Women's Ways of Using Caring, Connection and Collaboration to Create the Work Place as Community

Sarah E. Howard [1]

This essay examines how women's leadership styles in the work place help to establish it as a caring, connected and collaborative community. Women's ways of knowing and learning develop as natural extensions of their nurturing instincts. Women lead by using caring and connecting in relationships and collaborations. Women honoring relationships first, get more support and consensus on decisions and projects. A caring approach toward leading produces feelings of well-being in workers, promoting more productivity and harmony. This essay is meant to raise awareness about women's leadership styles as means to create the work place as a caring community.

This paper provides a theoretical framework for what is commonly known as women's ways of knowing, learning and doing within the specific context of how women lead in the work place (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Taru, 1986). Women tend to manage within the context of relationship, to self and others, as a framework for how they conduct business in the work place. Women's ways of knowing, learning and doing are deeply interconnected with their world views, their histories, their families, their social groups, their experiences, and so forth (Hayes and Flannery, 2000). Women employ such principles as caring, connection, collaboration, and accepting the work place as a community in managing their people and projects, creating a leadership style that is distinct and different from that of men (Rosener, 1990).

Although we refer to a particular leadership style as feminine, it is a mistake to assume that only women practice, prefer or use a leadership style of caring for others, or using relationships and connections as a backdrop for doing business or using community as a model for working (Rosener, 1990). For example, I have had male bosses who were very caring in their approach toward employees and were inclusive of others in their decision-making. This paper is not asserting that all women use a leadership style of caring, connection and community. Women are capable of adopting more traditional male models of leadership, such as hierarchical

---

[1] Office of Campus Life and Dean of Students, Purdue University Calumet. The author may be reached at Purdue University Calumet, 220 169th St., Hammond, IN 46323 or howard@calumet.purdue.edu

decision-making or top-down management. Some women may actually prefer to use traditional male models of leadership. Also, this paper is also not asserting that all women or all men adhere to a specific style of leadership. Instead, it examines the style of leadership used primarily by women that contributes to a work place that is run by caring, connection and collaboration. Employing a leadership style using these qualities renders the work place and workers more productive and supportive (Rosener, 1990).

There is a negative to using only this leadership style, however. There are times when top-down management may be the only viable way to approach a problem. For example, when it is certain that a particular decision will solve a problem, giving the order that a certain solution will be implemented is the most expedient approach. One cannot always get others' opinions or ask for collaboration or cooperation in this type of situation. It is not practical to assume that caring, collaboration and cooperation as a management style will suffice in every situation. A decision may need to be made in a hurry, so to use collaboration and cooperation as styles when there is an emergency situation is impractical as there will not be time to consult with others in an emergency situation.   I do not know anyone who practices these to the exclusion of other management styles and techniques. This paper addresses a basic attitude toward work rather than a one-size fits all approach to all situations.

A study conducted in 1989 illustrates these leadership styles and their inherent inclusive basic attitudes. The International Women's Forum (IWF) created the Leadership Foundation which conducted a study of men's and women's leadership styles.   The survey asked questions about leadership styles, the organizations in which individuals worked, work and family issues, and personal characteristics in general and in regards to work. The survey asked about two types of leadership styles: interactive (motivating others by transforming their self-interest into the goals of the organization, using an inclusive management style; intentionally enhancing the self-worth of others; seeking others' cooperation to achieve goals) and traditional male model (top-down, autocratic approach). The survey was an eight-page questionnaire that was sent to all the IWF members. All survey respondents were of similar age, occupation, and educational levels. The response rate was 31%.   The survey results revealed that women are more likely than men to use interactive leadership (Rosener, 1990). To help understand the basic tenants of the interactive leadership style, the following discussion defines caring, connection and collaboration.

Caring
> "Would you harbor me?
> Would I harbor you?
> Would you harbor me?
> Would I harbor you?" (Barnwell, 1994)

Sometimes the metaphysical language of art is the best way to express an idea in the real world. The idea of caring is expressed in this song's poetry by asking with the questions, "would you harbor me?" and "would I harbor you?" Inherent in these questions is the affirmation that I need to harbor you and you need to harbor me. In other words, we need each other; we need to take care of each other. The all women's group *Sweet Honey in the Rock's* rendition of this song skillfully draws the listener into the idea of caring, using the metaphor of a

harbor. The harbor represents rest after a long, sometimes dangerous and sometimes pleasant journey. The journey of life is sometimes plagued with natural and human disasters. At other times the journey is awash with beautiful sunsets and sunrises, gentle breezes, and serene blue waters that reflect pristine blue skies. The harbor is a place where one gets rest. It represents docking at the port after a long journey in order to refuel the ship, to get rested, bathed, fed and to get one's various and sundry thirsts quenched. One stops at the harbor to get replenished to be able to continue, refreshed on the journey.

This metaphor of the harbor can also be applied to the work place, where all are on separate, personal journeys and on a common journey to accomplish the goal of the company. Often that common goal of the work place is the only thing that connects those who work together. In a sense, that common goal becomes a resting place for different ideas and lifestyles, so that the common journey of the work place is the means to continue the journey and to establish community.

One of the many words that *Webster's Dictionary (*1968) uses to define "caring" is "compassion" (p. 214). To have compassion for another, there must be true caring. Harboring can be interpreted as giving rest (emotional rest), cutting someone a break, letting go of the little things, or being kind to others and not seeking revenge when someone slights another. To set the wheels in motion for a tit for tat wastes energy. A very wise boss once said to me as I was pointing out the faults of a fellow colleague, "You need to learn to let go of the little things." This comment struck me, and I have gone back to it time and time again when I have momentarily forgotten why I am in the work place, which is to accomplish a common business goal. Anything else that is given importance is a waste of time. At the same time, there is only a limited amount of time that can be spent at work to get the projects and tasks done, and I have seen many people get side-tracked with things going on at work, like power plays, gossiping, or what others are doing or not doing. These types of non-business goal agenda items keep us from focusing on the goal of the job and prevent us from making healthy connections with others.

A manager who employs caring as a part of her leadership style, will help those under her watch to stay focused on the business goal, thus helping to create a caring attitude toward the business goal and toward others. Power and Makogon (1995) state that "caring involves a sensitive responsiveness to the other that is based on an engaged attentiveness and openness to the other's experience" (p. 11). Care refers primarily to feelings of concern and solicitude for others. In other words, if one cares for another, she understands another's sorrow, so she can take that into consideration when interacting with the person. Understanding another's pain or sorrow is called role-taking (Power & Makogon, 1995). Role-taking refers to being receptive to seeing and feeling the world as someone else sees and feels it (Power & Makogon, 1995). Role-taking will allow one to let the person be as she is, and to feel as she needs to feel. This empathetic move promotes a real understanding of another's experience. This is true compassion, to be able to see from the other person's point of view.

Caring also refers to connecting with others. Connection cannot be understood unless one also understands separation. The separation of oneself from another in an attempt to let another be herself is the true test of caring. Caring is not enabling another to act irresponsibly, doing her work for her, lying for her, lying to her, or ignoring shortcomings that need improving;

instead caring involves understanding and allowing others to be themselves. So, caring is about connecting to and separating from another in a healthy way that allows her to grow in a correspondingly healthy manner. Dreher (1998) concludes that "caring for others is essential to life. An attitude of perpetual self-sacrifice can become pathological and self-destructive" (p. 8).[2] The *Tao of Womanhood* (1998) describes caring as "responsible nurturing means relating out of love, not obligation, balancing compassion with detachment and discernment. Detachment prevents you from getting too emotionally caught up in a problem. By combining detachment with compassion, you can stay centered, respond effectively, and maintain perspective, which the person you are nurturing may have lost" (Dreher, 1998, p. 63). Nurturing wisely requires discernment. Despite all our good intentions, sometimes our nurturing weakens other people as well as ourselves. (Dreher, 1998) Leading others in the work place to take responsibility for the bad decisions they make and the wrong actions they take, while still holding them in high esteem for things they do correctly, helps colleagues develop a high sense of self esteem that is not arrogant or false, but healthy and balanced. By not being attached to either the good or bad behaviors, a leadership style is modeled that is both compassionate and discerning at the same time. Others learn from this modeling behavior that it is possible to be both caring and detached at the same time.

Connection

When members in the work place community see themselves connected, they each contribute to the work at hand, knowing their respective parts to play, knowing they contribute to a whole. The first chapter in the *Tao of Womanhood*, entitled "The Lesson of Oneness" and within the first section of this chapter, is, "Dynamic Balance: Finding Unity in Multiplicity". The Tao teaches that by "seeing the relationship among the separate parts of life, one will experience more of the underlying unity" (Dreher, 1998, p. 17). In connecting with others, one needs to see self not as separate parts, but as parts of others to acknowledge unity or to acknowledge connection. When applying this concept to the work place community, all members in the community are part of each other and part of the community, which depicts unity and oneness.

Connections and relationships are how women approach work. Women work in the context of relationship and connection and see themselves as connected to others, whether they are the supervisor, the supervised, a partner, or a colleague. When this relationship or

---

[2] This quote is taken from the book, *The Tao of Womanhood*, which gives lessons for women on attaining power and peace, using the ancient Chinese text, the *Tao Te Ching*. This ancient text was written by Lao tzu in about 530 B.C., who studied the natural principles of nature by spending many hours observing nature and Her ways of being. The text is an inspirational set of lessons, written in a lyrical poetic style, that instructs how to handle life's problems in a way that teaches one to gain a sense of inner power and peace. It includes eighty-one lyric poems that depict the dichotomies and opposites of life. Lessons revolve around the yin and yang, the masculine and feminine aspects of life, the dark and light, the good and evil, the connection and separation, the nurturing and assertiveness, the action and contemplation, the power and peace, and such things as strength and gentleness. The Tao describes opposites as one coming out of the other, flowing from each other, as one whole, not as separate parts.

connection is valued, the work flows from this caring and connection. For example, Beth Pellicciotti, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at Purdue University Calumet, is one who uses caring and connection in how she manages her work. She values the relationship first and all the work flows from the relationships that she has established with others. She seems to "pull rabbits out of hats" with her work as she tackles one difficult project after another. She says that she approaches each project with the people of the project in mind. In fact, she gets to know people at the university on a personal level even before she has to work with them. In this way the personal connection has already been made, so that any projects on which she works flow from the relationships she has already established and nurtured. She is a person who goes to as many celebrations of those with whom she works as possible. She is also there for others when they are having bad times. She is a patient listener and honors people where they are. Her philosophy of making the relationship first and, then, working on projects has earned her the respect of many of those with whom she works.

Ms. Pellicciotti exemplifies connectedness and knows that she is part of something larger than herself, honoring all as part of one undertaking. The secret of life is connectedness - the thought that we are all something larger than ourself. Feelings of connectedness produce feelings that create and maintain one's emotional health (E. Hallowell, personal communication, July 12, 2006). Feeling connected is one of the basic human needs, and these needs are just as important at work as at home. Being connected produces feelings of "calm, concentration, creativity, cool, caring, collected, whereas being disconnected produce feelings of loss of perspective, paranoia-genesis, demoralization, promotion of diseases of the imagination, loss of inclination to strive and encroachment of fear. To have a healthy life we need to recognize that we are inextricably connected to something larger than self" (E. Hallowell, personal communication, July 12, 2006). When applied to the work place, this "something larger than self" is the members of the community who are working on the common business goal. The opposite of connection is feeling disconnected to life, others or the business goal. When others in the work place are treated in such a way that they do not feel connected, it causes depression and other emotional disease and prevents workers from doing their best work. This may account for some members of the work community who lose sight of the goal and start to look at negative things instead of paying attention to the goal of the business at hand. It is emotionally dangerous to feel disconnected. In a study of adolescent health and delinquency, it was found that kids who felt alienated at home and who did not feel connected at home got into trouble at school and in the community (E. Hallowell, personal communication, July 12, 2006). When we create a positive emotional climate, we make it possible for others to feel safe; when others feel safe, their imaginations work better, and they are more productive. In the work place, practicing connectedness can help all become more emotionally healthy, creative and productive.

The humanist psychologist, Abraham Maslow, who created the hierarchy of needs approach to human development, stated that we have instinctive needs that are hierarchical and that the basic needs must be met before higher level needs can be satisfied or even recognized (Maslow, 1943). According to Maslow, if each level of needs is met, then the last and highest level can be sought after. For the human being to develop in an emotionally healthy way, she must have all the levels of needs met. Maslow's hierarchy of needs, starting with the lowest level is as follows:

1.*Physiological needs* which are biological in nature. They consist of needs of oxygen, food, and water. They are the strongest because they are basic to survival.

1.*Safety needs* which are needs for security and needs to feel safe. The needs for security are not activated until the basic physiological needs are met.

1.*Love, affection and belongingness needs* are experienced after basic physiological needs and safety needs are met. When the person tries to get these needs met, he strives to overcome feelings of loneliness and alienation, learns to give and receive love and endeavors to quench her desire for a sense of belonging (Simons, Irwin, and Drinnien, 1987).

The final level of need attainment is self-actualization, which is a person's need to be and do that which the person was "born to do". If the person has not gotten the basic needs met, he cannot reach self-actualization (Simons, Irwin, and Drinnien, 1987). Using caring and connection as a way to treat another in the work place may help another to get her basic needs of belonging, love and affection met, which may also help free her to think more creatively and give more to the employer and herself.

Forming relationships is the way women connect and do business in the work place. Belenky, et. al. (1986) found that women make sense of the world by seeing a world comprised of relationships. Her theory states that a woman's life makes sense through connection to others, and that women's sense of self is centered on "making and maintaining affiliations and relationships with others" (Belenky, et. al. , 1986, p. 143). Belenky also noticed that women use affiliation to make decisions.

Studies show that women both prefer to learn with others and prefer a kind of learning relationship with others that emphasizes mutual support and caring. Flannery (2000) surveyed studies that describe how women learn through interacting with other people, especially in ongoing relationships. A common finding in these studies is that women learn best in environments that promote mutual openness and an ethic of care, cooperation, and collaboration (Belenky, et. al, 1986; Flannery, 2000). Studies in the business world regarding how women lead reveal similar findings. For example, Bierema (1995) found that "even though the corporate world is competitive, executive women preferred to use collaborative learning when learning to negotiate and when trying to influence the organizational culture." (p. 149)

Another way women connect in the work place is by having and showing compassion for others (Belenky, et. al., 1986). Women who use connection as a way to lead learn to understand other people's personal experience and knowledge. They are empathetic. They take the position of believing and trusting rather than judging what others say. They enjoy collaborative explorations in various kinds of groups, thereby increasing their own capacity to learn and grow and to become better team members (Hayes, 2000).

Learning from others is the base of connected learning (Belenky, et. al., 1986). Other components of connection are trusting another's point of view, validating another's knowledge, and trying to understand different viewpoints other than one's own, not judging others and believing that everyone will be treated according to the same values (Gilligan, 1982). These

90

ways of working help to create a community of workers who are connected in ways that honor the relationship.

Collaboration

Collaboration flows from connection. When people feel connected to others – that is, when they feel safe, and when they are validated as productive members of the group - they are more productive. Collaboration takes place when there is trust and respect among those collaborating. Collaborators must trust each other that their ideas will be taken seriously and will be added to the pool of ideas that the collaborators are discussing. The end product is much richer when others contribute to ideas and the final ideas are a compilation of all the ideas that were discussed. It may take longer and may be more frustrating, but the end result has more breadth and depth than if only one person had worked on the idea generation (Mealman and Lawrence, 1997)

Collaboration, which stems from both caring and connection, is successful when respect, trust and commitment are core values of the group (Mealman and Lawrence, 1997). It is not just enough for the leader of the group to have these qualities, but the leader should also try to instill these in others with whom they work. Individuals must talk about them in the context of the common business goal, and the group must adopt them as ways the group will use to collaborate on projects. A leader should make sure that all share a vision of the core values of how the work will get done. This is the way to build a collaborative community.

Community

Webster's Dictionary (1968) defines "community" as "having ownership or participation in common" (p. 288). To have community, there must be ownership of the common theme that brings people together. Randee Lipson Lawrence, Professor of Adult Education at National Louis University, who specializes in the study of cohort residential learning communities for graduate programs, defines community as:

> A group of individuals with a common goal does not automatically constitute a community. Communities develop over time and with intention. Members of the community must come to know each and develop respect for one another's strengths, weaknesses, and differences. When commitment is high and contributions from all members are valued, communities have the potential to co-create knowledge, make effective decisions, and effect change (p. 83). Lawrence, 2002)

She uses the circle as a metaphor for community, with the circle representing something that is held up by the members of the community. The circle is "where our ancestors gathered around, with the fire in the middle, and which provided the basis for socialization, decision-making, and problem solving" (Lawrence 2002, p. 84). All members are responsible for "holding up the rim" (Baldwin, 1994, as cited by Lawrence, 2002, p. 84) of the circle, which means that all members are responsible for keeping the circle from lapsing or falling over. If a group member is struggling, the other members will hold up the rim and offer whatever help is needed so that the

rim of the circle stays a perfect circle and does not lapse, lean or fall down.

Parker Palmer (1987) defines "community" as that place where the person with whom you least want to live always lives. When that person moves away, someone else arises immediately to take his or her place. We need to learn to commune with all, whether we like them or not, organizing around a common goal. In his own personal quest to find community after becoming disillusioned with college teaching at 55 years of age, Palmer spent time at Pendle Hill, a Quaker living and learning community near Philadelphia. At Pendle Hill everyone, whether a bus boy, a crop planter, a scientist or teacher, receives the same salary and all jobs are seen as equally important. Decisions are made by consensus, and each one takes care of one another. Palmer believes that what holds a community together is a mutual, community goal where all are respected and uplifted. He refers to this as "love", where those in the community are craving community, craving to be respected, cared for and connected. Palmer asserts our natural way of being is communal and in relation to nature; the reality of nature is that it is relational (Palmer 1987).

Paula Underwood (n.d.) tells us that in the Native American tradition it is customary to look at all of life as community. She explains that in the Native American tradition all people and things on earth, in the earth, around and through the earth are in relation to each other, and all is community. Everyone and everything is community and is in relation to everything else, and in this regard, we should cooperate with all persons and all things, human and non-human. Community is a natural aspect of life. Applying this concept in the work place provides what a friend of mine calls "organic", which means that there is a relationship and interconnection among all things involved in a process. In looking at this in an organic fashion, we work from relationship (building community), which is the way nature works, according to Underwood.

Anne Agosto-Severa, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services and Registrar at Purdue University Calumet, has an employee retention rate among her full-time employees that is not to be rivaled. The excellent retention rate she has with her employees did not just happen. She believes in celebrating her employees' successes, both personal and business-related, has celebrations of the holidays with them, has celebrations of anniversaries, births, graduations, and so forth, and is there for them when they have tragedies in their lives. Her personal care for them is evident when she takes her time on the weekend to help one of them move or be a judge in a contest in which one of her employee's children is a contestant. She was very humble about being used as an example in this article, as she doesn't think she is doing anything special. She doesn't see this as doing anything special because she manages from her own natural way of being. Her management style is an extension of who she is and how she is in her own life, which is to care for others and celebrate with them and grieve with them. She also works in an organic fashion, creating a work place community that is based on her on personal values of honoring the relationship.

This paper has addressed a non-traditional way of leading in the work place, using core values of caring, connection and collaboration, viewing the work place as a community. Traditionally, this non-traditional approach to leadership in the work place has been attributed to women's ways of knowing, learning and doing, but men also use these qualities in managing and working. The style has some negative aspects to it if used exclusively, and if other styles that

are more situationally appropriate are not used in conjunction with it. More studies are needed on this topic so as to add to the existing body of research and also to increase our knowledge and use of diverse ways of managing in the work place that will create a more productive and harmonious community.

References

Barnwell, Y.M. (1994). *Would You Harbor Me?* Washington, D.C.: Musical
    Source Publishing.

Bierema, L. L. (1995). How Executive Women Learn Organizational Culture.
    Human Resource Development Quarterly, 7, 145-165.

Belenky, M., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. and Taru, J, (1986). *Women's Ways of Knowing: The
    Development of Self, Voice and Mind.* New York, N.Y: Basic Books.

Dreher, D. (1998). *The Tao of Womanhood: Ten Lessons for Power and Peace.* New
    York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers Inc.

Flannery, D. D. (2000). Connection. In E. Hayes and D. D. Flannery (Eds.), *Women as
    Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning* (pp. 111-137). San Francisco,
    CA: Jossey-Bass.

Flannery, D. D. & Hayes, E. (2000). Women's Learning: A Kaleidoscope. In E. Hayes and D.
    D. Flannery (Eds.), *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning*
    (pp. 1-22). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's
    Development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Guralnik, D. B. (Ed.) (1968). Webster's *New World Dictionary, Second College
    Edition.* Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Hayes, E. (2000). Creating Knowledge About Women's Learning. In E. Hayes and D. D.
    Flannery (Eds.), *Women as Learners: The Significance of Gender in Adult Learning* (pp.
    217-245). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lawrence, R. L. (2002). A Small Circle of Friends: Cohort Groups as Learning Communities.
    New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 95, 83-92.

Maslow, A.H. (1943). A Theory of Human Motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*, 370-396.

Mealman, C. A. and Lawrence, R. L. (1997). [Handout] National Louis Doctoral
    Program Summer Institute, June, 2006.

Palmer, P. (1987, September/October). Community, Conflict and Ways of Knowing to Deepen Our Educational Agenda. *Change*, *19*, 20-25.

Power, F. C. and Makogon, T. A. (1995). The Just Community Approach to Care. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education, 2,* 9-24.

Rosener, J. B. (1990, November/December). Ways Women Lead. *Harvard Business Review*, *68,* 119-125.

Simons, J. A., Donald, I. B. and Drinnien, B. A. (1987). *The Search for Understanding.* New York, NY: West Publishing Company.

Underwood, Paula (n.d.) *We Build in a Sacred Manner.* Retrieved November 4, 2006, from http://www.ratical.com/ratville/future/build.html.