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**LEADERSHIP: LOVELY OR LONELY AT THE TOP? WHAT DO WE
NEED TO KNOW?**

Presenter: LAUREN STORCK

LAUREN STORCK: I think a good leader learns from the group. I don't know what you think about that, but if you have a question while I'm talking or if you disagree with me, please, raise your hand.

A good leader is supposed to have integrity, be willing and able to keep growing, have an open mind, have commitment, passion, and trust and what I think is one of the most important things, good communication. My favorite image of a leader is a big sailing ship. The ship is called "Leader" and the winds are in her sails, but the leader never knows what tomorrow brings. Without a crew, the captain gets lost at sea.

Who's a leader here? Is anyone a leader? The next president of the national association is a leader. We have some former presidents of other national associations among us. Do we have any chapter leaders?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm a treasurer of ALDA in New Jersey, and I was past vice president. I'd like to improve my leadership.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'm a past president of a chapter in Ontario. I'm not currently in a leadership position, but I'm somewhat critical of those who are in a certain position, so I need to have better insight into leadership qualities.

LAUREN STORCK: What do you mean "you're somewhat critical?"

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I don't feel that they're good leaders, so I'm just very curious as to what's going to come out of this workshop because I might be totally off base.

LAUREN STORCK: That's another good reason for being here. If you don't think of yourself as a leader right now, but are in a group, you want to be comfortable with your leader. You want to be able to evaluate whether they're doing a good job or not.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Leadership doesn't have to be in an organization or a work group. In every day in things we do, we meet in a group. We don't have to be the leader in order to help to lead.

LAUREN STORCK: Right, you can help one person and that has some leadership qualities, also. The Internet has a huge amount of information about leadership these days. Since we are all here at the ALDA conference, I'm going to talk about ALDA leadership. I'm going to encourage any of you who are interested to start an ALDA group or chapter. Of course, you may want to start an H.L.A.A. chapter or a Canadian association or a chapter of captioners, interpreters, and hard of hearing people who really need to get together a lot more to dialogue outside of these conferences.

My current favorite definition of leadership is, "to guide, especially by going in advance." There are a thousand different definitions of what leading means. But you have to have courage and energy to step out there and try it. If you have never tried leading in your area, please know I would love every person in the room to try it.

I think most of you are leaders, anyway. If you know somebody else who wants to have this information, tell them. A leader is a person who inspires confidence in people and supports them to achieve organizational goals. What do you think a good leader does?

AUDIENMEMBER: Delegate.

LAUREN STORCK: Yes, leaders learn how to ask other people for help.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Listen. Motivate. Be knowledgeable.

LAUREN STORCK: You have to have a certain basic knowledge. And if you're not very knowledgeable, you have to be open-minded to learning. Anybody can learn what they need to know, as long as they have basic communication skills.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Leaders inspire. Provide structure.

LAUREN STORCK: They have plans and goals in mind. You have to have a good frame, a structure with defined goals. And organizational skills. A lot of these things overlap. Delegating is very important but you also want to develop support because you can't do everything alone as a leader. Being influential or persuasive. Some people call this being charismatic. You have to influence and persuade people in an intelligent, knowledgeable and honest way. You have to believe what you're trying to do is the right thing, of course. You're trying to develop a good working group as a leader. We also have to learn how to trust the group.

I have just developed quite a lot of trust in this group. Do you know what I mean? I don't know you, and most of you don't know me. Why should you listen to me and why should you believe anything I tell you? Just because I have a Ph.D.? No. But if you ask me good questions, and I answer with something that makes sense for you, you develop some trust in me. It's also just as important for a good leader to develop trust in the group. We're not going to move forward together very much if I don't trust you.

Leadership is saying "hello," listening carefully, sharing information, facilitating regular communication, and encouraging stories. That is a new one: encouraging stories about our struggles and mistakes as well as our successes. A lot of leaders never tell you how imperfect they are. When there's trust developed between the leader and the group, you share your struggles together. If you make a mistake, since we all make mistakes one time or another time, you need your circle, or whatever your group is, to share what happened. Together you need to brainstorm about why that happened and what you can do differently next time.

That's sharing your mistakes. A lot of leaders fail to do that. They only tell you how wonderful everything is all the time. I don't trust a leader who tells me how wonderful and successful they are all the time.

Leaders are often looked up to. They're really loved. Some leaders like to be loved. A lot of people gravitate towards certain very special people who represent goodness in every way for them. That's fine sometimes. But most leaders usually fall off that pedestal. Most leaders get hated at times, too. They're resented for their position or some other reason. At the same time, they're also appreciated.

In other words, there are both positive and negative things about being a leader. If you become a leader, you often get a lot of appreciation. But at the same time, people may accuse you of being too bossy, or too controlling. It can be "lovely or lonely at the top." Any examples to share?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I've been involved in my town's commission on disability. I'm late deafened, and depend on CART. On my commission, we had two opinionated and strong hearing blind people, so that was a challenge. I learned a lot.

LAUREN STORCK: What did you learn? How did you cope with that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was very diplomatic during the process. I had my friends to vent to, so I had my public face, and my private face.

LAUREN STORCK: You really were walking a tight rope between your public face and your private, comfortable face. I can certainly identify with that because I've been working hard to establish a new chapter of ALDA in Maine. I try to be very diplomatic with some grumpy members who are good people but they're full of complaints all the time. Then a third complainer came along and I thought their complaining would turn people away.

Finally after talking to each of them individually, I said, "I'm going to have to take you off our forum." We have a Google group which was where they let out all their grumpiness and criticism. They probably hate me right now, but I had to make a decision for the health of the rest of the group.

Every leader develops their own style. I can't wear two faces. I can only be me. I can try up to a point. I can vent to my good, close friends, but after a while, I can't deal with it any more. That's where

leadership is “lovely and lonely at the top.”

It's really both. We enjoy being leaders because we get appreciation, and we feel like we're doing a good job. It can be very lonely sometimes, and that's just a reality of it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In that situation with the two deaf-blind men, did it even itself out due to compromise or was there another solution?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No. In all honesty in a community situation, people feel so strongly about area issues that it evened itself out. And it evened itself out for me because I'm not chairman anymore. So now I feel like I have a stronger voice. I can speak out about my issues. When I was chair, I found I couldn't really speak out. I had to maintain that neutrality and diplomacy.

LAUREN STORCK: A lot of leaders are very happy when they're not leaders any more. They're proud of what they did, but when they cease being a leader, they feel they have more freedom to do what they need to do for the group, which is another interesting thing to be aware of.

A Director of what shall be an un-named state department is a wonderful woman with a cochlear implant who had a high leadership role for seven or eight years. She burned out, and has a new job now. She just told me recently she feels much freer now to speak out for her passion, which is advocacy for captioning. She told me, “Once you're a leader, you have to value all the issues for each of so many different constituencies all the time, and each group attacks you for not doing enough.”

I never thought I would be leader, until I started doing it. I just saw a need to start a group. One of the first groups I started was a women's group in London. My husband and I moved to England in 1979 with two small children. We wound up living and both working in London for nine years. There was no woman's group and I needed a woman's support group for myself, for career development. So I just started one. That was the first time I ever started a group. It was easy and then I've kept starting other groups since then.

I next want to emphasize how important good communicating is. I'm giving you a lot of information of different kinds right now. You have to figure out what to do with it. Leaders get all kinds of information

that they, especially new leaders, put in the file cabinet and never look at it again. It's really communicating by beginning a conversation about all the information. That's much more important than all the paperwork written down some place. Also electronic communication is a very important part of modern leadership and leaders need to be able to help people with electronic technology.

Does anybody else feel like they're a good communicator using humor?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If you can't hear what's going on around you, it's hard to make a spontaneous, humorous comment. Since I've gotten my cochlear implant and can now hear what's going on around me, I find that I'm pretty good with a sense of humor I didn't know I had. I'm able to spontaneously say something funny in a conversation I've never been able to before.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I use a lot of humor in what I do, and it's very visual. Being a person with a hearing loss, I just always assume everyone else is. So, whether they're hearing or not, I will address them as if they are hard of hearing. It's a visual thing. I do use a lot of humor because it helps people understand a point better if you are able to use humor. With hearing loss, you keep a sense of humor.

LAUREN STORCK: Yes, no doubt about it. Humor is very important. Well, so far, we have talked about definitions of leadership. We talked about leadership skills. We shared some examples from difficult people. We emphasized how important communication is. It's all communication.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: When I was president of ALDA Garden state, I thought I wasn't a good president, partly because I didn't have enough patience to listen to people go on and on. I needed to learn the skills of how to manage a conversation so that certain people don't take over and make it unpleasant for other people.

Do you have some ideas on how to control that situation?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's really important to know that deafness is a really good way to control communication. In the work I do, I use my deafness to rule that only one person can talk, and you only have two or three minutes to say what you want to say. There's a clear time limit. Everyone gets their turn. Deafness is a good thing for controlling a situation. I find I can do more with a group by being

patient and understanding, but also making time limits on what the group can do. It's also important to have a clear understanding at the start of the meeting what the purpose is for that group.

LAUREN STORCK: That's one very good way for some groups. It depends on what kind of group you're leading. You can make the time limits very clear at the beginning, two or three minutes, if you want to.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: When I was a young man, I was a leader in the boy scouts. I went on a training course for leaders. I think that had a lot more effect on my leadership than I ever realized until I began to think about it now. They divided us into groups of six, took us out into the woods, and presented us with a difficult situation. We took turns being the leader. The group had one leader each day. So the leader had to assess quickly what needed to be done and think about what to do but at the same time, check with the other people. It did give you a good training.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Part of leadership is establishing relationships with people, and part is communications. I think just being aware of style as the communication is flowing is important to clear communication. I have a boss who has a coffee cup that says, "And your point is...?" It reminds me that I need to be clear and quick and get to the point. .

LAUREN STORCK: Building relationships is definitely part of being a good leader. At the same time in some situations, we have to be quick to get our point across. You have to evaluate how important the relationship is for you in that situation.

Here are more points about being a good leader. You have to inspire self-confidence in others to move toward personal and group goals. Teach, don't preach. Of course, that's easier said than done. You need to listen, and don't shut out any ideas just because someone has presented them in a difficult way. Try to make everyone in the group feel like they can contribute something important, but that is easier said than done. You take all the ideas that are given to you, but you need help in action. You can't do all this by yourself.

Don't expect perfection. I talked about this earlier. Disagreement is fine with me. Handling

disagreement is one of the most important things about being a good leader. Make sure that you open space for people to disagree with you. A lot of leaders don't understand that. But it's a very valuable asset. It takes a good deal of personal security not to react defensively but to remain patient, to be polite, to listen, to look for a solution to the problem, to negotiate. Again, sometimes easier said than done. Some people are impossible in any group. We all do the best we can. If you have some allies in the group, there should be a way to find a solution.

Limits are okay, also. Put a time limit of two or three minutes on discussions, so the rules are very clear. How do you put a time limit on a group member who is constantly criticizing other people? When someone does this over and over again, develop your own allies, and find a solution if you can. Unfortunately, some people are "help rejecting." No matter what you try to do to support them and encourage them and help them grow, they will continue in the same difficult way. So putting boundaries and limits on that kind of person is important for being a good group leader. Sometimes at the end of the day, instead of getting sick yourself as a leader because there are too many irrational complaints and criticisms, you have to ask a person to leave the group. That is one of the hardest things in the world to do. Of course, you have to make that decision on your own.

Here's a very important game I want to tell you about. It's called "strategic leadership." It's called a SWOT analysis. If you are leading a group and you feel stuck, and the group isn't moving forward in the right way, get someone from outside the organization, or a very trusted neutral person in the organization -- it's hard to find a neutral person in the organization -- to do a SWOT analysis. You want to figure out what the group's strengths are. Talk about what the Strengths of your group are, what the Weaknesses are, what the Opportunities are, and what the Threats are. By the end of the day, you should come up with an action plan about how to move forward together. This SWOT analysis is a standard leadership tool.

I want to cover two more things. First, I want to encourage everyone here to being a leader anyplace you can. It can be in your neighborhood, in your church or synagogue; in ALDA or any other place you want. I think we're very good leaders because deafened people are very sensitive to how important communication and relationships are. I think we can be very good leaders in all different situations, even in hearing groups. We help ourselves when we help other people, of course.

Everyone needs to learn how to communicate, express herself and connect with other people, no matter what language is being used.

Now the second thing is I want to return to the discussion question about different kinds of groups. There are lots of different kinds of groups. If you have a group of engineers who need a two-minute time limit because they go on talking too much, and everybody agrees to that rule, we call it a "group norm." If people agree to it, that's fine. For me, it's quite a rigid structure, but if it works in that situation, that's fine.

What are some other ideas about this issue of people who monopolize the conversation? Do you have some other ideas on what you would do? Did I interrupt anybody today? I did. I didn't let some people talk when they wanted to. Do you remember? Did you feel bad that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, at first I felt you would come back to it, and then I just felt that... you were interested in hearing other people but you didn't want, for whatever reason, to hear what I had to say.

LAUREN STORCK: I know you had a question. I had to make a choice about giving you enough information, developing a relationship with all of you, and trying to include as many people as I could in the limited time we have. So what was your question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It was just a comment about using humor all of the time. Humor is very useful. Sometimes it's time to make a comment about the fallacy of making hasty generalizations about the people of any group.

LAUREN STORCK: Do you have any ideas about how you would interrupt someone now? What's wrong with interrupting someone?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Sometimes it's okay. A lot of times it's not okay, especially when you interrupt somebody's train of thought, and then they can't get to the point that they wanted to get to.

LAUREN STORCK: Interrupting is a very common problem. Depending on the culture you come from, every cultural group has different norms about whether it's okay to interrupt or not. I think you have to just try it. You have to do what you're comfortable with for the whole group. You may make someone feel as if they're being mistreated or ignored. But then take time at the end of the group to talk to them and, you know, explain to the group. Everybody needs some time to speak, or something like that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We are talking about being leaders of hearing loss organizations. We have to remember who our members are. Our members are people who in the general population are isolated from communication. Our organization promotes that we provide them a safe place where they can communicate, and so they are probably grabbing that opportunity. While we need to draw boundaries in order to conduct business, we still have to maintain safe place for them to communicate. We have to stretch the boundaries a little bit but there still have to be boundaries set.

LAUREN STORCK: Yes, and it's always a fine line. The leader has to make choices, to find the right middle there for certain groups, as for hard of hearing groups. Our time is up. You're a great group. Thank you so much everybody for being here.

Lauren E. Storck, PhD. Has a long career in psychology, education and research and is now doing work online primarily, including on leadership positions. She is Chair of the ALDA International Committee, Chair of a new chapter, ALDA-Maine, and consultant to the Center on Aging University of Maine among other activities. She has been deafened for seven years.