

Whole Person Leadership
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How would you live your life if you knew you were valued for your whole self? Not just for your training and skills, your hard work and dedication, the results you have achieved, or the honors you have received. Or not even for your pleasant personality or good looks. But for your whole self... the whole of who you are.

This question calls us to live our lives fully, wholly, both with courage and with compassion, wherever we are – in a board room or our living room, in a community room or a courtroom. What would you do differently if you knew you were recognized and rewarded for your heart and your intuition, as well as your skills? For your spirit as well as your intelligence?

Leadership in the 21st century is about heart-centered, higher intuitive skills as well as decision-making skills and technical knowledge. The new leadership involves the integration of hard skills and soft skills. It is about generating new pathways and ways of doing business from the synthesis of both head and heart; mind and spirit.

We are now in the realm of both – and, rather than either – or, with the ability to hold, live and act from two seemingly opposite ways of being. Such leadership is both assertive and empathetic, persuasive and receptive, willing to take risks and careful, being focused and flexible, while getting things done.

A recent Harvard Business Review article calls this ability “integrative thinking” and contends that this skill – rather than a superior strategy or faultless execution – is the defining characteristic of most exceptional businesses and the leaders who run them.¹

Posner and Kouzes call this “exemplary leadership.”² The Center for Asian Pacific American Women calls it “Whole Person Leadership.” Whole Person Leadership is about drawing upon all aspects of you – including your values, intention, wisdom, and intuition. It is about leading from your center with your backbone and heart as well as your brain. It draws upon your entire repertoire of skills and talents, coupled with your authenticity, generosity and trust.

Such leadership goes far beyond any title, position, circumstance, or structure. It is a fundamental way of being. It encompasses skills like listening to “the other,” not just to form your response and then take your turn, but really listening – to learn and to be willing to be influenced by the other’s view of reality. It is about implementing a plan that incorporates the best of everyone’s ideas.

1 Martin, R. (2007). How successful leaders think. *Harvard Business Review*, 85.6, 60-67.

2 Kouzes, James M. and Barry Z. Posner (2007). *The Leadership Challenge*, 4th edition. Jossey-Bass.

Asian Pacific American Women in Leadership Roles

Before we take a closer look at Whole Person Leadership, let's have a look at the leadership landscape of today.

Today, more than ever, Asian Pacific American women are taking on high-powered jobs traditionally held by men. In fact, a greater percentage of us hold professional and managerial jobs than any other racial group – 41.1 percent of Asian Pacific American women versus 38.7 percent of white women and 36.2 percent of all women, according to the 2000 Census.

Statistics also show that Asian Pacific American women are the highest paid females in the United States. While our incomes still lag far behind those of white males, Asian Pacific American women who held full-time jobs in 1999 earned 75 cents for every dollar earned by white men; versus 70 cents for white women, 62 cents for African American women, 57 cents for Native American women and 52 cents for Latina women.

Businesses that are majority owned by Asian American women grew 80% between 1997 and 2006; during this period they also grew 77% in the number of employees and 57% in sales. The number of firms with employees grew by 52%.

Hindrances to Progress

As a group, Asian Pacific American women have clearly made significant achievements. Nonetheless, we are still likely to face a subtle “bamboo ceiling” – as noted by author Jane Hyun in *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling*.³ We face these barriers in a variety of workplaces, be they public or private, government or not-for profit; and while most are not outright acts of discrimination, they are micro-inequities that can impact careers and slow advancement. Why is this? Ever heard of terms like “implicit bias,” “rapid cognition,” or “intersectionality schemas?”

What are they? Here are several examples:

We can face the double whammy or intersectionality of both race and gender, neither of which can be separated easily and both of which have an exponential impact on APA women's experiences.

According to a 2003 Catalyst study, *Advancing Asian Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know*, Asian American women are less likely than other women of color to be in positions within three levels of the CEO, although they hold the highest levels of graduate education.⁴

We are often overlooked in diversity programs, fast track programs, or even Women of Color initiatives. We can be called the invisible minority.

3 Hyun, Jane (2005). *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling: Career Strategies for Asians*. HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

4 Catalyst (2003). *Advancing Asian Women in the Workplace: What Managers Need to Know*. Catalyst Publication Code D56.

White decision makers may understand less about Asian Pacific American or Asian cultures than they do about other ethnic cultures. According to Catalyst president, Sheila Wellington, “There is ...the perception that Asians have not been the victims of prejudice to the same degree as African Americans or Hispanics.”⁵ That can foster a belief that Asian Pacific American women do not require specific diversity efforts.

And old stereotypes still remain. According to a 2004 study by the National Partnership for Women & Families, Asian Pacific American women are still misperceived as passive and quiet. While they are commended for their work in the background “behind-the-scenes,” these abilities are not viewed as foreground, leadership skills, and therefore we may not be recommended for more aggressive projects, which, in turn, limits our opportunity for high-visibility assignments and advancement.

In addition, those of us of who have been not-so-sweet can also attest to being called arrogant for speaking our minds, or called a word that rhymes with “rich” for asserting our positions.

Thus, we may have accents; we may fail to speak up and are seen as passive, or we do speak up and are seen as too aggressive; we may secretly compete with one another and not know how to support each other; or we may not feel comfortable forging social relationships with those in authority. Nonetheless we, as Asian Pacific American women, have contributions to make, voices to be heard, experiences to share, and messages to convey.

Whole Person Leadership

At the Center for Asian Pacific American Women, we believe that Whole Person Leadership is leading from your center. Leadership and personal development are “inside jobs” – progressing from your inner self to your outer self.

Whole Person Leadership recognizes the importance of self-monitoring, self-correcting, and self-tuning, rather than reliance on others to do this for you or to you. With an increasing ability to coach and teach yourself, both personal and professional growth is an ongoing, multidimensional process, which involves an unfolding of the whole person at three levels – the individual, interpersonal and organizational levels.

The Individual Level: At the individual level Whole Person Leadership focuses on self-awareness and self-reflection in several key areas:

- “Who am I at my core or center?” is the central question asked of each leader. What is the cultural context in which I have grown up and continue to develop? Through self-awareness, self-reflection and cultural competency, we start to gain greater clarity in who we are at our most fundamental human level as well as who we are as leaders.
- What is the function of my personality? How is that distinguished from my true Self? What gifts do I wish to bring forward in addition to my gifts of intelligence, ability to analyze, and my quick mind? What is ego-based, and what is whole person-based?

5 Koss-Feder, Laura (2003). Diversity Efforts Often Ignore Asian Women. <http://www.womensnews.org/>

- What parts of my Self may be buried, unrecognized or obscured from view but essential for my Whole Person Leadership power to blossom and flow?

At the individual level, Whole Person Leadership fosters effective performance and management, successful coaching and mentoring, and the fulfillment of your dreams while being accountable for your own balance mentally, physically and emotionally.

The Interpersonal Level: At the interpersonal level Whole Person Leadership explores how who we are influences how we relate to others. Interpersonal development and building community includes learning competencies in several areas, such as the following:

- Gaining interpersonal cultural understanding, cross-cultural awareness, and the ability to better manage diverse teams;
- Articulating and experiencing the fundamental ways in which we relate to other beings (human and non-human) in the work that we do;
- Understanding our strengths, blind spots and leadership styles to better understand our impact on and relationship with others; and
- Identifying the obstacles that block and the behaviors that align best with fostering team and community goals, identifying rewards and recognition, and motivating others.

The Organizational Level: At the interpersonal level Whole Person Leadership integrates personal development, interpersonal skills, and organizational competencies, whether within a family, community, corporation, NGO, or government agency. It includes building skills in such areas as:

- Leading an organization with vision and values that reflect one's ethics, creativity, and trust;
- Assessing the organizational structure and its impact on productivity, morale and inclusiveness, so that everyone's talents are leveraged, and issues are addressed with greater ease; and
- Recognizing that knowing oneself and building culturally competent relationships with others and their environments are essential to "building a beloved community" – a valued place in which we can live, work and thrive.

Whole Person Leadership draws upon many disciplines and fields of knowledge in supporting our personal and professional development. These include self-awareness and self-reflective exercises, group dialogue, and a myriad of tools – from martial arts to leadership assessment instruments such as the Gallup Strength Finder and the Enneagram. Through these we gain greater clarity and focus on our Whole Person Leadership skills.

This life-changing process reaches beyond the mind to the true essence of the person. Whole

Person Leadership is grounded in one's character, commitment and collaboration within oneself and with others. It leverages individual gifts and talents to bolster personal and professional development. Like trust, it is a thread running through the entire gamut of work, family, community, and life!

Terry Seamon, an organizational development professional, has captured the spirit of Whole Person Leadership... to which we have added our belief about including both yourself and others.... Internal and external, within and then without.

Leadership Requires the Whole Person

The heart for loving yourself and others.

The stomach for courage look internally and face your fears as well as to face adversity externally

The head for critical and strategic thinking as well as discernment

The eye for looking ahead.

The tongue for telling truths and expressing love, compassion and forgiveness.

The ears for listening to others.

The hands for applauding your work and the work of others.

The arms for embracing others.

The back for lifting yourself and others up.

The knees for bending in service and gratitude.

The feet for making the journey and leaving footprints for others to follow

The soul for going down deep in search of wisdom, syntheses and grace.

The spirit for soaring to the heights of higher purpose and knowing all is possible.⁶

Thus, Whole Person Leadership calls on us to be fully present to many dimensions of ourselves. It calls on me to look at my core values, my true self, asking if I am willing to trust my heart as much as I trust my head.

If we do not embrace who we are – both our passions and our vulnerabilities – they do not disappear. Instead, the small whisper in our younger years that invites us to explore our interior becomes louder and louder... and some time in our third or fourth decade that whisper can become an urgent call or a persistent longing. Listen to that voice, for it is a part of yourself you may have not fully acknowledged and integrated. Ultimately it is your *Higher Self* calling you forward.

6 Posted by [Terrence Seamon](http://learningvoyager.blogspot.com/2006_04_01_archive.html), http://learningvoyager.blogspot.com/2006_04_01_archive.html, April 16, 2006.