

LEADERS in Action

Jason Womack interviews Commissioner ANN M. RAVEL



Commissioner Ann M. Ravel was nominated to the Federal Election Commission by President Barack Obama. Prior to her appointment, Ms. Ravel served as Chair of the California Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) overseeing the regulation of campaign finance, lobbyist registration and reporting, and ethics and conflicts of interest related to officeholders and public employees. Ms. Ravel received her B.A. from the University of California, Berkeley and her J.D. from the University of California, Hastings College of the Law.

Q&A

Jason Womack: *Do you have a simple way to think about how leaders get better?*

Commissioner Ann Ravel: Leaders must know that they can always be better, and focus on improving. I read — books on leadership, on communication, on current political issues. I seek out people who work in my organization, and meet with them to get a sense of the issues they're concerned about.

Remember, the work you do is important. When you take time to reflect deeply on those who benefit from the work you do you will want to be better at what you do and how you do it...every day.

JW: *What was your Defining Moment as a leader?*

AR: There was a specific time when I didn't set out to become a leader, however, my predecessor was fired and I was called to serve under particularly difficult circumstances. There were articles criticizing our office, and our leadership. I immediately recognized that I had to examine — and reexamine — what it takes to be a good leader.

I accepted that the perceptions were the reality, and I had to work to change those perceptions through action. I attended an executive program at a business school, and during the "Ropes Course" (an activity in which participants were to swing on a rope off of a platform) I realized personal fear. I considered myself to be strong and independent, and in that moment, I began to understand that everyone grapples with fear of something. Everyone is different, and individuals must be considered on who they are, and how they experience the workplace.

JW: *What will leaders increasingly need to include that up until now they may not have had to study in great detail?*

Continued

Q&A with Ann Ravel

In our interview, Commissioner Ann Ravel shares her insight on listening, reflecting and growing as a leader.

Learn about the questions Commissioner Ravel asks herself every day. As you read our conversation, ask yourself, "What daily habits keep me on track?"

AR: We must think more deeply about how technology is going to help - and hinder - our mission. The next generation understands and uses technology at a level that many senior leaders find hard to comprehend.

The best leaders will continue to learn. Read, listen, and talk about current events. In an increasingly complicated world, leaders must work to un-complicate and understand complex challenges.

JW: *What do you think are the most important questions effective leaders need to ask of themselves?*

AR: The questions we ask ourselves serve to slow us down. Ask yourself, “Am I seeing individuals based on who they are and where they are coming from?”

The question I ask myself every day is, “What can we do to make a difference in the community?” When I listen to the answer, I do everything possible to line things up in a way to accomplish those underlying purposes.

JW: *What are some of your own habits or routines as an effective leader?*

AR: Reading and thinking about the real, key challenges we face equips me to make things better and move the ball forward in the area I’m working on.

Writing about what I’m reading and thinking clears my mind and clarifies my perspective. I keep a note pad by my bed, one in my purse, and one in my car.

JW: *How do you listen - and what do you listen for - so you hear more than what is just being said by those you lead?*

AR: It takes some time. Leaders have to first establish goodwill, and have an actual interest in people. I sit with people in informal-type settings, over coffee, for example.

Afterward, I follow up with that person by sending an article, making an introduction, or checking in on a project they are working on.

JW: *How would you define your leadership philosophy in just one sentence?*

AR: We must fully understand and communicate the purpose and the significance of the work that we do.

-