

## ***Equipping Leaders for Success***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Perhaps the most sensitive and divisive issue in evangelicalism today is the role of women in church leadership. The purpose of this seminar is not to debate that issue. Rather, it is to support the vision of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an inclusive environment where justice, peace, health, human dignity, freedom, and nurture for all of its members are promoted and sustained.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been blessed by the gifts and talents of women prior to and since its inception. It is a Church that believes that developing, building, and nurturing the leadership skills of women in communities around the world is the best way to ensure a future for our communities, our nations, and indeed our world.

This exciting leadership seminar shares ten basic strategies that will help women in general and Seventh-day Adventist women in particular overcome some of the hurdles they face in work and worship situations.

It must be noted here that there are many tools that provide strategies for leadership success. Most are geared to professional and business organizations while some insights can be helpful to women in church leadership. This seminar shares information that has been deemed helpful to many church women in leadership who have experience in training and mentoring a new generation of leaders.

**(OH-1)** Equipping other people, especially other women, is essential to a leader's success. The ten basic strategies of the seminar will reveal ways to equip others as well as provide information on the concept of teamwork in leadership. The questions to ponder at the end of each strategy will engage the participants in discussions that will be of great benefit as each woman continues to discover, develop, and nurture the leader within herself.

### **STRATEGY 1: BELIEVE THAT GOD CALLS WOMEN TO BE LEADERS, TOO (OH -2)**

Everyone forms beliefs about the world, themselves, and their interactions in the world. These beliefs create an intricate web called "*a point of view*" or "*belief window*" through which we see events and people. Not only do we create our own reality, but we also cling to it because other people, many of whom we know, experience similar realities. Because there is consensus, we cling to old realities not only because others support that reality, but also because we are fearful of what others might think if we were to act outside those realities or

norms. This is one of the reasons many women have determined within themselves what they can and cannot be.

Many female leaders will tell you that their greatest opponents have been women who do not believe that leadership is a gift God gave to women. So the first hurdle for women in general and women who have specifically been called to serve to leap over is the belief that women cannot serve the church or their organizations as leaders, that leadership is a gift only assigned to men.

Women who still think this way are the ones we need to remind that selected women were vitally involved in leadership in ancient Israel, although their status and freedoms were severely limited by Jewish law and custom. (Three examples of women God used in leadership positions in Old Testament Times are Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah). Women also need to be reminded, too, that in Christ's day He overthrew centuries of customs, laws, and traditions that held women in subservient roles alone. For example:

**(OH – 3, 4, 5)**

- ✚ He ignored rituals and laws relating to impurity such as in the case of the woman whom He cured from menstrual bleeding. (Mark 5:25-34).
- ✚ He ignored the rule that men were not allowed to speak to a woman in public other than their wives or female children when He spoke to the Samaritan woman. (John 4:7).
- ✚ His experience with Mary, sister of Lazarus and Martha, showed that He accepted women as students at a time when women were not to be taught. (Luke 10:38-42).
- ✚ He accepted women in His inner circle, according to Luke, who describes the many female supporters that followed Christ. (Luke 8:1-3).
- ✚ Women were present at His crucifixion. (Matthew 27:55-56).
- ✚ He appeared to a woman after His resurrection, proving that women could be credible witnesses, too.
- ✚ He expressed great concern for widows. (Luke 4:26; 7:11; 18:1; 20:47; and 21:1).
- ✚ He treated married couples equally in matters that concern divorce. (Mark 10:1).
- ✚ His stories often included women as well as men.
  - a. Simeon and Hannah (Luke 2:25-28).
  - b. The Lost Sheep, The Woman and the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son. (Luke 15).
  - c. Ananias and Sapphira. (Acts 5:1-11).
  - d. Lydia and the jailer's conversion. (Acts 16:14-34).
  - e. Dionysius and Damaris. (Acts 17:34).

As a leader, you may find that some of the women you will be equipping will still be skeptical about women being in leadership roles. You will be able to identify some by their conversation, by their choices to attend the seminars conducted by males, or in other ways. You will want to do your best to help these women grow by sharing as much information as possible about women in leadership and by sharing a list of resources and/or references that examine the whole issue from a theological perspective.

In one such book, Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry, written by Stanley Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 86, the authors make the following statements which might be useful as you confront women who hold such a doubtful view **(OH-6)**

- ✚ *"The ministry of Jesus clarified decisively the value and essential equality of women. Jesus countered the culture of His day by treating women as equal to men."*
- ✚ *The radical agenda of Jesus was implemented in the post Pentecost period. Women, like men, functioned as authoritative prophets in the community" (Acts 2:16-17; 21:8-19; 1 Cor. 11:5).*
- ✚ *"Priscilla's teaching of Apollos shows that women functioned as authoritative teachers."*
- ✚ *"Women also functioned as co-workers (Romans 16), and Paul calls on believers to submit to such co-workers" (1 Cor. 16:6), and thus both male and female believers were to honor these women as leaders and submit to their authority."*

It must be understood that there are women who may never be convinced that women, too, are given gifts of leadership. Giving these women a list of additional publications to read in their leisure might be of help to them down the road.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: **(OH-7)**

1. Do you believe that God calls women to be leaders? Have you always been convicted in this way?
2. Who are some of the women leaders both ancient and modern that are your role models?
3. Are there leadership roles that are not suited for Christian women?

#### **STRATEGY 2: SEE YOURSELF AS ONE OF THOSE FEMALE LEADERS THAT GOD HAS CALLED (OH-8)**

When you perceive that God is calling you to a leadership task, it takes courage to step forward and accept the role to which He is assigning you. This will be

particularly frightening if you are moving out of your comfort zone into uncharted waters. There will be resistance at every step, the greatest of which will be the question, "Why me?"

You will not want to believe that God is calling you to meet the needs of the time. As Esther realized when it was brought to her attention that she was there in the Persian kingdom *for such a time as this*," women must realize that God has raised up women through the ages to meet the needs of the times. If you are such a woman that He is calling on today, feel blessed. Just as God did not leave countless others, He will not leave you alone to do the task. He only needs human hands—feminine hands, to do the job at hand, no pun intended.

David Cottrell and Eric Harvey, in their book Leadership Courage, (Dallas, TX: The Walk The Talk Company, 2004), remind us that *"For every person in every organization, there comes a moment when he or she must have the courage to step forward and meet the needs of the time. Regardless of whether your time is now or in the future, you must be prepared and willing to seize that moment as a courageous leader!"* **(OH-9)**

Since women are only recently beginning to be encouraged to use their leadership skills in the church organization, it will seem somewhat scary to step forward and serve in areas where few women have served before, even when the doors have been more widely opened. Many women will tell you that they resisted the opportunity to change because they feared what might be down the road ahead, opposition being one of their greatest fears.

Women must be taught that this type of resistance is natural no matter who you are. As humans, all of us, male and female, want to remain in our comfort zones; we want to be in control; and change makes us give up that control—at least until we have mastered that which we now resist. And if we have been productive all along, there might be cause to change again.

If the Lord has called you to lead, instead of asking the question, "Why me, Lord?" think "Why not me?" Remember that if God is calling you, He is not calling you to do the task alone. He has promised to be with you all the way. So let Him lead and you simply follow. This means staying on your knees and asking for His continued guidance. As Cottrell and Harvey suggest, *"Stay at least one step ahead—always focused on the results to be achieved. Embrace change because when you stop changing, you stop improving."* (Cottrell and Harvey, p. 26) **(OH-10)**

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: (OH-11)**

1. Do you see yourself as a woman God has called to lead? If so, in what areas?
2. How can a woman know that God has called her to perform a certain task?
3. How comfortable do you feel following a woman leader?

**STRATEGY 3 – DEVELOP THE LEADERSHIP SKILLS THAT GOD HAS PLACED WITHIN YOU (OH-12)**

It goes without saying that when you realize that God has called you to lead, you will need to learn more about yourself so you can change, grow, and become the leader that God has placed within you. One of the ways you can do that is to study well-developed models that will help you re-create or reinvent your leadership approach. Some of the things you will need to discover are:

- ✚ How to lead brilliantly, in ways that reflect your own values and personality
- ✚ How to liberate personal traits and energies you never knew you had
- ✚ How to connect in both group settings and one-to-one contexts.

If you have never led before, you may find it helpful to attend leadership seminars or even take a class in leadership. If you want to succeed at the highest level, you owe it to yourself and those around you to learn enough about yourself and leadership to lead others effectively. One of the fastest ways to develop yourself might be to connect with at least 10 to 12 other women you know whom you believe could help you achieve your leadership goals. From time to time go back over your list and for each person you have named, ask yourself the following questions:

- a. Why would this person support my vision?
- b. What could this person have to give up to support me? In other words, what's it costing them?

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: (OH-13)**

1. What are leadership skills that you feel you now possess?
2. How will you continue to develop them to be used in God's service?
3. How are you presently using your leadership skills?

**STRATEGY 4 – LEAD LIKE A WOMAN AND NOT A MAN (OH-14)**

One of the greatest mistakes a woman leader can make is trying to lead like the man that she is not. Since few female role models may exist in the area where they have been called to lead, many women imitate the only models they have seen—men. While one can learn a great deal about leadership from men, women need to know that they can get more of what they want by being more of who they are. Leadership is about figuring out what you really want, feeling comfortable asking for it, and then drawing on a neglected source of power to achieve it.

Ronna Lichtenberg calls this *“Pitching like a girl.”* She says in her book by that same title (New York, NY: Basic Books, Perseus Books Group, 2005, p. 3), *“We all pitch, at various times and in various situations, to get what we need and want in life. We just don't usually recognize what we're doing as pitching.”*

What is pitching? Ronna says *“A pitch is nothing more—or less—than using your influence, skills, and powers of persuasion to gain support and to get people to do what you want them to do. Pitching is about enlisting someone's support for your goals. It's about asserting your vision of what should happen, asking for support, and making it clear to the other party why it's in their best interests to come along with you for the ride. When you pitch, you are basically saying to someone, ‘I need your resources to make my idea happen.’”*

We may do well to be reminded every once in a while that God made man and woman in His own image (Genesis 1:26), so there is a feminine perspective. For centuries there has been this leadership vacuum in that few if any women were involved in decision making at higher administrative levels. The biggest competitive edge organizations have today comes from filling this void not just with competent females but in making their leadership teams reflect the diversity that is within the organization. **(OH-15)**

**QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: (OH-16)**

1. What are some of the leadership skills you have observed in women leaders that you know?
2. What is at least one of these skills that you need to develop yourself?
3. What leadership skills have you been told that you have?

**STRATEGY 5 – KEEP YOUR EYES AND EARS OPEN TO AVOID POTENTIAL CONFLICTS, PARTICULARLY WITH OTHER FEMALES (OH -17)**



The concept of teamwork is very important in leadership. In team building it must be recognized that differences of opinion and the conflicts that come with

them are inevitable, especially in work and worship environments. As long as people interact in these settings, ideas, viewpoints, approaches, feelings, agendas, priorities, and methodologies are bound to collide. The leader cannot leave these issues unaddressed; for if they are allowed to fester, these problems will be devastating, particularly to a female leader. This is definitely one area where a female leader's ability and character are put to the test.

Since women have only recently come on the leadership stage, many are not expected in many arenas to make the mistakes their counterparts make. So the advice is to keep your eyes and ears open to avoid as many potential conflicts as you can. Also, develop the skill of dealing with conflicts on a timely basis when they do come. And do not allow any issue to go unaddressed, particularly as it relates to other females. Females can be your greatest supporters and also your greatest critics when the tables turn.

We have all heard leaders say that they must pick and choose their mountains; that is, decide between the issues they will fight to the finish and the ones they will let ride out themselves. In conflict resolution we know the latter as avoidance. Sometimes it is difficult to tell if an issue is really a mountain (a large challenge) or a molehill (a small challenge). Cottrell and Harvey (p. 65) remind us that ignoring a molehill will not make it go away. It will just continue to get larger and larger, and if you ignore it long enough, it will eventually become a mountain.

They suggest the following molehills-to-mountains concept which applies to many situations, be it an interpersonal conflict between two team members or a simple lack of communication. Note that those issues have at least two things in common:

-  They all negatively impact people and overall team performance, and
-  Rather than fix themselves, they "snowball" over time.

In short, surveys have indicated that more than eighty percent of problems encountered by organizational leaders involve interpersonal conflicts within the work group. These conflicts cannot be neglected on the premise that they will work themselves out. They won't. People will always have issues, and leaders will always be needed to solve them. **(OH-18)**

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: **(OH-19)**

1. Some time ago the statement was made in management circles, "*Women are their own worst enemies.*" What does this statement mean to you?
2. Do you believe it is easier for women to support female leaders today? Why? Why not?

## **STRATEGY 6 – IDENTIFY OBSTACLES THAT MAY PREVENT YOU FROM BEING SUCCESSFUL (OH-20)**

Since most women have not been in public leadership positions before, there may be some obstacles that need to be identified and addressed to enable them to be successful. One of the most apparent hurdles is **FEAR**.

Another has to do with **RESPONSIBILITY**. In other words, recognition that “*the buck stops here,*” for there is no one else upon whom to lay blame if something goes wrong. When responsibility becomes an obstacle, it may be that there is no time in your already overcrowded personal and professional schedules to add this leadership task.

A third obstacle might be **LACK OF COURAGE**. As a leader you need courage to do what needs to be done at the time it needs to be done. Cottrell (pp. 8, 9) defines courage as having the guts, nerve, and heart to do things that foster and support progress. To become a courageous leader, you must have an undeniable, indisputable, and unwavering commitment to be the best you can be. He concludes that the true measure of your leadership is the ability to look in the mirror and know that you had the courage to do what you felt was the right thing to do.

A fourth obstacle might be **PERSONAL BAGGAGE**. Many women have been unable to step forward in leadership roles because of circumstances that took place in their past. We must realize that all of us have baggage from our past that we wish were not there. It was this baggage that led us to the baptismal pool, or to the ordinance of humility. If we allow those things to continue to prevent us from moving on, we might never become the effective leaders God wants us to be.

Baggage is like weights that the author of Hebrews explains that we are to lay aside. (Hebrews 12:1-2). We will never see sprinters running across the track field with heavy weights upon their backs. It doesn't take a Ph.D. to tell us that running with weights slows us down. The race cannot be run and won that way. We must deal with our personal baggage in ways that will allow us to rid ourselves of it and not be deterred by the past even when continually brought up by others. The past happened in the past, and if we allow ourselves to stay there, we will never move forward. Find ways to relieve yourself of personal and emotional baggage. The faster you do that, the faster you can move up the leadership ladder.

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: (OH-21)**



1. What are some of the non-personal hurdles you believe you will need to overcome? (Mention personal obstacles, too, if you desire).
2. Do you believe women have to leap over more obstacles to leadership than men?
3. Explain why you believe or do not believe women face more obstacles.

### **STRATEGY 7 – IDENTIFY PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES TO LEADERSHIP (OH-22)**

The first thing you need to know once you have identified obstacles that may affect your leadership adversely is you don't need to resolve all the issues at once. However, you should come up with two or three specific steps, even if they are baby steps, and let them help you move in a positive direction.

It could be that one of the steps you identified to become a more effective leader is to take a course, do some spiritual study, read more books on the subject, attend seminars, etc. Women who are at the local church level who want to engage in service there might not have a clue as to how to lead out in Bible study, for example. Perhaps a baby step would be to invite a group of women to your home and start studying together there. Then when you are comfortable enough to stand before women that you know and present a certain topic, this will enable you to later stand up before the church membership and lead out with a topic. From that experience you may even stand behind the pulpit some day.

Many women will tell you that their first experience at leadership was reading the Bible out loud at home. Then they graduated to outlining their study and reading it out loud to family members. Now some of these women are public evangelists. And it all began with baby steps. Even one baby step is fine. You just need to get moving.

### **QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: (OH-23)**

1. For the obstacles you named in Strategy 7, identify ways women can overcome them.
2. Share how you overcame at least one personal obstacle.
3. What are some baby steps that you can recommend to women who need to move from point A to point B?

### **STRATEGY 8 – LEAD WITH CONVICTION BY LIMITING EXPRESSIONS OF EMOTION (OH-24)**

Women have an easier time accessing, processing, and talking about emotions than men do. Most women, however, need to make a conscious decision

about just how much emotion to show, for too much makes you seem aggressive, which is commonly thought of as being overbearing, pushy, and autocratic for women leaders who operate in a male-dominated organization.

Between the two extremes of passive and aggressive is an effective, winning management approach known as the assertive style. It is a balanced approach that assures you'll handle people, get things done, and communicate—all in the same level-headed, confident manner.

Women leaders must keep their emotions in check. To cry or appear vulnerable in some way will be seen as lacking power and authority. On the other hand, showing too little emotion might be interpreted as having lost all one's feminine traits. Generally, a little goes a long way. Then you can shift back into business mode.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: **(OH-25)**

1. Were there ever times in your experience when you felt you were just being strong when others thought you were pushy or aggressive?
2. What can a woman do to keep her emotions in check?
3. What does it mean for a female leader to keep her emotions in check?

#### **STRATEGY 9 – BE OPEN TO OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROMOTION (OH-26)**

If you plan to accept the challenge, whether it's in a corporation or church organization, you are going to have to continually leave your comfort zone. That is to say, you are going to from time to time be asked to step into the unknown. So you must commit yourself to being a life-long learner. When opportunity knocks, you must open the door if you will reach the highest heights your Creator has designed for you. Do not close any doors to opportunities unless you are physically unable to walk through.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: **(OH-27)**

1. When you look back on your life, were there “opportunities” that you let slip by you?
2. How can you tell the difference between an offer and an opportunity?
3. Why is it important not to let an opportunity pass you by?

#### **STRATEGY 10 – DARE TO TAKE RISKS (OH-28)**

Effective leaders have many characteristics in common. The two most important ones are:

- ✚ They have the courage to make tough decisions when tough decisions need to be made, and
- ✚ They are willing to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of others.

In the story of The Queen (Queen Elizabeth of England) it is stated that Queen Elizabeth always put her service to the Crown before her own personal desires. Many effective leaders throughout history have done just that. They have made the hard decisions to do what they thought was right despite the course of their predecessors.

In Christian leadership we put God's desires for our life above our own, for He alone knows what is best for us. Throughout Bible history we have read about individuals who had limited education, but with God in control of their lives, achieved much for His work and to His glory. They decided to follow Him wherever He would lead, and without a doubt, success became theirs. **(OH-29)**

In this seminar we have shared ten strategies that are helpful to women whom God has called to do leadership service. They are: **(OH- 30)**

- ✚ Believe that God calls women to be leaders, too
- ✚ See yourself as one of those leaders that God has called
- ✚ Develop the leadership skills God has placed within You
- ✚ Lead like a woman and not a man
- ✚ Keep your eyes and ears open to avoid potential conflicts, particularly with other females
- ✚ Identify obstacles that may prevent you from being successful
- ✚ Identify practical strategies to overcome all your obstacles
- ✚ Lead with conviction by limiting expressions of emotion
- ✚ Be open to opportunities for promotion
- ✚ Dare to Take Risks

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER AND DISCUSS: **(OH-31)**

1. Name and briefly describe at least one woman in the Bible who had the courage to make tough decisions.
2. Name and briefly describe at least one woman of modern times who is celebrated as one who has made personal sacrifices for the benefit of others.
3. What is courage?

#### **SUMMARY**

The qualities that women have brought and continue to bring to the leadership of organizations, including those that are faith-based, is obviously valuable:

sustained focus, spatial ability, physical and mental stamina, spirituality, strong competitive drive, and a sincere desire to be of service to God, their families and other people. **(OH-32)**

### **HALF A DOZEN QUESTIONS THAT MIGHT GUIDE SOMEONE WHO WOULD BE DOING THIS ON HER OWN AS A PERSONAL STUDY COURSE**

1. How can a woman know if God is calling her to be a leader? What are some of the signs that she should look for?
2. What are ways that a woman can promote herself and ask for what she wants without feeling uncomfortable?
3. What can women do to prepare themselves for upcoming leadership roles in the church?
4. What are some corporate power games that teach women how to empower themselves for success in leadership?
5. How can women embrace who they are and yet bring their fullest selves to the business and marketing table?
6. How can a leader "close on an agreement without feel like she has put a good relationship at risk.

### **LIST OF RESOURCES**

1. Bennis, W. *On Becoming a Leader*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1989.
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