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Leadership Inspiration: Recognizing Potential

By Jamie Shallow



Editor's Note: In the Leadership & Development Section's Leadership Inspiration Contest, entrants were asked to tell us what inspired them to be a better actuarial leader. Here is an entry from the "Leadership Quote" category.

"Too many managers fail to recognize their people's full potential."

—Art Williams, *Pushing Up People*

It was 1995, shortly before my wife and I got married, that I was introduced to a company called Primerica. I was about five years into my actuarial career, and wasn't really thinking too much about management just yet. Having fairly recently studied *Actuarial Mathematics*, I was intrigued by the chance to learn the sales side of life insurance and teach people how it worked, along with such things as the rule of 72 and compound interest theory. I thought it was a great chance to really help make a difference in people's futures.

In the process of trying to take an actuarial mindset and transform it into a salesperson mindset, I was also introduced to the message of Primerica's founder, Art Williams. There were a lot of components, but in a nutshell it was servant leadership.

Growing up, especially with a father who struggled with alcoholism, I never really had the opportunity to witness strong leadership in action. I guess on one hand, I did really admire the character of Charles Ingalls on *Little House on the Prairie* as a family and community leader. However, real-life leadership was not something I was very familiar with. Then I began to read Art's classic book, *Pushing Up People*, in which he discusses in simple terms some of the most profound concepts of leadership:

- Everybody wants to be somebody
- Treat people good
- Build personal relationships
- The secret—praise and recognition
- Stand for something
- Become a crusader
- Develop a positive attitude
- Don't be afraid to fail
- You've got to pay the price
- Remember the giving principle
- Never give up
- And numerous others ...

This was a life-changing event for me! I have never been the same since. The journey begun back then has inspired me to not only seek to make the world a better place through the actuarial work we do in helping build social and economic security, but also to remember the value of servant leadership in our profession. It has led me to a place in the Leadership & Development Section, where I am thankful to serve and help instill this value in others.

In recent years, I actually wrote a letter to Art thanking him for all he's done in my life, even though he doesn't know me. I did receive a short personalized letter from him in response, which is something I treasure very much and keep posted in my office for continued inspiration! ■



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