***What I Learned about
Leadership and***

 ***Social Work
While Dancing in Las Vegas***

Gary Gardia, MEd, MSW, LCSW

ggardia@aol.com

**10 Lessons**

1. Lesson #1

Look like there is nowhere else you would rather be.

There are no bad days.

2. Lesson #2

It only takes one person to ruin the experience for an audience member.

For many people, it is the person who is “off” they remember.

3. Lesson #3

How you look and how you dance is your responsibility. It is reasonable for Fluff to expect that dancers are capable of performing their roles and that they will remain capable.

4. Lesson #4

Get along. It is not an option.

You don’t have to like everyone.

You do have to work together. And you have to look great doing it.

5. Lesson #5

Once you sit down, it is hard to stand back up. It is easy to get bored, lose motivation and excitement when doing the same steps two shows a night, three on Saturday –

6 nights a week (sometimes 7!) Passion is your responsibility…not Fluff’s.

6. Lesson #6

There are times when we are working onstage and times when we are working backstage. Both are important parts of the job and require different skills.

7. Lesson #7

The way you look coming to work and leaving after the show is just as important as how you look onstage. Dancers are easily recognizable and are a reflection of the organization.

Even standing in the wings Fluff would tell us to “stand up straight!”

8. Lesson #8

Backstage drama can affect how you feel when you are onstage. It can be draining and exhausting. You may be in the dressing room but you are still at work. Stay focused on the show.

9. Lesson #9

The show must go on!

Sometimes mistakes happen on stage but we do our best to minimize them and recover quickly.

10. Lesson #10

Dancers must re-audition every 6 months. That means you are never certain about “having more time”. You learn to enjoy each show, to never “mark a performance”, to keep up your skills, and stay in peak shape. Every 6 months is like interviewing all over again…with a stage full of new and excited performers wanting your spot.

11. Following the Example of MLK, Gandhi and Fluff in Today’s Politically Charged Environment

* Non-violence (Aggressive vs assertive)
* Seeking to defeat injustice – not people
* Seeking to build relationship and understanding
* Moving beyond “liberal/conservative” in order to meet people where they are

12. Let’s Look Again at Leadership

* Service and social justice
* Worth of the person/empowerment
* Human relationships/integrity
* Competence

13. Assess and Plan

1. Clients you find challenging because of their beliefs
2. Co-workers with different beliefs. Can you make peace for a higher purpose?
3. The destructive nature of resistance without a plan. (What you resist persists)
4. The destructive nature of meeting hate with hate or prejudice with prejudice.
5. Consider
	* Native Americans
	* People without documents
	* LGBTQ
	* People living without shelter
	* People living with mental/emotional illness

14. What are your leadership opportunities right now?

* What opportunities do you have (right now) to make peace in order to build bridges AND THEN to initiate change

15. *Never allow waiting to become a habit. Live your dreams and take risks. Life is happening now.*Jelly Wong

Thoughts for Discussion/Worksheet

Please note: I use the word “customers” here because it applies to anyone and everyone we interact with in the course of our work. It could be your “clients” and it might mean vendors, co-workers, volunteers, community members, etc.

1. What are your thoughts about the “no bad days” concept? Acknowledging that everyone really does have bad days now and then, are you/we (the team) able to deal with those days in a way that does not distract from your work with clients or distract clients from their work? If you were to ask people you work with to give you honest feedback about how **you** deal with bad days…what might they say and how might they feel?

2. Thinking about the concept “It only takes one person (or one phone call/visit) to ruin the experience for “customers”, what are your thoughts about your performance, the performance of your team, the performance of your department, etc.? Is there a weak link? If so, do you pull together to assist this person or do you back-away and/or criticize the person?

3. It is up to each one of us to take personal responsibility for our skills and our job performance.

How are you doing? Where can you improve? What do you need to do to raise your skill set and performance to the next level? (We can ALWAYS improve).

4. You don’t have to like everyone but you do need to get along. Professionalism is your responsibility regardless of how others behave. Thoughts? Experiences?

5. Hanging on to the passion for your work is your responsibility. How you feel about your job can influence how you perform with customers. How are you at staying on top of boredom, burnout, compassion fatigue and/or lack of motivation? (The worst employee is the person who quits…but does not leave).

6. For most of us it is clear that we need to be at our best when in the presence of customers (patients, families, others) but we forget that coworkers, visitors, vendors, etc. are customers as well. Would others say that you and your team have great customer service skills…“on-stage and backstage”?

7. If someone were to recognize you as a representative of your agency when in the grocery store, driving a car, other activities, would they see a person whose behavior is consistent with your agency’s values?

8. Do you contribute to workplace drama/gossip or are you good at redirecting those dynamics?

9. What happens when mistakes are made? What do you do when you make a mistake or when there is a complaint? Do you (or your team) become defensive or are you able to remain objective and professional and work through whatever it is positively and effectively?

10. Coasting is never good…especially in social service work. One theory is “In life we are either moving forward or we are moving backward”. What do you do to make sure you are always moving forward?