**Portfolio of a Servant Leader: You Can Lean on Me**

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# You Can Lean on Me

## Introduction

In August 2007, I decided to embark upon a journey of a lifetime. I made the choice to enroll in the doctoral cohort at Marshall University to earn an Ed.D. This had been a dream of mine that I had placed aside while raising my sons. However, now that they were almost grown, I could not pass up this wonderful opportunity. I quickly realized that it was going to be a challenge when I did not initially pass the Miller’s Analogy Test. Actually, I had to take it three times. I was very discouraged, but my husband and sons continued to encourage me. My family is extremely important to me, and I have always tried to be a good role model for my sons. You see, I believe that one of my greatest accomplishments is being a mother. In LS 710 Principles of Leadership taught by Dr. Powell Toth, one of our assignments was to complete a questionnaire about what we considered to be our personal best accomplishment as a leader. I chose that of being a mother. I felt I had to be accepted into the program, and that I must complete this new adventure to show my sons my drive and perseverance. When I was accepted into the program, as part of the admission process, I was interviewed by Dr. Mike Cunningham and Dr. Lisa Heaton. One question I recall from that interview was whether or not I had support from my family. I knew, without any question, that the answer to this was, “YES, I have 100% support from my family.” I knew that I could call on them for any need that I might have. One of my favorite songs, “Lean on Me,” by Bill Withers (1972) reminds me of the support that I have from my family, especially my husband, John Edwards:

*Lean on me*

*When you’re not strong*

*I’ll be your friend*

*I’ll help you carry on*

*For it won’t be long*

*Till I’m gonna need*

*Somebody to lean on.*

The first class meeting was on August 24th at Braxton County Middle School in Flatwoods, WV. It was a strange feeling to walk into the classroom and meet 21 other people with the same dream that I had. Actually, it was exhilarating. It was amazing how quickly we came together as a team. I believe our cohort is special; we are almost like family. When looking up the definition of cohort, I found that it is defined as a “group of companions and supporters.” We are definitely supporters of one another. Again, the song, “Lean on Me,” comes to mind when I think of the cohort:

*You just call on me brother  
When you need a hand  
We all need somebody  
To lean on  
I just might have a problem  
That you'll understand  
We all need somebody to lean on*

I would like to give credit for my success thus far to my husband, sons and the members of the cohort. I know that I have leaned on them many times throughout this extraordinary journey, and I hope that I have been there when they needed me as well. I look forward to this continued journey and I know that I will succeed. My topic, women in leadership, is extremely important to me and a personal challenge that I have set for myself. I hope to become a successful superintendent of schools upon completion of my doctorate, and I believe that the research for my dissertation will help to prepare me for this new adventure.

## Framework

In the course, LS 710 Principles of Leadership taught by Dr. Powell Toth, we were challenged to examine our leadership styles. Throughout this course, we examined various leadership styles and read literature written by prominent leaders. I chose to read *Assembly Required* by Lezotte and Mckee (2002), *Dealing With People You Can’t Stand* by Brinkman and Kirschner (2002) and *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* by Covey (1989). Reading these books and listening to the other cohort members’ summaries helped to broaden my definition and understanding of leadership. Dr. Toth shared the following with the class: “Leadership is based on a relationship between people that releases and focuses creative energy by initiating and sustaining growth and health in people to achieve shared purposes” (personal communication, January 2008). This statement along with all of the reading, research and discussion brought me to the following personal definition of leadership:

A work in progress…

Leadership is commitment to your beliefs. It is staying true to your values. Leading requires having confidence in yourself and others. Being a leader means that you allow others to find success. It is making decisions and sticking to them, if they are best for everyone involved. An effective leader has the knack of getting people to work together for the same purpose. Being a leader requires helping others understand why change is needed and then guiding them through the process. Having strong interpersonal skills, knowing the importance of personal reflection and awareness are also keys to being a successful leader.

Upon the conclusion of LS 710 Principles of Leadership, I believe that my leadership style can be described as a *servant leader*. Greenleaf (2003) shares that a servant leader has the following ten characteristics: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community. I tend to empower others, and I encourage collaboration and trust in others. I believe that if, as an organization, we all have the same focus and desire, we can accomplish so much more. It is important to build trust and solid relationships so that, as a team, shared goals can be accomplished. Spears (2004) states that servant leadership is “based upon teamwork and community, one that seeks to involve others in decision making, one strongly based in ethical and caring behavior.” Covey (2003) and Maxwell (2007) also support servant leadership. Servant leadership follows the pattern of serving others while keeping their integrity and values as a priority. Covey (2003) wrote the following about servant leadership:

The deepest part of human nature is that which urges people—each one of us—to rise above our present circumstances and to transcend our nature. If you can appeal to it, you tap into a whole new source of human motivation. Perhaps that is why I have found Robert Greenleaf’s teaching on Servant Leadership to be so enormously inspiring, so uplifting, so ennobling (p. 257).

Maxwell (2007) states that “followers come when leaders serve” (p. 11) and that “good leaders make the transition from selfish leader to servant leader” (p. 13).

## Chart of Portfolio Activities

Marshall University Graduate College requires the doctoral candidate to develop a portfolio of activities and experiences of the doctoral program as the qualifying assessment before being admitted to candidacy. This opportunity provides the student with a broader and more fulfilling experience while completing the coursework required. The portfolio requirements help to prepare the student for the dissertation stage of the program. My Educational Leadership portfolio consists of the following:

1. Scholarship – co-authoring and submitting for publication a manuscript in collaboration with a faculty member;
2. Scholarship – co-authoring and presented presentation for both regional and state conferences in collaboration with a faculty member;
3. Other – co-teaching a course in collaboration with a faculty member;
4. Other – developing a course in collaboration with a faculty member.

These activities are described in the following chart:

**Chart of Portfolio Activities for Tina Lou Edwards**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Portfolio Activity** | **Date(s)** | **Performed in Collaboration With** | **Description of Activity** | **Sample of Courses Supporting this Activity** |
| **Publication** | November 2007 | Dr. Fran Simone | National ParentNet Association  ParentInvolvementMatters.org  *Parent Partners: Leading the Way to Success* | CI 677 Writing for Publication  LS 703 Research Design |
| **Regional Presentation** | October 24, 2008 | Dr. Louis Watts,  Ms. Peggy Sue Crowe, and  Ms. Sarah Lee | Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration, Charleston, WV:  *Staff and Administrative Views of the Preschool Collaboration Program* | LS 710 Principles of Leadership  LS 705 Administrative Theory  CI 677 Writing for Publication  CI 701 Curriculum Development |
| **West Virginia Presentation** | November 20, 2008 | Dr. Louis Watts,  Ms. Peggy Sue Crowe, and  Ms. Sarah Lee | WV Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, Bridgeport, WV:  *Collaboration Preschool Program: Perceptions and Suggestions* | LS 710 Principles of Leadership  LS 705 Administrative Theory  CI 701 Curriculum Development |
| **Co-teaching** | May 26 – Aug 14, 2009 | Dr. Mary Harris-John | Co-teaching of LS 610 Leadership for School Improvement | LS 647 Adult and Continuing Education  LS 740 Public School Law  CI 702 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching |
| **Developing a course in collaboration with a faculty member** | August 2010 | Dr. Mary Harris-John | Co-developed the online course for LS 600 School Personnel Administration | LS 740 Public School Law  LS 707 Ethical Theories  LS 710 – Principles of Leadership  CIEC 700 Technology and Curriculum |

## SECTION I: SCHOLARSHIP

From the beginning of this adventure, I knew that I was going to learn many valuable lessons along the way. Quickly, I began a plan for completing the requirements for the portfolio. During my first semester, in CI 677 Writing for Publication taught by Dr. Fran Simone, I decided to write about a successful accomplishment in my career. When I was the Director of Federal Programs and School Improvement for Ritchie County, I started a program that gave parent volunteers the opportunity to become leaders. Demonstrating my leadership style as that of servant leadership, this program empowered parents and allowed them to become leaders in the elementary schools of Ritchie County. The publication that I wrote in CI 677 Writing for Publication taught by Dr. Simone, describes the program, and was published by the National ParentNet Association link: ParentInvolvementMatters.org in November of 2007. Dr. Simone guided our cohort in this process and provided us with many valuable tips for professional writing. One of the texts we used in this course was Jalongo’s book (2002,) *Writing for Publication: A Practical Guide for Educators.* Jalongo supports that successful writers work on more than one piece at a time and that writers grow by writing. This journey has taught me that this is very true. I know that I have improved as a writer and I have written several pieces along the way. Dr. Calvin Meyer’s courses, CI 702 Curriculum Theories and CI 703 Theories, Models, and Research of Teaching, both involved a significant amount of writing. We were required to write a 15-20 page paper every other week with a 10-15 page reflection in between each of those weeks. The critique that I am most proud of and through which I learned the most about myself was Critique 4: Humanism. I am most proud of it because I received full credit on my first attempt. Also, I learned more about my servant leadership while studying Humanism which, in part, is “people working together cooperatively to enhance human personality in directions satisfying both the individual personally and to the other members of the social group” (Hass, 1977). Humanism characterizes servant leadership because it empowers others. One of the keys to success in any area of life is being a servant—getting underneath others and pushing them up to succeed.

I continued to focus on completing the portfolio requirements during the Summer and Fall 2008 semesters. During this time, I worked collaboratively with Dr. Louis Watts, Peggy Sue Crowe and Sarah Lee. Ms. Crowe and Ms. Lee are also part of our cohort. Our research project dealt with a topic near and dear to me both personally and professionally. At this time, I was the preschool coordinator and chair of the collaborative preschool committee for Ritchie County Schools. I was very interested in the process of collaboratively working with Head Start. Dr. Louis Watts taught LS 647Adult and Continuing Education to our cohort during the Summer 2008 semester. He told our group that he was looking for students to work with him on a research project entitled “Staff and Administrative Views of the Preschool Collaborative Between Lincoln County Schools and Southwestern Community Action Head Start” (2008). I was immediately interested in participating in this study. Once we began working on the research, we soon decided that we could turn the project into a presentation. We submitted proposals to both the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration and the West Virginia Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development. Both organizations accepted our proposals. We were very excited to have this opportunity to complete our research and to share it with other professionals. The goal was to show that the collaboration between public schools and Head Starts could be beneficial to both systems and especially for the preschool students involved. This study helped to guide me in my position as preschool coordinator in Ritchie County. In a study by Barnett and Hustedt (2003), the collaboration between public schools and Head Starts would permit the systems to incorporate Head Start funding, expertise, staff and facilities into universal pre-K, thereby reducing costs to the public school systems and making maximum use of existing resources.

**Reflection on Learning**

Reflecting back over my experiences, I have had several opportunities to learn and grow in the areas of leadership and curriculum and instruction. The experiences gave me the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and cohort members as well as professional organizations such as the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration and the West Virginia Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development. The scholarly writing expected of us helped me to learn as a writer and grow as a researcher. The opportunities to present allowed for growth professionally and as a researcher. I believe that the many valuable experiences I have had have prepared me for the next step in this journey.

## SECTION II: PROFESSIONAL/ACADEMIC PURSUITS

## Co-Teaching with Faculty Member

The next step of this journey was a co-teaching experience with my Chair, Dr. Mary Harris-John. I had the opportunity to co-teach LS 610 Leadership for School Improvement during the summer 2009. This was also beneficial to me professionally. At the time, I was just hired as Superintendent of Schools for Grant County. Being the superintendent, gave me some insight into school system leadership and school improvement. I had also served as Director of School Improvement for Ritchie County Schools. Dr. Harris-John gave me the opportunity to share with the class the West Virginia Five-Year Online Strategic Plan. Sharing the site and how to navigate within the plan was valuable to me as an administrator. Since then, I have held numerous sessions with administrators and guided them through the process of inputting their school plans.

## Research Project with Faculty

Finally, in July and August of 2010, I co-developed the online course for LS 600 School Personnel Administration with Dr. Mary Harris-John. This was another valuable experience. I met with Dr. Harris-John and we discussed a game plan for re-designing the traditional course into an online course. My responsibilities included providing policy on West Virginia Employee Code of Conduct, and information on Policy 5310, Performance Evaluation of School Personnel. Assisting with this project gave me the chance to learn more about policies and West Virginia Code dealing with school personnel. I am thankful to have had this opportunity and am sure that the knowledge gained from this will enhance my professional career.

**Reflection on Learning**

Participating in the co-teaching and course development activities also allowed me to grow as a student, researcher and as a professional. When I reflect on these activities, I realize the value of these experiences. While co-teaching LS 610 Leadership for School Improvement, I was able to present to the students a responsibility that I was currently doing professionally. This gave me the idea of working with principals on their school improvement plan in a similar manner. Next, while working with Dr. Harris-John on developing ideas for transforming LS 600 School Personnel Administration from a traditional course into an online course, I had the opportunity to realize the necessary resources for an online course. The research involved in finding the appropriate materials for the online course was a valuable experience and led me to find additional resources for my profession. Again, this experience assisted me both as a scholar and as a professional educator.

## SECTION III: OTHER PROJECTS

The process of going through this program as a cohort has helped me in many areas both professionally and personally. I knew when I applied that I would love the idea of teamwork and collaboration that would be part of the cohort model. I have not been disappointed. From the beginning, I felt the support from the cohort members and the faculty from Marshall University Graduate College. The visits with the doctoral staff who came to our course meetings were very encouraging and supportive. This gave the cohort the chance to meet the faculty and also provided a forum for our questions and concerns. This collaboration and communication between the faculty and students helped us to decide upon our chairs and our committee members.

Another example of strong support from Marshall would be the doctoral seminars that are held in the fall and spring. The seminars were well planned and provided us with exceptional and important information that helped us grow and mature as doctoral students. We were given the opportunity to choose topics that were relevant to our place in the journey of the doctoral pursuit. I also helped in the planning of several of the seminars, for example, I provided gifts that were given out at the end of the day to the participants and assisted in monitoring the lunches that were provided during several of the seminars. During the fall 2010 Academic Breakout Sessions, I facilitated the session titled: Role of Higher Education in Professional Teaching Standards led by Dr. Sue Hollandsworth and Robert Hagerman. I also co-presented the gallery walk session titled: The Portfolio Paper with Mary Ann Triplett. Again, this helped me grow as a leader and gave me the opportunity to grow both professionally and personally. The seminar experiences gave us the chance to meet other doctoral students outside of our cohort and to see them progress and be successful in the endeavor to achieve the prestigious title of Doctorate in Education. I recall feeling like I might never have made it to this point early on, but here I am and I know that the encouragement of other students and faculty helped me to make it this far. Seeing others succeed and knowing that they went through some of the same experiences that I had or would experience gave me the strength to carry on with my journey…

*You just call on me brother when you need a hand.   
We all need somebody to lean on.   
I just might have a problem that you'll understand.   
We all need somebody to lean on.*

The work that I completed throughout the various courses helped me to grow professionally. While I served as superintendent of schools, LS 740 Pubic School Law taught by Dr. Mary Harris-John, gave me many resources that I used in making many of my decisions. The discussions of a variety of court cases and the chance to research several court cases will continue to guide me as a public school administrator. One of the first assignments was to discuss governance of public schools in the United States. I knew that knowing where to find information would be important to me as a school leader. This course provided us with many valuable resources in the area of school law. One point that I remember to this day from the required text is, “The purpose of the educational system in America is to provide for a general diffusion of knowledge, cultivate new learning, and nurture the democratic ideals of government” (Alexander & Alexander, 2009, p. 23). This quote is important to me because it is really what education is all about. Our goal as educators should be to instill the love of learning in our students and to provide them with strategies needed to be successful citizens.

LS 705 Administrative/Leadership Theory taught by Dr. Bobbi Nicholson, also provided many opportunities to grow as a leader. One article that made a strong impression on me was “Getting into the castle of educational leadership” by Kempner (1989). This article described various types of leadership within the administrative world. The conclusion emphasized the importance of “opening the castle door” (p. 121) and the idea of empowering others to serve and to grow as leaders. This idea subscribes to the servant leadership model.

**Reflection on Learning**

When I think about this entire journey and all of the beneficial experiences, I realize that I have learned that I can lean on others, but most importantly that I am available for others to lean upon me. I lead in a way that empowers others to find their strengths and to work collaboratively for a collective purpose. The cohort model and the seminar experience also seem to empower those involved and to bring out the strengths of the participants. I have learned more about my leadership skills and abilities and feel confident in my future endeavors.

## SECTION III: CONCLUSION

I have grown tremendously while getting to this stage of the doctoral program. Upon reflection of my experiences, I believe that I have the skills necessary to successfully complete this journey. More importantly, I know that I have the support to be successful at this endeavor. I have learned that I have my family, the cohort, and the faculty to provide me with encouragement when I might need it. Over the last four years, I have had many obstacles and stumbling blocks along the way. However, I overcame them and have made it this far. I now have a better understanding of the areas of curriculum and instruction and educational leadership. I realize that there will be new challenges while completing this journey. However, I believe that I am equipped with the tools and support systems necessary to succeed with the dissertation process. I also hope that along the way and in the future, I have provided encouragement to some, and that I will continue to be a role model for my sons and others. I know that I can lean on others when I might need to, but I also want others to know that I am here when they might need someone to lean on.

*You just call on me brother if you need a friend.   
We all need somebody to lean on.   
I just might have a problem that you'll understand.   
We all need somebody to lean on.*

*If there is a load you have to bear that you can't carry.   
I'm right up the road, I'll share your load if you just call me.*

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