
PREFACE

“How did you become TESOL President as a nonnative speaker of English?” I have been asked the same question again and again by news reporters, colleagues, and students over the years, but my answer is always the same: “Everyone has the potential to be a leader, but not everyone can be a leader. The secret is that you must desire to be a leader for a good cause first. Leadership is not developed in a day. It evolves on a daily basis over a period of time.”

Not until I stepped into my first leadership position as a Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL (NNEST) Caucus chair in 1999 did I realize how important leadership is for the TESOL profession. (I was a TESOL board member in 2001 and became TESOL president in 2006.) I believe that success is within the reach of just about everyone. Although it’s true that some people are born with greater natural gifts than others, the ability to lead is really a collection of skills, nearly all of which can be learned and improved. But that process doesn’t happen overnight.

Leadership is complex. It has many facets: respect, experience, emotional strength, people skills, discipline, vision, momentum, timing, and so on. For the most part, extraordinary people, teams, and associations are simply ordinary people doing extraordinary things that matter to them.

TESOL matters to us because we care about the TESOL profession. For this global association to move to the next level of excellence, each and every TESOL member should take an active role in a variety of capacities and contribute to this great association. If you see changes that should be made, remember that you, as a member, are in a position to make them.

I believe that personal success without leadership ability brings only limited effectiveness. A person’s impact is only a fraction of what it could be with good leadership skills. Leadership skills are indispensable in virtually all fields. But in language teaching and learning, leadership plays a role that will directly affect the quality of language education and the soundness of a program, as well as the satisfaction level of both teachers and students in their language classrooms and beyond.

As you can see, many factors that come into play in leadership are intangible. That’s why leaders require so much seasoning to be effective. It was around the time I began my presidential year that I truly began to understand the many aspects of leadership in TESOL with clarity and began to appreciate how much time and energy leaders have to invest in various entities of the association we

are so proud of. It is for this very reason that TESOL leaders Christine Coombe, Mary Lou McCloskey, Lauren Stephenson, and Neil J. Anderson edited this volume about leadership skill enhancement and strategies development. The contributors to this volume are an impressive line-up of leaders who have contributed to the TESOL profession in a variety of capacities.

Over the past few years, I have come a long way in honing my own leadership skills. It has truly been a learning experience. Had I had a book like this to guide me in my journey to leadership excellence, I would have saved myself a lot of time and some fumbling in the dark. As such, I am grateful that the editors have put together this wonderful volume for the many ELT professionals who desire to become future leaders in our profession.

Jun Liu, TESOL President (2006–2007)