

May 7, 2007

Message From the CEO—Deborah Nankivell

The Community Values were put into writing in 2000 to launch the Collaborative Regional Initiative. Over 400 people weighed in on the language. A few weeks ago, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors endorsed them; the first elected body to formally do so. Our practice is to have a board member speak to one at every meeting. At the last session, **Mike Wilhelm** offered his thoughts on “boundary crossing and collaboration.” His words were so powerful I used them as a FBC bulletin. Because so many organizations have endorsed them (Fresno State, United Way, RJI, Chamber of Commerce, One by One Leadership, Central Labor Council, State Center Community College, Nonprofit Council, FCASH, Fresno Unified, Maddy Institute), I asked Mike to keep going and write about them all. Values must be verbs to matter. This week’s message is about **Stewardship**:

“We will lead and follow as stewards of our region, caring responsibly for our community assets. We will work together to achieve the greatest, long-term benefit for the community as a whole.”

Any time we try to move collectively from point “A” to point “B”, it requires that someone take the responsibility to lead. Whether the ultimate goals sought are noble or ignominious, leadership is a must. In fact even to get to the point of having a set of well defined goals to pursue takes leadership. While leadership is a must, it is not in and of itself either good or bad. History is full of leaders who were horrible (albeit effective) people creating a wake of misery and suffering behind them. Of equal measure we also have the example of many leaders who truly worked for the betterment of mankind.

Followers are responsible for the leaders they have. They should consider motivation, character, competence, and the results sought before stepping in line. A community is benefited by leaders who truly seek the best for the community at large and is damned by leaders who see everything through a narrow prism of what is in it for them or their small constituency. Fresno is as diverse as any community in the world. It needs leaders who can take the broader perspective and seek the greatest good for the larger community.

There is a responsibility for those in positions of leadership to lead. If you have a leadership position but are not willing to do the heavy lifting, get out of the way of those who are. If your leadership is based on what is in it for you, please do this community a favor and step down. You are one of those that is, and probably has been, holding back this community for decades. It is not our socioeconomic challenges that have been the greatest obstacle to moving Fresno forward, but rather entrenched leadership that has failed to truly seek the general welfare.

It all begins with attitude. The first question that leaders should be willing to ask themselves is why and how am I leading? After those issues get squared away, they can focus on where they are leading. Fresno desperately needs to increase its ranks of steward leaders. We need folks that answer the how and why questions of leadership with true stewardship answers. A steward leader has the right heart attitude towards the work they do. Stewardship is a form of leadership where the leaders see themselves as serving the greater good. It is not about setting a series of personal goals and leading others towards them. Servant leadership keeps community, not self, the focal point.

The true community steward is a leader that understands the following:

- It is not about competing forces wrangling over a set of limited benefits; it is about expanding opportunity for everyone.
- It is about seeing things beyond the narrow focus, listening to all perspectives and insuring everyone is part of the process.
- It is about results not recognition.
- It about feeling successful when the community benefits whether you do directly or not.
- It is about developing the next generation of stewards through coaching and serving as a role model.
- It is about engaging for the long term. Stewards are willing to invest today’s blood sweat and tears for the future, even when there is no immediate payoff.