

Be the change... Mentor our future!

BY DEBORAH PENTA

One of my favorite inspirational quotes of all time and one that I find riveting every time I read it was delivered to the world by Gandhi. He said, "Be the change you want to see in the world."

As leaders, we have a significant opportunity to influence positive change both in the world and in the expansiveness of our professional lives. I wonder how many of us have actually fully engaged Gandhi's advice and emerged as the change we want to see in our companies, in our personal lives and in the multi-dimensional roles we play.

January is National Mentoring Month and former Secretary of State Colin Powell is headlining the 2008 campaign, which is a national effort to recruit volunteers to help young Americans achieve their full potential. Powell has made several appearances, is front and center in public service announcements and has delivered an important message focusing on mentoring and the benefits to both the mentor and to the child. His leadership on the campaign and commitment to the evangelization of mentoring offers young people a good living role model of one who is exemplifying, through his actions, a positive change in the world.

POWELL AND HIS WIFE ALMA founded the America's Promise Alliance, the nation's largest multi-sector collaborative dedicated to the well-being of children. I would say that Powell is living and has lived those words of Gandhi.

Powell was born in Harlem and is the son of Jamaican immigrants who believed in the value of a strong education and the importance of personal achievement. In every facet of

Powell's life, he worked hard and he accomplished one achievement after another. He has and continues to make a difference by "being the change."

One of the most significant components to our Female Leadership Interest Council (FLIC) is the opportunity for leaders to "pay it forward" and in many ways to "be the change" Gandhi speaks of and Colin Powell has exhibited in serving as a role model for young people. By making a positive impact on others through FLIC's mentoring program and the many other rewarding opportunities our organization offers, we hope that executives will achieve a greater fulfillment by mentoring others and that those being mentored will gain experiential knowledge and support through the many life transitions we encounter both professionally and personally. As an organization, FLIC will inspire more people to live those thought-provoking words shared by Gandhi.

I find it most appropriate that National Mentoring Month also celebrates another leader, Martin Luther King Jr., who lived his life according to the words Gandhi spoke. As a leader, King certainly became the change he wanted to see in the world. From his "Letter from Birmingham Jail" to his famous "I Have a Dream" speech, he was evangelizing his beliefs in an effort to create a movement and make significant change that would leave an impact on a nation. He received the Nobel Peace Prize at the young age of 35 and worked passionately and diligently to create a world that would be so much better for so many.

WE CAN ONLY hypothesize how much King inspired a young Jesse Jackson and so many others through his mentoring as a role model and

leader who had the courage to "be the change" he wanted to see in the world. Imagine how many people you can inspire in your own organization and in your micro-world by serving as a positive role model and mentor to influence positive change!

Among the many profound words of Martin Luther King Jr. were "Take the first step in faith. You don't have to see the whole staircase. Just take the first step." Isn't this particularly true with change? Sometimes, as leaders, we get so caught up in having to make sure the outcome is going to be perfect, we don't take any steps. We need to realize that taking the first step to creating positive change is the one most significant defining moment that will spur excellence.

Mentoring is one area where leaders can take the first step and let the rewards unfold. Being a mentor is one of the most satisfying and fulfilling experiences you will have in your life.

For the person being mentored, the experiential learning and relationship value are profound and cannot be delivered by any of the top business schools in the world, but rather by leaders who want to "be the change they want to see in the world" and to inspire others to inspire themselves through the powering of mentoring.

We'd like to know your thoughts. Please email me at dpenta@femaleleaders.org.

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