

**Excerpts from Jane Chmielinski Discussion: The Talent of Leadership**  
**January 19, 2006**

My thanks to Liz for opening up her home and hosting such a wonderful event. I'm truly humbled by the number of good friends and colleagues, as well as new faces that have come tonight. There are so many people in this room that have made such a difference in so many ways — to me personally and to the Greater Boston community as a whole.

When Liz first approached me to participate in the second year of her Salon Series, I must admit I was skeptical. The topic of Leadership is so broad and so subjective that I couldn't imagine what I could offer in the way of new and innovative information. After all, most people get their management information from reading airline magazines on the plane. An interesting factoid - if you google the word *Leadership* on Amazon.com — you end up with 18,604 references! You can walk into any bookstore and easily get lost among the shelves and shelves of books that claim to define leadership identify leaders give you tips to become a leader and on and on.

My hope is to pass along a few thoughts in the form of personal examples and stories as to what I consider to be some of The Talents of Leadership .

In thinking about what I would say tonight — who would I describe as a leader — my immediate first thought is my mother. All through her life, my mother has led with a strong and silent determination, grace and strength in whatever she was doing. She never got to be President of a company or run a public agency and she certainly didn't have the same avenue of opportunities that I have pursued, but she still led and continues to be a leader today. I truly hope I exhibit these same leadership talents that I see everyday in my mother.

My work history is no different than most of you in this room, from entry level to mid-career to an executive slot, whether in the public or the private sector. But in each phase of my career, I've been lucky enough to find some wonderful mentors who challenged me, made me think and made me take risks and responsibilities beyond what I thought I could achieve. And that is the first talent I would ascribe to a Leader — the desire to be a Stretch Performer and use your own capabilities, instincts and educational skills to stretch beyond your comfort zone.

After I had my first interview and subsequent job offer at the MBTA, I actually turned it down. Even though the money was okay and the people seemed nice, the job itself didn't grab me and I couldn't picture myself doing it. My father thought I was crazy (guaranteed health benefits for life?!). But as luck would have it, the same person from the T that had interviewed me for the first job — Jack Leary — must have liked me because he called with another possibility. It paid less but it sounded like interesting work — and I found myself entering the world of the environmental planner. I truly enjoyed it and this job formed the base of my career path. My message from this story is that sometimes you have to step back to get to where you want to be. It's also important that you have a passion for what you do and bring that excitement to the job.

Keeping the level of excitement and interest is also critical. I'll admit that part of my style is humor and sometimes that can be interpreted as not taking your responsibilities seriously. I'm especially prone to cutting up when I'm bored or unchallenged. Unfortunately in the moment is all we have to showcase our abilities and the valuable lesson I learned from one special manager at the T was — You have to start liking and doing the job you have to get to the job you want.

In 1993, I left the MBTA to join then-F.R. Harris and run the Boston environmental practice. I learned quickly that life as a consultant is very different from life as the client. But I appreciated the view from both sides, enjoyed the challenges and when we were awarded the contract for Tren Urbano in Puerto Rico, I saw an opportunity to work on a signature transportation project that would totally change the culture of a very unique part of the world. Despite warnings that I would fall off the corporate radar screen, I decided it was the right move for me so I left Boston

for San Juan. I consider the time I worked on that project one of the most rewarding of my professional career. And I guess I didn't fall too far off the screen — since instead of returning to the Boston office as I had expected, I was given an opportunity to move to Corporate Headquarters in New York and become part of the management team. That move has led to a series of interesting positions, including my recent appointment as President of DMJM Harris last October. It's a privilege for me to lead the talented and hard-working staff that is DMJM Harris and I'm honored at the support and confidence they've given me. I believe that we will do great things that have a significant national and global impact.

There's no magic to leadership. We work all our lives to develop particular skill sets that differentiate us from others and enable us to capitalize on a particular opportunity at a particular time. And timing is everything. To me, a key talent of leadership is to be in the right place at the right time with the right skill sets to make a difference. If I were to give any parting advice as to how to develop your leadership talents, I would say:

- Seize the opportunities you're given or work to create opportunities to seize.
- Be fair.
- Become the expert in whatever field you're in. If you're an engineer, be the best engineer. If you're a writer, be the best writer.
- Stay true to yourself.
- Keep your head down and work hard.

**Liz's Note:** Jane speaks without notes. These are excerpts only from Jane's remarks. They don't include her stories and remarkable humor which were truly the highlights of her talk. To catch these I urge you to see her in person. Jane and I will be in Los Angeles at the LA Chapter WTS Leadership Series on March 14th. Attend if you can.