

Leadership Lessons from Mom

As we approach the day when we traditionally honor our mothers, my faithful readers will know that I'm always happy to have an occasion to talk about mine. And I know, I know . . . some of you are already thinking, "How is she going to get this to a business/leadership perspective? After all, her mom was never in business."

Well, as my preacher dad would have said, "Oh ye of little faith." Stick with me on this one, while I dispel a few myths about mom, and share what she continues to teach me as she approaches 98 years young.

Mom was a career woman, speaker, and storyteller before it was fashionable, and to this day, she'd rather make a speech than do anything domestic (Gee, I wonder who inherited that 'gene'?). Yet, when she met my widower-dad (and yes, she was making a speech that night), she gave up her career to marry him and become the 'step mom' to my four older siblings. But that didn't mean she gave up sharing of herself: her knowledge, wisdom, experience, expertise; nor did she give up telling stories or speaking. She just learned how to combine being 'the preacher's wife', mom (my younger brother and I appeared several years later), secretary, chauffeur, 'domestic diva', Sunday School teacher, choir member, and so much more. What a role model! And it wasn't just because she was my mom - she continues to be a role model to many, even today.

OK, watch for it . . . here it comes. As leaders in our organizations, aren't we supposed to be role models, encouragers, supporters of our team? As thought leaders, aren't we supposed to inspire others, to share our knowledge, wisdom, experience, and expertise with those we come in contact on a regular basis? Mom taught me that.

Mom managed all that and more. Yes, she struggled with health issues and identity issues. Dad was typical of his generation - a true chauvinist, who never did understand why people asked her to travel to various conferences and retreats to speak. He was proud of her, but he never really 'got it' or 'approved'. And mom, was careful not to let it interfere with being his wife, his supporter and encourager, his champion. But her sense of self, her sense of identity was never lost. And she passed that along to many, encouraging family, friends, college students, young mothers, young military personnel, elderly church members, and everyone in between - always saying you can do anything you want to do, because you have value, because you are loved.

Now I'll be the first to admit, it's probably not appropriate to use those same words in the workplace; especially in these difficult and litigious times. But as leaders, we always need to communicate our appreciation for and belief in our team, our colleagues, our clients, our customers. Mom taught me that.

Today mom lives quietly in a retirement village near Sacramento, California. Her memory is not so good any more, she has more aches and pains, she rarely leaves 'the village', and it's frustrating (at times) to have to tell her the same things over and over, and yet . . . her values are intact, her belief in and encouragement of me and my work is never-failing, she still teaches two Bible study classes a week, she still encourages folks who live in 'the village' to do something for others in their community (making Easter baskets for the children who live in the surrounding neighborhood, etc), she still carries on meaningful conversations, she still tells stories to the 'old folks', and she still has her irreverent sense of humor. She continues to be a good role model, regardless of the situation or the challenges. Mom taught me that I should be one too.

What have you learned from your mom, grandmother, or other role model or mentor? What stories about them and their influence are you sharing with others?

Mom taught me about the magic of stories and sharing. Thanks for letting me share some more of her story with you.

Happy Mother's Day

Aloha