

Power Comes To Those Who Stand Up for It

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STAND UP, gentlepersons. Stand up, speak out, look eye-to-eye and touch somebody. Preferably one of those somebodies whose position is deemed more powerful than yours (but isn't really).

In a paragraph, that's the prescription for attaining power as told yesterday to about 50 persons attending the third lecture in the YWCA-sponsored "Values and Viewpoints" series.

The speaker was Dr. Sharon Lord, professor, author, management consultant, researcher, executive. . . . Her credentials are lengthy; her official dual capacity at UT is that of associate professor of educational psychology and direct of the Appalachian Center.

Women, said Dr. Lord, have been conditioned to choose to be powerless. In unconscious ways, they give their power away.

To illustrate, Dr. Lord told of an invariably recurring experience she has had in conducting classes in management for government and private industry.

"It's my custom to have everyone introduce themselves. The men will stand up and state their names; the women remain seated. This is true from Melbourne, Fla. to Seattle, Wash. It's the way they have been trained."

This conditioned, unconscious feeling of being not important enough to stand up can be overcome, if you really want it to be, she said. And it is helpful if you first "psych" yourself into it by overcoming the conditioned distaste women have for the word "power."

You must look at the word in a positive, not negative, way.

"Personal power is simply your ability to influence your life space and your ability to direct your life—and you have a right to that," Dr. Lord declared.

Imagine yourself as moving within your own personal bubble of space with you at the controls. "And the more power you acquire, the larger that bubble will grow."

Now comes the step at which you involve that personal bubble with others—that's the politics of power. "Politics does not refer just to the Federal Government or Watergate but to your personal power in relationship to the power of the group around you. There are power and politics even in the way a room is arranged."

Imagine, Dr. Lord proposed, that you are the only woman on a board of 40 directors which is to make a decision involving the disbursal of athletic funds. You want to make sure that women's athletics gets its fair share of the pie.

Your effectiveness in getting across your viewpoint will be greatly influenced by your placement in the room. If you are seated on the back row in an arrangement of rows of seats facing one podium from whence the chairman of the board presides, your chances are nil.

But, put a little planning into your presentation, and it may make all the difference. First, be sure the meeting is held in a room with a table at which all persons may make eye contact with each other—a round-table or an end-to-end arrangement of tables with seats on all sides.

Then, when comes your chance to speak, ask the chairman if you may borrow the microphone



Sharon Lord on power: "Women have been conditioned to choose to be powerless. In unconscious ways, they give their power away."

Photos from original News Sentinel story

("I'm a little weak-voiced today," she said with a smile). This will offset your less impressive "female" voice. Then (and this is probably the most important factor), STAND UP—to offset your less impressive female size.

Remember, said Dr. Lord, that we teach little children to respect people by telling them to "look up to them."

Think of tallness as a virtue—everyone else does, said the diminutive professor, who stands perhaps 5-feet-2, but thinks tall.

Shortness can be made up for by eye-to-eye contact, particularly in a person-to-person encounter, says Dr. Lord. It gives you a positive demeanor.

Also important in expanding your personal power bubble is the seemingly simple matter of touching. There's a complex political code to it, Dr. Lord explained.

Using as a source, "Body Politics" authored by Nancy Henley, Dr. Lord said, "If I can touch you and you can touch me back, then we are equal. People with power can introduce touch, but people without power are not supposed to touch back and certainly not ever touch first."

Observe the boss with his secretary, she said. The boss comes to her desk, puts his arm around her, and says, "Honey, can you get this for me yesterday?" But the secretary does not then give the boss a few good-hearted pats while saying "Why, I'll do the best I can."

In her own career, Dr. Lord said, there have been many instances to illustrate the politics of touching. She told the group of one concerning the dean of a college in which she was teaching.

"Whenever I would meet him in the hall, I would go away from the encounter feeling exactly like a child. And I couldn't figure out why. So each time I met him, I began to analyze our actions."

The encounters went thusly:

The dean (who was quite tall) would approach the young teacher, circle his arm around her shoulders, smile and say, "Well, Sharon, how's your work coming along?" The teacher, from within the encircling arm, would look up at the dean, smile, and say, "Why, it's going quite well, Dean Last Name, etc., etc., etc."—she looking up from her protected position, he looking down

from his protecting position.

"I finally realized that he was not behaving toward me as a colleague but as he had been conditioned to behave toward all the 'little' women in his life. He was not an evil man; he was a good man."

Nevertheless, his behavior was driving her up the wall.

So one day when she met the dean in the hallway, she deftly avoided the encircling arm, stepped directly in front of him, and fastened her eyes directly upon his. When the question came, "Well, Sharon, how are things going?" she answered with "Quite well, First Name, etc., etc., etc."

The result? "He never touched me again."

There's a second point to that story: The deliberate changeover to a reciprocal usage of the first name—which illustrates the doctor's last point in her lecture—the powerful politics of language.

"Language is set up to make women less powerful," she says. "There are many ways in which this is done, but the most important one—and the one that will get you the most pooh-poohs from men when you say it is important—is by the generic use of 'man.'"

"We say 'mankind' or 'man' or 'all men' and sometimes it means men only and other times it means men and women, too. But nobody tells the women when they are included and when they are not."

She recalled the day in first grade when her teacher asked, "Does everyone have his homework?" and she did not raise her hand, as she expected the next question to be "Does everyone have her homework?"

She caught on, though, and reflected that "a distinct advantage in my life has been that I learned very quickly to assume that I was always included, so when someone said, 'I want the best man for the job,' I thought they meant me."

A wealth of research findings exists which show the psychological damage done to female children by teaching only about "man's" achievements, said Dr. Lord.

One study in which she was personally involved was done with elementary school children. The children were conducted through a study on

“Cro-Magnon man.” As part of the study, they were asked to draw a picture “of Cro-Magnon man at work.” All the children, both boys and girls, drew pictures of men.

Later, they were asked to draw a picture of “Cro-Magnon people at work.” Again, every picture portrayed a male.

Last, they were asked to draw a picture of “Cro-Magnon men and women at work.” And, both girls and boys produced pictures with half the workers female.

In her own classes at UT, Dr. Lord has conducted experiments with the use of the generic “man.”

“I tell my students on the first day of class that I am going to use the terms ‘womankind’ and the pronouns ‘she’ and ‘hers’ rather than the traditional terms of ‘mankind,’ ‘he’ and ‘his.’”

The men usually chuckle (patronizingly) or groan at first, she said.

“But by the end of two weeks they are crying uncle. They say they cannot stand the feeling of being left out.”

The problem with the language is not only with the words themselves, Dr. Lord continued, but with the subjects and events the words have been used to document.

History has overlooked women, she said, illus-

trating her point with a small quiz. Among the questions:

Do you know who Elizabeth Cady Stanton was?

Do you know who Sojourner Truth was?

Do you know that several women successfully completed the early phases of the NASA astronaut training program? Do you know their fate in regard to that program?

Do you know what is celebrated in America on August 28?

Can you, in 60 seconds, name 10 outstanding American women whose husband’s or father’s identity you do not know?

The group failed the quiz—miserably—as Dr. Lord expected. “Your performance is normal,” she told us. I get the same results all over the country.”

Unless we want our daughters and sons to grow to maturity with the same dismal lack of knowledge regarding female contributions and achievement, we must do two things:

“One, reclaim our history. See that our children are taught it. Two, change the values of the historians. See that value is placed on ‘women’s work.’”

“Tell yourself that women have the most valu-

able power in the world. They can produce life and nurture it. We are the only half of the human race that can do this, and it is an awesome power. Yet, we are told it is unimportant.

“Look at what happens in this situation. A neighborhood surveyor rings a doorbell. A woman answers. She is carrying a baby, two more children are playing in the house, she’s got laundry in the machine, ironing on the board, supper on the stove. . . and when the surveyor asks what is her occupation, she answers, ‘Oh, I don’t work.’”

“Don’t EVER say ‘I don’t work,’” pleaded Dr. Lord, who was reared in the mountains of West Virginia, a land where everybody worked.

“I grew up thinking that men and women did whatever they had to do to survive,” she recalled. Her childhood was “advantaged,” she said, in that she was exposed to many strong female role models—a female sheriff, a female minister, a female teacher and a female farmer.

“My grandmother was not a farmer’s wife,” she told. “My grandfather (who was in the coal mining business) was a farmer’s husband.”