



Leadership Tips & Tools

JULY 2010

“Poppa Joe Young’s frame house was a grand place to a little boy like me. It had been built at the turn of the century by my maternal great-great-grandfather, Sidney Peters. Grandfather Peters had died long before I was born, but the house and the long front porch with its tall steps were still there, waiting for me to come along.

“I often climbed up onto the porch and sat at Poppa’s feet as he entertained his friends. I recall how the old men would come and spend a large part of the afternoon laughing, talking, and discussing the great drama of life. Of course, Mama Pearl was always there with southern sweets—like her red jelly cake, a yellow layer cake with jelly filling whipped up for an everyday dessert—and I watched as they ate together and shared their dreams.”

--Clifton Taulbert, *Eight Habits of the Heart*

Front Porches, Leadership, and Hope!

We slip back in time to the porches of Glen Allan, Mississippi with our friend, Clifton Taulbert, author of *Eight Habits of the Heart*. Clifton invites us into his memories of front porches sixty years ago. As in the days of my childhood, everyone had a front porch. Sunday afternoon or evening hours after supper, families would gather for conversation and community. Front porches were the primary meeting places that served each of us, and our communities, well. Dreams were shared; hope was instilled.

Nurturing Porches! Front porches and porch people are at the center of Clifton’s habits of the heart. “The memories formed from shared experiences, from unselfish acts of kindness, these are the elements of community that I cherish,” Clifton writes.

Our Front Porches! Where are the places for community to grow up from conversation, supportiveness, storytelling, and laughter today? Front porches may be an architectural artifact of the past, but surely the behaviors that happened there are NOT! Where do we find the places to share our stories, hopes and dreams? Kitchen tables? Patios? Coffee shops? Local cafes?

Today’s Porches! Facebook, Twitter, Skype and other forms of social networking may be front porches for some today. Available 24/7 global communities grow up around shared values, interests, and concerns. Just like Clifton’s grandfather’s front porch, folks gather to hear and be heard, to share and be supported, to develop relationships and be in community.

Porches of Summer! In summer we all become porch people for a time. Maybe our porch is the neighborhood swimming pool, back yard cook out, family gathering for ghost stories told around the campfire, weekend at the cottage, trip to the mountains, or catching up with friends on Facebook. These places we gather – virtual and real -- become hospitable spaces for “porch people” to share stories and make memories.

“We don’t remember days, we remember moments.”

--- Cesare Pavese

Porches Matter! Leaders in higher education need porches and porch people. Our need is two-fold! We need to enjoy the “porches of summer” to renew and refresh our personal spirit and energy for the upcoming work of the academic year. We also need porches and the ability to develop as porch people in our daily work as leaders. We get caught up in the urgency of daily issues, strangled by administrivia, and, as one participant in a recent Leadership Academy acknowledged, we are often “Involunteer Fire Fighters.” What would it take as a leader to be characterized by a nurturing attitude: unselfish caring, supportiveness, and a willingness to share time?

College Porches! Are we creating hospitable places for gathering for our teams and students? Where are our college porches? Break rooms? Around coffee pots? Student commons? Blogs of shared interest? What effect do those places have on staff and students? What can we do as leaders to make sure our campuses are replete with places for supportive, caring, hopeful community building?

From Front Porches to Well-Being! Sixty years may separate their experiences, yet Clifton Taulbert’s *Habits of the Heart* and Tom Rath and James Harter’s most recent work, *Well-Being*, communicate complementary messages. Sharing their research, Tom and Jim identify five essential elements of well-being: career well-being, social well-being, financial well-being, physical well-being, and community well-being. “These five elements represent our best attempt to scientifically describe the common factors of a life well-lived.” Social well-being is central to our conversation here!

“People with thriving Social Well-Being have several close relationships that help them achieve, enjoy life, and be healthy. They are surrounded by people who encourage their development and growth. Those with high Social Well-Being deliberately spend time – on average about six hours a day – investing in the networks that surround them. They make time for social gatherings and trips that strengthen those relationships even more. As a result, people with thriving Social Well-Being have great relationships, which give them positive energy on a daily basis.”

---Tom Rath and James Harter, *Well-Being*

Porch People, Social Well-Being and Vital Friends! We have visited before in this column about *Vital Friends*. Tom Rath tackled the controversial issue of friendships at work by sharing the Gallup research: “People who have a best friend at work are seven times as likely to be engaged in their job as those who do not.” Friendships matter!

Vital Friends! Vital friends are the people who measurably improve our lives. As leaders we can create a culture of vital friends and vital networks by creating “family ties, a “water cooler effect,” and “plug ins.” Tom shares that “when I speak with people who love their jobs, they always talk about how their work group is like a family.” The break room, coffee pot, or hall railing create a “water cooler effect” where we gather as if on a front porch. We all need to “plug in” to each other as people! Leaders in engaged workplaces “try anything to start a conversation.”

Start the Conversation with a Story! Porches are places for stories. So are our colleges. Whether the break room or board room, “in successful organizations, people’s sense of significance is rooted in shared stories, passed from person to person and generation to generation. These stories are about people, events, triumphs . . . these stories transcend time and place,” argue Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal in *Leading with Soul*.

“Narrative is a vessel for soul and spirit.”

-- Bolman and Deal, *Leading With Soul*

The Power of Storytelling! Research demonstrates that stories excite the imagination of listeners and create consecutive states of tension (puzzlement-recoil) and tension release (insight and resolution). Listeners are not passive receivers of information but are triggered into a state of active thinking as they puzzle over the meaning of the story and attempt to make sense of it, typically in reference to their own experiences and situations. Because this process is so engaging, it fosters listener’s attention and holds their interest.

Story as Metaphor! Recently I had the opportunity to share one of my favorite stories from Max De Pree with an executive team. We were on the porch, investing in our networks, strengthening relationships. The story is from *Leading Without Power*. (This story is a wonderful follow-up to the story about Zoe that I shared in our last issue of Leadership Tips and Tools.) In this story, Max shares an experience about his granddaughter, Zoe, who was born weeks premature and as a child had some special challenges.

“One day when she was three years old, she came to visit me in my office, which is a small condominium. She said, ‘Grandpa, would you like to see me run?’ And I must tell you, my heart jumped. I thought to myself, this little girl can hardly walk. How is she going to run? But like a good grandparent, I said, ‘Yes, I’d like to see you run.’ She walked over to one side of the room and started to run, right across in front of my desk and directly into the side of the refrigerator. It knocked her on her back, and there she lay, spread-eagled on the floor with a big grin on her face. . . . I immediately went over. I said, ‘Honey, you’ve got to learn to stop.’ And she looked up at me with a big smile and said, ‘But, Grandpa, I’m learning to run.’”

--Max De Pree, *Leading Without Power: Finding Hope in Serving Community*

Stories are Teachable Moments! When have you been like Zoe, full of life and learning? Have you hit the “wall?” Has it been okay? Have you enjoyed the development of your learning? When have you been like the grandfather, Max, delighted to see the results of hard work and devotion to task? Have you celebrated with the learner, or have you moved to the next lesson? With what results? Have you shared the story as a teachable moment?

The Moral of the Story! David Armstrong, chief operating officer of Armstrong International, is a prolific storyteller. He has created over 285 corporate stories organized around work themes such as “stories that kick start urgency,” “stories to make people brave and wise,” “stories about core values,” “stories to inspire innovation.” Each story is short. Each story portrays the real-life Armstrong men and women. Each story exemplifies actions that are most valued by the company. Every story explicitly concludes with “The Moral of the Story.” While the business press is overflowing with heroic stories about well-known CEOs of multibillion-dollar corporations, David is sitting on the front porch telling corporate tales about the true heroes and heroines of the workplace.

Finding Hope! Max De Pree brings us full circle for this issue of *Leadership Tips and Tools* with the subtitle of his book, *Finding Hope in Serving Community*. Isn’t that the essence of the front porch, porch people, and a nurturing attitude from Clifton Taulbert’s *Eight Habits of the Heart*? Surely, finding hope is at the core of our *Well-Being* and our reason for forming relationships with *Vital Friends*.

Leadership and Hope! “Instilling hope may seem like an obvious requirement for leading other people. Hope gives followers something to look forward to, and it helps them see a way through chaos and complexity. Knowing that things can and will be better in the future is a powerful motivator.” Again, Tom Rath, with his colleague Barry Conchie, provides scientific research finding that “Hope” is a critical element of our communication as leaders.

What We Need! In *Strengths Based Leadership*, Tom Rath and Barry Conchie share Gallup scientific research on “what followers need.” Trust, compassion, stability and hope are what we need. These enduring qualities were the qualities that Clifton Taulbert received from his benefactors: Poppa Joe, Mama Pearl, and the porch people of the Mississippi Delta sixty years ago. Today research confirms the place of these qualities in our leadership. As motivators for engagement and achievement, these qualities also help us build community. As strengths based leaders we focus on trust, compassion, stability, and hope. Yet, hope is our business. Rath and Conchie share an admonition: “the vast majority of leaders we interviewed did not spend enough time deliberately creating more hope and optimism for the future. Instead, even the highest-level executives reported that they spend almost all of their time reacting to the needs of the day instead of initiating for the future. While solving difficult problems is an essential part of effective leadership, identifying opportunities for the future plays a much more important role in creating hope and optimism.”

Hopeful Enterprise! We work in the most hopeful of enterprises! We are dream makers! As leaders in post-secondary education, we need to create hope and help others – colleagues, staff, students, and our communities - see the way forward. All of us come to our colleges and universities with dreams. Those dreams require hope to enrich, sustain, and achieve them.

Hope! Hope is a *Habit of the Heart*. “Hope, immeasurably valuable, cannot be purchased, bartered, or borrowed—it can only be shared and nurtured from heart to heart. And every good community has been built upon it.” Clifton reminds us, “Hope holds the blocks of community together. We must always remember how hope looks, acts, and feels, and the responsibility each of us has to practice it, share it, and pass it along.”

Remember Porches! Be Hope Full!!

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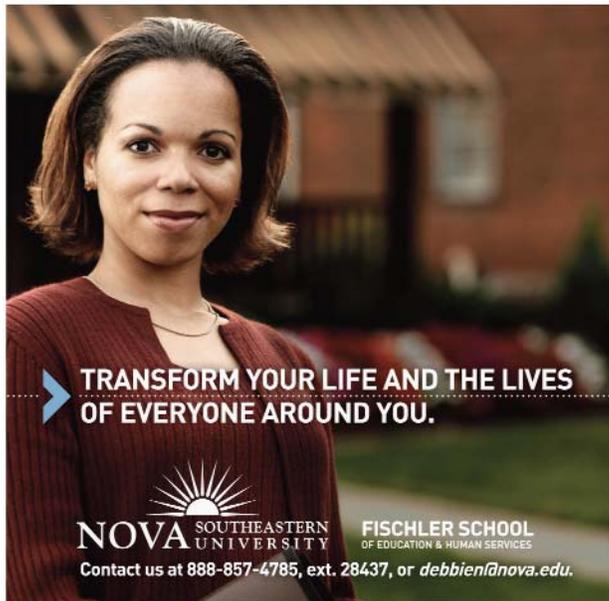
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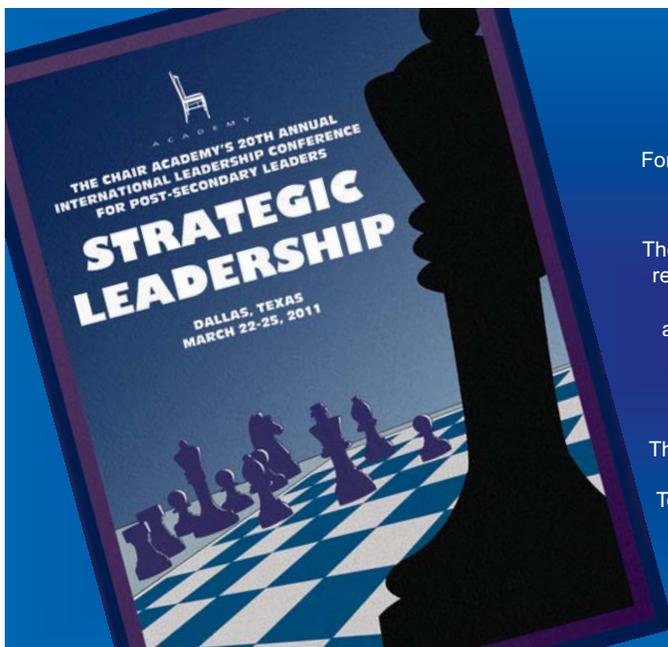
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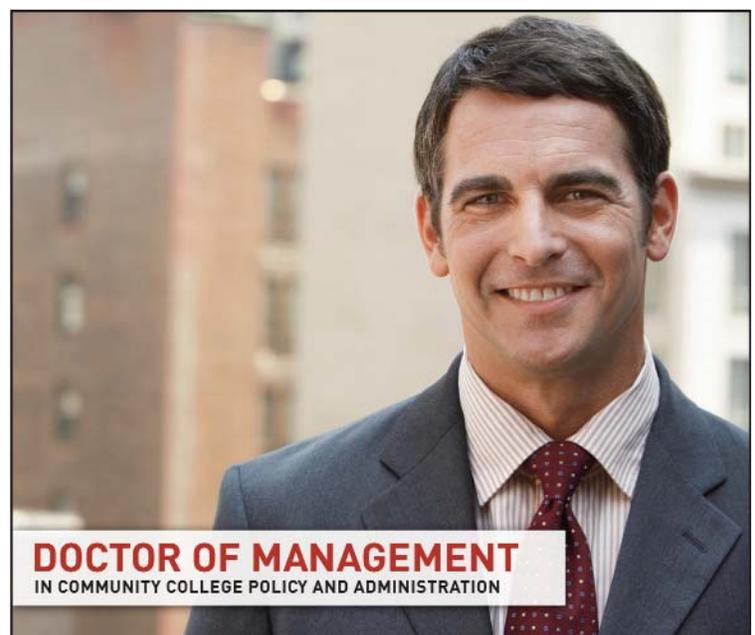
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