

“BRING ME MEN”

By Janet E. Nichols

When I entered the U.S. Air Force Academy as a cadet in 1977, I unceremoniously marched up the “BRING ME MEN” ramp. I was 18 years old, and at the time, I had no idea of the relevance of the quote, or what it stood for. I simply entered college, training, and a career without really understanding the significance of those words. The only vision I had in my mind was the historic picture of Julie (Richards) Apfel who marched up the same ramp a year earlier as one of the first women cadets.

“BRING ME MEN”. Samuel Walter Foss wrote a poem beginning with these words in “The Coming American” in 1894. Scores of Air Force officers have passed under those words. The words have since been removed from the Academy landmark in the Air Force’s attempt to address gender issues. That topic, however, is reserved for another day. Today, the topic remains, “BRING ME MEN”.

America is suffering from a crisis in leadership like never before. Our ethics and values are being attacked and eroded on every front. We are in an insidious war in each corner of our nation. From the smallest towns to largest cities, newest businesses to largest corporations, local politicians to the highest elected and appointed officials, in schools, in the military, in churches, and even in our own families; the crisis is leadership. Some individuals in our society have succumbed to greed and an instant gratification mentality. I do not mean to say that the erosion is prolific, but rather that the small cracks in our foundation will continue to grow if not mended.

Examples of the threat surround us. The news is filled with these stories each day. There are the corporations who lie about their balance sheets. How about the financial schemes, which have robbed people of their life savings? There are politicians who can’t seem to pay their taxes, yet demand higher standards of others. How about the preachers whose sermons teach hatred and intolerance from the pulpit? And last, but surely not least, what about Americans lack of loyalty and dedication to the family unit?

“BRING ME MEN.” I invite you all to read the poem that begins “Bring me men to match my mountains”. Samuel Foss was not describing men, women, or military officers. He was describing leaders. It seems that many of us have forgotten what a leader is. And now, more than ever, is the time to reacquaint us with what it means to be a leader.

What describes a leader? A leader is someone who lives by the Golden Rule. He is someone who believes in equal pay for equal work. She understands that a penny saved is a penny earned. A leader sets the example. Leaders build teams that believe that they can achieve any task with hard work and innovation. They share the fruits of their labor and the lessons they have learned. Leaders do the right thing, even though it may not be the easiest path to follow. They never give up, never. Leaders never sacrifice their character or integrity. They always make it a priority to bring out the best in others. Leaders choose to act responsibly.

America needs more leaders. Each of us has the ability to provide positive leadership on a daily basis. We all play a key role in helping to heal our nation and make it stronger. Americans must begin by acknowledging that life is about more than making a quick dollar. It is about making a difference. You can make the difference. America is calling, "BRING ME MEN".