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EHDI 2019

ROOM: DaVinci AB  
The Accidental Leader

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>> Good morning. Thank you for choosing this session. I know there a lot sessions to choose from, and somehow I thought if I put I got here by accident, we'd just have the room packed. But I got everybody else in the conference planned this out to a T.

I'm so excited to be able to just spend 25 minutes with you on this topic. I actually put in for an hour and got 25 minutes. I know a lot of people did. So I probably won't be able to cover everything I was hoping to, and I cut the slides full half and was looking at them and thought oh, it's still there won't be enough hours in the day. This is one of my favorite topics to talk about. I'm Janet DesGeorges. I'm a mom of three daughters who are know in finding in their way in life in their 20s. My youngest daughter Sarah is Deaf. I, the ‑‑ I hope at the end to share the story of that photograph because the other title that I've been thinking about is called how not to take a selfie and other life lessons in leadership.

(Laughter)

>> So today I really want to, for us to be able to just pause in this crazy conference, I just came out of this amazing session on trauma informed care of care, I know whatever you were at, you were probably just, you know, resonating with everything, and I wanted, when I thought about what would I want to put in a paper for to talk about, are here at this conference, I know it's a little bit off the beaten path but it really resonates so much with me in terms of my own experiences in being a part of the EHDI system. And as I share my own story, this isn't really about what I have done or gone through. I really hope it's reflective of maybe some of the things that you've encountered in your life as you've moved through your leadership growth in the EHDI system.

And so I saw this quote once, and I loved it because I was really being challenged every time I was on a community phone meeting, I was doing e‑mail, and when somebody would ask me a question, I'd say, sorry, you broke up there, what was the question again? And I went through a season where I decided I was going to try to be more present in spaces I was in. So I invite you, if you can, put down your phone, if you have, I know I'm going to be up here looking, and it you're on your phone, I'll say oh, man, they're just texting. This is the best presentation I've ever been in. So.

(Laughter)

I like to say about that.

So just be here. But think about, pause, what if you weren't here today? Would you leave a mark? Do you have a presence? In your community, whether you're a parent or a EHDI systems leader or a screener in a hospital? Whatever role you play as part of the system that we're helping to create together, to begin to think about who I am in the place of this process.

>> I start this had conversation and the idea of the accidental leader and a project I was on, on leadership development over the course of a year. And they made us pick a project and I said, I'll just write a book, that sounds kind of easy. And it is still unpublished. I'm still working on it. I might publish it some day. But I wanted to think about leadership because I was going through this course with all of these high level leaders who come from years and years of research and were really big in their fields and thinking about what leadership was. I just remember trying to take all of that in the context of who I was, you know, in the terms of the roles that I had and began to think, what does leadership look like in the lives of ordinary people? So that was my beginning.

I love to think about our why. And I'm sure, I've been at tables all week where people say, why are you here? And everybody raises their hand. We want to help children who are Deaf or hard‑of‑hearing. Of course. But if I took that off the table and asked you why are you here, not just, well, because I have a job for it, but not ‑‑ but why is it that the EHDI system won't be what it is supposed to be if you walk away from this? And I can guarantee you every single person in this room has a role, you have either a life or experience or a way to say something that no one else can, that if you're not in the room, the system is going to keep going in a direction that would not be improved if it wasn't for your presence. So think about what is your why internally, who you are that has a voice.

I know right now there's somebody who is sitting in here who is a SODA. Do you even know what a SODA is? A sibling of a deaf child. We barely ever talk about that and just think about what presence in this system needs to be talked about.

So when you think about leadership, you can think about inspirational leaders, inspiration, thinking about leading the way, leading a system by being able to articulate and talk about what's important to you.

I just saw a video of a mom that just, like, nailed it about talking about the context of the decision making process in communication choices and so whether you're a leader around being inspirational, and it is usually not an and/or thing, or whether you need to be a leader in your workplace, you might actually be in an identified position where you're leading others, either as a parent leader, maybe you're leading a guy by your side program in the Hands & Voices chapter, maybe you're in another family organization or within the EHDI system in terms of terms of being able to build your leadership stills in leading a department or an organization.

And we're all so busy, right? That was my to do list last week. I should probably take all of that stuff off my desk and have some sort of Zen office. And that is not me above the picture. But just thinking about taking some space to grow your leadership skills is not just something that will happen in your calendar. You have to intentionally think about how am I going to grow my skills in leadership.

And today I'm going to just give you a few specific areas for myself that helped me grow as a leader from starting on the journey of coming to the very first EHDI conference as a mom, having absolutely no life experience or life preparation to lead the way. It was really, I was just there as a first timer thinking, what do I have to contribute here? So we're going to look at that. And to think about, you know, man, I would love to take the time to grow my leadership skills but I just don't have the time.

We are, I'm going to talk a little bit about this being the sacred holders of our own calendars. So you may be, if you need to get up and walk out because you're like oh, dang, I accidentally went in the wrong room, if you ‑‑ if you're not ‑‑ I think the conversations we've been having at Hands & Voices about leadership is a resonance of people saying, I don't even identify with the term "leader." That's something different than who and what I'm experiencing, and so I just want to put out on the table that when we talk with leadership, you can ‑‑ there's so many books on leadership, like leading from behind. So leadership is not just the idea that you have a title that gives you the authority or the power to lead. So I'm telling you all here, sitting here today, yes, are you a leader.

I want to give you a context for my own leadership development within the genesis and the growth of Hands & Voices. Our vision is we envision a world where children who are deaf and hard‑of‑hearing have every opportunity to achieve their full potential. No one has time to change the world. And when we started Hands & Voices in Colorado 22 years ago, we had no business plan. We had no really desire or even thinking about how would we expand. And yet, over the course of our organizational growth, we began to expand through our own I think motto and vision that resonated with people. We began to think about how do we grow logistically and practically. But I will tell you today that the very thing that went from one little star on a big map to wide and who we are today at Hands & Voices is a really a result of our intentional focus on leadership development.

So for me personally, it has been something that I've challenged in and I think organizationally. So you might want to think about in your organization or your agency to what extent are we having conversations or talking about or building our skills selectively as well leaders.

I think part of the focus and turn towards leadership in our organization was addressing burn out. You know, our organization is mostly run by volunteers, and so we do have some organizations that have paid staff, but not all of our 50 states and chapters in the U.S. and Canada have that.

So I recently read an article where they said the five indicators of burn out, I feel burned out, I don't feel burned out but others think I am, I'm like oh, man, you know, I can't stand my boss or board situation, I have no passion, I just don't really care. So addressing burn out is one of the ways that you think about leading. Are you ready to lead? Every one has a starting point. I love what one of our ‑‑ one of my good friends says, don't compare your beginning to someone else's hours and hours of mastery. You'll get there too.

I think also it's important to think about the season of life you are in. We've learned this organic thing about being parents and, within our organization, that there are times we just have to stop and step back from what we're trying to do as an organization because other life things are integrated and meshed in with what we're doing on a day‑to‑day basis.

I just had to tell you that last night I had the chance to sit next to a mom who is part of a newborn chapter at Hands & Voices. And the space in her life to create, to give some attention to this was because her world sort of fell in, she had to go to the bedside of her father during his last days at his vedside, and she was there for many, many hours, and one of the ways she took some time to have a little space was start looking at the Hands & Voices materials, I've never heard of anything like that, I was just like wow, that was just so impressive to me.

But we all have seasons of life where we have to take our leadership growth and let it be measured by what we're doing. So for my, one of the advices is to say, to think about where you're at in the journey, to reflect on it, write about it, talk about your own life experiences that have created in you a desire to make change. I've seen many parent leaders come into this because their experience was something they don't want another family to ever experience again. There is this passion and motivation around that.

Other families who had such a good experience and then when they see other families who have been struggling to say, hey, I know what works, I want to be a part of this. So to think about why is it, again, why is it you're here, what is your life experience that you're bringing in to this process that could help others.

I think one of the things that people talk about as well, leadership requires confidence, and one thing I like to think about is that your competence builds your confidence. And so thinking about where are my areas of strength. I often track back to where my confidence in the deafness experience as a parent came from, and it started on the floor across from our early intervention provider. That is one of the pieces and places that when I began to grow in my confidence that I was going down a journey that I had absolutely no experience or context for, and I was in a world where someone would come up to me and around the context of choice, you know, if you ever signed to your child, she'll never learn to speak, and at one workshop on another day someone else, so I'm a brand newborn three week old parent, another person came up to me and said, if you don't sign to your child, she will grow up and turn away from your family and the deaf community will be her family, both in the same day.

So the context of my own, I had no confidence in this at all. But that early intervention provider and her relationship with me and building the idea that we were owners of our daughter's journey, that we would make the best decisions for our child, give them good information resources. My competence, to this day, to stand up and talk about bringing on anything, screening results, midwives, genetic testing, honestly, I don't have to know anything about the topic and probably I will have this confidence that whether it is me on the hundreds of families that I've talked to that oh, I could stand here and talk from about the parent experience, not every parent experience, but because I've been able to grow that competence over time. So think about that.

I want you to also think about, and I know I just have to move through this 25 minutes pretty quick, what, if only I had published the book, I could stand in the back and sign autographed copies.

What gives you the right to find your voice? And this is really important for us as parents in the room. I remember early on I started almost every sentence with any time I had the courage to raise my hand, to say, well, you know, I'm just a mom but. And then everybody would stop and go, you're not just a am most. You're important here. So I get that. But I want you to ‑‑ I want to tell you, that's also my street credit. I like to say, I am just a mom, a mom. That is not a disempowered sentence. That is an empowered sentence. In fact, I may get T‑shirts for us one of these days saying yeah, I am just a am most. On the back it will say, it turned out it wasn't fluid in the ears. Those are my two T‑shirts for the EHDI conference some day. Anyway, but thinking about that whether your control is, this idea that yeah, yeah, I am just a mom. Thinking about what are your credentials. So I think, I think about this personally, having been in the system a long time, where there was sort of a hierarchy of respect and a belief in what people were saying based on the letters after their name. And so it took me awhile to stand on a platform when everybody was a Ph.D. except me, I was just the mom, in fact, people ‑‑ I went to a conference once where they put Dr. Janet DesGeorges and I kept calling them because I said, I'm not a doctor, I didn't go to school, other people worked really hard for those letters, take it off. They didn't. To this day, I still get junk mail that says, deer Dr. DesGeorges. I forward those to my mother.

(Laughter)

>> Because I'm a high school graduate. I don't have any academic background at all, in anything to do with the deaf experience. I'm just a mom. So thinking about, but I do know that as my journey grew and I began to be in a position where I needed some skills around management, I remember the first time somebody saying to us, you know, nonprofit work, you're still a business, you know, when somebody said what is GAAP, G‑A‑A‑P, accept, you know, I can't even remember, but, you know, when thinking about financial, that we were now responsible for financial practices in the nonprofit organization and having to learn the skills of managing others, what is it that you need to know, wherever you're at now, you can build those skills so that then you're in a position to be in a place where you can continue on in the journey.

People often talk about motivation, what motivates you. I interviewed my brother‑in‑law. He's a basketball coach. And I'm like, I'm going to get the blind side story, this is going to turn in to a movie some day. And I'm like interviewing him, what motivates, how do you motivate your athletes? And he talked so much about self‑motivation.

And for me, that's reflected in the idea that at the end of the day, other people can motivate you, but you're the one that's going to have to raise your hand next time an opportunity comes that's challenging, take.

And I am telling you, if you want to be on the podium next year opening the conference, introducing the plenary speaker, I think the number thing ‑‑ number one thing that's got me where I am today is doing what I've said I would do. And sometimes I have to say, I can't do it. I promised it today, I can't do it until next Wednesday. But do you know how much above the crowd you will be if you do what you say you're going to do? I mean, honestly, that is a dividing line among leaders and people who are able to be ‑‑ to move and shake in this world is by just to the best that you can, do what you're going to say you're going to do.

I was taking a leadership course ‑‑ how am I doing, Cindy? Five minutes. Awesome. I was in a class where we took a ‑‑ a personality test and then they lined us up across the room. And they had the extroverts on one side and the introverts on the other. And I was ‑‑ I'm pegged out, way over on the extrovert scale. And so I'm like standing there. And this was the third day I've been with this leadership group. And the woman way at the other end, the introvert, I'm like oh, yeah, yeah, you I haven't really, yeah, I haven't ‑‑ I don't even think I've said a word to her. And the one thing she said, it didn't really resonate with me. And I'm standing next to this lady who we've already spent two nights in the bar together, you know, Toni, we're having all of this great time, and there's this concept about, like, this idea of we like to hang out. And I realized, now I know why I like Toni, because she's just like me. And this idea that we like to be around people that are kind of like us. But in our roles as leaders, and this is going to create tension, and if you can't live with the healthy tension of the idea that that because one person is the idea person, in a room and the other is the analytical evaluator, and you're having a conversation, and just because that dreamer and visionary says you know what, we need a family conference on a cruise ship, you know, and I'm sitting there going oh, my gosh, people are going to think we're saying federal dollars on that, and our evaluation and data person is like do you know how much of detail attention we would need to get there.

This idea that any given project we're doing, it is an awesome thing to, you have to learn to accept and close your own mouth when somebody else has a different perspective than you in terms of moving forward. And, to me, this is the beauty of what I've had the privilege of being a part of at Hands & Voices, why we have the DNA, why we don't argue about how your child communicates. We are the now what generation, okay? Whatever. Now what? What about the outcomes in education for our children, the underemployment of deaf and hard‑of‑hearing adults. You want to talk about systems? This is the world that we're living in have to navigate, and as a group of parents, we would rather stand together on all the ‑‑ the issues that face us together whether, these constant conversations about divisions. Every once in awhile I preach.

Giving credit where credit is due. You know, sometimes I'll be in a meeting and somebody will have an idea and they're off and they're like, that was a great idea. I'm like, wasn't that my idea? And I'm pretty sure I get an idea from someone else and steal it and go, I've got a great idea. So this idea of just letting go of why does it have to be focussed on you, why does it ‑‑ why does the idea or whatever you're doing, if you start thinking about that, this thing has to somehow reflect off of me and when other people get credit it's a difficult thing.

And our Hands & Voices crew gave me a button once that said, making Janet look good, and it's totally true. And I get that, though, because I'm one of the cofunders, sometimes, you know, and I know sometimes people like to come up and tell me what Hands & Voices is meant to them as if somehow it was me that did that. It's not. It's so many other people.

And we have a little joke around our office when I am saying, and I love the keynote yesterday about the pronounce we use, we, us, and we always joke when I say, okay, I think what we need to do. And by we, I mean you. You know. But I get to do a lot of the yous too. But anyway. Thinking about it's never about one person.

I have a dream when I'm ‑‑ I probably had last week before coming to EHDI, it's a recurring dream in my life, when I get stressed out, there's usually a lion chasing me and sometimes I can get behind a broken door, but it's always ‑‑ they never quite get get to me. But that's some, that's a visual in my mind around when I'm dealing with stress. Have you got to schedule insanity, ensure that are a sacred keeper of your calendar. I struggle with this all the time.

But honestly, I do find space in my world for what fills me, friends that I don't have to sort of engage with to try to give stuff too, they just fill me, running, for me, and putting on earphones and listening to music, whatever feeds your sole, you must find a way to keep it. And so I love these two, whether it is how Starbucks saved my life or alcohol, because no great story ever started with someone eating a salad. Whatever inspires you.

You have to think about long‑term. You can do anything for a short ‑‑ sometimes there's seasons where it is just going to be crazy, but for me, when I can live in those seasons, going, okay, there is a space coming where it is not going to be like this all of the time. But if it is like that for you all of the time in terms of your sustainability as a leader.

A final note about thinking about succession planning. You don't want this ‑‑ you don't want ‑‑ you know, sometimes people are like, well, if I wasn't here, the whole thing would fall apart. What an awful thing. At some point, I'm not going to be here and really all of you Hands & Voices people in the room, none of us will be here, think about what we want to create 50 years from now for the next generation.

I'm going to close with a story. I'm a terrible photographer. My husband is a professional photographer. So I'm I never take photos, I'm like he'll get the shot. So one day I was standing in the meadow, we were out, he was gone, and the light on the trees was beautiful and I'm like, I'm going to take a approximate picture. It is so gorgeous. And then I'm thinking to myself, I barely ever do selfies but I'm like, I'm going sort of want to be in the photo. So I'm starting to take the selfie photo. And then I remembered what my friend said, if you hold the phone up high, you'll look thinner. So here's my ‑‑ here's the beautiful picture of the light in the trees.

(Laughter)

>> And I have taken that and a thought a lot about the idea that as the parents we are the framers and the holders of the photos but the light on the trees is our children. And every time we begin to take our focus off of why we're here and begin to project it on ourselves, we'll miss the moment, the beautiful light in the tree with our kids. So thank you very much for this 25 minutes, and I really appreciate your time. And these are my grand ‑‑ my newborn grandsons.

>> Aww.

>> Yeah. It's pretty good. Thank you.

(Applause)