

# HARNESSING THE POWER OF INCLUSION

*Sarah McArthur*

“In tenuous times, thoughtful people know that there are no quick or easy answers. But they also know that the quality of their ideas and authenticity of their actions can shape the future.” - Frances Hesselbein, *Leader to Leader*, Vol. 1996, No. 1 “A Star to Steer By.”

Years ago, upon graduating from the University of Oregon, I was, like most college graduates, looking for a job. I had majored in English and Environmental Studies. For my English degree, I explored literature from Homer to Shakespeare to Bob Dylan and Woody Guthrie. For my Environmental Studies degree, I studied biology, physical geography, environmental studies, politics, law, and climatology.

With my outdoorsy, active, and environmental bent, my father suggested that I try out for the Wildland Firefighters in Southern California. Excited for such a challenge, adventure, and opportunity to serve, I took his advice and applied to the program. Then, every day for two months, I drove up into the Cleveland National Forest to take the required courses. I passed with flying colors and was accepted into the Hotshots.

The Hotshots are highly trained fire crews who perform some of the most demanding and hazardous tasks in wildland firefighting. The crews, called Hotshots because of their work in the hottest areas of wildfires, were started in the late 1940s in the Cleveland and Angeles National Forests in Southern California.

As the only female in my class, and a small one at that, I was nearly a foot shorter and a hundred pounds lighter than any of the other “rookies.” Noticing the great physical differences between us, I asked the team leader if I would be expected to meet the same physical requirements as the rest of the team or if there would be adjustments made, to pack size for instance, for someone of my stature and strength. I was told there

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would be no adjustments made. I double-checked with the director of the program, and was again told, “No adjustments.”

After thoughtful consideration, I thanked them very much and declined the opportunity to be on the team. It was not a quick or easy decision to make, but it was the right one. Without adjustment for my size and strength, I could not in good conscience commit to a position that I was not qualified for physically when so many lives depended on that physicality. It was disappointing, but like wanting to be a 5’ tall professional basketball player, my heart might say yes, but my physique said no.

## **A Positive Future for All**

This all happened years ago, and since that time, I have focused on leadership and communication, especially that focused in the direction of a positive future for all, which of course is dependent on including all of the stakeholders. Inclusion remains an ongoing challenge because it requires constant awareness and continuous adjustment and tweaking of systems and structures, some of which have been by created by one group or another and tend to accommodate exclusively one or another type of person, applicant, employee, and participant.

Inclusion, though, is a worthwhile challenge and one that is important to continue to make progress on.

Because in doing so, we shape a future that includes the wealth of our perspectives, conditions, ideas, skills, and talents. In fact, inclusion opens the door to our “Working Together” to create value and growth for all the stakeholders and the greater good, which I welcome you to read more about in our article in this issue about people working together to design and build the Boeing 777 in the early 1990s.

You may have heard of the 777 or taken a flight on one of these airplanes, but what you may not know is that the 777 is the first digitally designed and digitally premanufactured commercial jet. Not only that, but it is the long-range pioneer and largest twin jet airplane, designed as such so as to replace three- and four-engine jets and thus continue progress toward more environmentally sustainable airplanes.

Far from top-down, command and control leadership and telling everyone what to do, the bold leaders of the 777 led with humility, love, and service; coaching and facilitating all of the stakeholders. They created a culture of respect, openness, and trust in which everyone knew the vision, strategy, and plan; as well as their role, responsibilities, and importance of their contribution. As a result, the 777, this incredible feat of invention and design, was created because of, not in spite of, a focus on inclusion, on working together.

By putting people first, treating customers as partners, and including all of the stakeholders, from the flying public to global employees, to the unions, the shareholders, the airline customers, and the communities within which they serve, a new stakeholder-centered model for the future of leadership and management was shaped. It is called “Working Together,” and it is our greatest hope that it will be implemented on the broadest scale going forward, because we know that it is our actions today that shape our bright future for all tomorrow.

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**Sarah McArthur** is editor-in-chief of *Leader to Leader*, thought partner and trusted advisor to world-class leader, and former CEO of Boeing Commercial Airplanes and Ford Motor Company, Alan Mulally, and executive producer of *Defining Moments: The Life and Leadership of Quiet Revolutionary Frances Hesselbein*. She is author and editor of numerous books, including *Making Waves*, *Work Is Love Made Visible*, and *Coaching for Leadership*; advisory board member of the *Frances Hesselbein Leadership Forum* at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Public and International Affairs, founding member of *Marshall Goldsmith's 100 Coaches*, and former chief executive operating officer of *Marshall Goldsmith, Inc.*