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## Leadership Stories

by

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Mary Williams, Oregon's Deputy Attorney General, shared *Leadership: Lessons Learned* at the Mary Leonard Law Society monthly meeting and continuing legal education event held March 16, 2010, at The Ford Hall Board Room, Willamette University.

*Lesson Number One:* "If you find a job you love, do it." From September, 1991 when she accepted a position as an Honors Attorney at the Oregon Department of Justice, Mary has been "in love." She counts among her good fortune the opportunity to do appellate work and to have worked with Oregon Supreme Court Justice Virginia Linder, when she was Solicitor General, and Hardy Myers, when he was Attorney General.

*Lesson Number Two:* "Four most important words for any manager/leader: What do you recommend?" Mary found that once she was viewed as the leader everyone looked to her to have the answers and no one disagreed with her responses. If you ask someone a question like what do you recommend, Mary concluded that you are likely to get a thoughtful collaborative solution to the problem that was presented for you to solve.

*Lesson Number Three:* "Knowledge is power, but much more powerful if you share it." Even though knowledge is power, Mary believes that knowledge is more powerful when it is shared.

*Lesson Number Four:* "When in doubt, ask: What would (one of your role models) do?"

*Lesson Number Five:* "Keep friends as you move to higher places ... or at least a few good confidential informants." Mary was fortunate to have individuals willing to volunteer to provide her with unsolicited feedback to keep her grounded and to help her keep the organization moving forward in a positive direction.

In characterizing her career path, Mary used three short word groupings. First, Mary modestly acknowledged that having graduated from college (University of South Dakota) in two and one-half years and received a graduate degree in psychology from the University of Oregon and law degree from Lewis and Clark College of Law while working full time and taking evening classes, she is "very bright."

Second, with respect to "what she wanted to be when she grew up," Mary states she was "largely clueless." Mary quipped that she "never knew to say no" to the next educational challenge. Her good fortune was to be associated with caring and savvy individuals who considered her best interests when suggesting the next educational and professional experience for her.

Third, after having received the career advice, Mary stated that she did "best when" she had "a mission." For example, after graduating from law school, her supervisor at the Oregon Health Sciences University advised her to do "some law kind of thing." Her mission was to find a legal job and the best fortune of all was to be hired by the Department of Justice as an Honors Attorney and then placed in the Appellate Division. That was the first step on her career path to Assistant Solicitor General, then Solicitor General (a job she loved!) and her current position of Deputy Attorney General - a job she "is still learning."

Mary concluded her remarks by discussing three cases she argued and won before the United States Supreme Court: *Oregon v. Guzek* (2006); *Sanchez-Llamas v. Oregon* (2006); and *Oregon v. Ice* (2009). She emphasized the team effort required in presenting cases to the Supreme Court; hours and hours spent reading cases, reviewing the record, writing the brief, participating in series of practice oral

argument rounds, and finally surviving an intense four or five days in Washington D.C. prior to delivering in the allocated 20-30 minutes a persuasive (and winning) argument. Mary commented that there is a “noticeable difference” when Justice Antonin Scalia supports the position you are advocating then when he does not. She stated that *Oregon v. Ice* was the most difficult to argue (Justice Scalia did not support Oregon’s position) and the most rewarding because oral advocacy and oral argument made a difference in the Supreme Court’s decision.

Mary closed by stating that arguing before the Supreme Court is “a cinch compared to presenting a talk” about herself!

The Mary Leonard Law Society thanks Mary Williams and sincerely appreciates her support. In addition, a special thank you to the Oregon Department of Justice for co-sponsoring this event and Willamette University for providing the venue.

