

WHY “I” WROTE DANCE OF LEADERSHIP

Autobiographical Musings...

My CV gives people the bare outlines of my qualifications to write a leadership book, but not necessarily much information on why I wanted to write it. As an African-American woman raised poor in the United States, there were so many invitations to pay attention to the hurts – past and present – associated with subordinate status. So in my own life I've had to work hard to be psychologically balanced. Ever aware of the dynamics of difference and dominance in our society, I also have deep gratitude for my many blessings, so many of which emerged from the very experiences associated with having had a “lesser” social identity and societal subordinate status in many ways. From personal experience I learned that all of us—each and every one of us—can become leaders if we set our intentions and dance our true dance.

Indeed, despite (or maybe because of) the tumult of my upbringing, I managed to find a way to become a leader in my own life. I became student body president of my high school, graduated from Brown University, and earned a master's degree and doctorate from Harvard. I lead-teach in many ways in my life today – even when I am not the nominal-positional leader. I have lived the philosophy: “Right where you are, do what you can. Look for the places where you can say: ‘Yes!’—the very underpinnings of The Dance of Leadership.

Perhaps most satisfying of all, I have found a way to translate my personal experience into professional pursuits. In my 25 years as an educator, international business manager, and consultant I have known and studied a wide range of diverse leaders around the world. Few people have my breadth of interest in leadership diversity or experience with leadership in so many different walks of life.

For years I've taught a course entitled “Leadership and Diversity Through Life and Literature” because I saw a need for a wider range of images about who leads and what it takes to lead. This aspect of The Dance of Leadership has been a passion for years, grounded in my own personal experience of not seeing many folks out there who lead like I do represented in our media and yet knowing, and needing to know, that my life too has meaning.

I am also very moved by the instances of everyday leadership that surround us, but are invisible even to the people making such significant positive differences in our world. So I've decided to contribute to making that work more visible, and simultaneously to encourage people who might not otherwise see their actual or potential leadership.