



by Dr. Barbara E. Riley

# Lead by Example

## Be Mindful of the Choices You Make Concerning Your Health

In the June 2007 issue of *Pride*, we explored the metaphors of way stations and safehouses. Our journey began by exploring effective leadership — discovering that knowing who and what we are is as important as what we do. We saw that the interplay between our intuition and inner knowledge combined with our ability to use our senses to scan our environment minute to minute is essential to transformative leadership.

Our most significant contribution as leaders is as role models. When we explored the conscious chamber in the March 2007 issue, I talked about the importance of breathing as a link to critical pieces of information and signals coming from our bodies. An unhealthy body will mask the signals we need to survive and thrive as individuals and leaders, and will convey messages of pain and despair.

How important is our health to our ability to sustain a conscious frame of being? Reflect on your state of health. Take a deep breath. Do you believe your choices are limited? Do you live in a world of either/or: Either I will starve or I will be overweight? Are you allowing yourself to drift into denial about the choices you are making about your health? Are your choices creating a positive or negative impact on you and those you lead?

The answers to these questions say more about who you are and where you are in your journey to transformative leadership than you wish to admit. Others around us scrutinize our every act, from moment to moment. Our very presence indicates whether we think paying attention to our health is important, or not. As leaders, we are role models for health.

As African Americans, we have struggled for a long time with health issues. As a community, we are at the top of the list for heart conditions, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and more. Many of our most

talented die young. Our bodies are a constant feedback mechanism of information about how we are behaving and being in the world in relation to our health. To choose to be unconscious of our bodies limits our ability to think clearly, limits our ability to connect to our inner knowing and intuition, and keeps us blind to critical signs of injury or illness. All



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of our senses are controlled by the shape and condition of our bodies. What is the current state of your health and wellness? What shape are you in? How conscious are you of your health's impact on you and your impact on others?

### Free to Break the Cycle

Our ancestors, when enslaved, were given a high-fat, high-cholesterol diet that was much different than the balanced diet available in their homeland. They were forced to make this diet work for themselves and their families. Involuntary, backbreaking physical labor was the countervailing force that contributed to their surviving such a diet. Today, most of us have the freedom to behave differently. However, many of us are eating many of the same foods as our ancestors and have replaced physical work with the sedentary activities of attending meetings, watching television and surfing the Internet on the computer.

Our ancestors would expect more of us. As leaders of our present and our future, our ancestors would expect us to “lift up” and work to transform the health of our community. We cannot lead others to a safe, healthy and innovative future until we change how we interact with others and our environment. Our ancestors chose to stay alive and ensure the future of our community. How we will address this same challenge? Transformative leadership demands that we find a way. Addressing what we know in the conscious, context and choice chambers, we wake up to what needs to be changed.

Will you meet this challenge by choosing to be a role model for conscious, contextual and healthful living? Will you send the message of fitness and total health? Will you agree to uplift, transcend and transform the past to sustain generations to come? The choice is yours ... the time is now ... to lead from the inside out. ■

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