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Women, Leadership, and Power

Marilyn Swartz Lloyd

Women strive to attain power because it is the best way to achieve their personal and professional goals. This article describes how empowerment enabled its author to capture the vision of an ideal city in which education, culture, business, and industry all enjoy dignity and respect. Gaining acceptance for a light manufacturing zone in the city of Boston involved learning to build constituencies and rally support for a winning campaign.

The Board Room was packed with friendly people, but they had not turned out to support a friendly amendment. I was presenting a change to the city of Boston zoning code at the Boston Redevelopment Authority, which I believed was an important public policy that would literally save the working man and woman in Boston. But in April of 1989, the idea was trounced by a storm of opposition.

In learning how to succeed in winning the votes for this new light manufacturing zone, I gained an understanding of empowerment and leadership that, I think, is useful to women, whether in the world of ideas, politics, social services, or the corporation.

For a city planner, ideas are powerful. But ideas can't be powerful in a vacuum; they gain strength through refinement by others, so that they can become policies. Policies, however, have to be accepted, and they are effective only after being sold to the people who will benefit from them. Persuading a constituency to support policies and programs can make a strong concept or idea a moving force.

In *Plain Speaking*, biographer Merle Miller quotes Harry Truman on power in similar terms:

Everything . . . belongs to the people. I was just privileged to use it for a while. That's all. And since it was only lent to me, and by that I'm includin' the power of the Presidency, such as it is, I had to try to use whatever it was with great care so that I could pass it on to the next fella in the best condition possible.¹

When asked if he thought the Presidency was the most powerful office in the world Truman answered: "Oh, no. Oh, my, no. About the biggest power the President has

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... is the power to persuade people to do what they ought to do without having to be persuaded.”²

A Reason for Empowerment

Why should women want to hold power and figure out how to use it effectively, to share it, to persuade others? It’s the best way to achieve our objectives, whether our goals are to save the world or a piece of it, make a million dollars, support a family, change the way civilization looks at culture, or ensure that someone reads our poems. For me, power is a means to build the ideal city, a city that would be our best defense against killing one another off. In the established order of the ideal city, there is interaction, communication, and cooperation, industry, education, art, and theater. This city would translate and transmit our complex culture from generation to generation. I’m trying to capture Lewis Mumford’s vision of the ideal Greek city-state, in which orator and craftsman walk and work side by side, where elementary family loyalties, respect for neighbors, and a reverence for life can be handed on, where the leaders of a city create “an internal fabric of order and justice that [gives] . . . moral stability and mutual aid.”³

Mumford inveighed persuasively against a dependence on machines and feared that business and government were suppressing the life-nurturing functions of art, thought, and religious perspectives. However, I feel that my particular view of the city is not inconsistent with the essence of Mumford’s vision.

Give Everyone a Chance

Boston’s Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) is concerned with maintaining a diverse economy in which the blue-collar work force is better integrated into the city’s economy. Given Boston’s prominence in higher education, cultural life, health care, business, and development, it’s important that the blue-collar working man and woman be accorded the same dignity and respect — work side by side, if you will — as that granted to other members of Boston’s growing economy.

There are 40,000 blue-collar jobs in Boston, from which the city has been losing 1,000 jobs annually. They are not disappearing because manufacturing plants are losing their market share or because certain goods cannot be produced competitively. They are being discarded like unnecessary courtesies because the owner of a plant has figured out that the real estate it sits on is worth more than the operations of a plant employing two hundred people.

To create and maintain opportunities for the traditional work force in Boston, the EDIC introduced the light manufacturing zone, or LMZ. The zone allows only light manufacturers, like electronics firms, printers, or metal stampers, along with their support services, such as warehousing and data processing, to locate there. Day-care and job-training centers and small restaurants are also permitted. While luxury condos and high office towers are not only welcomed but encouraged in other parts of town, Boston will make a statement that in about 300 acres of this city of 41 square miles, it encourages only light manufacturing.

There is another important element to this zone. A lot of industry abuts residential communities, and industry has not always been a good neighbor. The zone, as created, becomes a buffer between homes and heavy industry. In addition to commercial and resi-

dential development, trash transfer stations, smelting plants, junk yards, and resource recovery plants are banned from an LMZ. Although such institutions are necessary to the functioning of a city, they have no place next door to residences. The LMZ is special because it sets design and performance guidelines for the development of a site and its manufacturing plant. Both the people who own a building and run a company and the people who work there know that they are part of the neighborhood.

It's important to protect light manufacturing and its work force, but owners of light manufacturing facilities have a responsibility that they often haven't lived up to in the past — being good citizens in their urban environment. The EDIC wants to protect jobs, but it also wants to protect neighborhoods. I think Lewis Mumford would have liked that.

Well, that's not a bad idea; in fact, it's a powerful one, but it wasn't going anywhere by itself. The concept needed EDIC's talented staff to join with me, to paraphrase Truman, "to persuade people to do what they really want to do." A big part of my job is not only encouraging that staff to work toward a goal, but to believe in it, be excited by it, and understand why fulfilling that goal is the corporation's most important work.

EDIC's goal was to win the LMZ. Together we waged a campaign.

Strength of a Team

Each person, no matter what the job description, was a captain in his or her sphere of influence. Each Monday morning we jointly developed three statements describing the LMZ. The statements focused our campaign and formed the basis for that week's speeches, press releases, letters, and discussions with supporters and opponents. They were influenced by feedback regarding misunderstandings of or disagreements with the LMZ.

The groups to whom we reached out included community organizations, labor unions, neighborhood business associations, individual company owners, realtors, developers, major businesses, manufacturing, real estate and architectural organizations, city and state government officials, the Boston Redevelopment Authority Board, and of course, the Zoning Commission members.

Every Wednesday, as we outlined what we had learned from each of these groups, we either changed or refined parts of the zone or developed an explanation in writing of why a particular idea did not work in the LMZ, but how it would work in other existing zones. We informed neighborhood, trade, and major print and broadcast media. We received both unfavorable reports and glowing headlines. An issue that is important enough to be controversial is a powerful issue, and we did not shy away from the controversy. We were greeted with cheers by workers and with anger from property owners. We did not back away from any heated discussions and sought out opponents to confer the same dignity on their arguments that we believed ours deserved.

Success of an Idea

Our campaign lasted eight months, from April to December. In April, when a few of the EDIC staff went with a few of our manufacturers before the Redevelopment Authority Board for a public hearing, as the *Boston Globe* said, a "cavalcade" of opponents marched up to testify. By November, before that same board, two hundred people who wanted to testify in favor of the zone couldn't crowd into the boardroom. After a couple of

hours, during which two people opposed the zone, the board unanimously recommended it to the Zoning Commission. The commission passed the zone unanimously in December when no opposition appeared.

Mayor Ray Flynn, who knows a lot about power and winning campaigns, has told me not to give him just good ideas and policies, but to show him the people who supported and were willing to fight for these ideas. By December everyone associated with the zone not only wanted it, but had a good deal to do with its appearance and winning the campaign.

Many people in the EDIC office feel they were in charge of the LMZ concept, process, or campaign. They are *all* right. Many people throughout City Hall believe the zone would not have passed without their lobbying efforts. This is also true. Those private-sector individuals, community residents, and labor union officials are also absolutely correct when they say that without their recommended changes the zone never would have passed.

Besides giving strength to an idea by opening it to everyone, the campaign enhanced the zone by encouraging discussion and debate. Many suggestions for changes were made and many were accepted. The validity of an idea, a process, or a new policy, however, does not come just from success, although it certainly helps; it also comes from withstanding controversy. A colleague once told me shortly after I became director of EDIC that she would know I was successful when I became embroiled in a controversy that was covered by the papers. She added that she hoped they would spell my name right.

Rewards of Empowerment

What are the lessons for all of us as we continue to seek to persuade, to build, to change? How do we grow into success? First, I am lucky because I grew up in a family in which no one told me that a woman couldn't do anything she wanted to do. My husband feels the same way about my goals, but he also says that there are no lucky people, just people who know how (and are able) to take advantage of opportunities. For as long as I can remember, I've expected that I would either write or have an impact on city life. I majored in government at Smith and went to Washington, D.C., when I graduated. I neatly followed that trail to Yale and city planning school. I don't make five-year plans, but I do have a focus to my life.

Fortunately, while traveling through Europe and Africa between the first and second years of graduate school, I had an experience that was more important than anything I've said about power. I learned that I could live without it. My former Smith College roommate talked me into staying with her in the Peace Corps in Kenya. For someone on the fast track, boiling water over wood and hiking thirty miles for groceries did not present many golden opportunities. But Kenya's scenery is among the most beautiful in the world, and I learned to gaze at sunsets without a thought in my head except for the glories of the colors. Since then I've been comfortable with a life that has exhilarating days and calm ones, great and mediocre weeks, years that soar and years that sort of putter along. So the second lesson is to maintain a balance and to think of occasional setbacks as breathing spaces for the next opportunity.

Power is competitive and we not only have to work to get it, we always have to work to hold on to it. The better we are at our jobs, and the easier we make them look, the more other people may think that they could do them just as well. Affirmative action requirements have made appointed positions for women in public life more accessible. But the

title and the institution won't mean much unless we constantly energize and excite the troops and, as a team, develop strong, useful, and winning programs.

Women Supporting Women

The most important idea is not that women be relegated to the world of ideas or that the public sector, the media, or education are the most fertile ground for women to gain leadership positions. The basic point is that a person has to build constituencies. Whether those constituencies elect a woman to office, applaud her work in the public sector, or offer support as she works her way up the corporate ladder, that support is her strength.

In *The Sisterhood*, Marcia Cohen takes us through a historical progress of the women's movement. Although fascinating and uplifting, her account also saddened me because of the infighting among the many talented and dedicated women who were envious of one another's celebrity. Compared to recent biographies of John F. Kennedy or the autobiography of "Tip" O'Neill, this group biography showed women who are brave and intelligent but seemed to lack that vital ingredient: a will to win. The need to win was certainly there, but as Cohen states, "Years later, many women would look back with regret on this Age of Agony, this battlefield of petty jealousies, would dismiss their attacks on their more talented 'sisters' such as Kate [Millett] and Susan Brownmiller as merely the growing pains of a new movement."⁴ Apparently some women were also unhappy with Gloria Steinem's leadership, because she had star quality and did not always sacrifice for the cause. Imagine what would have happened if the Democrats had decided not to support Jack Kennedy for President because he was handsome and born with a silver spoon.

Women can be very smart, but we have to learn how to work together better to win our goals. The strength of the Women's Economic Forum has been the ability of its members to rally around our agreements and leave our disagreements, whether political, economic, or personal, in some other room.

What can women do together with leadership and with empowerment? Whatever is important to us. Empowerment gives me the ability to make ideas reality, to encourage people in a community to have dignity and respect, to enhance cities to be instruments of caring and support, of great traditions and permanent beauty. And in Boston specifically, to bring good jobs at good wages to the residents of our city. 🐼

Notes

1. Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking, an Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1973), 10.
2. Ibid.
3. Lewis Mumford, *The City in History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961), 568–576.
4. Marcia Cohen, *The Sisterhood* (New York: Random House, 1988), 236.

