

Remarks by Pat Mitchell
Forum of Executive Women
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
September 23, 2003

Thank you, Kyra for that generous introduction, and for the work you do every day for my favorite public television station...at least my favorite one today.

Hard to have a favorite when all 349 public television stations that PBS serves do such good work.

But part of why I am so pleased to be in Philadelphia today is that I do get to acknowledge WHY Y and the significant contributions they make to this community.

Bill Marazzo, WHY Y's leader is here this morning with several of his talented team. Can I ask them to stand and be acknowledged?

And in return, can I acknowledge 'viewers like you' whose support makes it possible for WHY Y to continue the quality programming and services they provide to the Greater Philadelphia area.

I am grateful to Lori Reiner, Irene Hannan, Sharon Hardy, and all of you for inviting me here and for your work every day to advance women leaders throughout this city and region.

Earlier this year, I was participating in an executive conference at the Aspen Institute. Among the notable speakers was former Israeli Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Shimon Perez.

He gave a moving speech about the need for leadership in the Middle East peace process, and when he finished his remarks, he was asked what he thought was the most important change that had happened in the past 100 years?

Without a moment's hesitation, he answered, "the emancipation of women."

You could have heard a pin drop in that room. This was not the answer anyone anticipated.

Remember, this was definitely not a women's conference. In fact, there were probably only six women in the whole place. But he certainly had everyone's

attention as he began to eloquently and clearly give examples, country by country, of ways in which the political, economic and social stability were linked to the status of women.

Where women were economically empowered and politically engaged, societies flourished and where this was not the case, whole civilizations were being held back from their fullest potential.

It was a compelling presentation and I come back to it in my mind each time I prepare to stand in front of a group of empowered women and enlightened men as the touchstone for any thoughts I might share about where we are and where we need to go.

We have come a long way in this country since our emancipation less than 100 years ago, but our journey to fullest potential continues.

In many ways, the hurdles that remain are within our power to eliminate, not just for ourselves but for women everywhere.

“Not for ourselves alone” was, as you know, the sentiment expressed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony when their long journey towards voting rights for women ended. A right they did not live to exercise.

It is in that spirit that I share some of my own journey this morning and the lessons learned not for myself alone.

When the search committee at PBS asked me if I realized I would be the first woman president of a broadcast company.

I was not surprised, as not once during my 30 years in television had I worked for a woman president.

There are still no other women Presidents of a national broadcast company. And does that matter?

I believe it does and let me give you a few examples of why I hold this conviction so strongly.

Like many of you, I have often been the first and the only...a soloist looking for a chorus.

There wasn't a chorus to be found when I started in television in the early 70's, but there were new opportunities for women and minorities as the powerful

television networks were feeling pressure to begin to look a bit more like the audiences they were attracting.

The problem was that once they hired us...to make that difference...the last thing they wanted from us was anything different.

For those of us in front of the cameras, we were encouraged to lower our voices, wear ugly suits, and stay as far away as possible from covering stories about women and children.

In other words, try not to bring attention to the fact that we were different in any way and to spend way too much time and energy proving we could do the same jobs in the same way as the men who held them when we walked in the door.

This was not very satisfying for anyone and while there were diverse voices in newsrooms and executive suites, most of those voices weren't speaking up for change or speaking out for the very diversity of opinion, point of view, perspective that our presence was supposed to ensure.

And since there were usually only a few spots reserved for women or minorities in each television organization, the unspoken law was: protect your turf. This made it difficult to find allies, much less mentors, and even more difficult to find an authentic voice among us-one that was brave enough to speak out or speak up.

Some of us began to rethink this game; if the goal was to make a difference in television, then we needed to do that in a different voice.

The fact is, having a seat at the table when decisions are made matters. But bringing a different voice to the discussions about what stories get told, what policies are pursued, what perspectives are missing... that matters more.

I began to focus my work on the issues of women and children, and that's when I begin the journey to self realization that was not just for myself alone.

And like most journeys, there was a fork in the road.

I was working for the TODAY program, in those days, the Holy Grail...and I had convinced the producers that I wanted to tell the story of women on the front lines of conflict.

There were several to choose from: the middle-east, Northern Ireland, El Salvador...all engaged in the late eighties in violent civil wars.

I went first to Israel and found women, both Israelis and Palestinians-who had created the first Peace movement in that region.

They would stand together on a street corner in Jerusalem every Friday holding placards protesting the violence.

They were the mothers from both sides of the conflict who were watching their husbands and children die.

They were trying to get their ideas for a peaceful settlement to a long term conflict in front of their leaders, but no one would listen.

I had a similar challenge in that the head of NBC news called to tell me he didn't think this story was worth the money and time and he wanted me to return to NY.

I could not abandon this story. I decided to stay and managed to convince the crew to stay with me, with no guarantee that they would ever be paid for the work.

We were there when the Mothers in Black and other groups convened the first women's peace conference between Israelis and Palestinians in 1990. We documented their different approach to shaping an agreement that would have ended the conflict then.

It took one weekend and was 7 paragraphs long.

As one of the speakers said on the first night..."look it's Friday night. We have to be home by Sunday. So no long speeches, no list of grievances. Let's just get this done."

And so they did but when they returned, they could not get their peace agreement in front of either Israeli or Palestinian leadership.

But they did not give up. They are still there, standing on the street corner, meeting in private, speaking out and speaking up in a woman's voice for peace.

I remember Bella Abzug, who was there at the conference said, "in the 21st century, women will change the nature of power rather than power changing the nature of women."

In this country, we have some examples, never enough, in my opinion, of women who are changing the nature of power.

But we don't have to look far to see that the journey towards power, economically, politically, culturally is far from over.

Consider the journey of the women of Afghanistan.

Before the Taliban, they were 40% of that country's doctors, lawyers and teachers. During the Taliban, they were banned from all public life, invisible beneath smothering burquas.

With the Taliban vanished...at least for now...they are beginning the long journey towards emancipation, a journey still full of fear and danger.

I serve on the US/ Afghan Women's Council, public/private partnership, that is attempting to help the women there rebuild their lives and the young women claim the education and the access to work that they have never known.

Some have chosen to become journalists and to tell the stories that have not and will not be told without their voices to do so.

At PBS, we have mentored some of these aspiring Afghan journalists with astonishing results. Two of them most recently with us just completed a new documentary called Afghanistan Unveiled which you will see soon on PBS.

In October, Afghanistan will hold its first ever constitutional convention. While there will be some women in attendance, few believe that this new charter will grant equal women rights under the law.

I had the privilege of attending a lunch with the a delegation of Afghan women ministers and Secretary of State, Colin Powell who explained to them that our country also failed in that respect; that our constitution did not initially recognize more than half the population, including him and including me and most of you.

Secretary Powell went on to encourage these women to make sure that their constitution would be broad enough in its language to encompass the fundamental rights of all human beings.

So that even if they don't get everything they wanted this time around...full emancipation, they will at least have the freedom to continue the journey.

He also recommended that they come here to Philadelphia to see firsthand the Constitution Center. And they reported back that they were both surprised and reassured by what they saw.

There are no women among those statues in the signing room, but as the Center makes so compelling clear, our Constitution is both flexible enough, strong enough, and fundamentally sound enough to evolve as our democracy evolved.

That is what these Afghan women hope for their country and that is what our country must continue to stand for to them and all others.

Freedom and equality are not for ourselves alone...but their value to each and every one of us grows as we extend these values to others.

It's time on our journey to ask ourselves are we women leaders or are we leaders for women?

Fortune magazine publishes a list of the 50 Most powerful women in business every year which is due to come out next week.

I am always excited to see this celebration of women business leaders and each year, I have been invited to attend the conference that focuses on the achievements the list recognizes.

At last year's conference, the keynote address was given by the # 1 woman on the list, the CEO of Hewlett Packard, Carly Fiorina.

She began her speech with condemnation of the concept of the list and the conference, arguing that she and the rest of us were leaders-not women leaders-and that the more we celebrated our differences, the more we defined what we could do and how we would be judged and evaluated.

As you can imagine, she set off a heated debate.

Now, if what she was saying is that she wanted people, especially the press, to focus on the way that she was handling a huge merger fight, and not her "tailored suits" or her "stylishly cut hair," that's fair enough. I couldn't agree more.

But if she meant that we have to lead in the exact same manner as men to be treated with the same respect accorded male business leaders, then I have to respectfully disagree. Women who lead can have even greater impact, in my opinion, by fully embracing their differences as well as the ways in which they are equal to those who may have set the norm.

Just as Bella suggested we can change the nature of power rather than be changed by it, can't we change the concept of leadership rather than letting leadership be defined by one gender or one race or economic status?

Of course we can, and you are doing that every day.

Now, none of us walks into the office every morning thinking, "Hmmm, how would a woman solve this problem?" And certainly, we never assume that all women would solve it the same way.

But we do bring a different perspective to our jobs, and I find that empowering, not diminishing. We do make different kinds of managers and leaders-and I think the end result is a better, more equitable, more diverse environment.

Sure, most of us long for the day when we won't have to focus on this. When it will not be particularly noticed when a woman is made CEO, or named to a Fortune 500 corporate board.

But until that day comes, many of us will still be in the business of breaking new ground. We'll still be in the spotlight, watched and judged and perhaps even held to higher standards of performance and evaluation.

Remember what they said about Ginger Rogers: She did everything Fred Astaire did, but she did it backwards and in high heels.

Ann Richards, who made that line famous, has recently added, that it's walking in those heels that has made the journey seem so long.

But let's not forget why we are on this journey...which is at the end of the day, is about recognizing and celebrating the diversity that makes our communities and our country thrive.

And if I might just say a word about the role of media in this journey towards a thriving democracy. We have a big role to play. And many are asking, how well is the current media landscape responding to the responsibility that comes with such unparalleled power.

Not well enough if you consider the outpouring of concern from ordinary citizens...some 7 million wrote letters and sent emails...in response to the recent FCC rules changes that would have allowed further consolidation of ownership of media and the potential for 3 or 4 global conglomerates to control what you see and hear and read.

Without turning this into a pledge pitch...which is somewhat irresistible with a podium and viewers like you...I do want to remind you that there is still one media enterprise that belongs to you and the programming you will see on WHYY and every other public television in this country will deliver what you need to see, hear, read.

We will not join the race for the bottom for profits and popularity.

We have a different mission to serve, not to sell. To use media for a higher purpose. To make difference by being different.

That's a pledge and a promise.

Allow me to ask for a pledge and a promise from you...and it's not a check for WHYY although Bill would be happy to accept them and Rebecca Rimmel, President of the Pew Foundation would be happy to match it...

No, this is a pledge that I believe will speed up our journey towards the kind of world we want to leave for our children. For me, this means embracing fully the notion of our journey as leaders as one that we take not for ourselves alone and that our different voices, fully deployed, can and will make a positive difference.

And along with our voice, I have a couple of additional assets to mention that we can bring to bear for social change: our minds and our money.

American women, by themselves, are in effect the largest national economy on earth. We control \$1 trillion of our own earnings, and influence another \$1 trillion in household spending.

We're the bill payers in 95 percent of all households, and we make up 43 percent of all American with assets greater 500K. And over the next decade, a larger percentage of America's wealth will be in the hands of women than ever before.

What are we going to do with it? USE IT to create positive social change.

Let's find our distinctive, differentiated voice as consumers and choose our purchases as carefully and by the same standards as we choose our politicians - values and social consciousness.

We spend 12 billion a year on perfumes in Europe and the US.

Can you guess how much money is needed to provide reproductive health care to all the women in the developing world?

That's right 12 billion.

As investors, let's insist that the companies we invest in have a good record of women's employment and are hospitable to women. Let's be aware of who serves on the boards of the businesses we support.

You may be shocked to find how few of the fortune 500 companies have any women at all on their boards.

Your recent initiative, Women on corporate Boards, revealed how far this community has to go in engaging women's voices. And yet, the statistics point to the positive difference women can make: companies with the highest revenues have at least one woman board member; half of the companies with lowest revenue have no women board members.

Draw your own conclusions about that.

In Atlanta recently, a group of concerned women with investing power, did their own analysis of the banks in town and decided, as a group, to pull their money from their one bank that had no women of its Board.

Need I say that this Bank now has a woman on its Board...and let's just hope she defines that power for good rather than being defined by it as it now exists.

Let's let our trade associations and community groups and politicians know that we want to see more women in positions of influence and in their executive suites.

A recent poll indicated 76% of all Americans believe it's time for a woman to reside at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue...and not in the East wing but in the West Wing.

Let's be supportive of other women's organizations with time and money.

Let's use the unique networks we've established in so many cities around the country as well as other countries around the world to be a voice for women and girls who are struggling to find theirs.

I conclude that:

Being a leader for women means that when we are at the table where decision are made, we use our voices, our perspectives, our full range of experiences to help realize the fullest potential of the enterprise we represent or support or lead.

Being a leader for women means that when we reach the top, we drop ladders for those coming behind. We plan for our succession.

Being a leader for women means reaching back for others who are still struggling against the twin hurdles of poverty and prejudice here and everywhere.

Being a leader for women means speaking up for all women who still live without basic human rights, who are held back by culture, tradition, law, who look to us to model the way full emancipation can change everything for women in Afghanistan or Iraq or inner city Philadelphia.

Just like Shimon Perez said...

Our responsibilities as leaders for women goes beyond our own professions.

It goes to our choices as mothers, as members of our communities, as citizens of this country.

What we choose to do as leaders, how we use our power for ourselves and for others will shape more than just the journey for those who follow.

It will determine their destination.