

Remember! Celebrate! Act! Honors MLK's Legacy

1/23/2006

"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve," Martin Luther King, Jr., PhD, once said. So, it was "in the spirit of unity and service"—CDC's theme for this year's celebration—that a packed audience gathered to "remember, celebrate, and act" during the 2006 Dr. King Commemorative Program, on January 18.

King's work and his legacy of courage, dignity, and moral conviction have benefited the lives of many Americans, from all walks of life. In the spirit of service to ones fellow citizens, he believed that the ultimate measure of a person is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy.

Anything is Possible

Following a warm welcome by Chief of Staff Lynn Austin, PhD, Sharon Martin, Public Health Advisor, NCIPC, set the tone of celebration with her moving recital of the poem, "Anything is Possible." While the author of the piece is unknown, its words and Martin's raw passion captured the essence of King's dedication to not giving up the fight for equality and justice until they are enjoyed by all. "Persist," the poem challenged listeners, adding, "because with an idea, determination, and the right moves, you can do great things."

And great things this year's keynote speaker, Jim Hunter, has helped others accomplish. As the principal consultant at J.D. Hunter Associates, Hunter has assisted clients, including several of *Fortune* Magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work for," in implementing servant leadership within their companies.

Servant Leaders

Hunter is the author of the internationally best-selling book, *The Servant: A Simple Story About the True Essence of Leadership*. The book teaches timeless principles of servant leadership and is the text used in many MBA and other higher-education curricula around the world.

His second book, *The World's Most Powerful Leadership Principle: How to Become a Servant Leader*, was released this past summer. The book takes the reader step-by-step through the servant leadership implementation process.

"Leadership is not synonymous with management," Hunter said, in addressing the large crowd. "Leadership is synonymous with influence. We all influence people in some way-for the good or not so good. The only question



Jim Hunter shares what it means to be a servant leader during the 2006 Dr. King Commemorative Program. "Leadership is who we are and our ability to influence people to action." Photo by Greg Knobloch



Sharon Martin, Public Health Advisor, moves the crowd with a stirring rendition of poem, "Anything is Possible." Photo by Greg Knobloch

is will people be glad we were there?"



After the program, CDC presented a remembrance to Jim Hunter. Shown left to right are Chief of Staff Lynn Austin, Director Julie Gerberding, and Hunter. *Photo by Greg Knobloch*

Chief Diversity Officer

In keeping with the spirit of last year's celebration where CDC unveiled new diversity efforts, CDC Director, Julie Gerberding, MD, MPH announced, prior to introducing the speaker, that she has appointed [Avis Dickey](#) as its Chief Diversity Officer. Dickey will oversee CDC's enterprise-wide diversity agenda and ensure that it achieves the objectives of the newly-created Diversity Steering Committee.

"CDC's goal of ensuring an inclusive work environment that values diversity, respects the dignity of each individual, and promotes the development of the full potential of each and every member of the organization supports the legacy of Dr. King. Each of us has a responsibility to aid in the quest for equal opportunity, and each of us is responsible for living 'the dream,'" Gerberding wrote in her letter of address to program participants. For this to happen, everyone has to be

willing to think in different ways.

To Lead is to Serve

Hunter expounded on this new way of thinking, by adding a little twist. "Dr. King challenged us to think in new ways. I want you to think in new ways about leadership—and not just leadership, but servant leadership." He pointed out to audience members that Dr. King's work stands as one of the greatest examples of servant leadership.

Leadership is who we are and our ability to influence people, he said. At least 35 of the companies that made *Fortune's* list of "100 Best Companies to Work For" have implemented the servant leadership system. Companies like Starbucks, Federal Express, Marriott International, and Southwest Airlines have successfully built their businesses around the concept. Hunter sees servant leadership as a concept that is exploding worldwide.

"I've come across a lot of great managers who were horrible leaders," he went on to say. "I've come across some great leaders who weren't particularly good managers. Leadership is not about being the boss. It's not about being the head of an organization. It's not about being the dad. Leadership is about your ability to influence people to action."

"I'm not where I need to be, but better than I used to be."

Harkening back to his early post-college days, Hunter considered himself a "master of mediocrity." He spoke on how he did the bare minimum, until he ran into his first boss in business. The man so inspired him that he later wrote a

book about him. “He served me. When I left his company 5 years later, I was a different person.”

Hunter defined leadership as the skill of influencing people to enthusiastically work toward goals identified as being for the common good, with character that inspires confidence. That skill, he says, is a learned or acquired ability—just as is leadership.

It’s About Character

As humble as he was humorous and effective, Hunter admitted that he’s constantly working to “raise his game.” “I’m not where I need to be, but better than I used to be,” he divulged. The goal is not to become a perfect servant leader, he says, but to make changes that are good for the group.

He noted that many people think leadership is something they read in a book. Hunter went on to say that Americans spend about \$6 billion a year purchasing books that teach all about leadership, yet people don’t really know leadership because they’ve never served anyone. “We have to understand that leadership is not something that happens in our heads. It’s about skill, it’s about character.”



Chief of Staff Lynn Austin gives welcoming remarks during the 2006 Dr. King Commemorative Program. *Photo by Greg Knobloch*

Servant Leaders Inspire Greatness

“To lead is to serve,” Hunter emphasized throughout the speech. “Martin Luther King spoke a lot about serving—extending ourselves for others.”

“Dr. King had something to say about character,” Hunter said. “He dreamed of a day where his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.”

Time and again, Hunter turned the speech into an interactive forum. “What is character?” he asked at one point. Character, he informed the crowd, is the “person you are in the dark, when nobody is looking.”

“You’re all leaders at CDC, the question is, are you effective? Do you leave things better than you found them?” he asked.

Laughter rang throughout the auditorium when Hunter used his then 3-year-old daughter as an example of someone forcing others to do things in ineffective ways and because “they say so.” “My daughter was a brutal dictator, ordering her parents, grandparents, and pets everywhere,” he said, continuing, “Anyone can order people around and force them to do things, but true leaders inspire others to want to accomplish goals, to want to make change, to want to make progress. That’s leadership.”

In discussing the difference between power and authority, Hunter stated that power was essentially what his daughter believed herself to have. “Power,” he says, “is the ability to force people to do what we want. Authority is the skill to get people to *willingly* do our will because of our personal influence. Power is bought and sold, given and taken away. Authority is about who we are as a person. Dr. King called it ‘soul force.’”

To drive home his point, Hunter reminded listeners, “Dr. King didn’t have any power, but he instituted change. He

was able to do that because he served and sacrificed. That gave him authority. Authority, unlike power, can't be bought and sold, given and taken away. That's what it means to be a servant leader. The person who you are is what inspires others."

As we reflect on the legacy of Dr. King, we can clearly see that his work, his service, his sacrifice, still lives in the hearts of others. Because of him, many have felt compelled to carry the torch for equality and justice. Many more, we hope, will realize that to serve is, in many ways, to lead.

This ***Inside Story*** by Yolanda Barnes on detail with ***CDC Connects***.