Reflections on Leadership Learning
Presented by Melissa Chedid, IWL Leadership Scholar, May 14, 2010

As I was reflecting on my experience within the Institute for Women’s Leadership and how I was going to begin this speech, I thought it would be PERFECT to start off with a nice, CLEAR, definition of Women’s Leadership. Well, I realized all too quickly that after TWO years in the Leadership Scholar’s Program, I honestly cannot define it for you. And do you know what? I actually think that might be the desired outcome of this program.

Women’s leadership is not simply one type of person, one realm of study or one particular personality trait like you heard from my fellow scholars! With that, instead of trying to define it FOR you, I decided to use five verses of the poem, “Do It Anyway” by Mother Teresa, to share with you the lessons I’ve learned throughout my two years in the Scholar’s Certificate Program. I chose this poem because for me, Mother Teresa is a woman who exhibits the characteristics of leadership that I aspire to attain – one of service.

So what I’m going to do is read a verse of the poem, and then explain the lessons I’ve learned throughout this program as related to the verse.

Verse 1: People are often unreasonable, illogical and self centered; Forgive them anyway.

Lesson #1: We are going to have to interact with people that we can’t stand. I mean, at all. We are going to have to work with people who only see things their way. And sometimes, we are going to even be that person! But, what I’ve learned throughout my two years in the leadership scholars program is that a leader is someone who recognizes both the good and bad qualities in someone, and yes, even in ourselves. Because without self-reflection, how can we possibly grow, and understand other perspectives?

Verse 2: If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies; Succeed anyway.

Lesson #2: We will not be liked by everyone. It is an impossible and unattainable goal. But what I’ve learned in this program is that a support system is crucial. It’s important to recognize our true friends, like my sister scholars, and the importance of community; because success cannot be achieved alone…plus, it isn’t really fun if you don’t have people to share it with.

Verse 3: What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight; Build anyway.
Lesson #3: We will fail…and it's OK. Throughout this program, I’ve learned that being a leader means to persist especially when we face obstacles that seem insurmountable (like social action project proposals)! Because failure leaves room for so much growth – and that took me a long time to realize. But a leader is someone who turns failure into a learning opportunity and motivation to continue to move forward.

Verse 4: The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow; Do good anyway.

Lesson #4: I’ve been called a dreamer, a do-gooder, a romantic and the ultimate optimist. And if one thing is certain, there will always be people rolling their eyes or telling you to be realistic. And there will always be people who can give you all the reasons why you can’t or won’t improve the world. What I’ve learned through this program is not to lose sight of our fundamental purpose as leaders. I’ve learned that you can, you will and you are EXPECTED to do good through becoming aware of the world around you and critically and strategically becoming agents of social change.

Verse 5: Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough; Give the world the best you've got anyway.

I’ve learned within the Leadership Scholar’s Program that the world needs more of US, more responsible, strong, socially aware leaders. A lot of people these days are still waiting for Martin Luther King, Gandhi or Mother Teresa to come back – but they’re gone now. We are it! It is up to us - up to you. More than EVER before, our world needs more goodness, more kindness and more social action.

This is our time, yours and mine.
We have important discoveries to make and now is the time to make them.
We have important talents to develop and now is the time to develop them.
Most importantly, we have important gifts to give to the world, and through this program I’ve learned that NOW is the time to give them.