

## **EXPERIENCE—NEWELL FOGELBERG, BOULDER, COLO. TRANSCENDING DIFFERENCES AT WORK**

**Newell Fogelberg develops strength and happiness at his job while displaying true leadership.**

How many of you have had some kind of conflict where you work? It's a great place to accomplish your human revolution, isn't it?

Although it's hard to admit, I've been in the printing trades for nearly 30 years. I started by cajoling my way into running a small offset press. But, in printing, if you know how to add and subtract, they immediately make you an estimator and, if they discover you can also multiply and divide, you go straight into management. About three years ago, there was a rumor that I could pronounce calculus, so I was appointed as the director of printing and copying services at the University of Colorado at Boulder, overseeing about 35 employees.

Seriously, I've always enjoyed my job as I've had to learn and grow every day. Over the past several years, most of those lessons have been in how to deal with people.

In 1996 when SGI Vice Women's Leader Yumiko Hachiya visited Boulder, I received some guidance from her. At the time, I worked for a woman who directed publications and printing for the university and I was having a very hard time with my boss. She had to put together a business plan and was using the occasion to regularly browbeat me about some very bizarre things.

One evening at a district meeting, I told Mrs. Hachiya about my situation. Her response has always remained with me. She said: "This woman will make you strong. Her opposition to you will make you strong if you use it. View this as your opportunity to become a great leader and a strong business man." That wasn't what I wanted to hear. But, I considered what she said while I chanted.

I began to realize that my boss must have been hurting pretty bad to go so far out of her way to mess up my day. Then I remembered it was she who had hired me back in 1989 and there had been happier days working together with her. I started chanting for her and, fairly soon, I offered to help her write a business plan for the department. When she had an outburst toward me, I tried to ignore it. I reminded myself that she was probably not so much angry with me as with the pressure she was receiving from the administration and that working through this opposition would make me stronger.

After we completed the business plan—about three months later—her contract was not renewed. I was put in charge and got a nice promotion, a raise and a good deal of praise for my part in the business plan. I also got a terrific new boss who was and is the most supportive person I've ever worked for.

I was overjoyed until I realized that one of the things that was assigned to my new department was about \$200,000 of the former department's debt. We started out \$200,000 in the hole. I recalled Mrs. Hachiya's words and decided this was a challenge. I needed to learn financial management very quickly.

I was in way over my head, but my boss supported me through it all. He's the head of the Office of Financial and Business Services at Colorado University. Over the past couple of years, he's taught me financial management and strategic planning. So I had exactly the

right teacher at the right time and I started working on digging us out of our financial hole.

About two years ago, as we were poking our noses over the edge, my production manager went south on me. He had started his own printing business on the side with his wife. While both my assistant director and myself were on vacation, he and his wife went into one of our copy centers and told the employees that he was going to use one of the machines and that they couldn't charge him. Please understand that we're a government shop and it's illegal for us to use our equipment for private business. His wife broke the machine or I might never have known.

Because his actions were illegal, I could have fired the man at that point, but it was a first mistake so I gave him a letter of reprimand and warned him. He apparently interpreted this as weakness on my part and, over the next few months, he proceeded to execute his private business affairs from work, to the detriment of his job performance.

The state system is very restrictive about the steps you can take in reprimanding, correcting and terminating employees. This man was also the union steward in the shop. I followed the prescribed steps and, in June 1998, corrective action was taken. Within one week of the corrective action, this man inspired seven of the employees in the printing section to file a collective grievance against me.

After about three months of the lawyers and the union discussing this grievance, it was dismissed. The union abandoned this group and their demands as irrational and I was vindicated. However, when I received notice of this grievance, it stung me. I woke up at 3:00 the next morning with my heart hammering and tiptoed downstairs so I wouldn't wake my wife. I was overwhelmed with fury. This kind of black inky rage filled my mind and I'm ashamed to say that I was so angry I wanted to hurt somebody. I was so angry I literally scared myself and I realized it was time to chant.

The first benefit I realized was tremendous support from my boss, most of my co-workers, my peer managers in the university, the vice chancellor, my friends, my wife, senior leaders and terrific support from Boulder District. This kept me going and made me feel as strong as, and I quote, "a demon armed with an iron staff."

I wish I could say I immediately understood this karma, sorted it all out and knew what to do, but this took months. In the meantime, we had a sort of war in our department. There were memos and meetings and accusations and little side attacks against the people on my side, especially against my assistant director. This took the form of blatant sexism as they complained about a woman being the assistant director. During this time, there was even a physical confrontation when one of the original group "defected" — an older man in his 60s was knocked flat and almost injured when he brushed against one of the other group.

Because the guy who started this was doing a bad job, he quit just before I could fire him. As I said, the union abandoned this group at about this time. I had won. But it didn't feel like winning. It felt like a war. There was an atmosphere of tension. No one was sleeping well and, although the remainder of this group was obviously frightened to see what I'd do now that I'd won, they were defiant. You could still sense that there were two armed camps.

I thought about that guidance from Mrs. Hachiya and wondered how I could become happier and stronger through this experience. I read SGI President Ikeda's thoughts about authority and I thought about what it meant to create value. I realized that up until that point, my victory was basically selfish. A couple of years before, I'd confronted an irrational boss who was hung up on her authority. I did not want to be an authoritarian like

that. I didn't want to be the boss thumping on my chest and saying, "I'm the boss. You must do as I say."

I realized that my challenge was to be a leader. Whoever was right or wrong, the whole department was suffering and I had the power to change the situation.

I reached out to the rest of the group. I assumed the dual role of director of the department and the production manager for the printing section. I worked with these people for about nine months before we identified and hired a new production manager last July.

Since then, we have expanded our business to include many more services and are establishing two new copy centers to add to our other six. Whereas we were \$200,000 in the red before, as of last month, we had realized a net of \$130,000. I've been personally praised by the vice chancellor for this turnaround and our department is held up as an example to both the university and the State of how an auxiliary department should be run. I also have a production manager who, of all the printers I know, I would have handpicked for the job—a former mentor of mine.

Throughout this experience, my salary has increased more than 20 percent. Six months ago, a raise of more than 10 percent would have literally been impossible in the state system. My boss has done this as a reward for my efforts.

When I walked in the other day, after a good night's sleep, the presses were already clicking away. I am enjoying my job once again, in a happy shop, and I realize that I have indeed won a true victory.

In my study of Buddhism, I found the following quote from "Reply to Yasaburo" by Nichiren Daishonin to be very inspiring. I keep it hanging on my office wall: "You must be firmly resolved. Do not begrudge your fief; do not think of your wife and children. Do not endanger the Dharma by relying upon others. You must simply make up your mind. Look at the world this year as a mirror. The reason that you have survived until now when so many have died was so that you might meet with this affair. This is where you will cross the Uji River. This is where you will ford the Seta. This will determine whether you win honor or disgrace your name. This is what is meant when it is said that it is difficult to be born as a human being, and that it is difficult to believe in the Lotus Sutra. You should pray intently that Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions will all gather and enter into your body to assist you" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 829).