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FAVORITE QUOTE OR MANTRA THAT YOU LIVE BY?

I am old fashioned, but I remain inspired by JFK's 1961 quote "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." I was in high school in Washington, D.C. at the time and appreciated being asked to do something that could stretch me in a way I had not experienced before. I joined the Peace Corps five years later because of that quote and ever since I have always tried to reach out to others to make a difference, no matter how small that difference might appear to be.

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The Peace Corps was established by Executive Order 10924 issued by President John F. Kennedy in March 1961 and authorized by Congress on September 21, 1962 with passage of the Peace Corps Act.

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship by fulfilling three goals: 1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women. 2. To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served. 3. To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.

Executive Women in Government Leadership Spotlight



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United States Peace Corps, March 2018 – January 2021
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WHAT WAS THE TOUGHEST DECISION YOU EVER HAD TO MAKE?

The toughest decision I made was the one on March 15, 2020, to bring all 7,000 Volunteers home to the United States from their communities in 61 countries throughout the world. The COVID – 19 global pandemic grew quickly, countries closed borders, international airlines shut down flights, and Volunteers could no longer stay in their countries of service. For the first time in almost 60 years, there would be no Peace Corps Volunteers serving overseas.

I feared I might let down Peace Corps' founding leaders, Peace Corps' Mission and the Three Goals, the history that 240,000 Volunteers had helped to create across the world since its beginning, and the countries of service. I had to make the decision within a few hours in order for the agency to bring national and global resources together to complete the Volunteers' return quickly (eight days), without serious injury or illness. I knew I could never look back once the decision was made. Eleven months later, we see that it was the right decision, but at the time we could only trust that it was.

Even though this was an incredibly stressful time, I did not think about the stress I might be feeling. I went into overdrive in how to implement this decision successfully. The decision was that we must do this, and we had to decide what is the best way to do it. This happened on a Sunday at 10:00PM having only so many hours to get emails out to 61 countries. Two months later, I realized what this meant; thinking about others and how to protect them and keep everyone as healthy and safe as possible, both Volunteers and staff. Eleven months later, I reflect on the fact we were prepared for that moment in advance without realizing it. It is a miracle that we did what we did and I attribute that to having a strong institutional infrastructure, a strong history of community level service globally, and offices and people dedicated to this one purpose. We even had full Zoom access through our Information Technology team, as we were all working from home whether here in the US, South Africa, or Ukraine.

WHAT SUCCESS TIPS(S) CAN YOU SHARE FOR WOMEN WHO ASPIRE TO BE IN LEADERSHIP ROLES?

Trust yourself, respect yourself, be true to yourself in all that you do. Leadership comes with respecting others, and self-respect is at the core of honoring others. Feel secure with yourself, then you can feel secure with everyone else.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN HER CAREER?

- Observe what makes a good leader and practice the skills as everyone is a leader regardless of the circumstances.
- Find a mentor, discuss goals, honor and cherish the mentor relationship.
- Study organizations that reflect career interests, volunteer with these organizations as appropriate, ask for information interviews to better understand the organizations' work, purposes, and activities.
- Offer to do the extra when in a job and do it well. Show interest in the work and in those in the workplace.
- Take classes and complete degrees to have appropriate academic background for interests.
- Always be present for others.

Early in my career (in my 20's), I had mentors while working at Meals on Wheels of Central Maryland and then while working for the head of Health for Baltimore City. I learned so much from my mentors. I have an enormous amount of gratitude for championing me and taking extra time teaching me about managing non-profits. Now as friends, I stay close to many of my mentors.

WHAT ARE THE BEST QUALITIES OF A SUCCESSFUL LEADER?

I try to observe several elements of leadership, some easier than others:

Passion: Believe in the organization's mission and show it to others.

Trust: Show trust in others. Delegate with confidence.

Goals and objectives: Make organizational goals clear and communicate them clearly.

Teams: Build work teams, make them as horizontal as possible within the organization to bring people together who don't normally work together.

Decisions:

- Be willing to change decisions when necessary and when new data shows change is needed.
- Make decisions with adequate information, but then make decisions and announce quickly.
- Be transparent as possible about why and how a decision is made.

Once you make your decision, you must be firm. Know that you have gathered the information and the individuals' to help you make the decision; you did not make the decision in a vacuum. You can trust the decision process. You then communicate the decision and begin next steps with others. You can look at the impact of that decision later to see if adjustments are necessary. Some of my scariest decisions turned out to be good decisions. Having the attitude of wanting the decisions to be successful eases decision making. I have made some oops decisions; but most made were the right ones.

Interest in others: Show personal interest in others. Say thank you as much as possible, compliment honestly and frequently.

Successes: Be about others, not self, do not take credit for successes. People like their name called out for good work.

Communication: Leaders can never communicate enough, and it should be positive, focused, and forward looking.

Presence:

- Be present: Don't be thinking about other things; listen and give responses that show active listening. Ask related questions to get more information and demonstrate the listening.
- Speak: Become a reasonable speaker, speak to what the audience and staff come for, and challenge them. Know the audience.
- Be on time and respectful of others.
- Show confidence and yet show humility.
- Do not speak negatively of others, be silent if necessary.
- Hold personal council, don't share too much, don't overexpose.

- Try to always appear to be calm, and normal, relatively relaxed.

Subject: Know the organization's subject as well as possible, particularly its themes, history, values, culture, networks, purpose, and future.

EXECUTIVE WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT - OUR MISSION

Prepare, promote, support and mentor women for senior leadership positions in the Federal Government. Build a powerful network to share experiences, to enhance professional relationships, and to increase understanding among women executives in the Federal Government. Motivate women leaders in the federal government to contribute to effective succession planning by creating a mentoring culture within their sphere of influence.