



A lesson in leadership

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The Creating Change conference will be coming to Detroit in February 2008 and it is a tremendous opportunity for all of us in the region. The first meeting for those interested in working on the host committee, met at the new Affirmations center in Ferndale last week. Over 75 enthusiastic folks came out to hear about the nation's largest annual gathering of LGBT leaders, thinkers and activists, organized by the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

The meeting was led by Sue Hyde of NGLTF. Hyde is a skilled community organizer who has been at the helm of Creating Change since its inception 20 years ago. Her empowering leadership style honors the contributions of others and this appreciation for an individual's ability to make real change is the essence of the Creating Change conference itself.

We would be wise to take note of the power this style of organizing and leading offers. Acknowledging others, including them in the decision making process, being careful not to offend, and when offense is taken - which inevitably it will - to not react defensively. It is a method of leadership that builds community from the ground up and allows for natural leaders to emerge.

It is in stark contrast to the type of leadership and organizing that we experienced this weekend at the Battle Cry extravaganza at Ford Field. There, leadership is contained within the person of Ron Luce, a charismatic, scary cult leader who implores his followers to follow him blindly. He uses many of the techniques and strategies to control his followers that other cult figures have perfected - tearing down self esteem, making people feel inferior, scaring them, providing an answer to their emotional need to feel accepted in a group, and demanding absolute loyalty.

Cult leadership style is certainly not exclusive to right wing evangelicals (although it could be argued that it is particularly well suited to the militaristic, violent mission of Battle Cry), nor is an inclusive, empowering leadership style exclusive to progressive or LGBT groups. Leadership style is independent of any group's stated mission. But a leadership style that is empowering and inclusive is far more effective in the long run for our movement which has as one of its goals, achieving personal freedom and respect for differences among individuals.

Our LGBT community in Michigan can get a lot from having Creating Change in our own backyard. There will be workshops and presentations on various skills, strategies, ideas and resources that we all will need to build a better, stronger LGBT movement. Leaders are rarely born, they are developed and the conference will provide fertile ground to accomplish this. Healthy leadership skills can be taught and passed on from mentors. We will have one of the masters in our midst for the next few months. We need to strengthen our up and coming leaders. It's a matter of noticing, building, encouraging, training and empowering them in every way we

can. So lets all embrace Creating Change 2008 and consider joining the host committee as the work gets underway.