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The Tin Man

In the *Wizard of Oz* movie there are four seekers, Dorothy who is looking for a way back to her home in Kansas, a scarecrow who wants some brains, a cowardly lion who desires courage, and the Tin Man who wants a heart. In the end, they all get what they are seeking, although not perhaps in the way they envisioned.

The Wizard, who turns out to be a bit of a charlatan, gave the Tin Man a “testimonial” heart-shaped watch and told him “a heart is not judged by how much you love; but by how much you are loved by others.” Thus the kind and caring Tin Man was acknowledged for qualities he already had.

The folk-rock trio called *America* had a 1974 top-ten hit song called “Tin Man” with cryptic lyrics I can’t interpret except for the refrain, “But Oz never did give nothing to the Tin Man that he didn’t, didn’t already have.” For my many years as manager a sign with those lyrics was the wall of my office. It kept me humble.

I was reminded that I served as a “mirror” for the daily flow of staff, co-workers, customers and managers who came seeking support and advice. I had my administrative duties, of course, but reminding people of the knowledge, skills, abilities and talents they already possessed was, I thought, one of my primary responsibilities. If I added value to our exchanges because of my own experience, so much the better, but most visitors left my office with solutions they themselves crafted or “discovered.” I was continually impressed with the abilities of people to solve their own problems.

Taking time to listen to others, to *really* listen, is essential, whether or not you’re in a leadership role. Actually, we are all in

leadership roles throughout our lifetimes: parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle, sometime coach or tutor, co-worker, friend, spouse, etc. How important it is to see the possibilities and talents in others! How important it is to affirm others!

I have had the privilege (joy!) of being in Elementary School classrooms to read my poems and stories or to coach the young ones in writing. I am always very moved when I look into the faces of children and see their enthusiasm to learn, really, to *discover* who they are. It is essential, I think, to continually validate this. I have had similar experiences when teaching adults—there are many “grown-ups” who are eager to develop their talents, regardless of age.

It is easy to find criticism and carping. Just turn on the radio or television. Listen to conversations in public places such as the grocery store checkout line. Finding fault almost seems to have become a national pastime. I understand and appreciate an effort to guide or correct but how much better that effort is received when done with good will rooted in an optimistic attitude and a clear insight into the positive qualities others already have.

As a manager (or parent or counselor or friend), I found this maxim to be useful: Praise in public, counsel in private. There are many advantages to this approach not the least of which is showing respect for another person.

As you may have guessed by now, I am optimistic about human potential. I will not tell you I have never been disappointed by the behavior of others. But disappointments do not deter me from my fundamental viewpoint when it comes to others: Affirm, *affirm, affirm!* Remember the Tin Man and award some “testimonials” to others. Be your own Wizard of Oz.

