

Caroline L. Gross Fellowship  
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The Program for Senior Executives in  
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Submitted by

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## INTRODUCTION

How does one describe, or even begin to assimilate, the awe that is the Kennedy School of Government? How does one write about an experience that was a chance of a lifetime? How does one reflect on the relationships that were fused in such a brief speck of time that will go on to last a lifetime? How can the reader personalize the experience of this writer through mere words without having had the experience to meet with, learn from, and challenge world class professors? How can one fully absorb the multiple ways this program influenced us in the space of a few pages only weeks following the course, when the experience will permeate our thinking and actions for years to come? The answer is simple. It's impossible!

I apologize upfront for my inability to fully describe the relationships, experiences, learning and assimilation of having experienced so much in such a short amount of time. While I am used to and feel most comfortable working in the world of "gray", where charting new territory brings certain uncertainty, I initially felt uneasy dealing with the lack of concreteness in examining the numerous case studies handed us during our first week of the program. And yet...what incredible discussions resulted in an environment where "black and white" did not exist. Leadership may be, after all, all about managing the gray.

To decide what one thing stood out more than any other during the three-week session would do an injustice to the totality of an experience that will undoubtedly impact me for a long time to come. I can only say that there were times of inspiration, times of compassion, times of introspection, times for letting go of control, and times of validation for the work of the Citizens Council on Children and Families. I was amazed at the degree to which each session and each presenter reinforced the ones before. There was obvious intent on the part of the organizers to tie each thread, each theme, each hypotheses to another and a deliberateness set to the sequence of sessions edging the group to take further stock of their thought processes and challenge the status quo of whatever management styles with which we were previously comfortable. Or is that a false assumption? In the words of our Co-Director Bill Apgar, "*Don't assume a faculty conspiracy when simple ineptness will explain it!*" Whatever the interpretation, it was all very impressive.

Perhaps the most astounding revelation of the entire experience was that I was even there. Several times during the series, I reflected on where I was and why and how I got there. It was because of relationships, both personal and professional. I reflected on my own experiences that got me to where I find myself today and who helped get me here. And I wondered, why are not more of our youth inspired to dream of the possibility of themselves attending Harvard. Do they think this is not feasible? <sup>1</sup> Are we teaching our kids well enough to qualify them academically? Are we exposing them to college life and opportunities for them to sit, as I did, within the walls of such an esteemed university? Are we inspiring our youth with the courage, ambition and hope that they should aspire to such heights or is there despair, lack of direction, disconnectedness among other members of the community who, through relationships, can make these dreams reality?

<sup>1</sup> Harvard University recently announced that academically qualified students from families with income under \$40,000/yr. can get a full scholarship to Harvard.

Ron David, hypothesizes that “relationships are primary; everything else is derivative.”<sup>2</sup> If this is true, and I agree that it is, we cannot underestimate the need for today’s youth to develop and sustain relationships with other members of their community in order that connections and networks evolve, of such informal nature, that we see youth feeling socially competent, intellectually challenged and perceived by their community as valued citizens.

As I recall the expectations I had when applying for attendance in the program<sup>3</sup>, I am reminded that our work has only just begun and that in order to facilitate the discourse needed to respond to today’s children and families, we must develop new leadership styles. Marty Linsky would refer to it as *adaptive challenges*. By casting aside traditional solution-getting methods known as *technical problem-solving* techniques, we begin dealing with experimental strategies which address people’s attitudes, values and behaviors.<sup>4</sup> These precepts are what Community Justice is based on and the structures developed by the Citizens Council on Children and Families support raising the voices of children, families and the communities in which they live. What follows is an ill attempt to give the reader a synopsis of a truly incredible learning experience.

### **WHO WERE THE PEOPLE?**

Who are the members of the KSG Class of June 2005? We are 64 people from various walks of life representing 28 different states, 4 nations (Ireland, Denmark, Philippines, United States) and one territory (Puerto Rico). We are 21 women and 43 men who hold positions of appointed (20) or elected (18) office and career professionals (26). We are black, brown and white and we were committed to being at the Kennedy School of Government to be challenged, reinforced and awakened in whatever ways awaited us. We were all there to learn.

We were assisted in our learning by an outstanding faculty of ten members of various Centers and Schools within the Kennedy School of Government and Harvard University (Appendix A) and an excellent array of special guest speakers (Appendix B).

I would remiss if I did not mention and express my appreciation to the staff of the Kennedy School for their tireless devotion to the program and assuring all our comforts were met. The expert assistance and attention to every detail of Paige Ennis, Emily Walters, Meg Smyth and Kamron Mitchell made this experience of highest quality and equal to any event anywhere. My compliments and deepest gratitude to them all.

<sup>2</sup> Case Study: *Cocaine Mothers*, June 22, 2005. Senior Executives in State and Local Government, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

<sup>3</sup> In order to assure that our work is embedded in the culture of communities, we will need to look for ways that build public discourse and response into the issues confronting youth, families and communities, and to support local efforts that engage typical folks in local decision-making processes. Through participation in this program, I hope to gain greater exposure to methods and techniques that help me to work smarter, more strategically, as we look to develop a model for citizen involvement that redefines a socio-political process driven by a more informed and engaged public. In challenging the ways we go about our business, I hope to learn various strategies for effectively developing lasting partnerships among and between people who direct policy, constituents who are impacted by them, and the networks of programs and services that attempt to bridge supports and needs with ever-changing resources.

<sup>4</sup> *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading*, Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky. HBS Press

## PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The primary method of instruction and learning was offered through case study analysis.

“A case study is a written description of a problem or situation. Unlike other forms of stories and narrations, a case study does not include analysis or conclusions, but only the facts of a story arranged in a chronological sequence. The purpose of a case study is to place participants in the role of decision-makers, asking them to distinguish pertinent from peripheral facts, to identify central alternatives among several issues competing for attention, and to formulate strategies and policy recommendations. The method provides an opportunity to sharpen problem-solving skills and to improve the ability to think and reason rigorously. Most cases depict real situations. In some instances, the data is disguised, and infrequently, the case may be fictional. Cases are not intended to be comprehensive or exhaustive. Most cases are snap shots of a particular situation within a complex environment.

The focus of a case study is on a main protagonist who is shown at the point of a major decision. Typically, the information presented is only what was available to the protagonist in the real situation on which the case is based. Thus, as in real life, important information is often unavailable or incomplete. Because a case study describes reality, it may be frustrating. “Real-life” is ambiguous, and cases reflect that reality. A “right” answer or “correct solution” is rarely apparent.

Although the case study method is principally used in the development and improvement of management skill and leadership ability, its usefulness is not limited to this field. For example, case study pedagogy is also used to teach medical diagnosis to doctors, classroom skills to teachers, and legal decision-making to lawyers. This educational method is useful whenever decision-making must be derived primarily from skillful analysis, choice, and persuasion. The case study method actively engages the participant in these processes: first, in the analysis of the facts and details of the case itself; second, in the selection of a strategy; and third, in the refinement and defense of the chosen strategy in the discussion group and before the class. The case method does not provide a set of solutions, but rather refines the student’s ability to ask the appropriate questions and to make decisions based upon his or her answers to those questions.”<sup>5</sup>

The case study method, for me, was most challenging but epitomized one of the important reasons I needed to attend the program. Often in our hurried-up world of racing to meetings, meeting deadlines and organizing events, we lack the attention needed to think strategically about short-term crisis and long-term outcomes. That tends to be the nature of our work in public services. We were constantly reinforced that we are expert in emergency and crisis management; stretching scant resources beyond their natural means; and placating numerous, often conflicting, stakeholder demands. Personally I needed exposure to strategic thinking processes which my

<sup>5</sup> AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDY METHOD, Preparation, Analysis, and Participation, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, web site posting.

prior education and experiences did not necessarily provide me. The phrase, “be careful what you wish for” occurred to me several times throughout the course!

Over the three weeks, we read and discussed 45 case studies. Three of these were from those submitted as part of our enrollment packet. They allowed peer consultation to those whose cases were selected for discussion and gave us all current, real-life issues with which to associate our learning from previous sessions. The other case studies were framed around such topics as Public Value, Leadership, Management and the like. All case studies are available should the reader wish to examine their contents.

The consistency of presentation and relatedness of one topic over the other was reinforcing as it seemed that each professor was well-attuned to the case studies discussed earlier in the series. Equally compelling was the reference and reiteration to the “strategic triangle” as an applied management model for realizing organizational vision. The relevance of this triangle to the work of the Citizens Council was quite compelling and plays out frequently in the course of any given week.

Being a slow reader and one who is accustomed to working in a constantly harried environment, I found it exceedingly difficult not only in keeping pace with the assignments but examining each case from a strategic standpoint, beyond the obvious facts presented. Being witness to and participant in the ensuing discussions found me at once ignorant of so many other facets of the cases and anxiously open to the perspectives of my peers. As so aptly stated in the box above, there is no one solution to the case study. Learning occurs through the discourse. Again I was reminded of a parallel to the work of the Citizens Council. In our attempts to facilitate community forums and promote the Center for Civic Engagement, we purposely seek the community discourse so absent in our social interactions today. By the middle of the second week I felt I was finally gaining a rhythm and grasping hold of a strategic thinking process. It will take much practice to perfect, but worth every attempt. The key will be to consciously integrate strategic thinking in every decision point we encounter. A feat nothing less than a miracle I suspect!

## **STUDY GROUPS**

My learning and case synthesis was aided tremendously by the assignment to study groups. While the literature indicated that one study group would be assigned for the duration of the course, we were eventually assigned to a second group during the second week. There was a sense among the class that the reason may have been because the class became very close, very quickly and perhaps the facilitators wanted to see a bit more tension in the discussions. This was evident, as well, in a certain probing beginning the middle of week two. What may have been the only part of the experience that was a bit disquieting to me was a probing begun by Linda Kaboolian and continuing into week three. Actually, as I think back, Marty Linsky planted the notion that we needed to look deeply within ourselves and ask, “What is it that prevents me from acting on those things that serve as barriers to freedom?” Marty cautioned us to “not leave here after three weeks without getting out whatever it is that really prohibits us dealing with our fears.” At the break between week two and three, Linda challenged the group to think deeply

about what it is that we have failed to face, up to this point, and come back willing to reveal ourselves in relationship to those issues.

In time, I came to understand this probing to be centered around the tensions of racism and religious, sexual and gender biases. Our discussions with Linda and Ron David on issues of *Dominance and Privilege* were worthy of such a probing but many of us felt that these issues were perhaps being addressed in our study group discussions or in our social activities outside of class, beyond the eyes and ears of the facilitators. I had mixed feelings about the assumptions being made. First, I felt that perhaps with all of the experience of having offered this course over the years, if the facilitators felt these issues were critical and overtly or subconsciously omnipresent in our relationships with one another, I would prefer them to have openly declared this so and get to the discourse. Secondly, I have done much reflection on these issues over time and felt that I was being pushed to making self-accusations that simply did not exist. If ever there was a point to discuss matters with “black and white” clarity [reference intended], it was then.

Time adds clarity however. As I reflected on my frustration, it became clear to me that being born into the “white race” I have certain privileges that go unchallenged no matter where I go or what I do. In my final thanks to the class at our last session, I acknowledged that I am biased, however consciously or unconsciously that plays out, but being from a very “white” and conservative New Hampshire, I have little opportunity to check my bias with reality for lack of exposure. So, in order for me to seek a level of understanding and parallel thinking equal to racial, religious, sexual or gender biases, I have to relate my experiences to my own environment. On that level, what I look at as being important and culturally sensitive, is the issue of civility; that it ought not to matter the color of ones skin, religious leanings, or sexual or gender preferences. If we seek to find ways to be civil to one another, in all of our interactions, could we not become color-blind and bias-free as we create relationships of interdependency, of mutuality and, as Ron David would say, love? I know now that the issue runs deeper than this and I hope to continue to explore its root causes and my own hidden biases that lie beneath the surface.

The importance of our [Citizens Council] relationship with the Human Relations Committee of the City of Laconia provides us with opportunities to know people of other cultures; their wounds and healings of untold atrocities; and come to know them as neighbors; assets to their new community; people having gifts that contribute to the health of our community.

## **OUTWARD BOUND**

On our first Saturday in Cambridge, we were taken to Thompson Island for an Outward Bound experience. Remaining with an assigned group for the entire day and teaming up for some pretty fierce volleyball (okay...jungle ball) at the end of the day, was a wonderful experience of trial, challenge, pushing limits and, as we all know, teambuilding. Through active engagement and subtle observation, we came to understand our leadership styles and how they play into other members of the team. We gain a respect for how the ideas of others refocus our assumptions and how necessary each and every member is to the strength and success of the group.

Camaraderie continued to build as chatter, laughter and full scale yelling followed us through the day. From the most petite to the largest among us, we relied on each other to conquer “the ladder”. The strongest tired quickly. Machismo quickly gave way to feminine nurture and groups of five became teams of one. Self-reliance melded to the demands of dependency, trust and endurance. Together we ascended.

We’ve all participated in teambuilding exercises but this was my first experience in an Outward Bound environment. It was just the right end to a very busy first week and gave us time away from the readings and classroom to come to know one another on a different plane. Except for our dear Irish friend getting seasick to and from the island, everyone had a great day together!