



Every so often the planet is graced with a leader no one sees coming, an individual who accomplishes great things. Terri Bridenbecker, executive director of the Cayuga County Chamber of Commerce, was one such leader. When Terri found the confidence and courage to apply for this significant leadership position, no one saw her coming. In fact, she was an unknown in the traditional community leadership circles. Many did not think she had the "right stuff" to lead, much less transform it into the vibrant organization it is today. What was it about Terri Bridenbecker that made her take this bold step?

Terri took this bold step because she had a leader's heart. She knew if given the opportunity, she could be the Chamber's executive and be great at it. Even so, she did not aggressively pursue the position. She sat quietly day after day observing the board of directors engage in finding a new executive. She asked many questions but never spoke directly of her interest in the position. All it took to move her heart's desire to action was a question, "Terri, why aren't you applying?" She said, "Do you

think I can do the job?" The answer was, "Yes, but do you believe you can do the job?" Her answer - "Yes!" She submitted her resume, was interviewed, became a finalist and then her work really began.

You see, no one saw her coming. Many had to be convinced that she could be the leader of Cayuga County's business organization. Terri knew this too. During the final phases of the search she began to "act as if." She moved her heart's desire to her head and strategically aligned her words, actions, and deeds with those required of the Chamber's executive. With support and encouragement she began to practice leading as if she was the Chamber's executive director. In time, people began to see her as having the potential to lead. She was offered the position and the rest is history. Terri continued to thrive as a leader, right until the time of her unexpected death. She did this by always remembering to lead first with her heart, then with her head.

There are lessons to be learned from Terri Bridenbecker's successful and all too short leadership journey. You may be a leader no one sees coming. If you have it on your heart to be a leader go for it! Place yourself in situations that allow you to explore your capacity to lead. Move your heart's desire to your head and strategically adopt an "act as if" approach to developing as a leader. Align your words, actions, and deeds with leadership expectations in your organization. Don't hesitate to practice being a leader before formally becoming one. In time people will see your potential, and an opportunity will emerge. When it does, take it. Finally, when you become a leader never, ever forget that leadership is about the heart first, then the head.

Terri Bridenbecker never, ever lost sight of this and it is what made her a successful leader. Thank you, Terri for finding the confidence and courage to follow your heart's desire. It is my hope your leadership journey and legacy serve as inspiration for all those who follow in your footsteps.