifest itself in women's leadership styles and decisions.

On the other hand, the idea of women's transformational leadership, introduces substantively, different qualitative criteria, to the practice and understanding of women's leadership. When women are engaged in transformational leadership, they are committed to creating changes, that radically alter existing practices and processes, and that introduce new strategies and outcomes, wherever that leader operates, whether this is at the local, national, regional and global levels.

The five outstanding Caribbean women leaders we studied, Dame Nita Barrow, Peggy Antrobus, Magda Pollard, Nesta Patrick, and Dame Eugenia Charles all displayed characteristics of transformational leadership. These characteristics can be cultivated and practiced by both men and women. Transformational leadership is leadership that is visionary, it starts at the individual level, and transcends the personal to express itself at the group and institutional levels. Transformational leaders are innovative and foresighted, they are masterful communicators, and they are "able to define ideas and concepts that escape others"(Hackman and Jones 1996: 79-82). From that definition, you will discern that the women leaders we interviewed were all transformational leaders.

Women and men who are transformational leaders are identified by certain key characteristics. The women we studied displayed the following characteristics both of background, (that is their personal lives) and their performance in public office.

**Very close knit and nurturing family relations\supportive fathers.** The women described their early childhood experiences and family relations as very close knit and nurturing. They built self esteem and confidence within their families and their parents and other family elders, held high expectations of them, **which they accepted** and did not **see as burdensome**. They all

commented on strong, supportive relationships with their fathers. They stated their mothers were supportive, too but they each singled out the relationships with their fathers, and the high values their fathers conveyed as decisive in growing into leadership roles. These experiences in the Caribbean are not unique. In a review of conversations with thirteen powerful women leaders, a researcher found, "they cite supportive families, especially fathers, but mothers as well. . . there was an overriding belief in education for daughters as well as sons" (Harman 1990: 14).

**Capacity to capitalize on new situations.** The women all displayed the ability or capacity to immediately act upon and capitalize new information and developing situations. Often these situations were unfolding but they stayed on top of these. What appeared as serendipity in their lives, on closer examination, revealed that they had firmly established the background and laid the groundwork to exploit what appeared as chance occurrences. In other words they created their own luck. They always seemed to be in the right place at the right time (just as you are tonight), but this seeming good fortune came from thorough preparation. They were instrumental in institution building and each pioneered a particular programme or developed new institutional capacities.

I am often struck by how much we are afraid of risk and I am not talking about risks of financial investments. I have seen many organizational meetings implode just at the point where a new strategy was required, a new approach should be followed, and an old habit needed to be put to bed. Precisely at this creative juncture, at being on the edge, and stepping off by pulling on past skills to negotiate the jump, we retreat and often turn on each other. Transformational leaders make that leap, knowing that their organizational memory, finely developed skills and knowledge of the environment will create a bridge to the other side. Transformational leaders seem to create something out of nothing, in fact, they are quietly and consistently coaxing new outcomes out of existing inputs.

**Creating and exploiting existing networks.** Transformational leaders seize upon existing situations and see the potential for creating new outcomes. **Please** recognise that each cohort of CMD's programmes, represents a unique Caribbean network-in-the-making, if you understand the power of being thrown together for a significant period with men and women from across the region. Nita Barrow was recognised as a consummate professional at networking (Hall 2001: 186), Dame Nita offered an original, moral definition of this leadership and communication skill. "It is having friends and trusting people while working towards a shared goal. Networking is important, because you cannot afford to alienate people and you have to also trust people" (Barrow 1995). There was an international flair to their networking and the experiences they gained. They acknowledged that maintaining communication links with those who are not supportive, but **are** influential in the introduction of new proposals and policies were vital. They emphasized the importance of learning from situations of opposition and conflict, even as they maintained a curiosity about, and willingness to pursue change.

**Comfortable with exercising power.** The women all had pride in, and a deeply rooted commitment to developing Caribbean knowledge, methods, strategies and practices. They displayed an obvious decisiveness in decision making. They were unafraid of taking hard or unpopular decisions but remained committed to consensus building. They conveyed a sense that goals were achievable. They understood that they were effective role models and recognised that

their work had produced change and impacted on the region and Caribbean society. The women accepted they were pioneers and spoke comfortably about this. Eugenia Charles spoke easily and frequently of enjoying power, enjoying being in office (Charles 2002). They displayed no ambivalence about the power of the positions they held in various organisations or with the idea of being personally powerful. They were not afraid to make decisions and recognised in the process of leading that they would make mistakes. They saw this as part of the dynamic of leadership. Nita Barrow said of her leadership, "I am sure I shall make mistakes but I am not afraid of mistakes. . . who sits in the chair is the most important thing." In that statement she embraces her personal and professional power and demonstrates an understanding of decisive leadership, a quality available to all men and women.

**Continuous Reflection and Self Assessment.** The person who practices transformational leadership is reflective. It is a process that requires the individual to evaluate her or his behaviour and actions, against the principles and values of justice and democratic practices. Reflection and self assessment promotes consensus building and facilitates effective leadership. These women understood that however brilliant a person is, if they cannot promote consensus, if they cannot motivate others to work with them, then that person will be an ineffective leader, walking alone, because they will not motivate others to walk with them. Peggy Antrobus, Nita Barrow, Nesta Patrick, Magda Pollard and Eugenia Charles demonstrated they understood where power existed and how it should be used in terms of achieving their organisational objectives.

**Visionary Leadership.** Vision is a characteristic that sets transformational leaders apart. They displayed vision in conceptualising and delivering their work programmes, often working against that brief but powerful, negative, phrase, it cannot be done.

**Conclusion** These strategies of transformational leadership I shared come from interviews with outstanding Caribbean women leaders. However, these are strategies that can be cultivated by women and men interested in developing and practicing dynamic, innovative leadership. These women understood that the concept of leader does not have to be synonymous with the concept of dictator. They also accepted that conflict is part of organizational dynamics. They saw the potential in conflict and recognised its existence provided an excellent opportunity for leaders and organizations to become more dynamic. So when conflict did occur rather than express dismay, become vindictive or authoritarian, or be immobilized by its occurrence, they took a different approach. They expected conflict, and consistently established and tested new procedures to manage it.

There is a lot of work to be done in the region. I hope you will find these strategies useful in your continuing quest to practice responsible, innovative and transformational leadership. Let me wish you a very successful programme and to all of us a blessed and peace filled, holiday season. Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you.