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By Sally Cutler

In 1976, after five years of teaching public school and with a two-year old on my arm, I came to the Marshfield area when my husband and I bought his home farm. Other than the years at college, I had always lived in the country, growing up in remote northern Wisconsin. The stop lights, the traffic, and the consistent noise in Marshfield sent both fear and excitement through me. I knew the city would bring opportunities for theatre, live music, and furthering my education. I grew up on a Wisconsin dairy farm. I was rooted by a father who was on the school board, a mother active in civic affairs, and a sense that women were equal to men. Women could work as hard on the farm, get a job, and go to college. My future was what I wanted it to be; with hard work I could do anything.

The daughter of a farmer became the wife of a farmer. My husband stayed home to tend to his flocks and herds, caring for our two young girls. I worked outside the home, teaching at Mid-State Technical College. A year earlier, I initiated an innovative program at another technical school and now I was hired to implement the GOAL program at the Marshfield campus. The GOAL program, (Goal Oriented Adult Learning) was an individualized learning program designed for adults. In 1976, it was an exciting new collaboration. Our student body was diverse; we had students completing their GED, learning English, rehabilitating after injuries, or just yearning for more education. Our program increased their reading and math skills so they could then meet the demands of the college experience.

It wasn't long before I became part of a network of young education and service professionals within the Marshfield community: social workers, counselors, probation officers, and women trying to make a difference. Our team used the GOAL program as a respite place of learning where any adult could go, be assessed, develop a purpose, and achieve their next step. We worked collaboratively, focusing on the success of every person, sometimes pushing the envelope within our traditional and patriarchal organizations. We developed trust and collegiality between our programs throughout the city. We were working toward a common end: educational success for the non-traditional learners.

During the Vietnam War era, our country accepted many Southeast Asian refugees. Central Wisconsin was a mainstay for groups of Vietnamese and Hmong families. Our GOAL program initially served many of the young men finding a new life in the United States. Believing women needed a voice in this new country, we decided to focus on teaching the women. We created under-the-radar courses focused on learning English as a second language (ESL) and cultural norms by embedding the learning the women needed in courses acceptable for them to take: cooking, crafts and basic English. Often, we would go out of our way to give women an equitable chance toward finding their dreams.



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Often, the students in our program were in transition and needed to use the emergency service network in our community in order to live, while they increased their skills and worked toward their next goal. One woman, an immigrant from Colombia who enrolled in our ESL program, became part of our family. She had no money, nowhere to live, and no plans. She lived with us until she could speak enough English to get a job and establish herself as a professional. After the boost we were able to give her, she was able to find her path to fulfilling her dream. She became a teacher and relocated to Arizona, teaching elementary education until she retired, years later.

Right before I moved to Marshfield, I had joined the National Organization for Women (NOW). I identified as a feminist and needed to find a place where I belonged with other like-minded women. I found my group in Marshfield, talked about women's rights, the glass ceiling, and targeted personal development. We had meetings, got involved at the state and national level and had fun! Our first priority was a focus on domestic abuse. We started to establish safe homes in Wood County for domestic abuse victims; we supported a

vision for a community center for people with domestic, social and mental health issues and we counseled women who needed support. Most importantly, the team strategized and supported each other. With help from our various organizations, we brought in speakers and were able to travel to other communities for education using NOW as an organization for activism.

Supporting women in our community became a calling for us. As time went on it became more apparent the Marshfield community had women with domestic abuse and/or mental health issues that were not being well served. Our professional network stepped up and on the personal level, my family home became a safe home for victims of domestic violence. One night I got a call from a woman who needed a place to go with her three small children. The next morning, they were eating breakfast with my two girls, at our kitchen table. Our house had to fill the vacancy because there was no safe place for women and their children who could not return home, afraid for their lives at the hands of a violent partner. After a time, the Personal Development Center was established, which formally addressed these needs.

Although education has always been my fundamental work, eliminating domestic abuse has been where most of my donation money has gone. For me, the patriarchy of male dominance, power and control, and lack of respect for women are the issues I will always fight. Over the ten years I worked at Mid-State Technical College and the GOAL program, many of the original NOW organization members had moved on to other areas of focus. My experience in the GOAL program evolved into teaching and gaining expertise in career development. Soon I went on to pursue a master's degree from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. While studying, I saw even more clearly the prejudice women were fighting while hitting the "glass ceiling" and being grotesquely underpaid. Women were marginalized and often forgotten.

Business organizations began to realize developing current employees would benefit their bottom line. Educational institutions had done this for years, rewarding education and learning, stretching people toward their potential. MSTC supported me to engage in a technical college leadership program and in pursuing my master's degree. I became active in the Wisconsin Career Development Organization and served as state officer and conference chair. I was mentally, physically, and socially prepared to do more. I welcomed opportunities for leadership and collaboration. I was a role model to my daughters in professional leadership, a strong work ethic, and in helping others. I fulfilled my own image as a feminist working woman.

In 1986 I left MSTC and went to Marshfield Clinic. At the clinic, I forged a new path, establishing the Human Resource Development department. I transformed the traditional Human Resources department from just hiring and salary to including a focus on employee education and development; my mantra: "when preparation meets opportunity." As an organization with women as the majority employee, I knew few had reached their potential. Employees wanted to be included. Women within our organization were moms, homemakers and career focused.

During my almost twenty years at Marshfield Clinic, I taught classes, developed curriculum, counseled employees on their next education and/or career step, and spent numerous hours coaching staff in team management and conflict. I belonged to a group of professional women inside and out of the healthcare system who were trying hard to "break the glass ceiling." We aimed to be heard, respected, and to gain equal pay for equal work. We established a central Wisconsin American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) chapter. Our group consisted mostly of professional women on a multi county level. ASTD promoted networking, teamwork, and learning, while fighting our marginalization. Fortunately, I was also part of a strong Marshfield Clinic Human Resource team that listened, while I argued against inequality, established strong EEOC guidelines, and believed in the employee as the number one asset of the organization. My work related to domestic violence continued, I represented the clinic at the state level in a group looking at domestic abuse and health care. Working with this state group and a strong female physician I was able to establish patient intake questions related to personal safety for physician visits at Marshfield Clinic and develop a resource guidebook that was used in training at the clinic and shared statewide.

As a leader at the clinic, Fritz Wenzel, the CEO, invited me to work with Marilyn Hardacre, Director of the Marshfield Area Chamber of Commerce, to develop a community leadership program. After researching the programs across the country, we proceeded to design Leadership Marshfield, with Marilyn and I both overseeing the program. I did a monthly morning educational leadership skill session with the group and coordinated the projects. Eventually I took over teaching the two-day retreat workshop. It was a tremendous experience. I met so many wonderful young professionals and learned so much about the Marshfield community. Even today many people aren't aware

that many of Marshfield's current programs are rooted in Leadership Marshfield projects: the blue recycling tubs, the established Friends of the McMillian Mead, Project Backpack, Habitat for Humanity, a historical guided walk in the downtown, the bike trail, etc. (A complete project list is available at the Chamber of Commerce along with books of each year's participants.) Now, I smile wide when I see familiar names of former participants in the paper, making a difference in the community.

Finally, it was time to move on. I left the clinic, becoming a regional Director in the work-force-development area with the state of Wisconsin. This executive job covered a nine-county central Wisconsin area and was tied closely to government, a place in which men hold most of the positions of power. The glass ceiling was and still is thick and polished. Women were doing the program work; men were running the boards. This role gave me an opportunity to see the inefficiency in our bureaucratic system and how the system requirements increase the barriers for people to access resources. After 10 years, when Governor Walker established ACT 10 and started to erode established programs fighting for equal rights and equal pay, I stepped down. I went back to my roots on the farm. I returned to working with a large network of young people in Central Wisconsin who were my friends, my colleagues, and my supporters. I worked on building a local food network, focused on supporting local farmers and ensuring young people see equal pay and equal rights as a given. I went back to the land growing organic food, donating the excess to pantries and shelters. Now I do career counseling at the kitchen table with young women working with me in the garden, with grandchildren, and with the children of my friends.

Today, more and more women are at the forefront. Women are CEOs, business owners, successful salespeople, and public administrators. More and more women are at the head of organizations, professional schools, and being the "movers and shakers". In reflection, I know my experiences in Marshfield extended my roots in guiding people in their development: my passion! I met a lot of people and often find myself stopped at a store, event, or outing being asked, "Do you remember me? I was in your…. It really made a difference."