

# Leadership Is a Choice: A Conversation with Barbara Waugh of H-P's World E-Inclusion

*By Lisa Marshall*

Lisa J. Marshall is a nationally recognized expert, trainer, and speaker on leadership maturity and organizational development, and president of her executive coaching firm, Smart Work LLC. A best-selling business author, Marshall's newest title is *Speak the Truth and Point to Hope: The Leader's Journey to Maturity*, which presents to readers for the first time her critically acclaimed leadership-development approach. It includes powerful interviews with leaders from many fields, from Joe Dyer, former Vice-Admiral of Naval Aviation, Barbara Waugh, former Director of Personnel for HP Labs for 17 years and Bill Strickland, CEO of the Manchester Craftsmen's Guild/Bidwell Training Center. One of this country's most sought-after experts on the subject of leadership maturity, Marshall has spoken before numerous audiences at conferences throughout North America. Lisa Marshall has coached executives and teams at Fortune 500 companies, government agencies, and international corporations, including Intel, EDS, NASA, the USDA, DOE and Taiwan Semiconductor, among others.

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The following interview is an excerpt from **Speak the Truth and Point to Hope: The Leader's Journey to Maturity** by Lisa Marshall.

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*Barbara Waugh is the author of **The Soul in the Computer: The Story of a Corporate Revolutionary**. A long-time radical activist, she joined Hewlett-Packard twenty years ago and used her successive positions as company recruiting manager, personnel director and worldwide change manager for the renowned HP Labs to transform HP's corporate culture. Along the way she invented and discovered a set of "radical tools" for introducing practical change and energizing altruism at all levels of the organization. She is the co-founder of e-inclusion, a new HP business dedicated to bringing the benefits of the Internet economy to the poor around the world.*

*Barb doesn't leave her values at home. She has a doctorate in psychology and organizational behavior, a master's degree in theology and comparative literature and has served on the Board of Directors for the State of the World Forum, the Board of Directors for the Pacific Cultural Conservancy International and the Board of Advisers for the Global Fund for Women. She lives in Northern California with her partner and their two children.*

*I put this conversation first because Barb so clearly challenges the notions of heroic and even collaborative leadership. She's a dialogic leader: Her own book gives example after example of innovative ways to engage people in meaning-making conversations - the Third Principle leadership story. I also found her understanding of story to be profoundly enriching.*

*Barbara Waugh will presented "My Company: For The World" at The Women In Leadership Summit in San Francisco, CA on Monday, November 7.*

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**Barbara, you and I share a common conviction about the power of story to help move and motivate people. I want to explore how you have experienced a "call" to leadership in yourself and others, the roles others play in your leadership, what your leadership journey has been like, what issues you have faced, the ways in which you have changed and the ways in which you have stayed the same. First, what's your definition of leadership?**

A leader is anyone who has a very big and compelling story of how it could all turn out, who then identifies and amplifies positive deviance within whatever system they're attempting to move, using the system's strengths to migrate it to where it needs to be.

For example, the story I hold is that the corporate sector must join the non-profit and public sectors to step up to our share of stewardship for the planet. Studies on the diffusion of innovation have demonstrated that you need only three percent of a system to be firmly convinced of a new direction, to transform the system. Three percent of a given company, three percent of the corporate sector - these are doable in my lifetime.

**What is its source?**

The source is different for different people. The drive to lead is the leader's passion for how they

want the world to be, which she or he may not be conscious of (and doesn't have to be). For me, it's pragmatic; I have a better life, more interesting, fewer depressions, greater joy when I live as one of these passionate people than when I don't, and I know I have that choice. There's massive evidence to justify cynicism, but it just doesn't get you a good life. Why not live inside a story that gives you a good life and has the potential for turning out the way you would like?

The sources of leadership have been greatly mystified. I say to people, "Do you want a good life or not? Do you want to be happy or sad? Have fun or be miserable? It's not at the mercy of the evidence; the evidence is too complex to reliably predict a future from, so take note of it, and then go on and choose the way you want it to be."

**What was your first experience, or discovery, of your ability to lead?**

I sometimes have had the experience of people coming up to me from earlier parts of my life saying, "Do you remember when you...?" And I think they have the wrong person. So there may be something that was happening for other people through working with me that wasn't yet happening for me.

For me, my first experience of community organizing is a more useful reference point. Or when I started the first feminist newspaper column in Madison, Wisconsin. There was an amazing, unprecedented response: I was announced at parties, my life was threatened several times. I didn't care for it, but I did notice it. I was startled by the power in that role of creating reality. It was pretty chilling to understand the implicit responsibility, that what you attended to or ignored, choice-fully or inadvertently, had consequences. There was tremendous responsibility there.

**How has your gift changed over time?**

I truly don't think leadership is a gift. Calling it a gift is part of the voodoo of leadership. Leadership is accessible to anyone who wants it. It's a choice; you decide what you want your life to be about and you go after it. It's not that mystical. The three percent I was talking about earlier, those who make the choice to take responsibility for their lives, live inside a big story. And others flock to them - most people want to be in a big story.

Today I'm more mindful of both the power and the responsibility, and less startled, not as thrown by what comes out of it. I no longer hold any specific idea of how things will turn out. My Rock of Gibraltar is the big story, but the subplots can't be predicted. Now I watch for valences, directions, projects and people that align or could be "framed" to align with the big story, and I help things turn out that way.

**When do you know you've received the call to leadership?**

As I said, I'm not so sure leaders are "called." When I see it in others, it's because they're answering a question that people are living with but haven't, many times, even yet asked; giving words to the unarticulated longings. Probably true for me as well.

**How do you know the call has been answered?**

I know it is answered when I feel I'm contributing, when people light up around me. I like the

idea of being a messenger. I feel I've answered the call when I've transmitted the message without messing it up too much.

**What do you as a leader need from others in order to be effective? What roles do you need them to play?**

I work in one domain across all functions - the generative, the part that makes new things happen. I'm all over the company; there's no job description for it. I'm very lucky that that didn't mean to my management that I therefore couldn't do the job. Since all the operational systems require you to have some label or other in the book of jobs, we went with "Research Engineer" which isn't as far off as some of the job descriptions I've had. One way to look at what I'm doing is that I'm developing and refining change management tools for complex systems.

I also need to be coupled with someone who's as passionate about making ideas operational as I am about visioning. It's unfortunate - tragic, in fact - that I get the credit and they do the work. As long as our recognition and reward systems are so skewed in favor of the vocal visionary over the quiet implementer, in favor of the one over the many that it actually takes to get things done, we'll continue to be blind to the potential brilliance in the company.

The ongoing lament in companies that we haven't got the right people or the best people- well, I don't buy it. What I see is that we haven't gotten the right and the best of the people we have. If we did, we'd realize we have the perfect people for what we need to do and where we need to go.

**Describe your own leadership journey.**

Like most people, I always thought great leaders were born, not made, were gifted and special in ways that would never be mine. I figured the best I could ever do was find one and follow. What I didn't realize was that what makes a leader is a great story and that if you pick a big story and live inside it, great people will be attracted to you and you'll be lifted up by them.

I also thought that what life was about was spending a few minutes or less figuring out what you want and then spending the rest of your life going after it. Our whole culture tells us it's like that. Think of the structure of movies, advertisements, the myths of western culture - think of Jason and the Golden Fleece, the search for the Holy Grail, Star Wars, etc. How, in fact, it works in my life is that most of my life is figuring out what I want. When that's really clear, all kinds of things fall into place and I get what I want very quickly.

The real quest is for the story: *What story is worth your life?* Take your time with that, go on a search. If your search leaves you with less than a story worth your life, then invent one. Search for or invent the story; put together the pieces from other stories that compel you. Once you have the story, everything gets attracted to it, the pieces fall in place and things work out.

**What gets in the way of your leadership?**

Schedules that don't align with my own rhythms get in the way. I contribute more when I stay out of the system. The kinds of intelligence and insights required to shift the system are best fostered outside the system. My best "shape shifting" happens in the hot tub, on a long bike ride, or taking a nap. You think differently lying down than sitting up - it's literally a different point

of view.

**What are the dilemmas that cause you the greatest concern?**

My biggest dilemmas are when I start getting into control, having to make it turn out a certain way, worrying about "what if?" If I can live in the big story that doesn't happen, but I still get catapulted into the daily drama and lose that bigger picture. And I'm still trying to understand the role of informal leaders in making large system change happen.

**What do you understand about leadership now that you didn't five or ten years ago?**

I understand that what I mean by leadership is authenticity, and that it's a choice. It's not bestowed, it's not a gift, and it's something you can choose and if you do, you're in for a ride; it's worth your life! By authenticity, I mean both being true to your self and inventing a self that's worth being true to.

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