



My Leadership Autobiography

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Date: 2012

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By Jane Hancock

When did I become a leader? When did I want to become a leader? And how frustrating was it? I loved being involved. My mother said I might as well have the keys to the school because I was always going early for some meeting, or staying late for some activity. I just wanted to be around where the action was. I was never on Student Council, never class president, never prom queen, never starred in the school play, but I was there—working backstage with the props, cueing the actors, helping with sound effects, decorating the gym, cheering on the team.

In college I played a gravestone in the freshman play, didn't pledge a sorority until my sophomore year, did un-credited work on the yearbook, finally became vice-president of the sorority and finished the year as president only because the previous president graduated at mid-term. I was never a homecoming queen or princess, but the girl who was chosen queen borrowed my beautiful white formal for the occasion and returned it with a rip in the skirt. I didn't even go to the prom.

When I became a teacher, I continued to do everything I could, not realizing I was setting the groundwork for the person I would finally become. By everything, I mean, I started the school newspaper my first year as a teacher, taught noontime dance classes so the middle school students would know something about dancing when they attended the Friday night dances at the community center. I served on an advisory board with parents, board members, and teachers.

I moved to another school in another city where I taught for one semester and then took a year off to have another child. Just before I returned in the fall the principal called and asked if I would be department chair. "But I've only taught at your school for one semester," I said. "I know it," he replied, "but the retiring department chair and I think you would be the best person for the job. You need to know, however, that some people in the department think the job should be theirs. But we want you." So I said yes. No extra pay, no extra period, no perks, just responsibility. The responsibility of making teachers who may not like the idea of my becoming department chair go along with the idea.

And then came presentations. The Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) coordinator said, "Have you ever thought about presenting at conferences?" I had never been to a professional conference. I had no idea what they were. She became my agent in a way because she kept signing me up to present at GATE conferences all over the state—including the world conference which that year was being held in San Francisco, not some exotic place across one of the seven seas.

So when I heard about the Writing Project, I was ready. And I didn't even know when I went to the Writing Project what wonderful doors it would open for me. I didn't know that the director saw something in me that made her become my new agent as she signed me up to do workshops all over Los Angeles County. That was in 1981 and my first role as a Writing Project fellow, teacher consultant only got larger as each year passed, eventually bringing me to UCLA as Co-Director of the Project.

I think the reason I am a leader is that I can't say no. I have a hunch that is why you are a leader. You can't say no. I like where I am and what I'm doing.

My name is Jane Hancock and I am a leader.