

Do We Listen to Other People's Listening?

By Eugene Lew

While most Americans are raised and trained in a colonial, hierarchical form of leadership, immigrant workers and community leaders employ a “shared leadership” approach. As I was reading the “Student Leadership Training Booklet” in the course reader, I wanted to change my answer for the first question in the first part of this leadership development assignment. Some of my strengths that I did not readily associate with leadership were listed there: “nurturing others and bringing out their best talents,” expressing “empathy and compassion for others,” and “encouraging different viewpoints while upholding one’s core values and principles.” I think this is the beauty of shared leadership, that everyone’s strengths are used and developed. In this sense, anyone can be a leader because everyone has something to contribute to the group.

My church in Chinatown uses a blend of Western and shared leadership, but there is room for improvement. In the high school fellowship, for example, only a few students who show “potential of becoming great leaders” receive mentorship and training by older counselors while the other students do not get many chances to develop new leadership skills. It would be great if each student that received special training was paired up with another student that did not receive mentorship and has less experience. This act alone would double the number of leaders. These students, in turn, could later be paired up with other students to work on other programs. Adults would no longer be the only mentors because high school students would learn to train and develop each other. This idea of mentorship could be carried to other parts of the church. Instead of planning everything

themselves, adults in the church can pair up more experienced older leaders with less experienced teenagers and collegians to work together on various programs. In this way, every project can be used as an opportunity for developing leaders and future mentors.

Listening is a big part of shared leadership because there will be as many ideas as opportunities for miscommunication since everyone is a leader and has a say in the process. My high school math teacher used to ask us, “Do you listen to other people’s listening?” Behind this seemingly confusing and unintelligent statement lay an important truth that she wanted to tell us: when we listen to people, we need to understand what they are really trying to tell us and not what we want to hear or think we heard. By carefully listening to my classmates at our meetings, I try to make sure that there are little misunderstandings. By listening, I can also gain insight into the leadership skills and passions of my classmates. At the first reception committee meeting, one of the members asked if we could host the reception near downtown Los Angeles so that it would be more convenient for the restaurant workers. Even after someone agreed to get in touch with KIWA and ask for their input, he continued to suggest a place closer to the restaurant workers. Initially, I was annoyed because I felt that there was nothing more that we could do at that point, but then I realized that his comments revealed something about him: he cared about helping the restaurant workers by placing their needs and conveniences above our own. Although it is hard to remember all the leadership skills that my committee members want to develop, I try to ensure that each person’s opinions and actions are noticed and valued. I encourage those that are shy or indecisive to speak up and take action. By befriending me and caring about what I have to say, others have given me the courage to voice my opinions and be pro-active.