



THE ANTI-POVERTY SOLDIER

By Clarence Hightower, Ph.D.



Community Action

Developing the leaders in our midst

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Contrary to popular belief, my experience has shown me that the people who are exceptionally good in business aren't so because of what they know but because of their insatiable need to know more.

– Michael Gerber

The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers.

– Ralph Nader

Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.

– John F. Kennedy

In an earlier column, I explored the burgeoning concept of thought leadership and its increasing significance in the social, political, and economic arenas of today. I further noted that since its founding in 1964, Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties has positioned and re-positioned itself as a thought leader in the non-profit and human service industries.

Of paramount importance to the role and principles of leadership, as reinforced by the three quotations above, is the training of new and emerging leaders. And one of the hallmarks of the Community Action movement is civic engagement and leadership development of both its participants and employees.

On the participant side, Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties has demonstrated this philosophy of leadership building in a myriad of ways. These include the tripartite model of our Board of Directors, strategies such as the Community Blueprint to End Poverty and Opportunity St. Paul, and programs such as L.I.F.T. (Low-Income Fellows Together to End Poverty), You Be the Change, and Getting Ahead.

Among the leadership development measures undertaken to serve our employees is the Community Action Leadership Institute (CALI). Born out of a curriculum I developed at Community Action Partnership of Ramsey & Washington Counties titled Leaders In Action, CALI brings Community Action professionals together from all over the State of Minnesota in a year-long program to advance their leadership skills, foster self-reflection and improvement, forge their own management style, and maximize their potential for growth in the Community Action network, non-profit sector, and their personal lives. CALI is also “designed to provide intellectual challenge, enhanced self-awareness, clarity of purpose, and renewed commitment to service.”

The curriculum consists of a vigorous reading schedule, classroom discussions, research tasks, the design and exhibition of multi-media projects, and Resident Leader presentations from experts in the field. In addition to class sessions, CALI

participants further engage in critical topics through additional assignments and work group activities. Reading projects focus on such topics as governance, the laws and principles of leadership, the ability to change and adapt, and the dynamics of action oriented leadership.

For years I have closely studied the philosophy of leadership development and it is subject that is both near and dear to me. I have been afforded the tremendous honor and privilege to facilitate CALI, and in that role, there is nothing more rewarding than witnessing Community Action professionals rise above and beyond expectations on their way to becoming the future leaders of our movement. And when I think about what leadership truly means to me, I am reminded of a quote attributed to Alexandre Auguste Ledru-Rollin.

Ledru-Rollin, the nineteenth century French lawyer, journalist, and politician, is said to have proclaimed, "There go the people. I must follow them for I am their leader." Many doubt if Ledru-Rollin ever actually spoke these words. Nonetheless, whether apocryphal or not, I think this sentiment embodies the spirit of Community Action. It remains as important as ever that our participants play a leadership role in their quest to improve their lives. And it is imperative that Community Action develop more and more leaders from the ranks of its employees. CALI is attempting to do just that.

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