

Greetings!

As summer becomes autumn, I thought I would send along some semiannual inspiration. This message is about leadership and service to others.

Before I begin telling stories and asking questions, I thought I'd offer a personal update. Jon and I are thriving in Seoul, Korea! We have settled into our new apartment and are enjoying teaching English to college students, businesspeople, and other professionals. I am also excited for the coming of autumn – Korea is crisp and beautiful in the fall. If you would like some pictures, please email me for the links.

In addition, I am now blogging about community building, professional and personal development, self-reflection, and travel at Becoming – the Blog. Check out tips, travel stories, and interviews at <http://brianfishbone.typepad.com/becoming-the-blog/>.

Now, let's return to leadership and service. In this message, you can expect an opening commentary, two stories, and as always questions focused on you. It is one of my longer messages; so feel free to read it in installments. Enjoy!

Defining Leadership and Service to Others

Whenever I facilitate my “One Hour Leadership Lab” course as a consultant, I begin by asking participants to develop their own personal definition of leadership. As you may have guessed, everyone defines it differently. My starter definition of leadership and serving others is a combination of Aristotle and my life experience:

Doing what you choose to do with arête (loosely translated from Greek as “excellence” – there is no direct translation) and inspiring others to help fulfill a shared vision and goals.

Another favorite definition of leadership is: *seeing a need and not waiting for someone else to step up*, and below is some additional commentary about leadership and service.

- **I believe leadership and service to others begins with doing what you are passionate about.** Before you lead others, you need to lead yourself effectively by doing what you love! Your passion for fulfilling your own vision and goals will inspire others at work, in community service, and/or any in any other part of your life, and in the process, you can help them define and move toward their own vision and goals.
- **We learn to lead and serve others via observation.** We learn leadership and service early from our parents, teachers, and friends, and we continue learning from our partners, classmates, and colleagues. My friend Becky Grace, whom I have mentioned in previous messages, commented after reading the last message about my friend Lou's leadership via storytelling and appreciation, “I wonder who...Lou has observed over the years (to) respond the way he did.” She also mentioned that she learned a lot about leadership by watching her good friend and colleague Kurt, “He is truly concerned about every individual he meets (from housekeeper to board member)” and makes everyone he encounters feel important. And others learn about leadership and service from you. My friend Josh recently asked me, “How can we pass our values onto our kids?” I told him, “Just be you – let them watch you and your wife's commitment to others, and they'll learn.”
- **We also learn to lead and serve others via experience.** There is only so much we can absorb from watching others lead or learning about leadership and service in a classroom setting. At some point, you need to get out there and lead! Think about your past leadership experiences – what have they taught you? And whether or not you have led recently, be sure to keep looking for new leadership and service experiences! If you don't know where or how to start, why not try volunteering to lead a project or committee at work, or perhaps a service project in your

community?

Questions for You:

1. What is your definition of leadership? How did you come up with it?
2. What types of professional and personal activities give you passion and help you inspire others?

Story 1: Learning About Leadership and Service from Aunt Ruthie

You know that I love telling stories, and I hope this story, and the one that follows, help get you thinking more deeply about leadership and service to others.

Ruth Joan Brody, a friend of our family whom I refer to affectionately as Aunt Ruthie (the woman who introduced my parents – I would not be here without her!), was one of the first people in my life to teach me about leadership and service to others. One of my fondest memories of childhood was volunteering with her at Temple Emanu-El's weekly fundraiser – Tuesday night bingo. I was charged with selling candy and sodas and enjoyed a lot of delicious junk food in the process! Before Bingo began, I sat in front of a shelf of candies and filled customer orders, and during Bingo, I would push a cart of selected snacks throughout the temple. I loved that work, and I loved watching Aunt Ruthie sell the sheets of Bingo cards and kibbitz (Yiddish for chat or gossip) with the customers who knew her well. Everyone loved Aunt Ruthie. Not only was she there to help raise money for her beloved temple and its members, but she also genuinely cared about the women, and handful of men, that played bingo each week.

Aunt Ruthie also organized a temple bowling league for young mothers with kids so that they could socialize and learn more about our temple, led summertime worship services when the rabbi was on vacation, and took time to help special needs kids with their religious school studies. Aunt Ruthie passed away more than 10 years ago, but her leadership legacy lives on through the Temple Emanu-El Ruth Joan Brody Memorial Fund, which helps bring special programming to the religious school every year. She embodied selfless, servant leadership, and she touched many, many lives. I miss her immensely.

Questions for You:

1. What have you learned from Aunt Ruthie's story, and how can you use that knowledge to lead and serve others?
2. Who in your life has taught you about leadership and service to others? Think of a leader you admired early in your life – why did you admire him or her?
3. What can you begin doing today to better lead and serve others at work, at home, and/or in your community?

Story 2: Experiencing Leadership and Service in the High School Drama Club

I began developing this semiannual inspirational message by asking my mom what she thought was one of my earliest leadership experiences, and she urged me to tell you about my service as lobby manager of my high school's drama club. I must say that I, and countless others, became student leaders because of the drama coach, whom we affectionately referred to as Stidfole (his last name). He gave us the opportunity to push ourselves, and to shine, because he refused to view us as kids whose talent and ability were limited. For example, he had us write our own musical called Etchings on the Page (about cartoon characters that come to life), and our high school actors performed experimental plays that some New York City theaters would not even touch.

I thrived in the club because Stidfole gave me the opportunity to lead. No one had really been a lobby manager before (I managed ticket sales and the concession stand during performances, as well as the club's finances at other times), and he let me run with it. The specific experience my mom was referring to involved my very first business deal. I negotiated a lucrative price discount with the local Coca-Cola bottler for the concession stand's soda, and I was not even old enough to drive yet! And I had this experience because Stidfole gave me the space to explore the leadership ability that existed within me, and I seized the opportunity. At the time I was the only student in the club who did not perform on stage.

An interesting follow-up to this story is the surprise Stidfole provided me in the final days of my senior year. He gave me an achievement award in front of the entire student body during our final assembly of the year, and when I accepted the award from him on stage, he whispered in my ear, "I told you I'd get you on stage somehow." I felt accomplished and special, and the experience of leading and serving others transformed me. It readied me for the many leadership and service experiences that would follow at Muhlenberg College, in my career, and beyond.

Questions for You:

1. What do your leadership and service experiences say about you?
2. What do you want your next leadership and service experience to be? What will it look and feel like?

Wrapping Up with Bubbie's Reflection

After a recent lunch with my Bubbie (Jewish term for grandmother), she told me she had been assessing her 93-year life and indicated her only regret was what she deemed "sins of omission." She could have been kinder at times. She could have helped more people. This is the type of feedback you often hear from people who regularly lead and serve others – they are often very humble. By the way, Bubbie graduated college in the 1930s (a rarity for women in that era), taught schoolchildren and adults, raised two daughters (by herself for a few years while my grandfather fought in World War II), and volunteered extensively with the American Red Cross and Hadassah (a Jewish women's charity). And she worries she has not helped others enough!

In the end, we all lead and serve others, whether we know it or not. And if you ever doubt yourself in this regard, think about Aunt Ruthie, Stidfole, and Bubbie. They all positively impacted those around them, and so do you.

Question for You: If you were 93 and looking back, what would you celebrate, and what might you change?

Conclusion

Whenever I drive by the now-shuttered bowling alley just off Route 95 South in New London, CT where she had her bowling league, I think of Aunt Ruthie. I hear her hearty laughter; I see her helping moms, religious school students, and Bingo players; and I smile. Who's your Aunt Ruthie (i.e. your leadership and service role model), and have you thanked him or her recently?

As always, you have a friend in Seoul, Korea. If your travels bring you to this side of the world, please contact me about getting together. If not, keep me connected to your story at this email address, via LinkedIn, or via my blog.

Regards from Seoul,

Brian Fishbone

Global Educator and Community Builder
Language Instructor, Pagoda Academy - Seoul, Korea
Adjunct Professor, Human Resources Management and Business Administration
MBA in Human Resources Management, Temple University
BA in Business and Spanish, Muhlenberg College

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BFish@aol.com
www.linkedin.com/in/brianfishbone

<http://brianfishbone.typepad.com/becoming-the-blog/>

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