

# DECENCY, AUTHENTICITY, AND APPROACHABILITY IN LEADERSHIP

*Suzie Bishop & Sam Shriver*

There are some things in life you will simply never forget and for the two of us, it was meeting Frances Hesselbein.

It was a scheduled introduction in the Fall of 2017 that took place in her New York City office. As we reflected on the encounter, we decided it was—her eyes. We are convinced Frances had eyes like no other! They locked you in and immediately made you feel welcome. There was something about her that immediately communicated: *“I’m glad you are here. I value our time together. I want to learn about you. How can I help you along your journey?”*

Before anyone had said a word, all pretense was removed. She was genuine and gave us permission to simply be ourselves. There was no role to play or script to follow. Though degrees, plaques, awards, and photos covered her walls, she made you feel as though you were the most important person in the room—you were valued, and you would be heard.

We recognized later that was the essence of her gift as a leader and something we have reflected upon often. She wasn’t driven by gaining additional experience or recognition for herself. She was driven by opening doors and developing future leaders. She understood,

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†This article is part of a Special Issue commemorating the life and leadership of Frances Hesselbein.

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to her core, that putting others first and showing them respect was a positive outcome for everyone. It's the kind of thing that sounds great but, in reality, is counterintuitive since most of us must unlearn the tendency to protect or satisfy ourselves first, then direct whatever energy we have left over to the needs of others. Frances, instinctively and unwaveringly, flipped that mindset to prioritize the needs of others, which made her one of the most successful and revered leaders of all time.

So, how will Frances's legacy serve us moving forward? We believe significantly! The following quotes from her well-chronicled leadership journey are filled with wisdom and continue to challenge us each time we read, recite, and reflect upon them:

- “Leadership is a matter of how to be, not how to do.”
  - Regardless of the leadership approach you use in any particular situation, leading people is first and foremost about decency, authenticity and approachability.
- “To serve is to live.”
  - Helping others achieve their potential or work their way through a challenge provides your life with true and meaningful purpose—open doors.
- “Mentoring is a leadership privilege.”
  - Providing others with the benefit of your experience when it is relevant, counselling when it is needed and trusting or empowering them when they are ready to take flight is

indeed an honor—and when done well, you will feel exponential joy.

To say that Frances will be missed is an understatement beyond measure. However, given the wealth of knowledge and resources she left behind, it would be equally misleading to suggest that she is really gone. You simply don't forget leaders like Frances Hesselbein. Through heartfelt listening and acting accordingly, we carry on the tradition of a leadership icon to improve ourselves and the leaders around us.

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