



On Becoming A Woman of Influence

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When I think back about the leadership positions I have held, they are all in areas I am passionate about. Really believing in something gives you a sense that you have something to contribute and makes you put your hand up for things you might otherwise shy away from.

There is a definite theme in my most treasured leadership memories – women and politics (founding Executive Committee of Oxford Women in Politics), women and the law (Executive Committee Women Lawyers ACT and President of Women Lawyers Association NSW), social justice and leadership (President and Life Member of YWCA Canberra, National Board Director and Life Member of YWCA Australia, Legislative Advisor for the National Council for Women), and young people (Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition). Two of my best memories were attending the United Nations Headquarters in New York for the Commission on the Status of Women as a civil society delegate and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Geneva (Australian Government delegation); both what we might describe as examples of leadership in the “traditional mode”.

However, what I have learnt is that leadership does not have to be the “leading out front”, loud, confident leadership you might expect. Sometimes what you do might not even occur to you as “leadership”. The secret is to find your own authentic leadership style. Transformative actions by an individual can have a ripple effect beyond that one instance, when others take up the mantle or are shaped by the style they witnessed in handling a situation.

I was encouraged at Roseville to take those small, everyday leadership opportunities. To speak up and out when I saw something I didn't think was right, and to be a supportive school community participant. I was supported by the school to take on a leadership mantle when I, myself, didn't yet

perceive myself as a leader. For example, when I expressed surprise at being elected a prefect, the teachers around me said it was not a surprise to them. Sometimes you need to borrow the confidence of those around you to lead for a while until you find your own. Similarly, when invited to give a talk on what it means to have succeeded, I needed to reassure myself that they must have seen something in me to ask, rather than to listen to the internal voices that say “who am I to talk on this topic?”

My recognition in the 2018 “100 Women of Influence” by the *Australian Financial Review* is exactly this – an affirmation that the silent accomplishments, unrecognised individually, do make an impact over time.

Leadership is not always in the big moments but in the little actions. For example, whilst representing Australia at the International Labour Organisation, I co-authored a gender equality intervention for language use that is still in place today. As President of YWCA Canberra, it was not the grand speeches but the presentation of a different mode of leadership – one that delegated to empower those around me and to mentor the next generation to show that it is possible to both lead and have a small family, and that you need not do it all yourself.

This is all leadership: Supporting others in dialogue when they are too shy to speak, amplifying and supporting the voices of young women leaders, making space for others to take the opportunity to lead, and bringing people along with you. And let's be honest the “big-man-out-front-in-politics” model we have become accustomed to doesn't really seem to be what's required these days. It is increasingly perceived as falling short, isn't it?

Be *your* type of leader. Big or small, see it as leadership. We can all lead and are all called upon in different ways at different times, to lead. Be it in our school, our home, our workplace or in our community. The more comfortable we become, the more we realise that leadership is in all of us and we all have the power to influence change.