

SUCCESSFUL WOMEN IN BUSINESS

What Did I Bring Home from Paraguay? PERSPECTIVE.



By Sharon Mast, Spark Solutions & Support

Each of us has experiences that are life changing. These special moments change us and can make us better versions of ourselves — and in February 2016, I was awarded the opportunity to have just such an experience.

At the invitation of Paraguay's President Horacio Cartes, I was to accompany John C. Maxwell and his team to teach Transformational Leadership to 15,000 Paraguayan leaders. Imagine a president inviting you to teach leadership to government officials, the military and police personnel, school administrators, the media, health & human service agencies and religious leaders! To say the least, I was excited, humbled and honored. While we were seen as the leadership experts, it was I who walked away with the best gift of all — the gift of perspective.

Transformation Begins with Me. So often we look at those we work with and wish they were different. But before I can ask others to change, I must first look at myself. Am I being the best leader I can be? Notice I said leader, not manager. Leadership is about people. It's having the awareness of who you are and what you stand for and how you influence others to act and engage. It's modeling the behavior you want to see in others — but leading by example only gets you so far. We have to invite and inspire others to grow along with us. In Paraguay, our job was to teach and facilitate Transformational Roundtables. Roundtables are a simple yet highly effective process of engaging a small group of people led by a facilitator to explore a subject, in this case values and how to live with intention. Each roundtable followed a specific pattern: understanding or gaining insight into the values and intentional living concepts; discussion around the benefits one would experience when that concept is a focus; concrete steps to implement the value or concept; reflection on how you currently model the value or concept and action planning for further development. It gives you the opportunity to explore why this value or concept is important then ask, "What can I do?" and "How can I do it?"

One day I was sent to meet with department leaders at the Ministry of Defense. As we were exploring the value of Competence, a young lawyer spoke up. "I'm doing this all wrong," he said. The others looked at him with questioning eyes. "You see, before today, I saw competence as having to be the best no matter what the cost. I wanted people to see me as valuable so my competitive nature did whatever it took to prove I was the best. I realize now, I was confusing being right with being knowledgeable. And if I am to own my competence, then I also need to use it to help others not hinder their progress so I look good." Wow!

Roundtables are a great way to engage staff in exploring the principles your company is built on. It allows us to take them off the nice plaque on the wall and bring them to life. This is what inspires and keeps good employees and clients coming back even when your prices aren't the cheapest.

How You Influence Others is a Choice. From white collar to blue collar, my second day was spent with a group of mechanics at an auto body shop. This small, tight knit



group had a lot going for it but the owner was a strong willed, proud man who had trouble taking advice from others. He built his business on hard work and his ability to figure things out and he had a lot of pride. The lesson on the Art of Listening struck him between the eyes. He thought his job was to teach his young mechanics all that he knew. He learned that day his job was also to listen. What I experienced from that lesson was a kindness and compassion from his staff who explained to him that they were not trying to discredit his knowledge. They loved him and wanted to add value to the business. They too wanted to go home each day with a sense of pride in their work. Without learning to listen, he was creating a team that followed directions but didn't take the shop to the next level.



You Don't Need the Best Instruments to Make Beautiful Music. On the outskirts of Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, is the landfill for the city's 525,000 people. Built on this huge trash dump is a small impoverished slum with a one room school in the community center. No playground. No organized sports or clubs. Most children don't finish school. Ecologist Favio Chavez was working on a recycling project at the dump and was a lover of music. He wanted to teach the children to play music to give them something to do while their parents were working and also to keep them off the landfill, which was their playground. There was no money for instruments so Chavez began to sift through the waste to create makeshift instruments. Strings and wind instruments were made from oil and tin cans, old car radiators, forks and bottle caps and guitars from discarded wooden and cardboard boxes. In seven months, he had an orchestra. Social media put Landfill Harmonic on the map and 60 Minutes made an incredible documentary of its story. Our last night in Paraguay, we got to hear the kids play and I have to tell you, there was not a dry eye in the place. If you had your eyes closed, you would never know the instruments were made from trash.

(Continued on page 12)



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(Continued from page 11)

How do these stories impact you in business or you as an employee?

Our circumstances are what is happening to us, but they do not define us. Every day there are challenges to overcome and opportunities to explore. We can get sidetracked by fear, ego and what is not working and get stuck. We get caught up in, "We can't," "That won't work," "We don't have the time, money, resources" and as a result, our brain cannot hear or see the opportunity. When we step back and realize that as leaders, our job is not to have all the answers but to appreciate and tap into the experiences and ideas of our people, to challenge our own thinking and the world around us as we see it, we open the space for innovation and creativity and set ourselves apart from the competition.

Think about your business, your school, your organization. What values, behaviors, attitudes and actions tell others who you are and what you stand for? Many companies have uphill hopes but downhill habits. "We don't always get what we want, we get what we are."

When you don't get the ticket you want, take the ticket that will get you closer to the ticket you want. If you are learning in your losses and humble in your wins, you will climb.

Transformation begins with me. As a leader, what is the message you send through your behavior, actions and attitude. Do your employees and customers lean into you or back away from you?

Your company's sweet spot is the intersection between purpose, passion and planning. Share your vision then listen with intention. If your employees feel your passion and understand their purpose, they will help you to create a culture of excellence where they bring their best, give their best and be their best day in and day out.

That is top level leadership. That is a legacy to leave.

Sharon Mast is the owner of Spark Solutions & Support, a global training and facilitation company and a certified John C. Maxwell coach. Spark helps organizations and individuals to create the environment where everyone has the opportunity to reach their potential, is motivated to reach their potential and is inspired to help others do the same. Through workshops & trainings, facilitation of workgroups & Master Mind® groups and professional coaching, Sharon will take you and your team from Insight 2 Influence. For additional information, please call 610.781.1888 and visit www.sparkss.com.

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