

Leadership for a Multicultural Age:

A summary of the book
Salsa, Soul and Spirit
by
Juana Bordas

Developing Cultural Competencies from the Inside Out: Skills for Lifelong Learning
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Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age

New Approaches to Leadership from Latino, Black and American Indian Communities

Juana Bordas

This document is a short summary of the book Salsa, Soul and Spirit and in the pages that follow is a synopsis of each of the eight principles as a point of information and for reflection on how these principles can be applied in our personal and professional settings at the personal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural levels.

Multicultural Leadership

A multicultural leadership orientation incorporates many cultural perspectives, appreciates differences, values the unique contributions of diverse groups, and promotes learning from many orientations. People are encouraged to maintain their cultural identity while at the same time participating in and contributing to the larger society.

Multicultural leadership is uniquely suited to our mosaic world because it incorporates the influences, practices and values of a variety of cultures in a respectful and productive manner.

Multicultural leadership also entails changing organizational structures so that diversity becomes part of the framework and the standard way of operating. This requires a shift from hierarchical pluralism, which dictates that people conform to dominant cultural norms, to egalitarian pluralism, with values and norms that reflect a multicultural perspective.

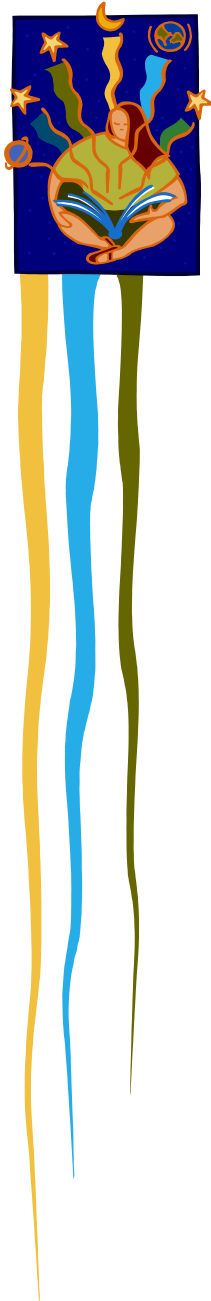
A New Social Covenant

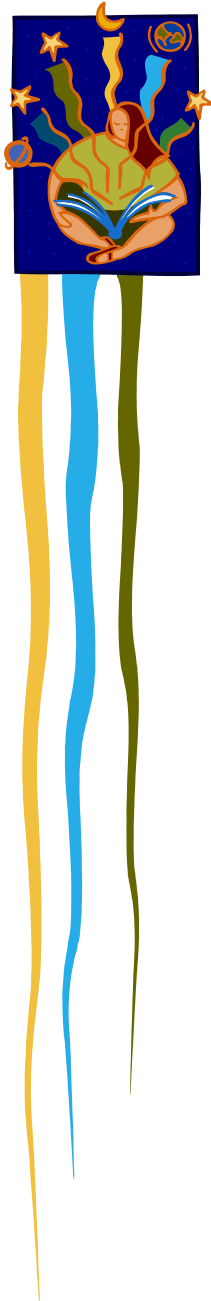
The old individualistic form of leadership must be transformed into a cooperative, collaborative, and people-oriented form. Leadership needs to change from an individualistic, self-centered orientation to a *We or other centered* orientation where leaders derive their authority from the people they serve, so they rely on people's support. Leaders are sanctioned by their communities by putting the collective welfare above self-interest. These values are the touchstones for multicultural leadership principles dedicated to building a benevolent and just society that upholds the well-being of all people.

Eight Principles of Multicultural Leadership

Bordas identifies eight core leadership principles common to Latino, Black and American Indian communities, principles deeply rooted in each culture's values and developed under the most trying of personal, societal and community conditions.

Bordas, J. (2007). *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Pgs. 1-21.





Principle #1 – Sankofa: Learning from the Past

Sankofa reminds us that our roots ground and nourish us, holds us firm when the winds of change howl, and offer perspective about what is lasting and significant. Although *Sankofa* rests on the foundation of the past, its feet are facing forward. This ancient symbol counsels us that the past is pathway to understanding the present and creating a strong future. *Sankofa* invites us to bring forward the meaningful and useful – including the values and spiritual traditions passed from previous generations – to learn from experience, and to avoid the dead ends and pitfalls of history.

Through time honored traditions, these cultures [the cultures of African-Americans, Latinos/as and Native-Americans] keep the past alive and accessible so it feeds the present. Since their history is a tale of conquest, cultural oppression, and racism, reclaiming and remedying the past is crucial to recovering power and wholeness. For many, this is not about times gone by, but their recent family history.

When the past is constructed in the bright light of honesty – or at least when everyone's story is told – we can begin reconstructing leadership from a Eurocentric form to one that's more diverse and inclusive. We can construct a new leadership covenant that reflects and respects the history and culture of all Americans.

Authentic diversity, however, can only happen on a two-way street – understanding must go both ways. Looking at history from a different point of view and considering the reasons why the past is so relevant to people of color can be the springboard for learning to lead from a multicultural orientation.

Sankofa reminds us that for most of human history, people lived in *We* or collective cultures, in which the collective superseded individual gain.



Principle #2– I to We: From Individualism to Collective Identity

We cultures share everything.

We cultures work together so everyone benefits.

We cultures are collective and relish togetherness.

No one gets left out of a We culture.

We cultures are impeccably inclusive.

We culture put benefiting the whole before the individual.

In We cultures the I exists only in relationship to others, not as a separate entity.

There are nuances of both individualism and collectivism. Our goal is to understand the nuances of both orientations. Collectivist's cultures are usually portrayed as tightly woven and integrated. They cherish group welfare, unity and harmony. To maintain these, people behave politely, act in a socially desirable manner, and respect others. The family, community, or tribe takes precedence over the individual, whose identity flows from the collective. People work for group success before personal credit or gain. In contrast, individualistic cultures are more loosely integrated. Change and risk taking are embraced. Individuals are highly differentiated from others. Self-identity and self-interest are keystones. To grow up means to become independent, autonomous, and responsible for one's own life. Individual freedom and choice are highly valued. Individual needs supersede collective ones.

The extent of one's individualist or collectivist orientation determines how much control one assumes in life. The independent focus says, "To a very great extent, I control my life, determine my reality, choose my experiences and shape my destiny. I am the captain of my ship. Collectivist cultures are more in tune with natural cycles and believe in a life power that is external to them. These forces influence their lives.

I and WE are not a dichotomy. The I is intrinsic to the We orientation—individuals must be strong for the collective to thrive. We do not have to choose one or the other. This concept of both and rather than either or is a thread that runs through collectivistic cultures. Just as the corn stalk grows tall on its own but only fully matures when many are planted and cross-fertilization occurs, the I is nourished in the rich soil that has been cultivated by the collective not just today, but for many previous generations.

Shifting from I to a We orientation implies an alteration in values whereby social responsibility and looking after the common good is embraced. It is understood that excessive accumulation of wealth or power by a few hinders the well-being of society as a whole. Deep sharing is a cultural touchstone and wealth is defined as being able to give to others.



Principle #3 – Mi Casa Es Su Casa: The Spirit of Generosity

Mi casa es su casa reflects a sprawling sense of inclusiveness and generosity. It encapsulates a joy in sharing and implies “What I have is also yours.” In collectivist cultures, possessions are more fluid and communal.

In collectivist *We* cultures, generosity is not a two-way street; rather, it is a busy intersection where everybody meets.... From a *We* perspective, because the self emerges from the collective, generosity toward others is actually giving to oneself. Cyclical reciprocity means people are continually giving to one another.

Generosity is the glue that holds *We* cultures together. The community fiber would be torn if some were to take more than their share or to accumulate great wealth at the expense of others.

Dealing with the social structures and revitalizing public morality so that an equitable and compassionate society can thrive is a critical leadership issue of our time.

James MacGregor Burns, renowned leadership experts defines leadership as a collective process linked to social change with the purpose of enhancing the well-being of human existence. He adds that leadership implies that ability to mobilize people and engage them in a process in which both leader and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

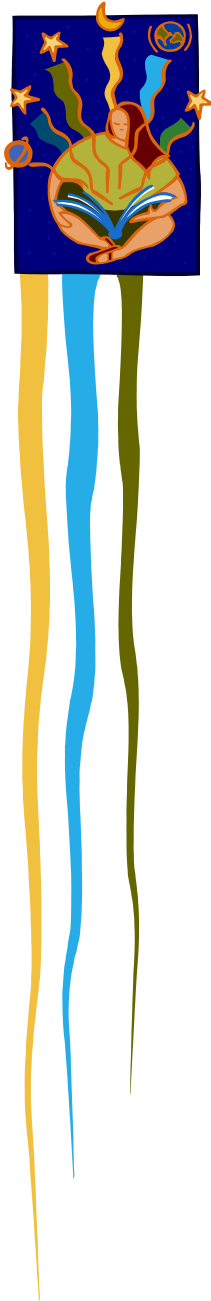
The purpose of leadership in communities of color is in step with Burns’ description – to promote that collective well-being by creating positive social change and securing equal opportunities through a collaborative process that develops and uplifts people.

If leaders are to enhance people’s well-being, then surely they must nurture a social, political, and economic environment in which people can get their basic needs met, including decent housing, work, education, and health care.

Leaders are as also guardians of the social contract whereby people willingly follow the rules, laws, and structures of society in return for the benefits received. When these begin to unravel, there is social disengagement, alienation, and increasing economic need, as well as more violence and crime.

The imperative that leaders are the guardians of future generation’s mandates that they be good stewards and include a vision for a sustainable future.

Bordas, J. (2007). *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Pgs. 58-73.



Principle #4 - A Leader among Equals

In collectivist cultures, a leader's authority comes from the group. Leaders are expected to reflect the group's behavior and values. By listening and gathering people's opinions, the leader integrates the group wisdom. The leader must find unanimity within the group first, and then act in concert with it. Like a battery, leaders charge people up, facilitate their working together, and assist them in solving problems. Through empowering others, a community of leaders evolves. Standing out too far from others or calling too much attention to oneself can damage the group cohesion that is central to collectivist cultures.

This kind of leadership centers on good character, honesty, humility, generosity, and keeping one's word. A key responsibility is treating everyone with fairness and consistency and following the rule. A leader among equals focuses on the common good. His or her skills, energy and endurance are for the well-being of the people they serve. Leaders who serve a greater purpose lessen their self-importance...

Leadership is conferred by the Tribe

Leadership is externally conferred by people who recognize a person's abilities, talents, or vision and know how this benefits the community. If a person has admirable qualities—generosity, sharing, responsibility to self and others—people will follow.

A person is valued for what they can contribute to their community. Since everyone can contribute, leadership is rotated depending on the task or function at hand, and therefore, is much more distributed.

Personalismo

In the Latino culture, people identify and work with a leader because of personalismo—people's respect for the leader as a person. Personalismo implies that leadership centers on character and emphasizes the importance of honesty as a leadership trait. Leaders must also do what they say they are going to do. Latinos expect their leaders to accomplish extraordinary things while remaining ordinary people. A leader must embody his or her community and never forget "where he or she came from." (Cesar Chavez)

Setting an Inspiring Example

In the Black community—leaders are known as people who "walk their talk." . Although uniqueness and personal style are celebrated, self expressions is considered a way to enhance collectivism—unlike the usual American individualism that separates one from the group. It's analogous to a jazz group playing different interpretations—the individual musician has to be in harmony with and contribute to the music of the group. When the individual player adds his own interpretation and style it is always in sync with the group and the other musicians back him up, appreciate his improvisations, and encourage him. Others in the group may then take the lead. His differs from the kind of individualism in which a person sets himself apart. Nurturing group identity is a key function of this type of leadership.

Principle #5 – Leaders as Guardians of Public Values: A Tradition of Activism



Leadership springs from a collective orientation in which people have to be inspired to work together to solve mutual concerns.

Dr. Antonia Pantoja, Founder of ASPIRA, the first Puerto Rican leadership and advancement program concludes, “The whole purpose of leadership is to exercise one’s power, knowledge and access to change those aspects of society that are inequitable.”

Leaders are guardians of public values. Communities of color must assume a macro view of leadership that concerns itself with the public values and institutions that underscore racism and discrimination.

Historically, an African-American leader emerged because he/she was concerned with the macro ethics of large systems and institutions as well as the micro ethics or private virtues of individuals.

Leadership in communities of color is inherently a public responsibility to bring people together to address and change the social and economic conditions that affect their lives.

Ethnocentric thought and the pull for assimilation pose questions as to whether people can be Americans *and* still stay connected to their race, culture, country of origin, or ethnic group. Ethnocentricity blinds people to the benefits, customs, traditions, and languages of our rich cultural mosaic. ...The task of preserving and honoring cultural traditions and integrating these into a multicultural mosaic is a key function of leadership in a diverse society.

Leaders also have to inspire people to believe in themselves....A point of cohesion for Latino leaders is that they are united by a concept known as La Causa – the cause – which recognizes leaders as *advocates* for justice and equal opportunity. ...It supports the notion belief that we are part of a long-term movement.

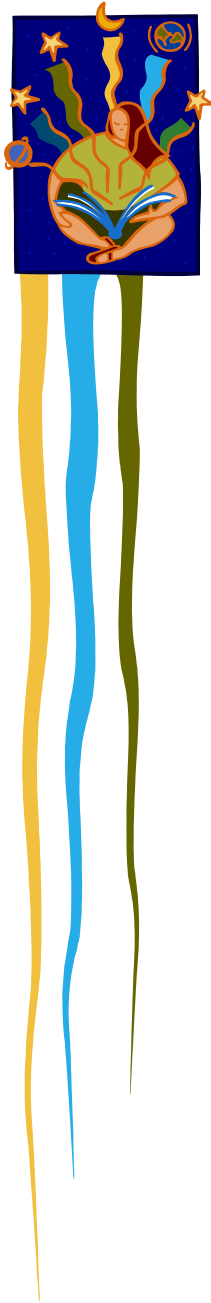
Dealing with oppression, people’s lack of belief in their abilities, and the cold facts of discrimination is a central charge of leadership programs in communities of color.

Leaders in communities of color must uncover how the internalization of the psychology of oppression has affected them personally.

Only by becoming aware of how society is structured to perpetuate the dominance of some groups and to limit access to others will leaders be able to create a framework for the just and equal society in which diversity can flourish.

The lack of awareness of White privilege perpetuates the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all which supports the individualistic stance of meritocracy – that people make it based on their talent and hard work.

Bordas, J. (2007). *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Pgs. 96-113.



Principle #6 – Leaders as Community Stewards

Leadership as service integrates the concept that leaders are not motivated by self-interest, personal influence, or power. They accept the mantle of leadership to serve the people, communities and ideals they sought to further. Examples include Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., Susan B. Anthony, and Cesar Chavez.

Robert Greenleaf's servant leadership urges leaders to engage in "making power legitimate for the public good." Community stewards derive their power from the communities they serve and are accountable to them. It expands the scope of the servant leader to community servanthood and stewardship.

Community stewards build people's capacity and foster group empowerment. They are also trustees of their community's future and guardians of future generations. Community servanthood is based on involving many people sharing power, and benefiting others. Leaders, therefore, are agents of change working in partnership with the community leading others to collectively find solutions to the community problems. Community progress is a key component.

A shared community vision is the collective aspirations of the group or the organization. Community stewards recognize that a shared vision promotes unity, continuity, and wholeness.

Listening to understand is a key leadership trait. As a community steward, leaders listen to everyone's ideas and ensure that everyone in the group speaks before the leader ventures an opinion. In this capacity, the leader functions as a weaver, integrating people's ideas, discerning the group consensus, and bringing forth the collective wisdom.

Community stewards nurture full participation, consensus building, and respect for each individual's opinion. Only after much listening, interchange, and reflection does a collective answer or solution surface.

Creating a community of leaders grows other people's capacities and builds the critical mass needed to promote social change. As community stewards, leaders are dedicated to serving people, a movement, a cause and a greater purpose. A crucial step is setting a destination that synthesizes a compelling and shared community vision.

Bordas, J. (2007). *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Pgs. 116-134.



Principle #7 – All My Relatives: La Familia, the Village, the Tribe

The widespread custom of treating people as relatives is a natural evolution of the We identity that is the heart of collective cultures. It reflects a spiritual understanding of the universal human connection.

Treating all people as relatives would transform leadership. We can also surmise how this would create a very different society – one that is more compassionate, equitable and socially responsible.

The importance of acknowledging that people are related extends to leadership as well. Leaders are expected to treat people as family members. This is easier to understand when noting that leadership is not a position or a passing stage, but a lifelong commitment.

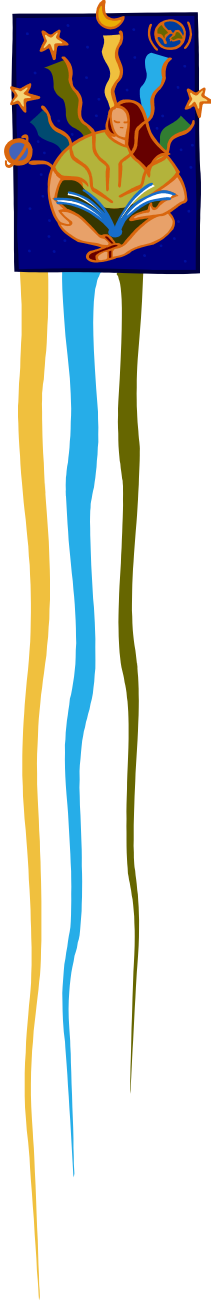
Seeing people as relatives, as members of one big family, as one's community or village, presents a different model of how leaders relate to their followers.... Seeing relationships as responsibility lays the foundation for leadership that assumes accountability for the social institutions that safeguard equity, the common welfare, and justice for all.

A society that regards people as relatives would actively address the social and economic structures perpetuating inequities.

Leaders must personally model the behaviors they aspire to see in society – making a private value reflected as a public value. The private aspect is how individuals act toward each other and the public values are ensuring that the society is structured in such a way that people are cared for and treated humanely.

Leaders in communities must ensure that the table is wide enough to include all people of goodwill who are ready to build a society that will benefit the human family.

Principle #8 – Gracias: Gratitude, Hope and Forgiveness



There are many spiritual attributes that nourish Black, Latinos, and Indian leaders, *gracias* (gratitude), hope, and forgiveness are three that transformed oppression and need into an enduring faith in life's goodness.

Gratitude was deeply ingrained in early We cultures, in which just surviving was a blessing indeed. Most indigenous culture had celebrations to give thanks for the cycles of nature. *Gracias* means grace as well as thank you. It embraces an appreciation for parents, family community and those who came before.

Gratitude and thankfulness is an essential reflection of the reverence for life inherent in the American Indian Culture. Coming from a place of gratefulness and thanksgiving, instead of focusing on lack or needs, replenishes the fountain of generosity that flows from collective cultures. *Gracias* strengthens community, inspires optimism and allows people to keep the faith during trying times or when faced with limitation. Gratitude is a transforming force that engenders hope and generosity even when one has little to share or times are difficult. *Gracias*, being grateful, is a key quality that cultivates hope because people concentrate on what they have, not what they lack.

Gratitude or focusing attention on what one has, not what one wants was a spiritual survival tactic for communities of color during centuries of oppression and lack. Practicing gratitude brings a sense of contentment with one's life. It can also be an antidote to the rampant materialism that is dividing our world into the haves and have-nots.

Hope and Optimism

Keeping hope alive is a powerful force among African Americans. In the American Indian culture hope is anchored in dreams, visions, prophecy, and good counsel of wise elders and shamans. Hope kept tribes together when they were removed from their lands.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation

One of the key contributions African Americans make to the world is reconciliation...the challenge of resolving conflict through reconciliation and bringing people together. Forgiveness also allows people to begin enough. At the start of each year, Cherokee tribal members make a procession to the stream and gather together in a ceremony of swirling water overhead. With each swirl they wash away any thoughts or actions that are not beneficial for their future well-being. Particularly important is forgiving anyone who had offended or hurt them.

Spirituality

The term spiritual responsibility reflects the integration of leadership, spirituality, and people's welfare in communities of color. When relationships imply responsibility, spirituality is a moral obligation to ensure others' well-being and the collective good. The leader as community steward and guardian of public values grows out of this conviction.

For Indian people, spirituality is the integrating force of their lives and the essence of leadership. It is the personal power or "medicine" a leader carries that allows the leader to contribute to the community and obtain greater consciousness, awareness, and balance

Bordas, J. (2007). *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers. Pgs. 160-176.