

# GOOD REMINDERS: PROFESSIONAL INSPIRATION ON LEADERSHIP

BY KIMBERLEY HOLMES



My professional inspiration role model was a woman named Marilyn. Marilyn was the resource teacher at Central Memorial High School. She taught the “down and out” kids – the ones that society really did not want a lot to do with. Her job was to take these learners and try to make them into something. I must be honest; it was not a coveted job. Yet she was an amazing master. These young people walked into her classroom bitter and disillusioned, and transformed into something entirely different under her gentle guidance. I use the term guidance because she was indeed a guide. She did not try to shape, mold, or structure anything. She simply taught them to look inward and see the beauty that was within them.

The significant memory I have is of a simple statement that Marilyn made to me one day. As the leadership teacher, I was eager to have everyone involved and participating in the extra curricular activities around the building. It was my role as the leader to round them up, and get them involved (whether they wanted to be or not!).

I was expressing my enthusiasm one day in the staff room, and remarked to Marilyn how it would be good to get her kids involved in a certain project. She asked me if they had expressed interest, or if I had asked them what they were interested in. My response was “of course they would be interested, it would be good for them, it would help them grow.” She stopped me midsentence and asked me, “Is that your place?”

She simply taught them to look inward and see the beauty that was within them.

At the time I was infuriated. Of course, that was my place. I am an educator here to shape minds of the future and show them the way to success and happiness. How dare she ask me if it was my place to involve these kids? And then, because I really respected her and what she was doing, I began to really think about what she had said. I now realize that was the beginning of the formation of my philosophy of leadership.

Leadership is not about rounding up the troops and making them do things. Leadership is about relationships. Had I taken any time to build a relationship and find out what was significant to these learners, or had I simply decided what would be best for them? Leadership is about inspiration. It is about inspiring others to reach their potential – not telling them what their potential is. Leadership is servant-based, not hero-based. I needed to provide the support, not necessarily build the structure.

I began to see what my place was and Marilyn was completely correct in questioning me. I began to really question my teaching philosophy. Was I really helping learners become leaders or was I simply leading them along the way? There was a big difference! Through many deep discussions with Marilyn I began to understand the true essence behind this and really see why her students were so successful.

A key component of this philosophy is in the work of Angeles Arrien. In her book *The Four-fold Way* she explores life by walking the path of the warrior, teacher, healer, and visionary. The text encompasses four basic premises for life, which I find just as applicable for leadership learning.

*The Four-fold Way*<sup>1</sup>

- Show up
- Pay attention to what has heart and meaning
- Tell the truth without blame or judgement
- Be open to outcome not attached to outcome

Through Marilyn I realized that leadership was much deeper than I had thought. It had so much to do with acknowledging people, paying attention and inspiring others. I often think of her gentle reminder, and her question about my place. It has done wonders for my teaching and my relationships. We are all here together and all have something to offer. The key is to look for everyone's individual gifts. You will be amazed at what

you will find. Thank you, Marilyn, for showing me the four-fold way and inspiring me to become a better teacher, leader, and human being.

### Notes

1. Arrien Angeles. (1993). *The Four-fold way. Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary*. Harper Collins Publishers.

### About the Author

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