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GLOBAL LEADERSHIP GATHERING The Art of Connecting Across Cultures, Time, and Distance

Debbe Kennedy and Jessica Roemischer



Inspirations

Our lives and work teach us that we are designed to connect with one another, if we are open to receive it and willing to experience it. This truth is universal --- and today technology is making it possible in ways we never imagined. We can effortlessly reach across cultures, generations, time, differences, and distance. We can delve into the enduring wisdom of those who walked before us with a click of a few keys. We can work, up close and personally, with people we've never "met" in worldly terms. The story that follows is a reflection of these great Gifts. Its beginnings emerged from the leap of faith in 2004 that opened the virtual doors of the Global Dialogue Center. After one of our first online virtual gatherings, I received an email from a young leader, who was deeply moved and surprised by the connection he felt with others in the distance. He included the treasured ancient Chinese wisdom below. It captured for him what we had shared together that day and what would reveal itself over and over again. Its message serves as both a prologue, and a take-away, for the story pianist and music educator Jessica Roemischer and I are sharing with you.

—**Debbe Kennedy**, author and founder, Global Dialogue Center



“An invisible red thread connects those who are destined to meet, regardless of time, place, or circumstance. The thread may stretch or tangle, but will never break.”

Coming Together

The idea of and possibilities for, global leadership gatherings have changed. As accessibility to technology continues to expand, we're increasing our knowledge of how to use it effectively to discover and learn from one another. On August 10, 2010 one of these remarkable ONLINE gatherings took place. It had a timely theme: **LEADERSHIP by Example**. We (*Debbe Kennedy and Jessica Roemischer*) were both honored by the opportunity to serve as co-hosts for this global gathering produced by the Global Dialogue Center in partnership with the Leader to Leader Institute team in New York.

The event grew out of a series of unexpected happenings that connected many “*who were destined to meet,*” attracting over 750 people from 34 countries, representing over 400 organizations and companies. Imagine all of us showing up from very different vantage points across cultures and industries, including nonprofit, education, government, corporate, small business, entrepreneurs, and students, individuals and teams. It created a diverse leadership *happening* within a virtual meeting place that provided common ground.

The context for our meeting was significant. Global economic challenges, corporate meltdowns, societal impasses, and multiple wars—brought to us by a 24-hour news cycle and social media—are the stage upon which we regularly witness ineffective and even corrupt leadership. Some who participated are among those whose lives have been directly impacted. Consequently, when we chose **LEADERSHIP by Example** as the theme for this virtual event, we knew that it demanded an executive dialogue leader who lived up to a high standard of integrity—a true *leadership role model* whose message would resonate with a diverse group of global leaders and innovators. We were honored when such an exemplary leader, Mrs. Frances Hesselbein, accepted our invitation.



Mrs. Hesselbein is a founding President and CEO of Leader to Leader Institute in New York (formerly the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management). Peter Drucker, “the father of modern management,” when asked who he thought was the greatest leader in the country, stated unequivocally, ¹ “Frances Hesselbein could manage any company in America.” Among her many distinguished achievements is the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States of America’s highest civilian honor. It was awarded to Mrs. Hesselbein by President Bill Clinton in recognition of her pioneering efforts on behalf of women, volunteerism, diversity, and opportunity for all.

LEADERSHIP by Example: Our virtual conversation with Frances Hesselbein

People from across the world set the agenda for the gathering with the input they gave us prior to the event. Upon registration, we asked participants to describe: 1) one *quality* they felt distinguished them as a leader and innovator and 2) one “*best practice*” they thought others would find useful. Over 700 insightful responses were received, which were compiled into handouts. We selected three key themes for the global dialogue with Frances that reflected the interests and curiosity of those participating: 1) Lessons from Frances’ *leadership journey*; 2) Wisdom about *leading by example*; and 3) insight from *leadership practices* she felt had passed the test of time.



Notably, an integral part of the value and meaning in the global leadership dialogue was the real-time online interaction and the substantive peer-to-peer knowledge exchange that took place. Participants “took the mic” to talk with Frances and they wrote on our “virtual walls” during the event, sharing lessons learned from the conversation.

What unfolded that day was *magical*. The interaction and knowledge-sharing enriched our virtual conversation with Frances and enhanced the sense of a shared experience. Many later spoke of it in letters and write-in comments. Dr. Linda B. Caviness, Professor and Department Chair, Curriculum & Instruction, La Sierra University described it this way: “...An uncommon synergy. I felt an exceptional connection, which I had not expected...”



Call-to-Action from Frances Hesselbein

We all discovered that Frances has a remarkable way of imparting her wisdom and life-long leadership experience. She embodies a striking combination of incisiveness and humanity. Over the course of nearly two hours, she responded to questions in conversation with Debbe, Jessica, and participants, tracing the arc of a life’s journey that began amidst the coal and steel industries of Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

To bring the dialogue to a close, Frances shared a riveting story about the “defining moment” in her life, one from which she forged a pioneering approach to leadership that embraced **respect for all people**. It is a story you don’t want to miss! It is included in the REPLAY (*Segment: Mr. Yee Story: 1:00:38 – 1:07:30*). Frances closed by inviting each of us to pinpoint our own defining moment. It was a very moving ending!

Experience “LEADERSHIP by Example” for Yourself!

Below is the link to access the global conversation with Frances Hesselbein. It includes an audio/video slideshow, numerous hand-outs, take-aways, and related links. You’ll experience the peer-to-peer knowledge and know-how that was an integral part of this event.



Click on the link below

http://globaldialoguecenter.com/conf_center/leadership-by-example/

“...from Frances’ photos taken at all different times in her life,
I see the immutable love and kindness in her eyes.
The webinar was beyond words.”

—**Xuan (Shiny) Feng**

M.A., Ludwig-Maximilians-University, Munich, PhD Student

“... a remarkable global dialogue.
I was there. I was present. **I was changed.**

—**David Schmaltz**

author, consultant, and founder
Project Community

Lessons Learned about Global Leadership Gatherings

Lessons Learned from Debbe Kennedy

There are three key areas of learning for me from this truly remarkable experience.

1. Our intentions, values, and heart build trust.

I think Rumi was onto something important when he said, “*There is a place between voice and presence where information flows.*” I believe this human attribute is strengthened in virtual gatherings. Your intentions, the values you live by, and your heart speak loudly to others in the silence on the virtual plane. These are the factors that build trust in online experiences. More and more leaders and innovators are developing this kind of “sixth sense” as they learn to effectively develop a rich communication, working together with others in new ways through technology. The **LEADERSHIP by Example with Frances Hesselbein** webinar was another validation.

2. Virtual collaboration is powerful; we never know where it will lead us.

Extraordinary results can emerge from virtual online collaborations and global gatherings—just like on the physical plane—whether it is between two or three, a small team or many. When the right people, “destined to meet,” connect, “the remarkable” often takes place if we are open to receive it, willing to invest it, and generous enough to share it with others. [Related *Integral Leadership Review* article: Open Invitations: Engaging People One Dialogue at a Time].

As noted earlier, the LEADERSHIP by Example event grew out of a series of unexpected happenings that “connected many who were destined to meet, including Jessica and I. Interestingly, we met via *Integral Leadership Review* at the suggestion of Russ Volckmann, shortly before the idea of the LEADERSHIP by Example webinar came to life. Although, we’ve never seen one another in person, we recognized something remarkably similar in our very different work, which is designed to create innovative environments that promote growth, trust, engagement, and change. My approach centers around virtual dialogue. Jessica’s work centers around her unique approach to piano duet improvisation. Our meeting was an integral part of the “series of unexpected happenings” that opened the way for its success.



It began when Jessica interviewed with me for the Global Dialogue Center. Her remarkable story influenced a special exhibit at our Women's Gallery to showcase the interview: *[Differences in Duet: Musical Expressions from the Heart with Jessica Roemischer](#)*. The exhibit became the catalyst for our collaboration and it also ignited the discussions of possibilities with Frances Hesselbein and the partnership between the [Global Dialogue Center](#) and [Leader to Leader Institute](#) that produced the **LEADERSHIP by Example** webinar. Only "destiny" can explain it, but it proves again that we never know where our virtual connections will lead us.

3. Small details matter.

Over time, webinars have developed a reputation marked by mixed reviews and results. We keep learning that producing memorable online global leadership gatherings requires planning and many small details. Again, Rumi left us timeless wisdom as a guide: *"Attention to small details makes perfect a large work."* At the Global Dialogue Center, we continue to learn it's not about having a webinar. It is about creating a *memorable experience*. Five success factors seem to play a key role: Choice of partners, an involved keynote, session design, collaborative promotion, and engaging participants in the process.

Lessons Learned from Jessica Roemischer

1. There IS cause for optimism!

To lay the ground for the **Leadership by Example** webinar, the Global Dialogue Center asked participants to submit one *quality* that they believed distinguishes them as a leader and innovator. Their responses were collected prior to the event and compiled into a single document that Debbe Kennedy [made available as a handout](#). As I scanned through the hundreds of replies, I found myself overwhelmed by hope and optimism. Across the board, those who were drawn to this webinar embraced values that will certainly enable us to forge a new and positive future.

Here are a handful of the "distinguishing leadership qualities" we received:

- *A belief that all things are possible and that all people are to be valued.*
- *A commitment to growth and "truth".*
- *A great listener!*
- *An ability to influence others to innovate.*
- *An ability to adapt to new situations.*
- *An ability to bring different perspectives together for a common, higher purpose.*
- *An ability to Change.*

2. Virtual Meetings will help generate the community of the future

The Global Dialogue Center's virtual platform allowed Frances Hesselbein to infuse all who attended with her unwavering positivity and undeniable integrity. I doubt that any of us who heard Frances that afternoon will be quite the same. (You must listen to her recount the story of her defining moment!) As a result of this experience—my first Global Dialogue Center webinar--it's clear to me that we can and **MUST** embrace our new global interconnectivity. It is a potent means to awaken the sublime qualities that lie within each of us, wherever in the world we are!

Reflections

Reflections from Debbe Kennedy

I was particularly moved by Frances Hesselbein's insight about being a leader of quality and character. She set the standard high for us all...

*Being a leader of great quality and character means never deviating from our values. ...It means **never**.*” (with emphasis) She explained that we can't decide to make an exception one day and hope to regroup tomorrow. “No,” she told us, “the principled, ethical leader lives his or her values. We are aware that all the people around us watch us closely...When our behavior and actions are consistent with the values we proclaim, we release new energy and new hope in people.

For me, her insight reinforced Gandhi's wisdom that has always been important to me. In several places in my home, I have small framed signs with one of Gandhi's messages strategically placed to catch my eye during the day, “*My life is my message.*” It is interesting how those *five* words have shaped so many days—so many actions—so many decisions. They place the question of *rightness* to every action and decision one makes. It is humbling on many days to realize that my humanness has kept me from living up to this proclamation in the way I wished I had.

I think Gandhi smiles down on Frances Hesselbein. Her life is *her message* and she helped us all witness it and discover ways to *be leaders by example* too.

Reflections from Jessica Roemischer

“When I work with people, I focus on each person. I look for their strengths, what they do uncommonly well.” —Frances Hesselbein.

Here, Frances goes to the heart of what it means to be a **TRUE** leader, teacher, parent, friend—it is a universally applicable approach to unlocking human potential. If you apply this one principle, you will simultaneously liberate yourself as you free another to fulfill her or his destiny on earth. Frances' lifetime of experience at the highest levels of leadership has revealed to her what is, indeed, the Golden Key to a new future.

Notes

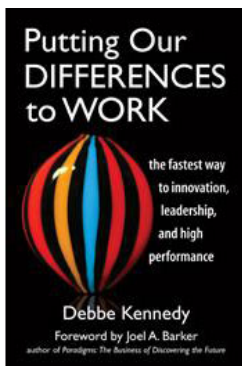
¹“Why Peter Drucker hailed Frances Hesselbein as the world's best leader? *The Economic Times*, Corporate Dossier, January 15, 2010, Arati Menon Carroll, ET Bureau.

About the Authors

Debbe Kennedy is founder, president, and CEO of the Global Dialogue Center (see the [PDF Brochure](#)) an online virtual gathering place for people throughout the world and Leadership Solutions Companies, an award-winning enterprise since 1990, specializing in custom leadership, organizational, and virtual communications solutions, Formerly, she had a distinguished leadership career with IBM Corporation for over twenty years.

Her latest book, *Putting Our Differences to Work: The Fastest Way to Innovation, Leadership, and High Performance* (Berrett-Koehler 2008) is a ** 2010 Axiom Business Book Award Winner **

—Bronze for Human Resources and Employee Training.



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www.globaldialoguecenter.com www.lscompanies.com

Jessica Roemischer is a pioneering pianist, educator and consultant who liberates the human spirit through music. In performances, workshops, coaching sessions, retreats and lessons—as well as in her acclaimed music program at Riverbrook Residence for Women—Jessica is sharing the catalytic power of her work with individuals and groups throughout the United States and internationally. Her innovative approach to piano improvisation makes it possible for everyone, regardless of age, background or even the presence of a disability, to access the source of creativity within.



DIFFERENCES IN DUET:

Musical Expressions from the Heart with Jessica Roemischer
at Global Dialogue Center Women's Gallery

Learn more:

[Website: www.pianobeautiful.com](http://www.pianobeautiful.com)

[YouTube Channel: http://www.youtube.com/user/JessicaRoemischer](http://www.youtube.com/user/JessicaRoemischer)

[Blog: http://jessicaroesmischer.blogspot.com/](http://jessicaroesmischer.blogspot.com/)

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