

Between Mother's Day and Election Day

As I'm writing, it's May 15, and we're sitting between Mother's Day and Election Day. I was thinking about the similarities and differences in the roles of mom and elected public official.

First thing, nobody can do either one perfectly. Both are leadership roles, requiring the courage and humility to step up and do what seems best while knowing that failure is both inevitable and no reason to stop trying. "You must be willing to be wrong—and learn from it," said a wise man I know. "It's like playing cards. If you never go down, you're not bidding high enough."

Second thing, a person needs enough ego to take on a challenge and enough humility to learn from doing, every step of the way. We write press releases to persuade voters to elect us. Nobody writes a press release to convince people we should be allowed to become a parent. But another wise man told us in his writers' group, "You can't believe your own press releases."

We're forced during a campaign to clarify both our perception of our community's needs and the relevance of our own skills to meet those needs. After that, it's a matter of trust.

The third and most important part is trust. Our children probably know us better than almost anyone in the world. They figure out pretty early how to relate to us to assure their own survival, and we learn how to support them the best way we know how so they flourish in the world. That's a tall order on both sides.

With voters and elected officials, trust is still involved, but it's more complicated in a way. We elected folk want to hear what you have to say, but we have to listen to what everyone else has to say. Then we apply our best research skills, looking for data and opinion in order to sift and sort into sound policy decisions, programs, and community conversations.

The fourth aspect is, how to deal with differences of opinion, conflicting needs, mutually exclusive means and methods? We can operate from the point of view that finding common values and desired results is both essential and possible.

Or we can do our very best to weaponize every conversation and seek the destruction of somebody or anybody we decide doesn't deserve to live. We can harden our hearts and our minds to learning any new way of approaching the world, or we can be curiously tender and continue to grow in beauty, freedom, power, and grace.

OK, that last sentence was a giveaway, right? You can tell my bias, challenging though I find it to implement that. My impulse may be to destroy or disparage another person for some reason or no reason. My impatience, grief, hunger, or fatigue may compromise my judgment. My hope and prayer for myself and for you is that we always settle back in silence until we find our grace and kindness. Then we reach out to listen, learn, and do good together whatever our role may be.

