



# THE CORNER OFFICE

**As a Sister of Divine Providence, Marie de la Roche Province, Sister Barbara McMullen believes that much like a flying trapeze artist lets go and spins through the air, trusting in the strong arms of the "catcher," we each must trust that God is there, waiting for us to let go, and He will be our "eternal catcher."**

## Let Go of the Trapeze & See Where God Takes You

Trust is the foundation of any successful business or personal relationship. It not only allows us to overcome fear and doubt, but ultimately brings peace of mind. When trust is present, a person feels a confidence that everything will somehow work out. Much like the trapeze catcher, leaders play a crucial role in developing and maintaining trust -- by showing reliability, empathy and a realization of each individual's personal goals.



In her book, *Soul Stretching: The Inner Landscape of an Ordinary Life*, McMullen writes, "Maybe we are not flying on a trapeze, but perhaps we are on a spiritual journey that is taking us to new places, new understandings, new horizons." She says it is those times that often stretch us

### About Us:

Corner Office is a monthly publication produced by REALM.

Each newsletter will explore the multi-faceted topic of leadership with notable senior Women Religious leaders. Through these interviews, we hope you will not only gain insight and expertise, but find "pearls of wisdom" that inspire you to lead with passion and purpose.

### SAVE THE DATE:

Join us in Dallas, Texas on October 26th and 27th for the 2013 LeadingAge Catholic Leaders Symposium!



out of our comfort zone and call us to a deeper trust... to let go and just enjoy the ride.

McMullen currently serves as Executive Director of the Women of Providence in Collaboration, a national organization of Providence communities across the United States and Canada. Read on as she shares how getting to know more about yourself, your relationship with God and with other people makes all the difference in setting the path for your future.

**REALM: Who are some of the best leaders you have worked for?**

BM: I think of a couple of the leaders that I worked for who I appreciated, as they were collaborative. Even though they might have been the CEO, they never made you feel like you didn't have something to offer. They were open and listening, they didn't micromanage, and if they knew that you understood how to do the job, they trusted you to do it. When I think about a couple others, they recognized the wisdom of the people that worked for them and trusted that they had ideas and possibilities for that organization. They operated out of a shared vision.

**REALM: What were some of the lessons you've learned from some of your "less than stellar" leaders?**

BM: I've learned that micromanaging defeats possibilities. When you try to control everything, it leads to status quo and non-production. Top-down leadership doesn't allow for a lot of other open possibilities and solutions.

**REALM: What was your first leadership experience?**

BM: I did things in high school and as a young woman at St. Teresa's Academy that developed my leadership skills. In my more professional life, outside of being a teacher in elementary school, my first experience in the community was being Formation Director and later being elected to Provincial Council when I was 36 years old. I was not in leadership full-time and I had to balance my leadership responsibilities with my ministry.

**REALM: Can you talk more about not being in full-time, congregational leadership and balancing it with ministry?**

BM: I believe it's a good experience because your ministry work keeps you grounded in the "real world," so to speak... and, broadens the vision you can bring to leadership. It helped me to learn how to create balance. When it came to the days that were set aside for leadership ministry, we used the time well because we knew we only had a certain amount of time together. It forced us to be more organized and clear in our tasks and outcomes.

**REALM: How did the balance go between those of you in full-time leadership and those in leadership and full-time ministry?**

BM: There were some rocky times, but I think there was a healthy respect among us so that things could move ahead smoothly. As for taking on duties according to what people felt they could really do, I think it stretched us to think in new ways.

**REALM: You mention that one of your first leadership positions was as Formation Director. How did that transition go from just being a member to being a leader?**

BM: In the beginning it was kind of scary. As Formation Director, you are working to help deepen a person's call to religious life and determining where God is really calling them. You do the best you can, but try not to get in the way of the Holy Spirit.

**REALM: What is your leadership style?**

BM: Collaborative and participative. I also see my style as servant leadership rooted in gospel values. I think networking is important, as well as listening. People have said that I am a good listener...I think you learn a lot by listening to others and letting them tell you where they are and what the problem is.

**REALM: When you were involved in other ministries, how did you live out servant leadership and gospel values?**

BM: There's a lot of trust and genuine compassion involved, as well as trying to accept the person where they are (whether they are a novice or a lay person who has come to you for some kind of spiritual direction or a colleague, community member or member of your leadership team). You try to let go of your own ego and really hear the other person. The gospel call of service is bringing your best self and applying the gifts and talents

that God has given you.

**REALM: What are some of the leadership skills you've needed to develop or get more training on as you have grown?**

BM: I certainly needed to develop more attention to detail, as well as create balance between my work and my personal life. I also learned over time not to take myself so seriously - especially amid stress. It is okay to make mistakes because you learn from them, however, you have to let go of them.

**REALM: What were some of the things that you did to create balance between your work and personal life?**

BM: When I was in leadership in Pittsburgh, I moved out of the Motherhouse. Not because I didn't love the sisters there, but because that was my place of work. I often found myself down in my office after dinner and working until late in the evening. You can't do that and keep yourself fresh... you need a break. I was able to take time for myself to read and do other activities, and then do fun things with the sisters with whom I lived, like playing cards or going to the movie.

**REALM: In your different leadership roles, how did you get feedback from those you were leading?**

BM: I really didn't need to seek out feedback because most people felt comfortable coming to me. If I really wanted to get feedback from people, I usually tried to set up a time just to have a good conversation and let them know that I was there and open/approachable if they had problems or questions. If they wanted to complain, I would listen and then we would talk about it.

**REALM: In your book you talk about doors opening and closing and that both of those actions can offer grace-filled opportunities. Can you share some grace-filled leadership opportunities that came about because a door opened or closed?**

BM: I certainly believe that being elected to the Marie de la Roche leadership team at our 2006 Chapter was a door that opened. It exposed me to the wider community and gave me an opportunity to know a greater number of sisters other than the St. Louis group - forming many new relationships that have continued today. When a door closes, there are always graces that come from those

decisions, too. When I decided to leave leadership it was a very tough decision, but then I see all that it has brought for me. It gave me time to write my book, as well as the opportunity to look for another kind of job that uses my leadership skills and gifts. Doorways are really great opportunities... the ones that open bring a myriad of life experiences and the ones that close (whether by our own choice or not), always have something around the corner to teach us.

**REALM: When you were in leadership and you interacted with other women religious leaders, what kind of collaborative experiences did you have?**

BM: We did some collaborative things back when I was in leadership in St. Louis when we had Pillar Place, a transitional housing ministry for women that was possible because of intercommunity collaboration. The way that I have been able to collaborate between our homeless shelter and the staff here - as well as with women religious in the area who know about it and support it - has opened doors to many different kinds of relationships. In Pittsburgh, getting to know the different religious communities there was certainly an open and enriching experience for me as we were able to collaborate on many issues. Collaborative partnership is essential today and is going to become even more important in the future as we see the need to respond to social issues and the many other signs of the times. Jesus told us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the sick and give shelter to those who need it. If we are doing that in a homeless shelter or elsewhere, it's all a part of the gospel challenge. In my current role, collaboration happens in all kinds of ways - through the newsletter I send out, collaborative writing projects, committee meetings and conferences/events throughout the year.

**REALM: In past roles, but certainly in your current role, how do you try to honor the leader in everyone?**

BM: You honor the leader in everyone by listening to the voices and visions of others and by recognizing the gifts and wisdom that come from those different voices. That way, people feel they have a role in creating something.

**REALM: As a leader, how do you go about resolving conflict?**

BM: For me, it's always sitting down with the person(s) involved and trying to really have an open dialogue. It

takes deep listening and setting egos aside. Even though you might feel you have the right stance, you may have to let go of that in order to really hear the person and try to see it from their perspective. You also have to acknowledge that mistakes were made and that sometimes there is not just one solution. Another important step is finding where forgiveness or reconciliation is needed and making it happen so you can move forward.

**REALM: How do you approach change?**

BM: I see change as good. If we continue to do the same thing, we're really not moving ahead. It is a process that you open yourself to, and you have to embrace it. If you come into change with an attitude of openness, then I don't think there is as much resistance to it within yourself or in others.

**REALM: What is your best advice for emerging leaders?**

BM: It is important to do your own inner work so that you can be your own person, and, in turn, bring your best self to the table - always acting with integrity and conviction. Joan Chittister once said, "Don't be afraid to speak. Be afraid of what will happen to the whole truth if you don't." I think that we all have a little piece of the truth in us, and if we are afraid to speak it, then some of the whole truth is missing. If we don't speak our truths and we don't allow the bigger picture to be seen, we're not living in a way where we experience everyone's little piece of the truth. As a leader, you will create a harmony that is fuller because you've accessed other people's visions and worked through the tough situations to get to the deeper connections that bind you together as one.

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