

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Journal of Women in Educational Leadership

Educational Administration, Department of

---

4-2004

## Successful Women in Leadership: Portrait of a Gentle Warrior

Deborah E. Stine

California State University - San Bernardino, [debstine@csusb.edu](mailto:debstine@csusb.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel>



Part of the [Educational Administration and Supervision Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

Stine, Deborah E., "Successful Women in Leadership: Portrait of a Gentle Warrior" (2004). *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*. 117.

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel/117>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Educational Administration, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Women in Educational Leadership by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

# Successful Women in Leadership: Portrait of a Gentle Warrior

---

Deborah E. Stine

This paper paints a portrait of successful leadership that was built through the directorship and ethic of caring of a female site administrator. The paper addresses the major question, "What major principles need to be incorporated into the daily life of those in leadership positions to assist in their success?" The study is framed through the work of Starratt (1993), who described leadership through the metaphor of drama, with the leader serving as the caring director, involving playing the drama with "greater risk, with greater intelligence and imagination and with greater dedication to making the drama work" (p. 41), and that of Carlos Castaneda (1967), who described the path of a warrior in metaphorical terms through seven principles of power. These are: (a) knowing the battleground, (b) discarding the unnecessary, (c) choosing battles, (d) taking risks, (e) seeking retreat, (f) compressing time, and (g) exercising power. These are then applied to the narrative of a site principal, and are modified to provide the reader with a guiding list of emerging administrators. This study adds to the knowledge base, broadening the use of the principles with the addition of the elements of drama and caring, clarifying why the application is particularly useful to explain success in leadership roles.

The historical movement and the struggle of women provide a foundation for understanding of their survival in leadership positions. In the early bureaucratization of schools, men were promoted to the management of schools. The suffrage movement in the United States, however, set the stage for an eventual increase in the number of women in school administration positions. A setback was seen in the movement for equal pay and the economic depression of the 1930s, decreasing the number of women in leadership positions. More jobs were available for women in World War II and the number decreased in the post-war era when the G.I. Bill allowed

### About the Author

*Deborah E. Stine*, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Leadership and Curriculum in the College of Education at California State University, San Bernardino, where she has been teaching for nine years. Previous to this position, she served in the public schools as administrator, counselor, and teacher for twenty-five years. Her research interests include women in leadership, school law, policy, and accountability and decision-making processes. Contact Information: [dstined@aol.com](mailto:dstined@aol.com)

---

more men to enter school administration. The Cold War precipitated a panic that called for more preparation of students in math and science and drew men into both teaching and administration. Societal expectations are in conflict with roles of women as leaders. The increase in career options for women has drawn women away from careers in education. However, many have persevered.

Starratt (1993) described leadership through the metaphor of drama, with the leader serving as the caring director, involving playing the drama with "greater risk, with greater intelligence and imagination and with greater dedication to making the drama work" (p. 41). Carlos Castaneda (1967) described the path of a warrior in metaphorical terms through seven principles of power. These principals include: (a) knowing the battleground, (b) discarding the unnecessary, (c) choosing battles, (d) taking risks, (e) seeking retreat, (f) compressing time, and (g) exercising power. For one to be a successful warrior, these strengths must then be applied to "The Riddle of the Heart" (as described by Castaneda, 1967), and include the ability to: (a) laugh at oneself, (b) have patience without fretting, and (c) incorporate the principle of improvisation while thinking on one's feet.

Castaneda's (1981) *Principles of Power* (here utilized as the *Principles of Leadership*), provided a metaphoric frame for interpreting and understanding leadership. Estes (1992) addressed the use of metaphors from data, organized and categorized to advance understanding, when she said, "this work is to show . . . what we have received through our sudden knowings from story, from body, from dreams and journeys of all sorts" (p. 33).

Carlos Castaneda's anthropological studies focused on a Yaqui Indian from northern Mexico, Don Juan Matus. According to Castaneda in the *Eagle's Gift* (1981), Don Juan possessed ancient knowledge, which in our time is commonly known as . . . "psychological science, but which in fact is a tradition of extremely self-disciplined practitioners and extremely sophisticated praxes" (p. 1). Castaneda became an apprentice to Don Juan who taught him about the multiplicities of the natural world. Castaneda learned disciplines that exist in the world of the "seer," a type of visionary who combines intuitive "knowings" and rational sense with disciplined systems for success and survival. These multiplicities and "knowings" are useful for active or emerging administrators. Brunner (2000) examined the daily engagements of women superintendents, applying Castaneda's seven principles of power.

Brunner (2000) provided a model that adapted Castaneda's system to help turn insights from data into useful information. Castaneda's (year) system provided disciplines for living "impeccably" in a world of multiple realities, something that is a part of the world of every new administrator. Use of this system with women superintendents helped Brunner (2000) see a pattern in intangible data. This manuscript extends the work of Castaneda (year) and Brunner (2000) by suggesting a guiding list for women leaders.

In *The Power of Silence: Further Lessons of Don Juan*, Castaneda (1987) related Don Juan's sacred training for spiritual leaders. His system incorporated the use of seven Principles of Power. These principles may be used to measure success in school site leadership. Successful warriors, or leaders, embody these principles in their daily lives through an ethic of caring.

The first principle of power is knowing the battleground. "Warriors choose their battleground, a warrior never goes into battle without knowing what the surroundings are" (Castaneda, 1981, p. 278). Like this first principle, most of the mainstream literature on leadership advises leaders to know their surroundings, to know the culture (Bolman & Deal, 1991). Castaneda (1981) emphasized that knowing how to survive the battleground is knowing how to communicate in terms established by the surroundings. Learning to communicate effectively required a warrior's skills. Leader must know constituents and opponents, the factual basis of encounters, and where to find out details.

Castaneda (1981) described the second principle, "Discarding the Unnecessary." He said dependency on what we think is necessary makes us weaker, "This is not meant to imply that interdependency weakens us; it

is just to give the message that warriors must be strong" (p. 278). Leaders do not bring excesses into a situation, and they listen carefully.

The third principle of power is "Choosing Battles." Castaneda (1981) stated,

Aim at being simple. Apply all the concentration you have to decide whether or not to enter into battle, for any battle is a battle for one's life. . . . A warrior must be willing and ready to make his last stand here and now. But not in a helter-skelter way." (p. 280)

Castaneda (1981) conveyed that complications may draw us from the central purpose and leave us confused. Leaders in schools must choose battles and must recognize that it is not possible to pursue all battles—prioritization is important—planning is essential.

The fourth principle of power is "Taking Risks." Castaneda (1981) admonished "relax, abandon yourself, fear nothing" (p. 280). Castaneda recalled a moment when he could not organize his thoughts. Because of this, he took deep breaths to relax. Don Juan praised him and reminded him of the fourth principle. Castaneda came to understand that unless we could move into a state of relaxation in which he feared nothing, he would not be able to move in the direction of the unknown; he would not be able to take a risk. According to Cantor and Bernay (1992), "Risk taking is a critical factor of successful leadership" (p. 158). Bennis (1989) agreed. At the top of the list of characteristics of future leaders is "willing to take risks" (p. 41).

As Don Juan said in Castaneda's (1967) book *Journey to Ixtlan: The Teachings of Don Juan*, "The basic difference between an ordinary [person] and a warrior is that a warrior takes everything as a challenge while an ordinary [person] takes everything as either a blessing or a curse" (Fields, 1994, p. 3). Brunner (2000) showed that the women superintendents understood that courage is not evident unless difficulty or adversity is present. The women had courage to be self-reflective—a necessity for leaders in determining next actions.

The fifth principle of power is "Seeking Retreat." Castaneda (1981) stated, "When faced with odds that cannot be dealt with, warriors retreat for a moment. They let their minds meander. They occupy their time with something else. Anything would do" (p. 281). Castaneda wrote that at one point in his warrior training he could not focus on a particular topic. He began examining the furniture in the room and even the buff-colored tiles that made up the floor. One of his trainers praised him for retreating for a

moment by letting his mind meander. Site leaders value the importance of reflection and know that it is essential to success.

Castaneda (1981) related that warriors are often confronted with so much new or confusing information that retreat is critical, much like the life of practicing administrators. In times of retreat, warriors do anything that takes their minds away from the confusion of the moment. After taking respites, warriors are ready to move quickly with sureness; they have regained their sense of purpose and self. Medical science reminds us to take care of our bodies as well as our minds; Castaneda reminds us that we think more clearly when we take care of both. Further, retreat is a part of the warrior's training. It must be practiced along with the other principles or the warrior never reaches a state of impeccable practice, solving the "riddle of the heart," which is guided by three actions for people who live the principles.

The sixth principle is "Compressing Time." "Warriors compress time; even an instant counts. In a battle for life, a second is an eternity; and an eternity that may decide the outcome. Warriors aim at succeeding, therefore, they compress time. Warriors do not waste an instant". For an administrator, knowing how to prioritize and schedule time is essential.

Brunner (2000) indicted that women superintendents compressed time by:

1. Doing more than one thing at a time.
2. Thinking about more than one thing at a time.
3. Viewing the role as one relational thing to do.
4. Understanding the patterns of uncertainty and ambiguity.

The seventh principle is "Exercising Power." Power and the exercise of power are at the heart of a warrior's social role and are at the heart of the school leaders role. Castaneda's (1981) trainer was most impressed with this principle. In the application of power, the differences in outcomes are discerned between "power over" and "power with." Castaneda pointed to situations when power was given away and people became all they could be and deserved credit for their successes. As the internal and external environments are addressed in this model of "power with" followers, this collaborative model of power is emphasized as a model for success. Castaneda's model dealt with perceptions of individuals within a particular context. Castaneda then "filters" the seven principles of power through the "riddle of the heart," stating that apprentice warriors must be schooled in

three areas of expertise: the mastery of awareness, the mastery of intent, and the art of stalking. He stated that:

[t]hese three areas of expertise are the three riddles [warriors] encounter in their search for knowledge. The mastery of awareness is the riddle of the mind. . . . The mastery of intent is the riddle of the spirit, or the paradox of the abstract. . . . The art of stalking is the riddle of the heart; it is the puzzlement [warriors] feel upon becoming aware of two things: first that the world appears to us to be unalterably objective and factual because of peculiarities of our awareness and perception; [and] second, that if different peculiarities come into play, the very things about the world that seem so unalterably objective and factual change. (Castaneda, 1981, p. 14-15)

### **Application**

Leadership is a challenge for those who are brave enough to weather the battlefield. Leaders can learn from the themes of warrior and director, as framed through the work of Castaneda, Brunner, and Starratt, and this knowledge may contribute to their success. Castaneda (year) wrote about what he learned from the warrior, Don Juan, a Yaqui Indian from northern Mexico. The seven principles of power for Yaqui warriors outlined through his work could equally be termed “principle of educational leadership.”

Don Juan’s system offers guidance for living in a world of multiple realities, shifting perceptions, and changing paradigms. Its blend of intuitive leaps, rational “sense” and disciplined systems can help individuals survive in leadership positions. Its applications school leaders are:

- Know your battleground.  
According to Don Juan, “A warrior never goes into battle without knowing what the surroundings are.” As an educational leader, learn all you can about your surroundings so you can choose the time and place for action.
  - Communication is paramount—“insiders” (to the organization) are important, but it is equally important to include “outsiders,” the community, the media and service organizations to accentuate and build the positive culture of your school.

- Networking is essential to success—a leader must identify key educational leaders within and outside of the school, and rely on their strengths.
- Understand the culture and the community standards—don't try to reinvent the wheel.
- Know your opponents, or enemy. And knowing the enemy, keep him/her close to you. You never know when listening might happen—with the outcome being success.
- Know the contract. The contract and the past practices of the school and district will be invaluable in conflict management and consensus building.
- Mentors and Mentoring . . . Don't Go It Alone. Researchers have reported the importance of mentors in furthering women's careers in educational administration by providing support, encouragement and networking opportunities (Cohn, 1989; Grogan, 1996; Mertz, 1987). Research concludes that women in educational administration benefit from having women as their mentors because they could explain the unwritten rules of the organization and identify the informal networks (Fleming, 1991; Hill & Ragland, 1995).
- Discard the Unnecessary  
Be willing to let go of what no longer serves your purpose. The dependency that makes you hold on too long can weaken your leadership.
  - Focus on the Mission and Vision.
  - Delegate to the lowest responsible level.
  - Interdependency can be good—but be able to recognize when the school and its children are not being served through its continuance.
  - Learn what is working, and what is not. If it is working, don't try to fix it.
- Choose your Battles  
Don Juan advises warriors to keep it simple; apply your concentration to deciding whether to enter a particular battle. It is important for leaders to stay focused on their central purpose and keep their priorities clear.
  - Leaders must be aware of their personal and professional commitments. Once the leader understands his/her role as principal, goal setting and team planning can occur with



success. With these structures in place, leaders can more easily “choose their battles.”

- Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and follow up on those issues that can be resolved.
- Leaders in schools must choose battles and must recognize that it is not possible to pursue all battles—prioritization is important—planning is essential.

- **Take Risks**

Deep breathing in the face of fear can help you relax enough to organize your thoughts. It is useful to frame a problem as a challenge instead of a curse; risk and adversity give your courage a chance to shine.

- Be self-reflective—this is a necessity for leaders to determine their next actions.
- Be open to new ideas and change. Don’t say, or stay with something because it is just “comfortable.” There will always be faculty who say, “but this is the way it has always been done.” There is value in this, but be open to considering alternatives.
- After considering the adverse consequences, take risks realizing the positive possibilities.

- **Seek Retreat**

When things get overwhelming, take a break and let your mind meander. Do something physical. “We think clearer when we take care of our bodies as well as our minds.”

- Measure your emotion and your energy. Periods of reflection can be beneficial. Site leaders value the importance of reflection and know that it is essential to success.
- Before making a major decision, take at the very minimum several minutes; close your door to the world. . . . Then move forward. Your focus is essential.

- **Compress Time**

Every moment counts, in administration as well as battle. Compress time by doing and thinking about more than one thing at a time.

- Understand the patterns of uncertainty and ambiguity.
- Only touch a piece of paper once; return phone calls as soon as possible—problems get bigger when they are put off.

- Wait efficiently. Bring reading, work, etc. You will be amazed at how you can accomplish more and arrive less stressed!
- Exercise Power
 

A successful leader refers continually to the meaning and purpose of the drama itself, while encouraging the players to express the drama in their own terms.

  - Leadership needs to be *empowering*; it is the ability to admit and even to celebrate that others have the ability and skills to carry on the job with excellence in the absence of the leader.
  - It takes more time at the beginning to discover the strengths and interests of others—but once they are discovered, these individuals can be involved in streamlining site processes: the mission, the budget, and staff and community functions. Bring these people to the decision table and involve them.
  - A collaborative model of “power with” will serve you better than “power over.”
  - Sharing power in a caring leader-follower relationship is a model for leadership success.

## References

- Bennis, W. (1989). *On becoming a leader*. New York: Addison-Wesley.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (1991). *Reframing organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Brunner, C. C. (2000). *Principles of power: Women superintendent's and the riddle of the heart*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Cantor, D. W., & Bernay, T. (1992). *Women in power*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Castaneda, C. (1967). *Journey to Ixtlan: The lessons of Don Juan*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Castaneda, C. (1981). *The eagle's gift*. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Castaneda, C. (1987). *The power of silence: Further lessons of Don Juan*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Estes, C. P. (1992). *Women who run with the wolves: Myths and stories of the wild women archetype*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Fields, R. (1994). *The awakened warrior: Living with courage, compassion and discipline*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.
- Starratt, R. J. (1993). *The drama of leadership*. London: The Falmer Press.