



Women as Leaders

Pulling Together to Secure Harmony on Earth

by Linda Sechrist

Since 2005, the power of media images has been stretching our collective imagination and changing the perception of what is possible for young girls and women who dream of using their leadership skills to make our world a better place to live.

High heels, lively stepping across the presidential seal embedded in the carpet of the Oval Office, have been the subject of prime-time television dramas such as *Commander in Chief*, starring Gina Davis, and *24*, featuring Cherry Jones as President Allison Taylor. Although life didn't imitate art on January 20, half of the world's population inherited a new dream when the two-year campaign trail to the White House gave New York Senator Hillary Clinton an opportunity to showcase her political talents.

"Hillary left us with an indelible image, a knowing that anything is possible and a green light to put our courage and commitment to use in leading the way on issues that we passionately believe in," says Joellen Raderstorf, one of four Mothers Acting Up founders.



 **Holistic Moms Network**

Living Healthy Living Green

Join Us!

www.holisticmoms.org
(877) HOL-MOMS

Photo: Shimayyah Sutton



Joellen Raderstorf

Raderstorf and three friends gathered around her kitchen table in 2002 to share their passion for making a difference in the lives of the world's children. "We had just returned from Washington, D.C., where our state senator informed us that, due to a tax cut, we would not have funding for our community programs," says Raderstorf.

The four mothers realized they needed to gather women like themselves to advocate on behalf of children. "It was clear to us," explains Raderstorf, "that we needed many more voices to speak out for the well-being of our global family." Within weeks Mothers Acting Up, an Internet-based, non-profit organization, was born. Understanding that change will not occur without their courage, commitment and activism continues to inspire the organized effort that now affords mothers in 49 states and 23 countries a say in corporate and public policies that affect the world our children will inherit. "We felt in our hearts that women must unite to mobilize their political strength, in order to ensure the health, education and safety of every child, not just a privileged few," remarks Raderstorf. "In a

global economy, all children's well-being is connected." Members point out that children around the world breathe the same air, eat fish from the same ocean and live as neighbors. "It's time," she says, "to measure the true impact of our political and personal choices by how they affect children everywhere."

Acting Now for Future Generations



Jean Shinoda Bolen

Jean Shinoda Bolen, a psychiatrist and author of *The Millionth Circle* and *Urgent Message from Mother: Gather the Women, Save the World*, shares Raderstorf's

concern about the need for women to speak up and take action. "The dormant power of women together is the untapped resource needed by humanity and the planet," emphasizes the Jungian analyst. "Every woman's voice is needed, particularly those interested in keeping the premises safe for all, as well as those concerned for children's needs and development."

Bolen's experience affirms that the qualifications to forward change come naturally to women. These include the ability to manage resources, resolve conflicts, work collaboratively, ask questions, listen and learn from the experience of others, and act with compassion for the benefit of all, including generations to come.

In the eyes of Linda Tarr-Whelan, author of *Women Lead the Way: Your Guide to Stepping Up to Leadership and Changing the World*, women like those in Mothers Acting Up, who organize on the grassroots level in their communities and beyond, are change agents for a better future. She points to research conducted by Rutgers University's Center for American Women and Politics, which demonstrates the benefits of empowering women in leadership capacities.

"Women make a decided difference when they come to constitute 30 percent of a board of directors, executive management, political body or any organization," notes Tarr-Whelan, a



Linda Tarr-Whelan

former ambassador and U.S. representative to the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women during the Clinton administration. "Only then does the dialogue change; only then do women's voices get heard and their ideas acted upon. Until we reach this tipping point, all of us have good reason to be concerned about the missing priorities, qualities, talents and experience that women can contribute."

Accomplishments Despite Uneven Odds

Examples abound of what women's representation in elected office can achieve. In the United States, women-friendly policies have been written into national legislation ever since they began winning congressional seats, tackling such issues as violence against women, child support, welfare, equal wages and unemployment benefits.

Yet, today, women account for only 17 percent of Congress' 535 seats. During the last decade, our country has lost ground in women's political representation, plummeting from 47th in the world to 71st, behind Iraq (33rd), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (57th) and Sudan (65th). Rwanda recently made global history when it became the first nation electing more women than men to parliament.

The staff and board of directors of Green America (formerly Co-Op America), a nonprofit organization deploying the power of the marketplace to solve social and environmental problems, is now beyond the 30 percent tipping point. Women comprise 70 percent of its board of directors. Executive Director Alisa Gravitz has been nurturing her activism and leadership talents since collaborating with her 8th-grade classmates to organize a recycling center and environmental education classes in the 1970s.

"I realized early on that when you work together, you can do anything," quips Gravitz.

Values Women Bring to the Table



Alisa Gravitz

Working together collaboratively is one of the distinguishing qualities that women bring to the workplace. "Women encourage others to be involved in the decision-making process and view consensus as an important element in reaching a decision," observes Gravitz.

Her list of other proven traits that women bring to the arena of green activism includes: a holistic and integrative approach to problem solving; compassion, that translates into a sincere interest in people; and a more encompassing view of stakeholders' return on investment.

"Women ask questions not just because they want to know the story of the human being behind the investment," advises Gravitz, "but, because they care about more than the return on the dollar."

"Women are socialized to be listeners and view things relationally," adds Dr. Linda Stillman, a specialist in cultural communication, interpersonal relations and gender issues. She also served as the permanent UN Nongovernmental Organization (NGO) representative for Soroptimist International, a volunteer international women's organization for international women's issues.

Possibilities Unlimited

Discover your radiant self
Explore ways to express that self
Empower yourself to live your truth
the Possibilities are unlimited!

Sue Freeman, CEC, RMT 862-222-4268
Certified Empowerment Coach, Reiki Master,
Intuitive & Spiritual Counselor, Ordained Minister
Call for your free consultation
Receive 20% off your first session





Dr. Linda Stillman

Stillman observes that women tend to approach leadership through their relationships. "Women converse to build connections and seek multiple options before reaching decisions or taking action," she explains. This behavior reflects a more democratic and cautious approach to doing business, as recently highlighted in a *Washington Post* article on the banking industry's missing gender balance. It led: "The first rumblings of a gender revolution are underway in an industry long controlled by men."

Cultivating Long-term Perspective

In an organization like Holistic Moms Network (HMN), founded by a handful of mothers who yearned for the support and friendship of others parenting outside the mainstream, gender balance might be unexpected. Yet, according to founder Nancy Massotto, the nonprofit's 120 chapters across the United States and Canada counts many supportive fathers as members.



Nancy Massotto

Massotto, who jokes that her "Type A" personality helped her master the mountains of work required to take HMN from an Essex County, New Jersey network to a nonprofit organization crisscrossing North America, remarks, "I don't easily shy away from challenges; I am a holistic mom, who birthed my children at home, breastfed and raised them on

organic food. Thus, this work is almost a calling." Massotto views her background in research organizations, along with her doctorate in political science and teaching experience at several universities, as preparation for organizing HMN. An educator who has always worked on behalf of women, Massotto observes that, even though all women are not the same, the majority generally cultivates a long-term perspective regarding the impact of their choices.

She remarks, "I see selflessness, particularly by mothers who give of themselves, without wanting anything in return other than the satisfaction of doing something that has a positive impact."

Connecting with others and building consensus, as well as practicing stewardship and service over self-interest,



Mary Evelyn Tucker

are behaviors common to women's egalitarian approach to leadership. These strengths are what Mary Evelyn Tucker believes make women ideal candidates for leading the way in community development and caring for the environment.

"Women have a deep spiritual sensibility, a humility that allows them to sense that they are a part of nature and not apart from it," says Tucker, co-founder of the Forum on Religion and Ecology. "This experiential connection creates the link between religion and ecology." Activist stories featured in *Renewal*, a documentary film that highlights several grassroots environmental initiatives led by women, supports this. Tucker's international, multi-religious project explores religious worldviews, texts and ethics in order to broaden understanding of human-Earth relations.



Margaret Wheatley

Enlightened leaders agree that women's strengths, among them relationship building, story sharing and community organizing, are urgently needed in today's world.

Margaret Wheatley, author of *Turning to One Another*, believes that when we begin to truly listen to each other and talk about things that matter to us, the world begins to change. "There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about," asserts Wheatley, whose experience confirms that "Change only comes when everyday individuals gather in small groups, notice what they care about and then, take those first steps to change the situation."

In 2000, at the start of a weeklong conference to review progress made since the Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing in 1995, former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan boldly declared, "The future of the planet depends on women." Another grassroots group of women are among those now taking the first steps on the journey to a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable future for all. They are organizing Sophia 2010, a women's world conference convening in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2010.

The event will highlight for the world successful approaches to achieving global goals of improving social conditions, preserving nature and celebrating universal spirituality. This groundbreaking international forum is the brainchild of women confident in the fact that a small group of thoughtful people, looking to advance social development, gender equality and wisdom can lead the way to change, through courage, commitment and activism.

Writer Linda Sechrist recently returned from the 53rd session of *The Commission on the Status of Women*, the principal global policy-making body of the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

SMITH FAMILY CHIROPRACTIC
1 Lackawanna Pl., Morristown, NJ 07960



Treasured moments shouldn't be spent in pain. Chiropractic lets you enjoy all of life's Precious Moments.

Call us for a complimentary exam
973-267-7744

Nancy Smith, D.C. • Mariangela Remetz D.C.