

Core Aspects of Feminist Leadership Practice

Originally curated and compiled by Charles Knight, 31 March 2008; latest revision 05 August 2023

Note to readers:

In 2008 I decided to summarize and compile these principal aspects of feminist leadership practice.

In 2008 I had been a member of the Women's Theological Center (of Boston) community for over five years. During that time, not only did I have the privilege of being part of an amazing community of women (and a few men) working for social justice with an emphasis on anti-racism, but I had extensive exposure to creative and inclusive leadership practices that had roots in the feminist, civil rights, and workers' movements.

Significantly, these practices also had roots in spiritual practice, some connected across oceans and centuries.

As someone with plenty of experience witnessing leadership in more 'traditional' male-led spaces, I experienced these leadership practices as revolutionary. These practices succeeded in developing and supporting a community of strong and confident leaders.

After I had completed the initial compilation, I decided to post it on my website. I have no real idea how many people have read or been affected by it during the subsequent fifteen years. A few times I did Google searches on "feminist leadership," expecting someone to have published a more definitive exploration of the subject.

I was surprised at how sparse the returns of those searches were. Some articles used the phrase. None the less, the focus was usually narrow, as though feminist leadership might be a niche interest or curiosity. If you know of additional source material that might improve this compilation, I will be grateful if you let me know. You can reach me at cknight@comw.org.

I am solely responsible for the summaries here. Please feel free to suggest improvements.

~ Charles Knight, 2023

These are aspects and common themes of feminist leadership I find in the literature and practice:

1. Awareness of **self as part of a larger whole** -- both in the present moment and through generations and cultural legacy.

- Attention to history (ancestry). Greater attention to interconnectedness and collectivity than to autonomy and independence. Understanding that *leadership is rooted in communities and their histories*, one person or group cannot define it for another (Women's Theological Center - *Spiritual Leadership*). Self and community knowledge and discovery is a necessary part of the process.
2. **Shared leadership.** Attention to bringing the collectivity and community along with the process. Affirmation and mentoring of emergent leadership qualities inherent in all ("training more about affirming skills than imparting skills" – Susan Eaton). Transparency is essential for effective process and trust-building.
 3. **Relational** -- building strong, trusting relationships. *Relational/Cultural* models – Jean Baker Miller. Importance of *storytelling* in affirmation of the person and the community.
 4. **Inspirational/Spiritual** (with depth). Emphasizes the protection and nourishment of the human spirit in each person wherein the leadership capacity resides – thus increasing the capacity to transform the individual, their relationships, organizations, and communities.
 5. **Clarity of purpose** with an orientation toward the **transformational** (of the individual and the whole).
 6. Explicit awareness and **attention to power dynamics** and their varied meanings in the context of different cultures and identities. Attention to the role of fear and the obsessive need for control in the power relations of dominance. Enduring sympathetic recognition of fear in the individual and the community. Much of leadership is about bringing people through their fears toward collective goals.
 7. Attention to learning **rituals, celebration**, and the personal and community **expressions of joy and sadness**. Joyful expression is especially valued.

8. Attention to creating **safe environments** for expression, self-care, participation, and growth of leadership skills. Collective support for challenging each person toward the best practice of leadership.

Primary text sources for this compilation

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“What is Spiritual Leadership?” Women’s Theological Center, Boston MA.

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This document is online at:

<https://comw.org/obrm/fulltext/NotesonFeministLeadership.pdf>