

Is Your Desire to Serve a Calling or a Craving?

By Donna Zajonc

Co-Founder, Bainbridge Leadership Center, Seattle, Washington



Donna Zajonc will give two presentations on Friday, October 31, at the 2008 TML Annual Conference and Exhibition in San Antonio. At 7:30 a.m., she will be the guest speaker for the Women in Government Breakfast, and at 10:30 she will present a session titled "Stoking the Fire: Keeping Your Passion for Public Service Alive." Don't miss her top-notch programs.

In public life, there is a thin line between the calling to serve and the craving to serve. Some public leaders report such a strong need to serve that it becomes a "craving," a kissing cousin to addiction. Those of us dedicated to public service sometimes confuse our desire to serve with a belief that we are "supposed" to serve. Our offering of service is then a craving rather than a calling.

A calling is a desire to give. A craving is a desire to get. A calling is our opportunity to share our unique contributions and blessings with others. A craving is a fear that there is "not enough," a hole that we must fill. A calling arises naturally from our sense of completeness. A craving is a need to get because we are incomplete.

A calling is a conscious awareness of our wholeness, spurring us to acts of spontaneous generosity. We know that by responding to our personal calling, by sharing our gifts in full, we encourage others to reveal their own greatness. Conversely, a craving is a nagging sense of lack, an unconscious

reaction to an imagined deficit that demands to be overcome.

If we as public servants live with a craving to serve, we are in the grip of many of the destructive byproducts of addiction that may arise in us: fear, manipulation, control, anger, jealousy, and excessive pride—the hallmarks of self-defeating behavior. Housing such toxic emotions, we become unable to listen to others. Our political approach turns mean-spirited as our cravings gradually begin to run our lives for us. We may become so delusional that we believe we are "destined to

serve," and that someone on high has anointed our time in office. Our grandiosity grows, and we move into a full, self-centered power grab—but all in the name of serving the people!

In the seductive world of public life, whether in the corporate world or in the arenas of sports and entertainment, our cravings may be fed by hobnobbing with the rich and powerful. Hovering lobbyists, persons of privilege bidding for our attention, adoring staff, as well as plenty of alcohol and other drugs, all combine to make the public leader's life fertile ground for cravings and addictions.

Even healthy people who enter public life with their cravings under

control often find that its pressures and temptations tend to magnify their cravings, sometimes even igniting full-blown addictions. As the cycle of need unfolds, we work desperately to retain our power, doing whatever it takes to ensure our re-election or maintaining our powerful public position. Before we know it, we're living an unconscious, mostly unfulfilling life grounded in selfish desires rather than higher motives.

When we are called to service, we become aware of our passions, and our actions unfold with ease and joy. Colossal tasks become simple. We glow with excitement that attracts others to join our vision. By relinquishing attachments that feed our cravings, we surrender to higher motives; therein lies the true satisfaction of living our calling!

If you are in a public service position now, take time to ask yourself whether you are leading from a place of wholeness or incompleteness. Do you *need* the adoration of voters or the fame that may come from public life? Only you know your true motivations and what is underneath your desire to serve.

During this 2008 election cycle, listen carefully to the language and motivations of various candidates running for office, including yourself, possibly. As you listen, attempt to distinguish between whether the desire to serve is a calling or a craving. We all want leaders, including ourselves, whose time in public life is based on a true calling to serve. ★

