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Bubbles: The Leadership of Beverly Sills

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Leadership examples and women leaders can be found in many venues. The recent passing of Beverly Sills (1929–2007) spawned a flurry of tributes recounting the legacy she leaves. Described as “one of the finest high-flying sopranos of the latter 20th century, she leaves behind a rich legacy of recordings and an opera scene revitalized by her tireless efforts on behalf of American singers.” (Serinus)

Von Rhein noted, “She embodied the American dream that anyone, from anywhere, can achieve anything if he or she works hard enough. . . Sills’ rise from humble origins, years of struggle and family tragedy to triumph as a singer and opera administrator touched millions who wouldn’t have been caught dead in an opera house. . . Sills’ greatest achievement, beyond her early vocal triumphs, was as a popularizer of high art, one who could sell opera to the masses without breaking faith with the classical cognoscenti.”

A Globe editorial noted, “She loved her art so generously that she was a glowing example of the vital importance of passion. Everyone should love something that much.” Marsee wrote, “Her greatest attribute, besides the obvious one of being a great singer and interpreter, was the way she treated people. Everyone was greeted as though they were long-lost friends. Everyone wanted to talk to ‘Bubbles’ and experience her ‘bubbly’ presence.” Marsee also wrote, “My husband, Mark Weinstein, who worked for Beverly at New York City Opera years later, was always amazed at her outstanding business skills. No wonder then that every ‘retirement’ led to greater responsibilities—from star singer to general director at City Opera to head of Lincoln Center and finally to board chairman of the Metropolitan Opera.”

These quotes from Serinus, von Rhein, The Boston Globe, and Marsee reflect a fragment of the tributes written to recall the impact Beverly Sills has had through her life and work. The attributes noted in these few brief quotes, suggest her leadership. “The way she treated people,” “a glowing example of the vital importance of passion” reflect what we know about leaders.

References

